



SUPPORTING THE EARLY  
CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE AT SCALE

# Preschool Education in Ukraine

# EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE INITIATIVE

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.



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We extend our deepest appreciation to the Early Childhood Program at the Open Society Foundations for their generous support of this work.

### **Suggested citation:**

Putcha, V., Neuman, M., Zaplotynska, O., & Sofiy, N. (2018). *Supporting the Early Childhood Workforce at Scale: Preschool Education in Ukraine*. Washington, D.C.: Results for Development.

# INTRODUCTION

Strong and growing evidence on the impact of early childhood development (ECD) services on children's development has contributed to efforts to increase access to ECD programs, although there are persistent challenges related to ensuring their quality. Although evidence indicates that the workforce is one of the most important factors influencing quality of center-based services, relatively little is known about it. Through the Early Childhood Workforce Initiative (ECWI) – a multi-stakeholder effort to support and empower those who work directly with young children led by the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) and Results for Development (R4D) – R4D is carrying out a series of *country studies* to understand the experiences and challenges faced by those in particular roles in several countries. The country studies intend to focus on a range of roles including professionals and paraprofessionals, paid and unpaid workers, and frontline workers and managers, from the education, health and nutrition, and social and child protection sectors.

This study, the second in this series, focuses on the role of preschool teachers in Ukraine. The country, with a predominantly public network of preschool education, has achieved coverage for a significant proportion of the population. Nevertheless, it struggles to meet demand and ensure quality of services. In addition, Ukraine is at a unique moment where increasing attention is being paid in the country to improving the quality of preschool education and supporting inclusion, which have been elevated in recent policy reforms. Taking into account the significance of preschool teachers to the system of preschool education, this study aims to gain a better understanding of their experiences, including their backgrounds, the support that they receive, as well as the challenges that they encounter.

By illustrating the experiences of preschool teachers in Ukraine and identifying the size and scope of the challenges they face, it is hoped that this study will support officials within the Ministry of Education and Science (*Ministerstvo osvity i nauky*) in Ukraine as well as local education departments to strengthen and support preschool personnel through targeted policies and programs and contribute to the knowledge base around the early childhood workforce.



# BACKGROUND

Ukraine has made a significant commitment to providing all children with affordable opportunities for preschool education through its public system. However, as the system struggles to keep pace with demand, a number of children are left without the support that they need for their growth and development during a critical stage in life. In 2014, 90,000 children were waiting for places in public preschools, 15,000 in Kyiv alone.<sup>1</sup>

Preschool teachers form the backbone of this system, and in order to improve access and quality, further attention is needed to their role. In terms of their background, according to the *Law on Preschool Education (Zakon pro doshkil'upnu osvitu)* (2001), preschool teachers are required to hold a university degree in teaching.<sup>2</sup> In reality, nearly all teachers have completed post-secondary education in teaching, 40 percent from pedagogical colleges and 59 percent from universities.<sup>3</sup> Teachers receive initial training at 93 higher education establishments that train professionals in preschool education.<sup>4</sup> Although there is variation across colleges and universities, the curriculum includes general courses on topics such as history and philosophy in the first two years, after which there is more professionally-focused training. In terms of in-service training, preschool teachers are required to participate in formal opportunities every five years as part of attestation (*atestatsiya*) requirements<sup>5</sup>. This involves evaluating teaching activities and suitability for a particular post and defining a teacher's qualification level and teaching category.<sup>6</sup> However, in practice, teachers without a master's degree are ineligible to attain higher qualification or teaching categories. Salaries for preschool teachers are calculated based on a standard *stavka* (tariff) with bonuses provided for qualification categories and increasing years of experience. In 2015, the average monthly salary of a preschool teacher was only 38 percent of the average wage of full-time employees of private enterprises, and only 45 percent higher than the minimum wage in Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> However, in September 2017, significant salary increases were introduced — the basic monthly *stavka* for teachers without any qualification category increased 36 percent from UAH 2310 (US \$ 88) to UAH 3152 (US \$ 120).

# FINDINGS

In order to complete the study, the research team carried out a desk review of policies relevant to the preschool education sector, as well as a review of ECD services provided to young children and families from birth to age six. Based on issues surfaced in the desk review, the research team conducted interviews and focus group discussions with a range of stakeholders knowledgeable of and responsible for preschool education in the country. Once data were collected, they were coded and analyzed across of key themes which produced a set of findings and recommendations.

Based on data collected during interviews and focus group discussion, the following emerged as key takeaways:

## Finding 1

**While pedagogical colleges and universities are perceived as providing prospective teachers with a strong theoretical foundation in teaching, initial preparation programs offer limited opportunities for practical training and are often unsuccessful in encouraging students to enter into the profession.**

- A** *Higher education programs do not impart sufficient practical training to prepare teachers to work in preschools or support inclusive education.* While initial preparation programs impart theoretical knowledge in subjects, such as psychology and pedagogy, programs could offer more opportunities for practical training. Many courses in university and college training programs were described as being lecture-based, while opportunities for hands-on learning are often not incorporated until after the first year. The lack of practical opportunities in pedagogical training programs is also related to the fact that many teacher educators do not have practical experience themselves. This seems to be a particular challenge in universities, where few professors possess teaching experience, as opposed to colleges. Moreover, although there has been a growing focus on inclusive education in the country, and some colleges and universities offer specific courses on working with children with various educational needs, there is still insufficient training and support for preschool teachers on how to embrace inclusive education as a new paradigm for education.
- B** *Many graduates of pedagogical colleges and universities do not go on to undertake roles in preschools, which may reflect ineffective screening criteria for applicants as well as an inability of higher education institutions to impart a professional identity among students around teaching.* The current admissions process for teacher training colleges and universities is reliant on the results of external independent tests which do not sufficiently address factors such as motivation and interest in working with children. Considering that many graduates do not pursue careers in preschool education and that programs do not deliver sufficient practical training, it may be that higher education institutions are not effectively imparting a sense of professional identity among students, which could sustain their interest and motivation in working with young children.

## Finding 2

**While parents seem to be generally satisfied with the support that their children receive, there appears to be a mismatch between parents' expectations of teachers and teacher capacity, which has resulted in growing interest and enrollment in private kindergartens.**

- A** *Parents express appreciation for teachers and preschool institutions.* Many parents expressed appreciation for the work that preschool teachers do to support their children despite low salaries and heavy workloads. They also highlight frequent opportunities for regular communication with teachers.

- B** *Teachers mention that one of the biggest challenges that they face is communicating with parents.* While parents generally reflected on positive interactions with teachers and other preschool staff, teachers, preschool directors, and teacher methodologists frequently mentioned communication with parents as one of teachers' biggest challenges. Teachers often expressed that parents were not sufficiently involved in their child's development and learning and that parents ignored recommendations on how to support children at home.
- C** *Recent growth in private preschool enrollments reflect private preschools' ability to flexibly meet the needs of parents.* While parents generally expressed satisfaction with services provided in public preschool institutions, a growing number of parents are enrolling their children in private preschools, which seem to offer modern approaches and relative flexibility compared to public institutions.

### Finding 3

**It is difficult to recruit qualified candidates to teach in preschool, particularly in metropolitan areas where there are more attractive employment alternatives.**

Preschools face challenges in recruiting an adequate number of qualified preschool teachers. The primary factors contributing to the lack of interest include the low salary and social status afforded to professionals in these roles. In addition, the growing presence and generally better pay of the private sector creates competition for recruiting preschool teacher candidates.

### Finding 4

**Preschool teachers value access to in-service training and the opportunity it provides to connect with peers, as well as daily guidance provided by teacher methodologists, but additional peer learning and practical training opportunities are needed.**

- A** *Although teachers are offered mentorship by more experienced teachers and supervision by school-based teacher methodologists and school directors, these opportunities do not fully address their needs.* Teachers are supported by senior teachers, teacher methodologists, and in some cases, school directors. School-based teacher methodologists observe teachers' practice, review teachers' lesson plans in order to ensure relevance, and offer guidance where needed, often suggesting particular resources for teachers to review. Although teacher methodologists are committed to supporting teachers, teachers reflected that teacher methodologists often have limited knowledge on specialized topics and rely too heavily on sharing literature and resources rather than modeling good teaching practice.
- B** *Teachers value in-service training for the opportunities that it provides to connect with peers and to reduce burnout; however, the content and format of in-service training is not always relevant to preschool teachers' needs.* Teachers and school directors expressed appreciation for in-service training opportunities, which are offered to teachers at no cost. In addition, they described these opportunities as helping teachers connect with and learn from peers, and to reduce burnout. Yet, there were some concerns that teachers are unable to choose training courses that interest them and that such courses are not relevant to teachers' needs. They also expressed interest in having more opportunities to learn from other teachers suggesting that practical knowledge from peers may better address professional needs than training courses. Finally, teachers lamented their lack of access to online resources and training opportunities, which they believe would support ongoing training and professional development.

- C** *Despite the presence of pathways for teachers and teacher technical assistants to advance within the preschool education system, opportunities can be limited, which has contributed to low career aspirations among some teachers.* Several teachers interviewed for this study had previously served in assistant roles, while a number of teacher technical assistants interviewed expressed interest in advancing to teacher roles. However, transitioning to a teacher role from a technical assistant role can be difficult, as completing higher education requires significant time and resources. And while attestation processes provide a formal mechanism by which teachers can be considered for higher categories and roles, without a master's degree, a teacher has limited options for advancement. Although some teachers interviewed expressed interest in advancing in the preschool education system, others had limited aspirations – likely a result of the perceived lack of opportunities for advancement.

## Finding 5

**Despite challenging workloads, low pay, and low status, teachers remain in the profession due to their motivation to work with children and few employment alternatives.**

- A** *Teachers are motivated by a desire to work with children and express appreciation for opportunities to see children grow and develop.* When describing why they joined the profession and what brought them the most satisfaction in their work, teachers frequently mentioned a strong desire to work with children and satisfaction derived from seeing children grow and develop with their support.
- B** *Teachers face challenging workloads in terms of the number of children for whom they are responsible, the range of tasks they support, as well as the diversity of children's needs.* Teachers frequently noted that large group sizes were one of the negative aspects of their jobs, contributing to a heavy workload. In addition, teachers expressed that they were responsible for completing a large amount of paperwork, which detracted from the time that they could spend working with children. In addition, numerous teachers described challenges related to working with children with special educational needs, citing a lack of knowledge and skills as impediments to providing effective support. As a result, teachers, school directors, and experts were all encouraged by the recent addition of the teacher assistant role to support inclusive classrooms, although few teacher assistants have been deployed to classrooms.
- C** *Despite low pay and low status, teachers enter and remain in the profession due to a lack of employment alternatives.* All stakeholders interviewed – central and local authorities, experts, preschool personnel and parents – agreed that teachers' salaries are too low. Although recent salary increases represent progress, further effort to remunerate teachers in order to provide motivation and contribute to positive job satisfaction may be required. In addition to low salaries, teachers receive few incentives beyond minimal health benefits and small bonuses. Teachers also describe feeling undervalued for their work. Among other factors, teachers feel that parents do not believe them to be highly skilled. However, teachers have few employment alternatives and are grateful for finding work in preschool institutions.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Ukraine has made a robust commitment to providing children with affordable preschool education opportunities that support their growth and development. While there are remaining challenges related to ensuring access for all children, Ukraine’s preschool education system is at a critical stage. Additional focus on and support to preschool teachers is needed in order to improve the quality of services delivered at scale. Below we present a set of recommended actions for officials within local education departments and the Ministry of Education and Science in Ukraine that would address the challenges surfaced in this study. Recommendations that are actionable in the near term and have minimal cost implications are classified as short-term while those requiring potentially greater resources and a more substantial timeline are deemed as long-term.

## Short- and long-term recommendations of support for preschool teachers

	SHORT-TERM	LONG-TERM
INITIAL PREPARATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop an onboarding program for college/ university graduates which imparts practical skills and orients new teachers to work with young children in preschools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In order to better understand the strengths and areas for improvement of initial preparation programs, carry out further analysis of pre-service training curricula to understand their content and methods. Based on results of review and input from a wide range of stakeholders, develop standards for training programs, including the timing and amount of practical training needed in initial preparation programs.</li> <li>With input from teachers, teacher educators, policymakers, parents, and other relevant stakeholders, develop and introduce pedagogical competencies and standards for preschool teachers which can also help in cultivating a professional identity.</li> <li>Review admission criteria for initial preparation programs and revise to ensure that students who enter programs demonstrate commitment to working with young children (e.g., through previous work/volunteer experience, essays, interviews).</li> </ul>
PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage school directors and teacher methodologists to provide guidance to teachers on building strong relationships and partnerships with parents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner with pedagogical colleges/universities and regional training institutes to review existing course offerings related to working with parents and use results of review to introduce and enhance courses on such topics.</li> </ul>
RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide teachers with more professional freedom by supporting opportunities for peer learning as well as through reducing non-teaching workload by removing any non-essential paperwork requirements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make further increases to teacher salaries. While new salary increases have been implemented for teachers across the country in 2017 (in addition to the 2016 salary increases in 2016 in Kyiv), there is a need for more substantive increases to help raise the status of the profession. This has been done for secondary school teachers and must be repeated for preschool teachers.</li> </ul>

	SHORT-TERM	LONG-TERM
ONGOING SUPPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide training for teachers, teacher methodologists, and school directors on the concept of inclusive education and how to incorporate it into daily practice.</li> <li>• Introduce training courses for teacher methodologists to advance their knowledge on carrying out observations, providing feedback, and incorporating mentoring into their day to day work.</li> <li>• Given the value derived from peer learning opportunities, encourage local education departments to create professional learning communities where teachers with varying levels of experience can exchange ideas and provide support to one another.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the presence of a dedicated teacher methodologist in every school (in more rural areas or smaller schools, explore the possibility of having one teacher methodologist supporting a small number of schools).</li> <li>• Provide scholarships to motivated and strong-performing teacher technical assistants in order to support their advancement to teacher roles.</li> </ul>
MOTIVATION AND SATISFACTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify qualification requirements for preschool teacher assistants in order for there to be greater clarity in their role and enable more teacher assistants to support inclusive classrooms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of preschools and preschool teachers in order to reduce overcrowding and reduce the workload of teachers. Supplement local resources with funds from the <i>oblast</i> (regional) or central governments to those areas most in need.</li> <li>• Revise staffing standards such that there are specialized staff available to support teachers in their day to day work.</li> <li>• Develop and launch information campaigns on the importance of preschool education in order to elevate the status of preschool teachers. In addition, provide more opportunities to share information about careers in preschool education to students in high school in order to generate greater interest in the profession.</li> </ul>

# LESSONS FOR POLICYMAKERS AND PROGRAM MANAGERS

Ukraine's experience has generated a number of lessons, many of which may be useful for policymakers and program managers from other countries seeking to provide quality universal preschool education:



## **Carry out human resource planning for the early childhood workforce:**

Human resource planning efforts are important exercises for identifying the number of qualified staff needed to deliver preschool services, along with current gaps. Such efforts may help bolster provision of opportunities for motivated individuals within the workforce (including assistants) to gain needed qualifications in order to fill vacancies and address recruitment challenges.



## **Take a broad approach to support children with special educational needs:**

One barrier to supporting children with special educational needs is stigma and discrimination. Broadly defining and implementing inclusive education can minimize this stigma and also enable adequate staffing to provide more individualized attention to children with diverse needs.



## **Ensure the relevance, accessibility, and career advancement potential of professional development:**

Preschool teachers value professional development opportunities which can help connect them with peers and also provide a refresh from challenging day-to-day roles. These opportunities are most valued when they are accessible, relevant to daily practice, and linked to career advancement.



## **Explore and address how teachers and parents view preschool education:**

Addressing discrepancies between teacher and parent views on preschool education can help to ensure complementary home and school environments that support a child's development. Positive engagement with parents helps teachers to feel effective in their roles and also improves how they perceive their own status.

# ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> OECD. (2017). *OECD Reviews of Integrity in Education: Ukraine 2017*. Paris: OECD.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Education and Science. (2003). Order Number 305, *Regulations on Preschool Institutions*.

<sup>3</sup> State Statistics Service of Ukraine. (2015). *Statistical Bulletin on Preschool Education in 2015*. <http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/>

<sup>4</sup> Data collected from interview of staff Department of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education and Science.

<sup>5</sup> In special circumstances, attestation can take place every two years and may be requested by teachers or at the recommendation of a school director.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Education and Science. (2010). Order Number 1255/18550. *Regulation on Teachers Attestation*.

<sup>7</sup> Unified Tariff Plan for 2015. (2015). Available from: <https://buhgalter.com.ua/dovidnik/pratsya-ta-zarobitna-plata/posadovi-okladi-za-yets/posadovi-okladi-za-yets-2015/>

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