**The LEGO Foundation launches USD 143 million global competition to tackle early years development**

*Chief Executive Anne-Birgitte Albrectsen calls for urgent attention around young children amid global early childhood emergency, threatening future generations*

*Biggest public grant of USD 143 million ever provided by The LEGO Foundation*

*Global competition launched in the LEGO® brand’s 90th year seeks transformational ideas to help solve the biggest global challenges facing birth to six-year-olds*

**Denmark, Billund, 16 February 2022, EMBARGOED UNTIL 09:00 CET** – The LEGO Foundation has announced a USD 143 million global challenge to fund bold and impactful solutions focused on early childhood in what CEO, Anne-Birgitte Albrectsen says will address a *“global early childhood emergency”,* one that is characterised by a loss of access to services and support, exacerbated by the global pandemic.

Launched by The LEGO Foundation, the Build A World of Play Challenge will enable any organisations who can make a positive impact on the youngest children anywhere in the world, to bid for a proportion of the USD 143 million grant. The amount is equivalent to 900 million Danish Kroner, reaffirming the LEGO Foundation’s commitment in the LEGO® brand’s 90th year to ensure children globally are given opportunities to learn through play. This will support their early learning and the development of holistic skills, ensuring children everywhere thrive and reach their full potential in life.

Grants will be awarded to those exploring evidence-based innovative solutions to the biggest problems of today such as access to quality early childhood education and care, adequate nutrition, eradication of toxic stress in homes and communities, reduction of violence in homes and communities, protection from pollution, and supporting the social and emotional well-being of the whole family. The solutions should make a substantial contribution to the lives of children from birth to six years old, and spark a global movement to prioritise early years development.

*“All children have the right to feel safe and have access to quality education and healthcare. But to date, early childhood development has been not just under recognised, but grossly underfunded,”* said**Thomas Kirk Kristiansen, Chair of the Board of Directors at The LEGO Foundation, and the fourth-generation representative of the LEGO owner family.** *“Children are the builders of tomorrow. To build a better world for future generations – focusing on innovation and action – we must work together. If we do not invest in the youngest children in our society, we don’t invest in our collective future.”*

In the 90th year of the LEGO brand, investment in early years development is more important than ever. Between March 2020 and February 2021, 167 million children in 196 countries lost access to early childhood care and education services[[1]](#footnote-2). Pre-primary students were the least likely to have access to remote learning, impacting 120 million children. Between 2018 and 2020, an average of between 290,000 and 340,000 children were born into a refugee life per year, which means nearly a million children were born as refugees[[2]](#footnote-3).

**Anne-Birgitte Albrectsen, CEO of the LEGO Foundation said:** *“We are currently facing the biggest global early childhood emergency that the world has ever seen. The quality of experiences in the first few years of a child’s life is where brain development is in its most adaptive and rapidly developing state. They also provide the foundations for learning, health and behaviour in the long-term – investment in which we know improves educational outcomes, develops holistic skills, and enhances quality of life. Providing whole-child support through early childhood development interventions is one of the most powerful and cost-effective equalizers we have at our disposal. Through the Build A World of Play Challenge, we want to join forces with others to urgently address the biggest challenges societies globally face, with creative, actionable ideas that put children at the centre of global decision making. We must start building a world that puts the youngest in society first: building cities, education systems, healthcare systems and solutions to save our planet, at the forefront. This competition is an opportunity to make a real difference to the lives of the youngest children.”*

The grant, totaling USD 143 million will be available to the five winning organisations globally. There will be three grants of approximately USD 30 million each and two grants approximately USD 15 million each. In addition, the 10 organisations selected as finalists will receive USD 1 million each to strengthen their proposed plans, start building the team, and skill up to successfully implement their innovation. Potential applicants must register by April 7, 2022. The deadline for submissions is May 17,2022.

All entrants will need to complete an online application via [https://learningthroughplay.com/build-a-world-of-play/the-challenge](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flearningthroughplay.com%2Fbuild-a-world-of-play%2Fthe-challenge&data=04%7C01%7Crajdeep.roy.chowdhury%40LEGO.com%7C09219eebbb18455cef4508d9e703118a%7C1d0635156cad41959486ea65df456faa%7C0%7C0%7C637794822626437436%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=MIR4NVLEA5hQxXnYPSj8f1kixiLkzcZPqtcDhCSswmA%3D&reserved=0). Factors that will determine the winners include, among other things, how impactful, feasible, community-centred, and sustainable their applications are.

The Build a World of Play Challenge is being managed by [Lever for Change](https://www.macfound.org/programs/lever-change/), a non-profit associate of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation that leverages its networks to find and fund solutions to the world’s greatest challenges - including racial and gender equity, economic development and climate change.

More details on the Build a World of Play Challenge can be found at [https://learningthroughplay.com/build-a-world-of-play/the-challenge](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flearningthroughplay.com%2Fbuild-a-world-of-play%2Fthe-challenge&data=04%7C01%7Crajdeep.roy.chowdhury%40LEGO.com%7C09219eebbb18455cef4508d9e703118a%7C1d0635156cad41959486ea65df456faa%7C0%7C0%7C637794822626437436%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=MIR4NVLEA5hQxXnYPSj8f1kixiLkzcZPqtcDhCSswmA%3D&reserved=0)

**Ends**

**The LEGO Foundation**

The LEGO Foundation shares the mission of the LEGO Group: to inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow. The Foundation, which owns 25% of the LEGO Group, is dedicated to building a future in which learning through play empowers children to become creative, engaged, lifelong learners. It is through the ownership model, that a portion of profits go to funding research projects, activities and partnerships. In 2021 for example, the LEGO Foundation provided grants of DKK 2.8 billion (USD 443.9 million) to initiatives which help children reach their full potential through play. The LEGO Foundation works in collaboration with thought leaders, influencers, educators and parents aiming to re-define play, re-imagine learning and equip, inspire and activate champions for play. [www.learningthroughplay.com](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.learningthroughplay.com%2F&data=04%7C01%7Crajdeep.roy.chowdhury%40LEGO.com%7C4a42857b477e452166ca08d9ea558912%7C1d0635156cad41959486ea65df456faa%7C0%7C0%7C637798475359355329%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=onuZXQCCEnNjiOMJoexu6DqxkE9DPBA%2BqJiDASbppBA%3D&reserved=0)

**Lever for Change**

Lever for Change leverages investments in solutions to the world’s biggest problems—from racial and gender equity to climate change. By matching donors with problem solvers through customized challenges and tailored funding opportunities, Lever for Change accelerates social change. Outstanding teams from these challenges form the Bold Solutions Network, which focuses on elevating organizations and catalysing further funding.

Founded as a non-profit affiliate of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in 2019, Lever for Change has influenced more than USD 800 million in grants and provided support to more than 140 organizations to date. To learn more, visit www.leverforchange.org.

1. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/the-state-of-the-global-education-crisis-a-path-to-recovery> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. [https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/#:~:text=Forcibly%20displaced%20people%20worldwide,84%20million%20at%20mid%2D2021.&text=are%20Venezuelans%20displaced%20abroad.](https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/%23:~:text=Forcibly%20displaced%20people%20worldwide,84%20million%20at%20mid%2D2021.&text=are%20Venezuelans%20displaced%20abroad.) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)