Bernard Van Leer Foundation
Appointment of Chief Programme Officer
February 2022
A good start puts each individual child on the path to realising their full potential and sets the foundation for a healthy, fair and peaceful society.

Founded in 1949, the Bernard van Leer Foundation focuses on working worldwide to ensure that babies, toddlers and the people who care for them have a good start in life. Our mission is to improve opportunities for all young children, especially the millions of young children growing up in circumstances of socio-economic and environmental disadvantage around the world.

After nearly six decades of investing in early childhood development, we believe the major challenge is the transition to scale. By working together with governments, civil society, philanthropy, academia, international organisations and businesses, we find the best programmes and policies to improve children’s lives. We partner with them by providing funding, expertise and networks to scale these up for maximum impact.

**Why focus on the early years?**

The early years of life is a unique window of opportunity to improve lives.

Babies’ and toddlers’ brains develop rapidly, and small changes at this young age can have lifelong effects.

Research has increasingly shown that investing in babies’ and toddlers’ development translates into better health, a greater ability to learn and work with others, and higher incomes in adulthood.

**Early experiences shape the brain:**

- **1 million synapses** are created in a baby’s brain every second.
- **250 million children under 5** – across almost every country in the world – do not receive the care they need to reach their full potential.
- **US$ 6 – 17**: the estimated return for every $1 spent on high-quality early years programmes.
What is early childhood development?

For a child to thrive, they need good nutrition and healthcare, protection from harm, opportunities to play and loving exchanges with adults.

Early childhood interventions are a priority for the Foundation because hundreds of millions of young children across the world do not have access to a good start in life, which prevents them from reaching their full potential. It’s also an increasing priority for governments and other stakeholders worldwide as they recognise the exponential return on investment in the early years.

Traditionally, early childhood interventions can take many forms: from nutrition, health, water and sanitation, to education and social protection. More recently, we have been working to include a focus on the early years in other sectors that affect millions of young children’s early experiences, such as urban planning and humanitarian assistance.

Further information on the importance of the early years can be found in our Early Years Starter Kit or in this persuasive TED Talk by 7-year old Molly Wright!
Current strategy

The Foundation is coming to the end of its current strategy.

The first cycle of this strategy ran from 2016-2020 and was subsequently extended through 2023. We will begin a new strategic planning process later this year.

The current strategy has three focus areas in which we provide funding and support for a diverse range of partners to implement promising solutions at scale.

Parents+

Combining caregiving training for parents with at least one service that meets families’ basic needs. This can be an efficient way to achieve scale and improve the effectiveness of both the coaching activities and the underlying service with which the coaching is combined. We partner with national governments in 8 countries to provide parent coaching at scale.

Urban95

Bringing a focus on babies, toddlers and caregivers into the cross-sectoral planning, design and management of cities to improve access to quality services, sustainable mobility, and good public space. Currently, we are working on Urban95 with more than 70 city governments in 11 countries.

Early Years Thought Leadership

We offer knowledge and support to individuals working to serve babies, toddlers and their caregivers by sharing research, promoting inspirational ideas on how to scale-up initiatives and bringing people together to build a network of leaders and champions. One way we do this is through executive education with partners such as the London School of Economics, INSEAD, Columbia University and Harvard. Since 2016, over 300 leaders have attended these programmes.

Global impact and learning

Portfolio countries

We have small offices in Brazil, Israel, India, Jordan and the Netherlands. In these countries our on-the-ground teams work closely with local and national government administrators, civil society, NGOs, communities and others to refine the most promising early years innovations.

Global displacement portfolio

We have a team focused on strategic partnerships to support children born into and growing up within a refugee or migrant context. This work takes place in and beyond our portfolio countries.

Learning partnerships

Through learning partnerships we provide technical and financial support to partners outside portfolio countries. We currently have learning partnerships in Albania, Colombia, Côte d’Ivoire, Ecuador, Ethiopia and Mexico.
Global scanning

With the help of our partners and networks, we track relevant innovations around the world and ensure these are reflected in our work. One signature example of this is our Early Childhood Matters journal, which we have been publishing for more than 20 years. Our 2021 edition was focused on the impacts of climate change on the planet’s youngest children.

Our next strategic plan

We will begin a strategic planning process in the second half of 2022, which will include an opportunity to review and reflect on lessons from the last 7 years of work and chart a path forward. In the strategic planning process we will try to identify which areas of work we would like to wind down, what we would like to expand and what new avenues we want to explore.

Our primary activity will continue to be our flagship programme on early childhood development worldwide which aims to inspire and inform large-scale action to improve the health and wellbeing of babies, toddlers and their caregivers. Additionally, we will also look at how we can incorporate two new activities that have historically been managed at the Van Leer Group.

These are:

- A programme focused on democracy and pluralism which includes support to the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute (est. 1959) and the Jerusalem Film Centre (est. 1974), both founded by the Van Leer family.

- The management of our endowment through which we fund our philanthropic work and aim for a positive social impact by making investments aligned with our mission and programmes. This includes a small impact investing portfolio as part of our private markets allocation, which we began to develop in 2021 and hope to grow further in the coming years.

Our team and governance

We are governed by an 8-member Board of Trustees who are leaders from diverse sectors including non-profit, business and academia. Our team is made up of 40+ professionals from 15 countries. See the organisation chart.
Finance

Our philanthropic activities were originally funded from the dividends of the Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer. In 1996, its board decided on an IPO for the company, the ultimate process of which formed an endowment that funds our philanthropic activities today.

The endowment value is approximately 840 million EUR. Each year we make 3.6% available (the average value of the endowment over the last three years) available for charitable spending. In 2022, this translated into an annual budget of 27.2 million EUR.

- 840 million EUR of endowment
- 3.6% available for charitable spending
- 27.2 million EUR annual budget
Job description

A great team, a strategic moment: The Chief Programme Officer is responsible for managing an exceptional global team of professionals across 5 countries. The team works to translate the organizational strategy into impact at scale through strategic partnerships worldwide. They are a deeply committed and diverse group with a wide array of expertise. As part of the Management team, the Chief Programme Officer reports to the CEO and is a key voice in shaping strategic decisions for the Foundation as a whole. S(he) will be joining as we launch a strategic planning process to define our 2023+ focus and will play a central role in this process.

Key responsibilities of the position:

- **People management:** getting the best out of the team through active coaching, challenging and celebration of their achievements
- **Offering to strategic partners:** ensuring the Foundation is well positioned to offer an impactful combination of financing, expertise and network to our strategic partners
- **Strengthening our “glocal” model:** ensuring learning and collaboration between local and global programme activities in order to increase the total impact of the Foundation
- **Strategic partnerships:** develop and reinforce strategic partnerships and chair the committee that approves new partnerships including grants of up to 500,000 Euros
- **Thought leadership:** act as an external representative of the Foundation and support members of the team in developing themselves as thought leaders and representatives
- **Monitoring and reporting:** ensuring monitoring and reporting on all programmes is effective and contributing to decision-making and learning at the Foundation
- **Endowment advisory:** advise the investment management team on new investments designed to increase the social impact of the endowment
- **Board engagement:** prepare the programmatic section of board reports including bi-annual programme reviews and make presentations in all board meetings

Professional contacts:

**Inside the Foundation:**
Management Team, Programme Director, Knowledge for Policy Director, Country Representatives, Director for People and Culture, Board of Trustees.

**Outside the Foundation:**
Leadership at current and potential strategic partners - e.g. government, business, non-profit, academia, media, philanthropy.
**Person specification**

**A service leader:** We are looking for a service oriented leader who is committed to our mission, excels and enjoys managing, motivating and challenging passionate teams, is strategic and practical, is empathic and a good listener, can take and communicate important decisions, is agile and believes in the power of diversity to drive impact and innovation. We encourage applications from a wide variety of backgrounds, who would bring a genuinely international and cross-cultural experience, especially from the countries and regions where we work.

**Expertise and experience:**

- Advanced degree (Master’s or MBA)
- 10+ years of successful people leadership and management experience, including senior management roles in a social change-oriented initiative or organisation

Demonstrable experience:
- Developing/implementing programmes to achieve social change at scale
- Applying thought leadership strategies and growing leadership networks
- Building diverse coalitions that include members with different worldviews and expertise
- Applying a range of approaches to monitoring and evaluation

Work experience in:
- At least two sectors – e.g. government, business, philanthropic, non-profit, academia
- Multiple geographic contexts – ideally including countries where we work
- Culturally diverse organisations

- Can understand, interpret and present complex information from a variety of sources

- Communication and listening skills with people at all levels of seniority and cross-culturally

- Demonstrated thought leadership on issues prominent in our programmes (e.g. children and families, democracy, pluralism, philanthropy)

- Fluency in English (other languages used in the Foundation are an advantage – e.g. Arabic, Dutch, French, Hebrew, Hindi, Portuguese, Spanish)

- Willingness to travel regularly to countries where the Foundation works.
Living in the Netherlands

Journalist Netta Ahituv is a graduate of a Bernard Van Leer sponsored executive course for media professionals on writing about early childhood with Columbia University. In an article, Netta explored why Dutch children consistently rank among the highest in the world in UNICEF studies of children’s happiness. Below is an excerpt:

“We set out, therefore, to find out the secret of the happiness of the children of Holland. We visited the city and the village, the houses and the public space, played in playgrounds, visited museums, swam the ferry, rode bicycles, used public transport, ate Dutch food and talked to parents and children, educators, architects, cycling experts and also one happiness researcher.

Everywhere we visited - whether it was bustling Amsterdam, the tie-dyed Hague or a small village - we encountered one common situation that surprised us: as in Israel, children run around and frolic in public parks. But there is a small difference: here the parents seem to enjoy it too.

Beatrix Park in Amsterdam refines this idea. The children run around here in wonderfully aesthetic playgrounds, while the parents drink wine or coffee in the cafe in the center of the park. Along the lake a group of third-graders is running around with paper and a pen to complete a research mission on birds in the park; An ice cream cart with a kind seller provides the necessary dose of sugar; And many cyclists pass trails, many of them children of all ages. This beautiful, generous and inviting park provides an urban, quality and lush piece of nature for everyone, but really for everyone, that allows children to run free, sing, fight, ride, climb, run - be kids - while their parents relax and inhale clean air full of lungs. Everyone there seems happy. How do they do that?”

Some other fun facts about living in the Netherlands:

- 90% of people are proficient in English
- 17 million people live here, but they own 22 million bicycles. In cities, many people do all their daily commuting on bikes and there are routes throughout the country for longer rides
- According to the OECD, in 2019 the Netherlands ranked the highest for work-life balance
- The Netherlands is very safe and has one of the lowest crime rates in the world
- It is a great jumping off point to explore other parts of Europe by train, plane or car.
How to apply

The Bernard Van Leer Foundation is partnering with the executive search firm Perrett Laver on this appointment.

Completed applications comprised of a CV and cover letter should be uploaded at https://candidates.perrettlaver.com/vacancies/ quoting reference 5650.

The deadline for applications is 9am CET on Monday 14th March.

Longlisted candidates will be invited to meet with Perrett Laver in April 2022. After this shortlisted candidates will be interviewed by the Selection Committee.

This position is based in the Netherlands, but regular periods of remote working are common at the Foundation. Compensation is benchmarked against the median of the Netherlands general market.

The Bernard van Leer Foundation believes that excellence will be achieved through recognising the value of every individual. A broad range of perspectives, backgrounds and opinions amongst our global community of colleagues is crucial in maintaining our culture of openness, intellectual curiosity, and creativity. We take an active role in supporting under-represented communities and groups in becoming better and more fairly represented in the leadership of all organisations. We also know that diverse and inclusive teams have a positive impact on our ability to identify, engage and secure candidates from these groups.

Our commitment to inclusion across race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, identity, and experience drives us every day – for clients, for candidate identification and in the recruitment, development and retention of colleagues.

To ensure inclusion on the basis of age, disability, ethnic or national origin, family circumstance, gender, gender identity, marital status, nationality, political or religious beliefs, race, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, we would like to specifically invite applications from under-represented groups.

Protecting your personal data is of the utmost importance to Perrett Laver and we take this responsibility very seriously. Any information obtained by our trading divisions is held and processed in accordance with the relevant data protection legislation. The data you provide us with is securely stored on our computerised database and transferred to our clients for the purposes of presenting you as a candidate and/or considering your suitability for a role you have registered interest in. As defined under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Perrett Laver is a Data Controller and a Data Processor, and our legal basis for processing your personal data is ‘Legitimate Interests’. You have the right to object to us processing your data in this way. For more information about this, your rights, and our approach to Data Protection and Privacy, please visit our website: http://www.perrettlaver.com/information/privacy/