



STRENGTHENING AND SUPPORTING  
THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE:

# Working Conditions

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# Introduction

## Who is the early childhood workforce?

Early childhood development (ECD) services<sup>1</sup> have a strong, positive impact on children’s development. Research from diverse contexts shows that interventions that promote nurturing care in early learning environments significantly improve childhood development and later adult outcomes (Britto et. al., 2017). Despite increasing knowledge on the benefits of ECD, however, much remains unknown about the early childhood workforce, the range of individuals across paid

and unpaid roles who provide services to young children and their caregivers across the health, nutrition, education,<sup>2</sup> and social and child protection sectors (Table 1 provides a snapshot of the various roles within the workforce). Research supports that the workforce is one of the most important factors influencing the quality of ECD services. However, key questions remain unanswered, including:

- ▶ What does the early childhood workforce need to know and be able to do in order to carry out their roles?
- ▶ What types of training opportunities are most effective for building the knowledge and skills that the workforce needs?
- ▶ What types of feedback does the workforce receive on their work on a daily basis?
- ▶ What financial and non-financial incentives impact the job satisfaction of personnel?

In an effort to address these questions, the [Early Childhood Workforce Initiative](#) (ECWI), a multi-stakeholder global initiative co-led by [Results for Development](#) (R4D) and the [International Step by Step Association](#) (ISSA) that works to support and empower those who work directly with young children, is carrying out a series of **global landscape analyses** to illustrate the size and scope of the challenges faced by the early childhood workforce, while also highlighting promising practices countries have adopted in response to these challenges. Spanning a range of roles including professionals and paraprofessionals, paid and unpaid workers, and frontline workers, supervisors, and managers, from the education, health and nutrition, social protection and child protection sectors, these analyses aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the current status of the workforce worldwide.

Primary Sector	Roles
HEALTH AND NUTRITION*	<p>Roles may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Auxiliary nurses &amp; auxiliary midwives</li> <li>• Community health workers</li> <li>• Home visitors</li> <li>• Nurses &amp; midwives</li> <li>• Medical doctors</li> <li>• Nutritionists</li> <li>• Health educators &amp; trainers</li> <li>• Health service directors, managers, and supervisors</li> </ul>
EDUCATION	<p>Roles may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child care workers</li> <li>• Early childhood teachers</li> <li>• Primary school teachers</li> <li>• Social pedagogy professionals</li> <li>• Teacher assistants</li> <li>• Teacher coaches</li> <li>• Teacher trainers</li> <li>• Supervisors</li> <li>• Education service directors/managers</li> </ul>
SOCIAL AND CHILD PROTECTION	<p>Roles may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social service workers</li> <li>• Community child protection officers and workers</li> <li>• Psychologists</li> <li>• Mental health professionals/specialists</li> <li>• Residential care staff</li> <li>• Social service educators &amp; trainers</li> <li>• Community child protection officers and workers</li> <li>• Social service managers</li> </ul>

\* Hygiene is an important aspect of health and roles addressing this area are encompassed in the health and nutrition sector.

**Table 1: Roles within the Workforce**

<sup>1</sup> The term early childhood development (ECD) is used in this report to refer to services across the education, health and nutrition, and social and child protection sectors. The term early childhood education and care (ECEC) is used to refer to services encompassing early education and care from birth to the transition to primary school.

<sup>2</sup> When referring to the education sector, we are also including the child care field unless otherwise noted.

## Overview of Landscape Analyses

The four themes which are explored in this series include:<sup>3</sup>

- ▶ **Competences and Standards** – Competences and standards ensure that there are agreed requirements and expectations for what early childhood workers should know and be able to do. They also lay the groundwork for the core principles, regulations, guidelines and procedures guiding work with young children and their families.
- ▶ **Training and Professional Development** – Since the early childhood workforce is very diverse, including, for example, many volunteers or staff without formal education, training and professional development opportunities support the acquisition of necessary knowledge and skills.
- ▶ **Continuous Quality Improvement** – Creating systems for monitoring, evaluation, and assessment that are complemented with continuous feedback, coaching, and reflective supervision are important for ensuring that workers receive information that they can use to improve their practice on an ongoing basis and for linking members of the workforce to pathways for career advancement. Additionally, collecting data on the early childhood workforce can help decision makers monitor and improve the quality of ECD services.
- ▶ **Working Conditions** – Currently, the level of remuneration, working conditions, and status of the early childhood workforce are poor, even relative to primary teachers and other similar professions. Recruitment and retention challenges, unclear roles and responsibilities, high turnover, and low morale compromise the quality of provision. There is a need to explore ways to improve the attractiveness and perception of the profession, create a support system (e.g. professional networks, coalitions) for members of the workforce, and promote ways to give voice to practitioners in their daily work and in policy discussions, including through collective action.

## Objectives

It is hoped that a diverse group of stakeholders working in ECD, including policymakers, researchers, program managers, and practitioners can use the findings of these landscape analyses to generate lessons for countries looking for ways to support and strengthen the early childhood workforce, and enhance existing programs, policies, research, and advocacy efforts concerning the early childhood workforce. This report, the fourth in this series, addresses the theme of **working conditions**.

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<sup>3</sup> These themes were identified in collaboration with a group of experts convened by the Early Childhood Workforce Initiative in 2015.

# Methodology

The authors undertook several steps to produce this report. First, the research team reviewed global studies on the early childhood workforce from across the education, health and nutrition, and social and child protection sectors. A framework was used to organize the data around the four previously identified themes - competences and standards, training and professional development, continuous quality improvement, and working conditions – and to identify key questions for further exploration in each of the four planned landscape analyses.

Guided by the key questions identified through this initial review, a call for evidence was circulated to early childhood researchers, program managers, and practitioners to collect the latest research and evidence related to continuous quality improvement. In addition, a targeted database search was carried out to identify published and grey literature specific to this theme across sectors. Once the literature was collected, the team reviewed it to understand the policies surrounding this topic, as well as the availability, format, structure, and delivery of the approaches being studied. Data across all sources were then reviewed to identify findings. The following research questions guided this process:

- ▶ **What are the terms/conditions of work?** How do these influence job satisfaction and motivation?
- ▶ **What types of financial and non-financial incentives do members of the workforce receive?** How do these influence job satisfaction and motivation?
- ▶ **What gaps exist in recruitment and retention?** What strategies are employed to address these challenges?
- ▶ **What roles do professional networks, coalitions, and associations play in supporting the workforce?**

In addition, brief case studies were prepared to illustrate the approaches that have been taken to improve the working conditions of members of the workforce. These case studies were informed by desk reviews and key informant interviews (KIIs) with experts on the subject. Countries and programs were selected in order to reflect diverse sectors, regions, and roles within the early childhood workforce.

## Roadmap

The report begins with a rationale for the study and then presents four key findings (listed in Box 1) that emerged from the review of literature. These findings are further illustrated by case studies of approaches taken to supporting the workforce in this area across a range of countries and sectors. The main text is also complimented by COVID-19 related examples to illustrate methods that have been used to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic on the early childhood workforce. The report concludes with recommendations for policymakers and areas for further research.

### Box 1: Key Findings on Working Conditions

**Finding 1:** Early childhood personnel face low pay and unstable terms of employment, which reduce job satisfaction and retention.

**Finding 2:** Heavy workloads, limited access to resources, and challenging working environments contribute to job stress and reduce job satisfaction and motivation.

**Finding 3:** Early childhood programs face challenges in recruiting a qualified and diverse pool of candidates.

**Finding 4:** Professional associations and unions can play an important role in advocating for a better supported and more empowered workforce.

# Rationale

Despite growing recognition of the workforce as central to the quality of early childhood services, the environment for these professionals and paraprofessionals remains poor. Challenging working conditions, such as low remuneration, heavy workloads, and economic instability, make it difficult for early childhood personnel to foster positive relationships and adequately support the holistic development of children in the early years (Korfmacher, Green, Spellman & Thornburg, 2007; O'Brien et. al., 2012; OECD, 2019). These challenges also hinder recruitment and retention efforts, which can create system inefficiencies and reduce the quality of early childhood services (OECD, 2019).

To address these challenges, attention needs to be paid to improving the working conditions of early childhood personnel, as doing so will improve the quality of early childhood services and promote whole child development outcomes. Additionally, special attention needs to be paid to supporting the workforce during times of crises, such as the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), which presents early childhood personnel with a unique set of challenges, such as the potential exposure to diseases and the lack of essential supplies (Zero to Three, 2020). **This landscape analysis examines the challenging working conditions that members of the workforce face, as well as the efforts that have been taken to mitigate these challenges, in an effort to provide decision makers with the tools and resources needed to support and strengthen the early childhood workforce at scale.**

## Box 2: Common Stressors Affecting the Early Childhood Workforce

- **Limited compensation and incentives:** Members of the workforce receive low levels of remuneration and financial benefits in their roles, especially in relation to educators of higher levels.
- **Economic insecurity:** Lower rates of permanent employment among members of the workforce lead to lower levels of job security and satisfaction.
- **Limited resources:** A lack of resources (e.g. medicines, counseling cards) can make it difficult for early childhood personnel to carry out their roles.
- **Heavy workloads:** High caseloads coupled with added responsibilities (e.g. administrative tasks) can increase stress and burnout in the field.
- **Low social status and recognition:** Public perceptions of the early childhood profession being “unsophisticated” and “unskilled” decreases the social status of members of the workforce and makes them feel undervalued in their roles.
- **Safety issues:** Threats to physical safety, health risks, and psychological trauma create challenging working conditions for members of the workforce.

# Key Findings

## 1. Early childhood personnel face low pay and unstable terms of employment, which reduce job satisfaction and retention.

Although experience varies across the workforce, **early childhood personnel tend to receive low levels of remuneration and financial benefits in comparison to other professions requiring similar skills.** In the ECEC sector, teacher salaries at the pre-primary level are generally not equivalent to those of teachers working at the primary level (Sun Rao Pearson). For example, a review of policies in the ECEC sector in Latin America and the Caribbean found that, while early childhood teachers in some countries earn salaries equivalent to counterparts in primary education, this was not the case in other countries, including Brazil, Chile, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic (UNESCO, 2016). In addition, within split systems where responsibility for care and education are separate, personnel working with children ages three and under typically receive lower pay and benefits than their counterparts working with children ages four to six (UNESCO, 2016). This is further illustrated in Table 2, where child care workers in the U.S. consistently earned less than their early childhood counterparts in 2019.

**Table 2: National Median Salary of Early Learning and Elementary School Teachers in the U.S., 2019**

	Child Care Workers Annual Median Wage	Preschool Teachers	Kindergarten and Elementary School Teachers
Yearly Salary	\$24,230	\$30,520	\$59,420
Hourly Salary	\$11.65	\$14.67	\$28.60

(Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019)

**There is also a gender disparity that exists within the early childhood field in relation to remuneration and terms of employment.** Although the field is highly feminized, research shows that men tend to receive higher pay and status than their female counterparts. In Australia, research shows that female employees in the preschool sector were paid roughly 31.9% less than men (Wahlquist, 2017). Additionally, in the U.S., pay inequities between men and women continue to persist, although women make up 93% of the field (Lynch and Brown, n.d).

The low levels of compensation that members of the workforce face can decrease worker morale and increase turnover rates in the field. **In the health field, many Community Health Worker (CHW) programs utilize volunteers and provide no remuneration other than per diem payments, social recognition or in-kind benefits,** while others provide a nominal stipend. In some countries, such as Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, and Nigeria, higher-level CHWs are formal civil service positions and benefits are similar to those of government employees (Perry et al, 2020). A review of ECD interventions under the Saving Brains portfolio found that most (61%) project workers were salaried while 20% of projects offered no incentives, and a further 20% offered only a contribution to expenses (Kohli Lynch, et al., 2020). Social service workers face similar circumstances; for example, in sub-Saharan Africa, low pay in the public sector often contributes to workers leaving for higher wages in NGOs or outside of their home country (McCaffery, 2013). In CHW programs, a lack of financial incentives with which to complement compensation (e.g. transportation stipends) can impact workers' motivation and abilities to carry out their roles (Pallas et al., 2013). Additionally, although evidence shows that appropriate pay and benefits are important components of a positive working environment, in the ECEC field, few child care workers receive health insurance and paid sick leave in their roles (Schlieber and Mclean, 2020; Rosenbalm and Baker, 2020). In addition to attrition issues, many members of the workforce pursue additional work to supplement their incomes. For example, in Siaya County, Kenya, although community health volunteers (CHVs) who deliver home visiting services receive a stipend for their work, many of them must supplement this with part-time employment and other income generating activities (Putcha, 2019). Low pay can be demotivating to the workforce, increase turnover and also raise sustainability concerns. **Moreover, using volunteers in a workforce reliant on women and members from other traditionally disadvantaged groups can increase gender and other disparities** (Kohli Lynch et al, 2020).

### Responding to COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a rapid study conducted in South Africa to understand the impact that COVID-19 had on ECD operators found that **roughly 83% of ECD operators were not able to pay the full salaries of staff during the lockdown period.**

Researchers proposed that South Africa's government offer income support of 1000 rands per month to ECD workers as a temporary relief from loss of salary. This income replacement, equivalent to the average monthly income of those employed in the informal economy, would help members of the workforce offset their loss in household income.

(Bridge et al., 2020)



**Non-financial incentives (e.g. career development opportunities) also influence motivation and job satisfaction in the field.** For CHWs who often enter their roles as volunteers, for example, certification after training and promotion can incentivize further pursuit of professional advancement (GHWA & WHO, 2010). Relationships with supervisors and access to supervisory support encourage job satisfaction, as demonstrated in a study of home visitors in the U.S. (Sandstrom et al, 2020). **In addition to career development, recognition within their community and public perceptions of their value can also help increase motivation and job satisfaction in their roles.** For example, community-level child protection workers mention recognition by community leaders and small rewards (e.g. badges) as important incentives that can help increase motivation in their roles (Roby et al, 2016).

**Economic insecurity is another factor that can hinder recruitment and retention efforts.** In some OECD countries (Iceland, Korea, Turkey), ECEC staff have lower rates of permanent employment, making it difficult to attract workers to the field (OECD, 2019). Additionally, in the Cuna Mas program in Peru, short term contracts for regional staff create job insecurity, which results in staff members leaving the field to pursue more stable employment opportunities (Josephson et al., 2017).

**To address this challenge, different sectors have started instituting legal frameworks that articulate the roles and responsibilities of the workforce and provide protections that can help address these challenges.** For example, in the health sector, WHO guidelines for CHWs recommend providing paid CHWs with a written agreement specifying roles and responsibilities, working conditions, remuneration, and workers' rights (WHO, 2018). In the Philippines, a Magna Carta for Public Social Workers (2007) outlines legal rights and privileges including terms of employment and ethical standards for the profession (GSSWA & UNICEF, 2019). **Such legal frameworks can help to address challenges specific to job security but can also establish guidelines for training and other standards which can collectively contribute to elevating the identity and status of workers** (GSSWA & UNICEF, 2019).

### Responding to COVID-19

To reduce the likelihood of child development teachers and workers losing their jobs as a result of COVID-19, the Philippines' Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Council created a set of guidelines that outline different activities (e.g. conducting home visits, administering surveys to parents) that workers can continue to carry out during the pandemic, and institutes measures that allows them to carry them out safely (e.g. sanitizing work areas, promoting virtual learning).

The Council also continued to professionalize teachers and workers by offering scholarship grants and online courses to members of the workforce that allow them to increase their knowledge and skills in early childhood education.

(Bonsu, 2020)

### Box 3: Mobile Creches Creating favorable working conditions to empower child care workers in India

For five decades, Mobile Creches has worked to improve access to education, nutrition, and healthcare for 750,000 young children living in poverty in India, and trained 7,000 child care workers across 700 daycare centers. Mobile Creches has been working to create channels for career advancement, provide staff with a comprehensive benefits package, empower child care workers, and increase the attractiveness of the profession.

Mobile Creches conducts bi-annual evaluations using key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the key responsibility areas (KRAs) of child care workers, help set goals, and inform annual salary increases and promotions. In addition to standard remuneration, all staff - from child care workers to training managers - receive social benefits such as health and gratuity insurance, retirement benefits, and maternity leave to complement pay. These channels create pathways for workers to advance in their roles and ensures that they

receive a comprehensive benefits package as they carry out their work.

Mobile Creches has sought to empower workers in their roles by providing staff with incentives such as awards, celebrations during national holidays and festivals, and annual retreats. They have elevated the voices of child care workers by offering paid opportunities for frontline workers and office staff to share their experiences with each other, broadcasting their voices on social media, and inviting them to discuss their successes and challenges in donor meetings.

Mobile Creches has also advocated for recognition of child care as a professional job that warrants fair pay, proper status, and other social benefits across India. In 2013, it provided inputs to the National Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) policy and successfully advocated for the incorporation of additional training of child care workers. Under the 2020 New Education Policy, it recommended that the Government develop a cadre of high quality ECEC professionals by providing fair remuneration, standardizing in-service pre- and in-service training, creating mentoring mechanisms and career mapping, and promoting continuous professional development in the field. At the onset of COVID, Mobile Creches also advocated for safety and protective measures, such as health checkups. However, limited funding, recently exacerbated by COVID-19, has prompted Mobile Creches to explore different ways of supporting workers by strengthening virtual communication channels and starting an emergency response fund for employees and their families.

Mobile Creches' experience highlights how creating fair and transparent systems for remuneration and opportunities for staff to openly share their experiences, can help support, retain, and advance the early childhood workforce.

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## 2. Heavy workloads, limited access to resources, and challenging working environments contribute to job stress and reduce satisfaction and motivation.

**Early childhood personnel face heavy workloads in their roles.** A common stressor among personnel in OECD countries is the presence of too many children in the classroom (OECD, 2019). This challenge may be exacerbated in low- and middle-income countries where, in 2017, the average pupil-teacher ratio at the pre-primary level in low-income countries was 34:1 compared to 14:1 in high income countries (UNICEF, 2019). Similar experiences can be found in the social service workforce, where there is documentation of high caseloads. In Botswana, one study found that one social worker was responsible for coordinating care for 629 orphans (BFTU, 2007). Home visiting personnel face similar challenges in the *Creciendo Nuestros Hijos* program in Ecuador where one

visitor is responsible for 60 children (Bonsu, 2019). Since the work of home visitors and many other members of the early childhood workforce focuses on relationship building, keeping caseload to a reasonable size is very important. For this reason, some programs, such as the Early Head Start program in the U.S., limit caseloads to 12 families for weekly visits, while others specify a maximum number of visits per month (Jones-Harden et al., 2012).

**Personnel often have added responsibilities, including administrative tasks, which can further exacerbate workload.**

Research conducted across OECD countries found that insufficient human resources (e.g. being assigned extra duties due to absent staff, having too many children in the classroom) were significant stressors for the ECEC workforce (OECD, 2020). A study of preschool teachers in the Ukraine, for example, found that paperwork took up a significant proportion of personnel time – up to one workday a week – and contributed to heavy workload and job dissatisfaction (Putcha et al., 2018). In Ghana, research found that kindergarten teachers with high job demands, (e.g. the physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects of a job that require continued mental or physical effort) had high levels of burnout in the field (Lee & Wolf, 2018). A study of the Lady Health Worker (LHW) Program in Pakistan found that workers are frequently overwhelmed with additional tasks (e.g. loading and unloading of medicines), and experience high levels of stress when the number of tasks they are assigned increases (Afsar & Younous, 2005; Haq et al., 2008). In the Cuna Mas program in Peru, facilitators work twice the number of hours stipulated by the program despite their voluntary status and limited compensation. Similarly, technical companions work long and intensive hours, which hampers their ability to practice the behaviors they promote in their work with their own families (Josephson and Coddington, 2017). Identifying and addressing these stressors is important, as research shows that work stress is a predictor of physical health and illnesses, which can lower the overall well-being of members of the workforce, and reduce their engagement and productivity in their work (OECD, 2020).

**Limited resources (e.g. counseling cards, medicines, play materials, development assessment tools, etc.) also present challenges for the workforce.** Across countries surveyed in the OECD in the ECEC sector, a lack of resources was highlighted as a significant source of stress for personnel serving in both pre-primary education and centers for children under three years of age (OECD, 2019; OECD, 2020). Community health workers face similar circumstances. When CHWs do not have access to drug supplies and equipment, their image and credibility can be damaged (GHWA & WHO, 2010). A review of CHW programs cited, for example, the lack of medicines in Uganda and Zimbabwe as contributing to a lack of motivation, noting that these issues are not endemic to these countries (Perry et al, 2020). A study of home visiting personnel supporting the Cuna Mas program in Peru similarly found that worn and inadequate play materials interfered with the day to day work of personnel and increased their workload (Josephson and Coddington, 2017). Without the play materials, personnel lacked the structure required to carry out their visits with families and then needed to spend additional time repairing those resources for visits.

**Members of the workforce also face safety issues that impact their abilities to carry out their roles.** Some of these include:

- ▶ **Threats to physical safety.** This is particularly relevant to female members of the workforce, who receive physical and sexual assault threats while carrying out their roles. In India for example,

### COVID-19 Challenges

COVID-19 has highlighted the societal distance that exists between K-12 teachers and child care educators. While K-12 teachers in the U.S. have been able to close temporarily and then transition to distance learning, while continuing to receive pay and benefits, child care workers have faced a number of challenges during the pandemic. Some of these include: being unable to attract the usual funding from parents and the local community, finding their programs unable to reopen after the pandemic has subsided, being forced to take unpaid leave and, when services reopen, working with limited safety policies in place (e.g. COVID-19 testing for educators, sanitizing supplies in centers), thereby increasing their risk of exposure.

(Whitebook et al., 2020)

some Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) refuse to go out at night in response to situations where other ANMs have been called to homes in the middle of the night and experienced assault. Unmarried ANMs have also reported being verbally harassed by young men in the village and having stones thrown at them while carrying out their roles (Perry et al, 2020).

► **Health risks.** Members of the workforce face health risks while carrying out their roles, especially during epidemics such as Ebola and the coronavirus pandemic (Perry et al, 2020). Child care workers, for example, are at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 due to the fact that they are at the frontlines of the pandemic and come into physical contact with children and their families on a daily basis. Further compounding this issue is that few child care workers receive health insurance and paid sick leave in their roles (Rosenbalm & Baker, 2020).

► **Psychological trauma:** Members of the workforce consistently struggle with high rates of burnout and stress in their roles. Additionally, since many early childhood personnel work in high poverty communities, they may face secondary or “shared” trauma (Roby, 2016). To address these issues, supportive resources are needed to improve the overall well-being of these workers. For example, in the child protection sector, the Care for Caregiver model provides group and individual counseling by a clinical psychologist to frontline personnel. It has recently been used in South Africa (Box 3) to help Child and Youth Care Workers prevent burnout, promote stress reduction, and help workers resolve their own crises (Roby, 2016).

### COVID-19 Challenges

The COVID-19 lockdown has highlighted the essential role that members of the workforce play in educating and caring for children. As services begin to reopen, preschool staff have remained dedicated to maintaining early childhood services, citing the importance of preschools in early childhood development.

However, in carrying out their roles, workers across countries have reported a number of challenges. In Sweden for example, members of the workforce reported feeling anxious about being exposed to the virus due to close contact with children and families, as well as transmitting the virus back to their loved ones at home. Additionally, in Norway, pre-school staff reported feeling worried about how they would be able to adequately support the social development of children (e.g. through play based learning) while maintaining social distancing in schools. The added work of having to deal with many children and their families at a distance and develop new materials suitable to that style of learning – especially for children who require special attention – is another major challenge.

(Samuelsson, 2020)

### Box 4: South Africa’s Care for Caregiver’s Program: Prioritizing mental health and psychosocial care among members of the workforce

In 2007, the National Association of Child care Workers (NACCW) in South Africa implemented Care for Caregivers (C4C) to provide professional psychosocial support to Child and Youth Care Workers (CYCWs) in the Isibindi program (which trains workers to deliver integrated services and referrals in children’s homes and communities). CYCWs deal with long hours and high levels of stress while carrying out their roles and C4C aims to heighten their emotional and psychosocial capacity to better serve orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and their families.

The C4C program engages clinical psychologists to facilitate monthly group and individual counselling sessions for CYCWs over a six-month period. Psychologists work to enhance team dynamics among teach skills to prevent burnout, and promote stress reduction, as

well as resolve their own personal crises. Team building activities such as the “Little Tree” activity allow CYCWs to explore their individual and group responsibilities to strengthen the team’s “tree.” Participants discuss trust, forgiveness, actions that might weaken the team (e.g. gossiping) and methods for enhancing positive behaviors to strengthen it.

Six half-hour individual counselling sessions allow CYCWs to discuss personal issues and share their life stories and struggles. Various techniques, such as “Journal Writing” help workers understand and cope with their feelings, as well as recover from any traumatic relationships and life events. The psychologists also use “Cultural storytelling” to help CYCWs learn how to overcome challenges they are facing. By reflecting on stories that their elders told them when they were children related to dealing with challenges, the CYCWs explore ways of addressing problems in their personal and professional lives using their cultural backgrounds as reference.

Despite successes, the program has also faced several implementation challenges. The short-term program only includes six individual and group sessions over the six-month period and does not have any systems in place to ensure continued support. Additionally, the program lacks formal systems to monitor and evaluate its processes and outcomes. Although CYCWs provide feedback to C4C staff, a more rigorous assessment approach could help program staff better understand the effectiveness of the model.

As South Africa works to expand and strengthen C4C implementation, it is taking a significant step towards prioritizing mental health and psychosocial care among members of the workforce. The C4C program serves as a useful point of reference for other programs looking to promote self-reflection and problem solving, and alleviate burnout and workforce-related stress.

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### 3. Early childhood programs face challenges in recruiting and retaining a qualified and diverse pool of candidates.

**Across roles, sectors, and countries, early childhood programs struggle to attract qualified workers to the field. Although many programs have minimum qualification requirements in place to inform recruitment efforts, they struggle to attract candidates who meet those requirements** (OECD, 2019). To address this problem, early childhood programs are exploring different ways of recruiting prospective workers, while also ensuring that they are able to meet the requirements needed to carry out their roles.

**Requirements vary for the knowledge, skills, and educational backgrounds that members of the workforce should have prior to entering the early childhood field.** In the health sector for example, programs typically require CHWs to be permanent residents of the community in which they will be working and have basic literacy and numeracy skills (GHWA & WHO, 2010). In the ECEC sector, minimum qualification requirements for entering the field differ across countries and service types. In 2012, for example, the minimum required length of pre-service training for ECEC teaching staff in OECD countries ranged from one to five years. However, in recent years, many countries have also started raising their minimum education qualifications, with certain countries (e.g. France, Iceland, and Italy) requiring pre-primary teachers to hold master’s level qualifications (OECD, 2019).

Across the child protection and social welfare sector, many countries require prospective social workers to have an academic background and experience in social work, although shortages in the field have forced certain countries to increasingly rely on para-professionals to carry out duties (UNICEF, 2019; Roby, 2016).

**Although many programs have minimum requirements in place, they struggle to recruit workers who meet these qualifications.**

In Namibia for example, only one third of the posts intended for social workers within the Directorate of Child Welfare were filled in 2007, and, in Kenya, only 400 out of 1,277 child officer posts were filled in 2010 (McCaffery, 2013). In 2017, Anganwadi supervisors, responsible for supervising workers who run preschool programs and provide health and nutrition education to pregnant women, mothers, and adolescent girls, had a 35% vacancy rate in India (Perry, 2020). That same year, England's ECEC sector had roughly 25,000 staff vacancies in the private and voluntary sector, equivalent to almost 10% of the existing workforce (OECD, 2019).

**Across different contexts, the early childhood field is often regarded as a low status profession, with early childhood practitioners considered as "unskilled" or low skilled by wider society** (Bury et al., 2020; Whitebook et al., 2016). In Saudi Arabia, for example, workers in preschool centers are traditionally viewed as caregivers rather than educators and have limited opportunities for career advancement, as opposed to educators at higher levels who have more opportunities to achieve professional status in their roles (Gahwaji, 2013). This lack of social status can dissuade prospective early childhood workers from entering the field. In several European countries (e.g. England, Finland, and Norway), many students enrolled in pre-service ECEC training only intend to stay in the field for a limited period before transitioning to other roles, due to factors such as low pay and social status (OECD, 2019). Additionally, in Ukraine, prospective preschool teachers often opt to explore alternate career paths (or enter the private sector) after completing pre-service training programs due to the low salary and status afforded to the profession (Putcha et al., 2018). The low status of early childhood educators can also dissuade males from entering the field, further aggravating workforce shortages. In Pakistan for example, the low social status of ECE educators coupled with low pay scales limits male participation in ECEC (Saigol and Danish, 2016). Additionally, in China, it is considered inappropriate for men to work in ECEC due to the feminized nature of the field, as well as its low socio-economic status (Xu and Waniganayake, 2017).

**To improve the public perceptions of personnel, some countries have started using different platforms (e.g. social media, public campaigns) to raise awareness on the importance of ECD.** For example, in Vietnam, communication forms and media (e.g. newspapers publications, radio segments) have been used to promote the visibility and public awareness of ECD (Shaeffer, 2015).

**In light of these challenges, many countries have started recruiting volunteers to carry out the duties of full-time employees.** In Malawi, for example, the social service sector recruits volunteers to carry out the roles of the workforce due to a scarcity of qualified workers (McCaffery, 2013). In the Dominican Republic, non-formal programs, especially for children younger than 5, often employ youth and volunteers from the local community, parents, and teachers at other levels who cannot find work in the areas in which they were trained (UNESCO, 2015). In China, most pre-primary teachers in rural areas are not professionally qualified and programs often hire teachers

## Responding to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in many members of the workforce losing their sources of incomes and benefits (e.g. health insurance), thereby forcing workers to consider other means of employment to manage costs (e.g. health care and child care) in their personal lives.

To entice workers to the field, Let's Grow Kids, a non-profit organization in the U.S., recommends that the Government implement a "COVID-19 Child Care Recruitment and Retention Incentive Program" for child care workers working during COVID-19. The incentive program would provide qualified individuals with a payment of at least \$500 that would mitigate some of the financial burdens they are facing as a result of the pandemic.

(Richards, 2020)

with only an upper secondary or even lower secondary education and minimal ECEC training (UNESCO, 2015). Although this has provided a temporary solution to the shortage of workers, it has also highlighted a need to develop appropriate policies and training channels to ensure quality. These measures might include on-the-job training to rapidly increase the knowledge and skills of volunteers and ensure that they are equipped to carry out their roles (ILO, 2013).

**The influx and outflow of workers (e.g. new volunteers entering the field) has encouraged systems to explore ways of tracking entry into the field.** In Tanzania for example, the Government uses the iHRIS Health Workforce Information Systems Software to monitor the availability and distribution of trained community volunteers in the field, identify any workforce gaps related to remuneration and promotions, and ensure that workers are deployed to areas with the greatest health care needs. (McCaffery, 2013; Davies, 2016). Additionally, the Human Resources for Health Toolkit, implemented by the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Health Workforce Alliance, is intended to help countries develop, implement, and monitor, evidence-based Human Resources for Health (HRH). Developed in response to the increasing demand by countries and other stakeholders for addressing HRH challenges (e.g. health workforce shortages, gaps in skills and competencies) in their specific contexts, the toolkit brings together a set of existing tools and resources used for four different phases of country-level HRH development (situational analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) in six action fields (leadership, partnerships, policy, finance, education, and HRH management systems) (WHO, n.d).

**It is also common for programs to add early childhood-related tasks to existing roles in an attempt to mitigate shortages in the field.** In Uganda for example, a dearth of health professionals has inspired policymakers to design and implement policies for extending the roles of community health workers, nurses, and midwives to deliver cost-effective maternal and child health (MCH) interventions (Nabudere et al., 2014). Shifting tasks to other roles can help rapidly expand the human resource pool and increase the skills of community workers (WHO, 2007). However, it also increases the risk of overworking and overburdening workers. In Siaya County, Kenya for example, community health volunteers (CHVs) face heavy caseloads in the field due to a limited supply of workers, which has contributed to high levels of stress and high turnover rates (Putcha, 2019).

**Alternate entry points, including apprenticeships and train-in-place programs that offer students a chance to earn while they work, have been used to attract workers to the field.** In many OECD countries, the length of pre-service training (3-5 years), coupled with stringent entry requirements, sometimes dissuades potential workers from entering the field. To address this problem, certain countries have started offering alternate pathways to expedite the amount of time it takes workers to begin working. Germany, for example, has started offering paid practice-integrated vocational training and apprenticeships in an effort to address staff shortages and encourage young professionals to pursue a career in ECEC. This effort has shown to be popular, as the program has more applicants than it can accommodate. In Singapore, the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) is exploring more diverse and flexible entry points to the profession in order to attract individuals who are coming back to formal work or switching careers. These include a "train-in-place" programs that allows participants to undergo training while working and earning a salary, and an apprenticeship model that allows participants to complete fewer classroom hours than traditional training programs and receive on-the-job coaching by experienced educators (Neuman, 2019). In Ecuador, although official hiring guidelines stipulate that care assistants working in child care centers must have a technical or university degree, most care assistants only have a high school or secondary school degree. To address this challenge, the Government created a technical career and in-service training program in 2014 that allows staff members in child care centers to earn a technical or university degree while working. This effort has helped to reduce qualification barriers that prevent potential workers from entering the field and allows them to grow professionally in their roles (Bonsu, 2019).

**The early childhood field has also struggled to ensure diversity in the field in regards to gender, ethnic and linguistic identities, and socioeconomic status.** These challenges, and the corresponding approaches that different countries are taking to address them, are highlighted in Table 2.

**Table 3: Diversity-Related Challenges and Responses**

Challenge	Response
<p><b>The early childhood field is largely dominated by women.</b> Across OECD countries, only 3% of pre-primary education teachers are men (OECD, 2019) and, in the health and social welfare fields, women make up roughly 70% of the workforce (ILO, 2017). In Latin America for example, existing cultural stereotypes and prejudices on the role that men play in society (e.g. men are not suited to look after young children) have contributed to the feminization of the profession, with 100% of ECE teachers in certain countries (e.g. Chile, Trinidad and Tobago) being women (UNESCO, 2016). Additionally, in the health sector, it is sometimes considered inappropriate for male CHWs to visit the homes of women and provide them with certain services, including family planning (Perry, 2020). Even in countries where there are no gender restrictions in the recruitment of CHVs like Kenya, most volunteers are women due to the nature of services offered, such as family planning (Perry, 2020).</p>	<p>To address these challenges, countries have started:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Launching public relations campaigns that specifically target men</b> (ILO, 2013). In Belgium, the Flemish Community launched a one-year media campaign to normalize men’s participation in the field, which helped increase the number of men working in child care . Similarly, in 2012, Scotland launched a campaign, “Men in Child care ,” through which 1,500 previously unqualified men were hired and trained as teachers (UNESCO, 2016). Additionally, in Denmark, national campaigns have also helped attract males to the early childhood field (Peeters, 2007).</li> <li>• <b>Promoting mentoring, networking, and peer-to-peer support</b> among prospective male workers and those already in the field (OECD, 2019). For example, in the U.S., male social workers visit high schools and colleges in an effort to normalize men’s involvement in the social service field, as well as to recruit more ethnically and racially diverse male candidates to the field (Morris-Compton, 2007).</li> <li>• <b>Maintaining a gender lens when recruiting and hiring men.</b> To address the cultural and gender stereotypes that prevent home visiting programs from recruiting men, countries have started recruiting male CHWs and splitting tasks between them and their female counterparts using a gendered lens (e.g., women exclusively providing family planning services). This allows programs to find an appropriate balance between hiring male CHWs and respecting cultural norms (GHWA &amp; WHO, 2010).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Early childhood programs lack ethnic, linguistic, regional, and socio-economic diversity</b> Struggles to promote ethnic diversity among pre-primary teachers is common across many countries, as exemplified in Belgium, where particularly in urban areas with large migrant populations, there are few teachers from the same ethnic backgrounds as children (Oberhuemer and Schreyer, 2018). In Luxembourg (and in many other countries) language competences of early childhood educators may not match the languages spoken by children (Oberhuemer and Schreyer, 2018).</p> <p><b>Financial barriers (e.g. tuition costs, foregone earnings while attending trainings), coupled with low remuneration and few incentives, can dissuade workers (especially those from low-income backgrounds) from entering the field (OECD, 2019. Davis, 2009).</b> For example, in the ECEC field, prospective workers from low-income backgrounds who do not have the means to pay for ECEC programs, and who do not want to receive low pay once in the field, often opt for higher paying jobs instead of pursuing a career in the field (OECD, 2019).</p> <p><b>There is also a shortage of early childhood educators in poor and rural areas due to factors such as a lack of quality training programs, and the long distances trainers have to travel to reach these areas – or the distance trainees have to travel to reach the programs that exist.</b> In rural China, for example, there are relatively few kindergartens with qualified teachers despite the fact that roughly 61% of children under the age of six live in these areas (Sun et al., 2015). As a result of this disparity, children from poor and rural areas are usually disadvantaged in comparison with their urban counterparts (Sun et al., 2015). Evidence shows that addressing the diversity gaps can help children feel confidence in their own self-identities and enhance their learning experiences (Reid et al., 2015).</p>	<p>To address these challenges, countries have started:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Creating alternate pathways to enter the field.</b> In the U.S., research shows that using strict pre-determined benchmarks (e.g. GPA and test scores) can keep racially and ethnically diverse students out of social work programs (Beimers et al., 2013). To address this, U.S. social work programs have started offering enhancement seminars that allow candidates from diverse backgrounds to develop the basic knowledge and skills needed to gain admission into social work programs (Beimers et al., 2013). Additionally, in the City of Ghent, Belgium, pedagogical coaching for previously unqualified candidates has encouraged greater diversity among child care workers (see Box 2).</li> <li>• <b>Providing financial support through pre-service education and training.</b> Japan, for example, has started funding pre-service training for child care staff with no previous experience, and, in Denmark, pre-service ECEC training is free and students receive a “practicum salary” during the periods when they are on practical placement (OECD, 2019). Additionally, Afghanistan has started providing scholarships to social work students in an effort to promote social work education and professionalization and attract additional workers to the field (GSSWA &amp; UNICEF, 2018). These efforts have helped attract a diverse range of workers into the field who otherwise might have been discouraged by financial barriers.</li> <li>• <b>Providing rewards and financial incentives to entice workers to rural areas.</b> In Australia for example, under the Teacher Quality National Partnership Agreement, there are reward structures in place for teachers and leaders who work in disadvantaged indigenous, rural, and hard-to-staff areas (Sun et al., 2015). In the U.S. social work programs in rural areas have started providing scholarships to prospective undergraduate social work students from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds to encourage them to work in these areas (Beimers et al. 2013). Additionally, in China, some rural kindergartens cover tuition fees for teacher training programs provided that ECE teachers work at the kindergarten for a specified amount of time after graduating (Sun et al., 2015).</li> </ul>



## Box 5: Case Study: Diversifying the early childhood workforce in the City of Ghent, Belgium

In recent years, the city of Ghent has been exploring different ways of creating a solid pipeline of qualified staff and managing high turnover in child care centers. One recruitment and retention strategy has been to offer a variety of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities for child care workers who work directly with children, child care coordinators who manage centres, and pedagogical coaches who directly oversee the mentoring and coaching of these two groups. This CPD program features a wide range of pedagogical topics, approaches, and methods that can be adapted to the context of a specific child care centre, including:

- **On-demand coaching and peer groups** that allow child care workers and managers to exchange knowledge and obtain practical experience.
- **Professional learning communities** that encourage child care workers and centre leaders from different child care centers to learn from one another.

Although both new and experienced staff members have found these approaches to be effective in supporting quality, promoting collaborative learning with their peers, and receiving continuous support and feedback from their coach, the public child care system still faces high rates of turnover, with workers leaving the field for other sectors. In addition, previous recruitment processes, such as a written examination, made it difficult to hire a diverse pool of workers, including foreign nationals. To address these problems, the City of Ghent has built on the existing pedagogical coaching model with a new approach that strengthens coaching and mentorship offerings and prioritizes the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce.

The new approach provides a **professional competence framework** for child care workers that highlights 15 different competences that are needed to become a successful early childhood worker. A "growth plan" begins with the competences for new child care workers and evolves into competences for more experienced workers. When child care workers first assume their roles, they review the competence framework with child care coordinators and receive the assignments they will need to complete in order to fulfil each competence. As they complete their assignments, child care coordinators provide these workers with ongoing support in the form of continuous feedback and reflection. They also provide different tools and resources (e.g. reflection worksheets) that allow them to grow professionally as they work towards attaining a long-term contract. This approach has successfully increased the diversity of new workers to include more foreign nationals and created a solid pipeline of qualified candidates. Despite these achievements, staff struggle to make enough time during their daily practice for additional formal and informal learning and are exploring different ways of incorporating digital learning into this approach.

The City of Ghent's experience highlights how continuous quality improvement can support recruitment and retention efforts. In particular, eliminating barriers to entry into the child care profession and providing workers with continuous feedback, ongoing support, and peer reflection sessions while they develop the competences for their role can create opportunities for those who may not have entered the field otherwise, thus generating a robust, diverse pipeline of early childhood professionals.

### Sources:

Peeters, J., De Kimp, C., & Brandt, S. (2016). *The Competent Early Childhood Education and Care System in the city of Ghent: A long-term investment in continuous professional development*.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with City of Ghent officials

## 4. Professional associations and unions can play an important role in advocating for a better supported and more empowered workforce.

**Though nascent and not yet widespread in many countries, professional associations and unions can play an important role in supporting and strengthening members of the workforce.** Although membership rates vary from country to country, in most of the European Union, teacher unions represent early childhood teachers working in preschools and other early childhood education settings that are part of the formal education system. In contrast, child care workers, who make up a large part of the early childhood workforce in many countries, are less often represented or organized by unions. **A qualitative study of seven EU countries (Croatia, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and The Netherlands) found that teacher unions are more likely to focus on the professional development and other needs of early childhood teachers, leaving those who work with children outside the school system or below preschool age with little representation** (Urban, 2009). In Sweden, child care workers are represented by a separate union than preschool teachers even though they work in the same settings (Urban, 2009).

Denmark has adopted a different approach by creating a trade union for all trained early childhood and school-aged child care staff, known as pedagogues, who work in nurseries, kindergartens, age-integrated child care centers, out of school care and leisure time centers, and youth clubs. The Danish Union of Early Childhood and Youth Educators (BUPL), which represents more than 95 percent of all pedagogues in Denmark, aims to “defend the professional rights of the pedagogues both in the field of salary and working conditions as well as the quality of education and care in the different types of child care services (ITUC, n.d).” It has played an important role in improving the pay and working conditions for members as well as providing training and professional development (Urban, 2009).

### Responding to COVID-19

The Association of Childhood Professionals, a representative and professional body for child care workers in Ireland, recommends that the government implement the following measures when reopening ECEC services:

- ▶ Paying a wage subsidy to cover a minimum wage rate of 15 euros per hour for staff members.
- ▶ Increasing consumable and wage expenditures related to COVID-19 (e.g. cleaning materials, additional staff to support cleaning).
- ▶ Subsidizing virtual modes of service delivery if in-person capacity is reduced due to updated public health guidance, insufficient staff availability, and COVID-19 fears.

(Association of Childhood Professionals, 2020)

**There are several examples from Europe of early childhood staff engaging in collective action to improve their pay and working conditions.** In Germany, ECE workers went on strike for 12 weeks in 2009, and approximately 250,000 early childhood educators went on a nationwide strike for equitable wages in 2015 (Education International, 2015). In 2020, tens of thousands of early childhood providers, educators, and parents demonstrated in Ireland (Fletcher, 2020). The Early Years Alliance – an umbrella group representing trade unions and early childhood professional and provider associations – organized the protest, which called on the government to increase funding in order to reduce fees for parents, increase pay for educators, and support the sustainability of services (Ni Aodha, 2020).

In the U.S., the National Association for the Education of Young Children seeks to advance the field by developing professional standards and position statements, overseeing voluntary accreditation of programs, and advocating for its 60,000 members. Child care workers, who are among the lowest paid professions in the country, are less likely to be unionized than early childhood teachers. In the state of California, after a 17-year fight, legislation was passed giving child care workers the right to unionize. In 2020, family child care providers (home child care workers) voted to join Child Care Providers United, which began as a membership organization and is run by two of the state’s largest unions. Child care providers will be able to collectively bargain with the state, which pays and licenses them to provide subsidized care for low-income families. While workers in a few other

states have unionized, the effort in California is by far the largest. Almost 45,000 workers are now eligible to join at a time when the state and country grapples with a child care crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (McCarty Carino, 2020).

**In low- and middle-income countries, ECEC workers are generally not organized to engage meaningfully in social dialogue and collective bargaining. Available evidence suggests that few early childhood teachers are members of trade unions. Given the wide diversity in their roles and workplaces and their relatively low status, early childhood personnel have been less likely to benefit from workers' rights movements than teachers in the formal system** (Shaeffer, 2015; Roland & Neuman, 2019). In many Low and Middle Income Countries (LMIC)s, early childhood providers tend to be set up as small businesses, which also makes them more difficult to be organized. Some teacher unions have by-laws and constitutions which do not include ECE workers. Even when early childhood educators work in preschools and become part of the formal education system, existing teacher associations or unions tend to be dominated by concerns of higher levels of education (Shaeffer, 2015).

However, there are a few cases of national teacher unions elevating early learning issues. In Sri Lanka, for example, the All Ceylon Union of Teachers has recruited and organized ECE teachers and pressured the government for the expansion of ECE services to reach more poor and marginalized children, increased public funding for ECE and teacher training, and the protection of the rights of ECE teachers (Education International, 2015). A regional study of 16 countries provides examples of unions and professional associations in Argentina, Brazil, and Peru engaging in influential activities from salary negotiation to the dissemination of innovative pedagogical methods, whereas those representing early educators in Chile, Colombia, and Trinidad and Tobago seem to have relatively less power (UNESCO, 2016).

At the global level, Education International (EI) – a international federation of teachers' trade unions that represents over 30 million education personnel – has played a prominent role in promoting ECE that is publicly funded and universally accessible. EI also advocates for the integration of ECE into education systems and continuous professional development for teachers and other professionals. In 2008, EI set up a Task Force to advise the federation on various aspects of ECE. In addition to its global and regional convenings to unify trade union action, EI supports partnerships across affiliate unions. For example, Denmark's BUPL has engaged in projects to support unions in several African countries to promote social dialogue and create decent employment in the ECE sector. Since the 1990s, for instance, BUPL and the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) have partnered to help organize early childhood workers with the aim to promote recognition, prestige and respect for work with young children.

**There is comparatively less information about unions and associations in the social services and health sectors (aside from doctors and nurses).** A recent review of the social service workforce found that three-quarters (27 out of 36) of countries surveyed had at least one social service professional association; about half of these national associations are members of the International Federation of Social Workers. Where they exist, these national associations have been particularly important for establishing and disseminating professional codes of ethics, which promote values and principles to guide the profession (e.g., human rights, social justice) and expected behaviors (e.g., confidentiality). In a few countries – Romania, the Philippines, and Thailand – professional associations also have the legal recognition, budget, and authority to act as a certification, regulatory, and/or licensing body (GSSWA & UNICEF, 2019).

**In most countries, the majority of early childhood workers are women, and many work in the informal sector or the informal component of the formal economy.** Promoting labor rights is an important strategy to address gender inequities in working conditions. Within the health sector, unions have played a key role in improving the pay and status of community health workers (CHW). In India, where the pay of ASHA workers varies by state, union mobilization in 2013 led to the central government providing a monthly honorarium. In Pakistan, unions of Lady Health Workers successfully obtained formal recognition of the profession, and a Supreme Court case established in 2012 that they should receive at least the minimum wage. Since 2013, they have been recognized as public health employees, which improved the terms of their employment (Public Services

International, 2018). Concerns about working conditions and pay for CHWs has made it challenging to fully implement South Africa's national health care strategy. In response, CHWs have engaged in collective action and sought to establish representative bodies, such as the National Union of Care Workers of South Africa (Perry, 2020).

**In recent years, global and regional early childhood networks of practitioners, civil society organizations, and government officials have played a key role in advocating for the early years and amplifying the voice of practitioners in the field across education, health, and social protection sectors.** These include the global Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN) and four regional networks: the Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN), the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC), the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) and the Arab Network for Early Childhood Development (ANECD) (Neuman & Okeng'o, 2019). It will be important to monitor the impact of these networks on improving working conditions over time.

## Policy Recommendations and Areas for further research

The following recommendations derive from the existing research and experience on the working conditions in early childhood settings. They are intended for policymakers and managers of early childhood programs, particularly those who are responsible for designing, managing, and allocating resources for recruitment, retention, and career development of the early childhood workforce.

- 1. Provide stable and adequate financing for programs so that they may offer salaries and benefits packages that more closely align with skills and responsibilities required of the early childhood workforce and are competitive to those received by educators of higher levels.** Adequate and stable financing will allow programs to better plan for and support the early childhood workforce, ensuring better compensation, benefits packages, and longer-term contracts. During times of crises, such as COVID-19, programs should strive to continue providing workers with compensation and other benefits (e.g. hazard pay) to ensure that their livelihoods are not compromised. Implementing these measures will help ensure that members of the workforce are adequately supported in carrying out their roles, and can continue providing essential services to young children and their families.
- 2. Protect the health and well-being of the early childhood workforce.** In addition to adequate remuneration, early childhood workers should receive monetary and non-monetary incentives (e.g. health insurance, transportation benefits, adequate leave policies) that provide them with health and mental health support while carrying out their roles. Measures should also be taken to reduce heavy caseloads (e.g. minimizing administrative tasks) and increase flexibility in working hours and locations to reduce burnout and stress in the field. Particularly during COVID-19, measures (e.g. disinfecting workspaces, promoting virtual learning) should be implemented to prioritize the overall health and wellbeing of workers during times of crises.
- 3. Document the working conditions and experiences of personnel.** Programs should establish methods of collecting regular feedback from the workforce on their experiences (e.g. pay, career advancement, workload, and safety) to illustrate the realities that personnel face in their roles, and inform policy and programming decisions to improve the quality of the program. Creating an avenue for personnel to directly share these experiences amongst themselves (e.g. through professional learning communities) and other stakeholders (e.g. donors, decision-makers) promotes knowledge exchange and allows workers to feel empowered and valued in their roles.
- 4. Develop flexible entry points to the profession to increase and diversify the supply of workers.** To mitigate recruitment and retention challenges in the field, programs should recruit from non-traditional candidate pools and providing flexible training opportunities (e.g. on the job training) to rapidly increase the knowledge and skills of new personnel. Develop competency based requirements that recognize prior knowledge and practical experience to attract a broader

range of workers to the profession, including those without traditional credentials/training. Lastly, programs should create alternate pathways to shorten the amount of time it takes newly recruited workers to acquire the skills needed to begin working, and ensure that professional development and advancement opportunities are linked to increased responsibilities and remuneration.

- 5. Strengthen workforce planning to address the uneven recruitment and deployment of staff across programs and geographies.** Collecting and aggregating data on the influx and outflow of workers enables programs to identify staffing gaps in the current system, allowing them to allocate trained workers to the areas with the greatest need. These systems can also provide insight into existing gaps in workforce skills and competences, allowing programs to explore different options for training and professional development. Providing decision-makers with insight into the gaps that exist in the early childhood system can help strengthen workers, and consequently improve the quality of the field as a whole.

### Areas for Further Research

This study reviews the current evidence base across sectors, programs, and workforce roles to provide insight on the working conditions of members of the early childhood workforce. The findings that emerged from the evidence collected highlight the obstacles that make it difficult for programs to recruit and retain members of the workforce, the challenging working conditions that early childhood personnel face in their roles, and the role that professional associations and unions play in empowering the workforce. While this study attempts to consolidate existing evidence on this topic, further research is needed in the following areas:

- ▶ *The effectiveness of strategies to improve the working conditions of members of the workforce, and strengthen the overall quality of early childhood programs.* Understanding the effectiveness of the strategies used to improve the working conditions, and overall status, of early childhood personnel can increase the attractiveness profession, which could assist with recruitment and retention efforts. It would also allow programs to gain insight on the best ways to diversify the workforce (e.g. gender, ethnicity) in order to create a workforce that represents the children and families being served. These insights would allow for the strengthening of early childhood programs and the improvement of child development outcomes.
- ▶ *The strength of the relationship between different aspects of working conditions (pay, workload, benefits, etc.) and recruitment and retention efforts.* Although research shows that challenging working conditions can hinder recruitment and retention efforts, additional information is needed on the extent to which these factors dissuade workers from entering and remaining in the field.
- ▶ *The extent to which recruitment efforts are inclusive of potential early childhood workers with disabilities.* While research provides insight into the recruitment efforts that have been taken to promote gender, ethnic, and regional diversity in the field, additional information is needed on the extent to which these efforts target people with disabilities and how representation within the field can be better addressed.
- ▶ *The impact of unionization, social movements, and collective action on improving the working conditions of members of the workforce.* As early childhood unions and associations gain traction in the field, additional research is needed on how they can be more inclusive of those serving children in the early years, as well as those in the social services and health sectors. Additionally, gaining insight into the role they play in improving the working conditions of the workforce, particularly in relation to addressing issues such as low remuneration, can strengthen efforts to promote the voices of members of the workforce.
- ▶ *The cascading effects of COVID-19 on the working conditions for the early childhood workforce.* Additional research is needed on the effectiveness of different strategies (e.g. creating virtual learning spaces, providing income support payments) to mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19 on members of the workforce. Understanding the long-term effects of these measures will provide early childhood programs with valuable insight on how to support and strengthen members of the workforce during times of crises.

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