



STRENGTHENING AND SUPPORTING
THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE:

Training and Professional Development



The Early Childhood Workforce Initiative (ECWI) is a global, multi-sectoral effort to mobilize countries and international partners to support and empower those who work with families and children under age 8. This initiative is jointly led by **Results for Development (R4D)** and the **International Step by Step Association (ISSA)**, and supported by a consortium of funders including Bernard van Leer Foundation, Open Society Foundations, ELMA Foundation, and Jacobs Foundation.

This report was written by Radhika Mitter and Vidya Putcha, with assistance from Kimberly Josephson, and under the guidance of Michelle Neuman and Mark Roland at Results for Development (R4D). The following individuals provided invaluable insights as key informants for the study: Christine Chen (Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood/Association for Childhood Education International), Collette Tayler (University of Melbourne), Cornelia Cincilei (Step by Step Moldova), Liliana Rotaru (CCF Moldova), Matthew Frey (PATH), and Svetlana Drivdale (PATH). Many thanks are also due to the members of the Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN) Task Force on the Workforce for their guidance and input along with several other individuals including: Emily Vargas-Barón (The RISE Institute), Joan Lombardi (Bernard van Leer Foundation), Aaron Emmel (American Academy of Pediatrics), Tina Hyder (Open Society Foundations), Nurbek Teleshaliyev (Open Society Foundations), Rachel Machefsky (Bernard van Leer Foundation), Melanie Swan (Plan International), Mihaela Ionescu (International Step by Step Association), Amy Bess (Global Social Service Workforce Alliance), Aisha Yousafzai (Harvard University), Stephanie Olmore (National Association for the Education of Young Children) and Sheldon Shaeffer (international ECD consultant).

We are grateful to the Early Childhood Program at the Open Society Foundations for their generous support of the Early Childhood Workforce Initiative, including this report.

Suggested citation:

Mitter, R. & Putcha, V. (2018). *Strengthening and Supporting the Early Childhood Workforce: Training and Professional Development*. Washington, D.C.: Results for Development.

Introduction

Evidence is growing that early childhood development (ECD)¹ services have a strong, positive impact on children's development. Despite increasing knowledge on the benefits of ECD, however, we still do not know very much about the early childhood *workforce*, one of the most important elements influencing the quality of ECD services.

While we know that the workforce is important, key questions remain unanswered: What do early childhood professionals and paraprofessionals need to know and be able to do in order to perform effectively? How do requisite knowledge and skills vary across contexts? What types of training and support do staff receive? How is the early childhood workforce recruited, compensated, and incentivized?

In an effort to address these questions, the Early Childhood Workforce Initiative, led by the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) and Results for Development (R4D), was created as a multi-stakeholder effort to support and empower those who work directly with young children. To inform and guide the Initiative, R4D is carrying out a series of *global landscape analyses* to establish 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, trainers, supervisors, and managers from the education², health and nutrition, social protection and child protection sectors, the early childhood workforce is vast and diverse.³ Recognizing this diversity along with their many shared objectives, these analyses aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the current status of the workforce worldwide. The four themes⁴ which will be explored in this series include: competences and standards, training and professional development, continuous quality improvement and working conditions. This report, the first in this series, addresses the theme of *training and professional development*.⁵



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What is training and professional development?

Two of the primary types of training and professional development opportunities discussed in this report are pre- and in-service training.

- **Pre-service or initial preparation or initial training** refers to training in which an individual engages *prior* to beginning a position.⁶ This form of training ensures that workforce members are adequately prepared to serve in a particular role and may include a combination of coursework and field training.
- **In-service or ongoing training** is a form of training in which early childhood professionals enhance their skills and maintain current knowledge and practice. While often optional, in-service training may be required in order to improve knowledge and skills, to maintain individual licensure or advance to a new level of licensure, to meet employer expectations, or to meet other requirements for early childhood professionals working in the field.⁷ Continuing professional development (CPD), is designed to complement existing training pathways for early childhood development professionals, extending beyond the basic accredited training courses required for certification and recertification, where those systems exist. CPD embraces the idea that individuals aim for continuous improvement in their professional skills and knowledge beyond the basic training required to carry out the job.⁸

Why focus on training and professional development?

Taking into account the diverse backgrounds and experiences of individuals delivering ECD services, training and professional development programs offer an opportunity to impart a core set of knowledge and skills to members of the early childhood workforce, which is particularly important as programs look to scale and reach a greater number of young children and families. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that supporting individuals with such opportunities can influence child development outcomes. For example, a recent meta-analysis of global studies of center-based early childhood education and care programs found that higher teacher qualifications are related to improvements in supporting children's development, including those related to supervision and the scheduling of activities, organization and arrangement of the room, providing varied social experiences for children, and creating a warm and friendly environment for interactions.⁹ Beyond qualifications, other research has suggested that the quality of the education program – i.e. how well it prepares new teachers by, for example, grounding them in knowledge of child development and academic subject areas – may be a more critical factor in a teacher's ability to influence children's development and learning in a positive way.¹⁰

Although there is growing evidence that a well-trained and supported early childhood workforce is key to providing high-quality services to young children and families, there have been limited efforts to systematize the various approaches taken across the entire workforce. This is the first attempt to review global literature and experiences across early childhood sectors and roles. In identifying shared experiences, challenges, and approaches, it is hoped that this study can support efforts to strengthen the training and professional development opportunities available to members of the early childhood workforce.

Key Findings

This study synthesizes evidence on the approaches to and challenges associated with training and professional development across the early childhood workforce. An extensive review of published and grey literature, and key informant interviews with ECD experts yielded 10 findings:



1. A variety of providers deliver training and professional development programs for the early childhood workforce, leading to different types of qualifications.

Providers of both pre- and in-service training programs include universities, post-secondary and vocational training institutions, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). As pre-service training programs may be delivered by a variety of providers, this may lead to different qualifications, such as degrees, diplomas, and certificates. In addition, requirements for entry into the profession may vary by role, sector, and country. Similar to pre-service training, in-service training opportunities also take a variety of forms, such as workshops and conferences, and refresher and specialized training programs. However, requirements for in-service training are typically fewer than for pre-service training, and are in many cases optional for ECD personnel. Certain countries, however, have prioritized in-service training, such as South Africa – where it is required for all social service workers to maintain their registered status.¹¹



2. Access to training and professional development opportunities has steadily increased; however, it is often limited for those working with the youngest children, auxiliary staff and for rural and remote populations.

For example, in early childhood education and care (ECEC), those working with children in the 0-3 age group, and those working as caregivers or teacher assistants, typically receive less training than core early childhood educators. However, certain countries, such as the Netherlands and France, make concerted efforts to provide the same training opportunities for both core and auxiliary ECEC workers.¹²

Additionally, across sectors, rural and remote populations are at a disadvantage as many training programs are located in urban areas. To better reach rural and remote populations, distance learning is emerging as a promising solution. For example, the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI) in Eastern and Southern Africa, provides an 18-month accredited distance-learning certificate course in community-based work with children and youth for social and child protection workers.¹⁵



3. Limited financial support for training and professional development can further inequities in access.

While some systems provide robust financial support for training and professional development, such as New Zealand, which funds in-service support for the first two years of ECEC teachers' induction and mentoring program, in other systems, such as Ghana, ECEC teachers are required to pay for their own in-service training.¹⁴ Some countries are increasing financial support, including, through scholarships, to increase access to these opportunities. The state of Victoria in Australia offers scholarships in varying amounts for a range of ECEC certificate, diploma, and degree programs for Aboriginal populations, who may have limited access to training opportunities.



4. Variation in duration, structure, and intensity of training programs has quality implications.

There is much variation in the duration of different pre- and in-service training opportunities. While access to shorter training programs can be beneficial to early childhood workforce members who are unable to participate in full-time or degree programs, there is some evidence to suggest that training programs that are longer and more intensive allow for practitioners to develop a greater range of in-depth knowledge pertaining to their field. Results from a study comparing three forms of pre-primary education in Cambodia show a linear relationship between the intensity and duration of educators' pre-service training and effect sizes on children's learning.¹⁵ Additionally, training programs that are specialized or focused on specific topics in early childhood education and child development, can have a positive effect on teaching practices and children's learning outcomes. For example, it has been found that ECEC practitioners with specialized training and higher education generally engage in positive adult-child interactions, including praising, comforting, questioning, and responding to children.¹⁶



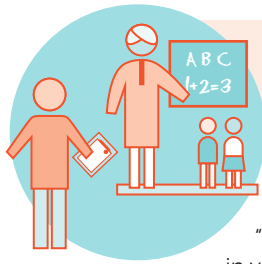
5. Training and professional development opportunities may be enhanced when aligned with competences and standards for roles and with guidelines for training providers.

Competence-based approaches, which help learners focus on specific areas for professional development based on their individual needs and the knowledge and skills identified as being important for job performance, strengthen training and professional development opportunities. Training programs for community health workers (CHWs), for example, frequently employ competence-based approaches to training, which focus on providing CHWs with the skills they require for their job, compared with traditional knowledge-based learning.¹⁷



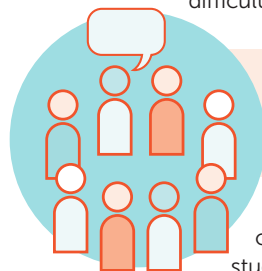
6. Training and professional development curricula should address the particular needs of the workforce to be relevant to local contexts.

While many countries lack the human and financial resources to develop local curricula and materials, efforts to develop more culturally relevant curricula have emerged on a smaller scale through specific NGOs. The Aga Khan Foundation Madrasa Resource Centers in Kenya, Uganda, and Zanzibar provide teacher education and preschool curricula that are closely connected to the local contexts in which the resource centers are located. Teacher training is focused on preparing teachers to use local stories and languages, culturally-relevant child-rearing practices, and locally-available resources.¹⁸ In general, involving multiple stakeholders in the design of training programs, such as frontline workers, managers, ECD experts and academics, and relevant ministries, can help ensure training curricula is aligned with the needs and context of the workforce members and the communities they serve.



7. Field education and other opportunities to gain practical skills are important components of initial preparation.

Across sectors, efforts to integrate field education into pre-service training programs are underway. In Burkina Faso, the national training program in social work places a strong emphasis on practice, with internships included as part of the curriculum. These internships begin with a one-month “observational” internship during the first year of training, followed by increasingly lengthy internships in years two and three in either government or NGO sites.¹⁹ However, challenges persist regarding the availability, implementation, and quality of field-based programs. In a number of countries, pre-service training continues to be theory-driven. Additionally, where field education does exist, it is often not formalized with clearly set guidelines, and field instructors are often inadequately trained to supervise students. Limited suitable placements and difficulty scheduling field hours with course requirements are also challenges.²⁰



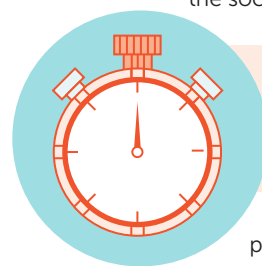
8. Professional development opportunities are most effective when they are ongoing, tailored to individual needs, and incorporate peer learning.

Professional development that is ongoing in nature and offers opportunities for self-reflection is often valued more by participants than training offered through one-off or short-term sessions.²¹ A study of European Union (EU) member states found that continuing professional development (CPD) interventions lasting over a year that are integrated into practice, such as pedagogical guidance and coaching in reflection groups, are effective both in countries with a well-established system of ECEC provisions and a high level of qualification requirements for ECEC workers, as well as in countries with poorly subsidized ECEC systems and low qualification requirements.²² The extent to which programs are tailored to individual needs is also a crucial factor in ensuring quality professional development. Coaching programs which are based on identifying and addressing practitioners’ individual needs, and setting achievable goals aligned with those needs can be useful in this regard. Additionally, Opportunities that incorporate peer learning is valued as a mechanism for growth. Research conducted on national efforts to strengthen the social service workforce in Indonesia, Moldova, and Rwanda, found that the use of peer learning was effective in building capacity, reducing isolation and burnout, and increasing support.²³



9. Roles are often not clearly defined which weakens training and professional development and limits opportunities for career advancement.

Many countries lack clearly defined roles for members of the early childhood workforce. For example, of 14 countries where job descriptions were requested for a study on the social service workforce in West and Central Africa, only 2 countries, Burkina Faso and Benin, could point to existing ones.²⁴ Without clearly defined functions, titles, and educational requirements, pre-service training opportunities are at risk of being ineffective in preparing workforce members for their roles. At the same time, when functions, titles, and educational requirements are poorly defined, it is difficult to connect them with in-service training opportunities in the system to facilitate career advancement. Certain countries are engaging in efforts to address this challenge. For example, Croatia’s *Act on Social Work Activity (2012)* defines the roles and obligations of the social service workforce.²⁵



10. Rapid training of paraprofessional workers can be effective in addressing workforce shortages, and also provide them with opportunities for career advancement.

Several countries, particularly resource-poor settings, have used task-shifting, or the training of paraprofessionals or staff with lower qualifications to take on a greater range of services that are outside of their traditional role, thereby increasing the supply of trained ECD workers while also offering paraprofessionals opportunities for career advancement. For instance, Ethiopia’s Health Extension Program has established a new cadre of community health workers by training selected community members to perform basic promotive, preventative, and certain curative activities typically performed by professionals.²⁶

Conclusion and areas for further research

Training and professional development opportunities provide critical knowledge and skills to members of the early childhood workforce. However, limited access among specific groups and varying quality, emanating from a number of factors including the length of programs, incorporation of practical experiences, and relevance to local contexts, reduce their potential for impact. As countries consider how best to design and implement training and professional development in their systems, they may want to consider identifying whether pre- and in-service opportunities are widely available, what types of practical training opportunities they offer, how they are linked to any available competences and standards, and whether they are relevant to the day to day activities of the workforce.

While this study advances existing knowledge on the early childhood workforce by synthesizing for the first time data on training and professional development experiences from across sectors, regions, and roles, many gaps remain at the program and systems levels. At the program level, while we know that the structure and format of training and professional development opportunities matter for quality, there is little evidence regarding specific factors that impact child outcomes, with most of the evidence coming from the education sector. At the systems level, we know that the costs of providing training and professional development opportunities can be major barriers in scaling them up. However, we know very little about how much countries spend on relevant training and professional development programs, how much high-quality training programs cost, and what percentage of budgets should be devoted to pre- and in-service training to meet current and future needs. Further research should address these questions in order to contribute to dialogue and policy efforts to strengthen support for the early childhood workforce.

Endnotes

1. 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.
2. When referring to the education sector, we are also including the child care field unless otherwise noted.
3. Table 1 in the full report provides a snapshot of the various roles within this workforce while the Annex provides a more comprehensive analysis.
4. These themes were identified in collaboration with a group of experts convened by the Early Childhood Workforce Initiative in September 2015.
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