



SUPPORTING THE EARLY  
CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE AT SCALE

The Cuna Más home  
visiting program in Peru

# 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. This study is the first in a series taking a country lens to analyze the challenges and opportunities for achieving a quality early childhood workforce at scale.



This study was a collaborative effort by **Results for Development (R4D)** in Washington, DC and the **Group for the Analysis of Development (GRADE)** in Lima, Peru. For R4D, the work was led by Kimberly Josephson and Catherine Coddington, under the general guidance of Michelle Neuman, Mark Roland, and Nicholas Burnett. For GRADE, the work was led by Gabriela Guerrero. Milan Thomas and Robert Francis carried out the costing work for R4D.

The authors would like to acknowledge the Bernard van Leer Foundation for its generous support of this study and would like to thank Joan Lombardi, in particular, for her continued guidance throughout this work. In addition, the authors would like to thank the office of the executive director, the home visiting technical team, and regional office leadership of Cuna Más for their support and interest in this study. The authors would like to pay special recognition to the many professionals and volunteers at regional and community levels who ensure that thousands of families receive Cuna Más services. This report would not have been possible without the time and reflections shared so generously by dozens of these individuals in the regions of Loreto and Junín.

#### **Suggested citation:**

Josephson, K., Guerrero, G., and Coddington, C. (2017). *Supporting the Early Childhood Workforce at Scale: The Cuna Más home visiting program in Peru*. Washington, D.C.: Results for Development.

# PREFACE

Early childhood development (ECD) policies and programs targeting young children and families, such as home visiting interventions, can positively impact a child's development and lead to long-term health, education, and social benefits. These programs employ numerous professionals, paraprofessionals, and volunteers. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that it is essential for this early childhood workforce to be highly prepared and well-supported to ensure that young children have a strong foundation for healthy development and future success. Yet across sectors and countries, inadequate training, burdensome workloads, lack of supervision, poor wages, and other adverse conditions threaten the motivation and capacity of this workforce.<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> The Early Childhood Workforce Initiative (ECWI) is a global effort to support practitioners. Under ECWI, a series of country studies will examine ways to strengthen and scale up a quality workforce. This first study focuses on Cuna Más, a large-scale ECD program in Peru that operates a home visiting service in rural areas. Home visiting is often used to reach vulnerable young children as well as their caregivers. Interventions typically involve regular, structured visits by a trained individual to a caregiver and child to improve parenting behaviors, the home environment, and impact child outcomes. The Cuna Más home visiting service enjoys relatively high coverage and early results are promising: a recent impact evaluation by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) found large effects on children's cognitive and language development. However, operating at scale presents challenges to quality and sustainability.<sup>5</sup>

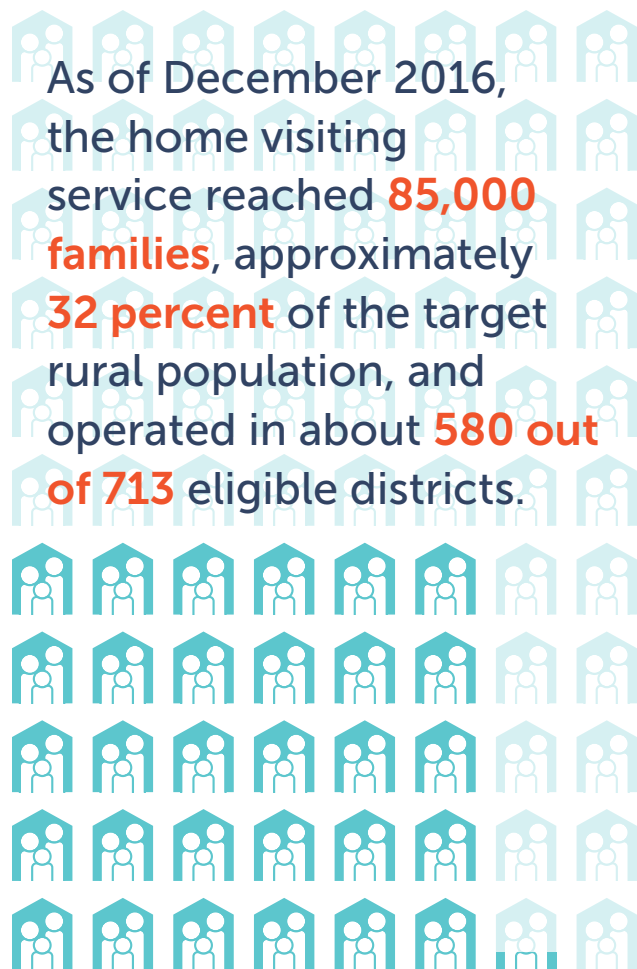
This study is intended for **home visiting program managers who want to understand the implementation challenges facing the workforce and learn how to overcome them.** The country-level analysis and actionable policy recommendations in the study will be useful also for **policymakers who want to improve the quality and scale of ECD services.**



# OVERVIEW OF CUNA MÁS AND THE HOME VISITING SERVICE

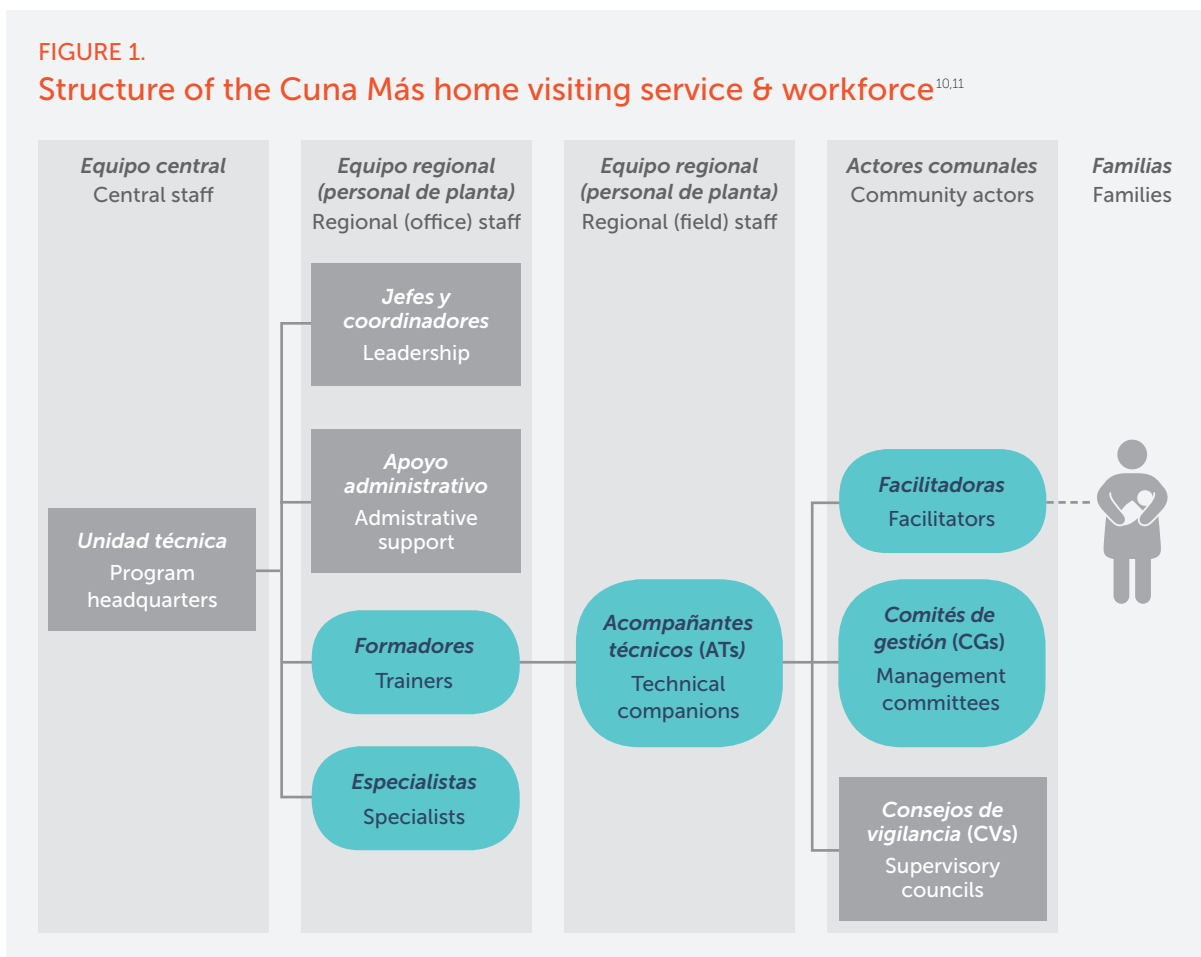
Cuna Más is a large-scale ECD program established by the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion in 2012 on the basis of the former Wawa Wasi program. Cuna Más aims to support the holistic development of children under three living in poverty, improve families' childrearing knowledge and practices, and strengthen attachments between caregivers and children.<sup>6</sup> A daycare service (*Servicio de Cuidado Diurno*) in marginalized urban areas provides comprehensive care to children aged 6 to 36 months and a home visiting service (*Servicio de Acompañamiento a Familias*) in rural communities delivers individual weekly visits and monthly group sessions for children under three and their primary caregivers, as well as pregnant women.<sup>7</sup> Cuna Más operates at central, regional, and local levels. Locally, Cuna Más operates under a voluntary, co-management model between the government and communities, where the latter are empowered to participate in program decision-making, monitoring, and general operations.

The home visiting service is implemented in rural districts with high incidences of poverty and stunting, primarily in Andean and Amazonian communities. As of December 2016, the home visiting service reached 85,000 families, approximately 32 percent of the target rural population, and operated in about 580 out of 713 eligible districts. Within targeted districts, one or more communities form *comités de gestión* (local management committees) and sign legal agreements of cooperation with the government; these *comités* monitor local operations and administer program resources.<sup>8</sup> Together with local communities, they nominate individuals to serve as volunteer *facilitadoras* (facilitators) who make weekly, hour-long visits to participating families. For volunteering an average of 10 hours per week, *facilitadoras* receive a monthly stipend of 380 soles (hereafter S/380), or a little more than US\$115.<sup>9</sup> *Facilitadoras* also assist their supervisors, *acompañantes técnicos* (technical companions), during monthly group socialization and peer learning sessions among families to reinforce information provided during home visits.



Cuna Más operates a cascade model of training and support: central program staff train and monitor professionals at the regional level, these regional staff train and support technical teams and community actors, and community actors work with caregivers and children. Through its cascade model, Cuna Más builds the capacity of its workforce through induction and initial training, continuous training, and technical assistance. This study focuses on those directly responsible for delivering services to children and families, as well as their trainers and supervisors. For Cuna Más, these are community-level volunteers – *facilitadoras* and *comités* – and regional staff – *formadores* (trainers), *especialistas* (specialists), and *acompañantes técnicos* (indicated in blue in Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1.**  
**Structure of the Cuna Más home visiting service & workforce**<sup>10,11</sup>



The total cost of implementing the home visiting service was S/129 million in 2016,<sup>12</sup> which equates to S/1,525 or US \$480 per family. The largest cost drivers are salaries and stipends for regional staff and community actors (about 60 percent of the total budget), followed by central program management costs (16 percent), and materials and resources for community actors (13 percent). Training and support costs and overhead for regional offices comprise the remainder of the budget.<sup>13</sup>

# RESEARCH AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

Difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified members of the Cuna Más home visiting workforce present a threat to sustaining program quality and expanding it to reach all vulnerable families in Peru. High turnover identified at multiple levels of this workforce can contribute to uneven service quality and disrupt the formation of stable and trusted relationships.<sup>14</sup> This study's primary aim was to examine sustainability and scale-up of the home visiting service, with a focus on challenges and opportunities experienced by community actors and regional staff who are central to delivering the program. Based on challenges identified, a second aim was to make policy recommendations to promote and enhance sustainability of impact on a larger scale. The following research questions guided this study:

## What are perceived successes of the program according to these workers? What are challenges to implementation, regarding workforce development?

This study used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to address these questions. First, a comprehensive review of existing program documents was conducted. This was followed by in-depth interviews and focus group discussions between October 2016 and January 2017 with 50 workers across central, regional, and community levels, concentrated in two of 22 regions delivering the home visiting service. Following data collection, summaries and transcriptions from all interviews and focus group discussions conducted were reviewed. Analysis involved organizing information first by each role (*comités*, *facilitadoras*, *acompañantes técnicos*, and *formadores* and *especialistas*) and then by five themes: motivation and satisfaction, recruitment and responsibilities, workload and resources, training and support, and compensation and incentives. This study also involved an examination of the current costs of delivering the home visiting service and projecting the costs of expansion through 2025, when the program is expected to reach full coverage. This exercise involved three primary components: estimating the size of the eligible population, calculating variable and fixed program costs, and projecting these costs, including various expense scenarios, through 2025.

This study is not without limitations. The sampling framework was not meant to be representative of implementation nationally and, as such, results should be interpreted with caution and not generalized to the entire program. For example, while all available *formadores* and *especialistas* within the two selected regions were interviewed, the participation of *acompañantes técnicos* was more limited, as many were dispersed throughout their regions and located significant distances from program offices (as many as 8 or 9 hours by bus). In addition, for logistical reasons, a limited number of communities were sampled. While much of this study focuses on workforce retention, those who had already left Cuna Más – and could potentially provide rich information as to the main drivers of turnover and useful incentives for reducing this – were not interviewed. Finally, limitations with respect to available cost data may lead to an overestimation of cost projections.<sup>15</sup>

# FINDINGS

## Motivation & satisfaction

- **Across program levels, workers are motivated to do their job and see value and direct impact from their work on the lives of young children and families.** Regional staff and even community actors, who receive little or no compensation, expressed feeling committed to the program despite difficult working conditions.
- **Short-term contracts for regional staff create job insecurity.** Cuna Más staff at central and regional levels are employed with short-term contracts under a policy that applies to all public, social programs. Under this scheme, staff are initially hired under one-month contracts which, if they perform well, can be renewed for longer periods of two or three months. The longest contracts offered by the program are for six months, primarily offered to *formadores* and *especialistas*. For staff with significant workload and demanding objectives, this job insecurity creates significant pressure and has implications for recruitment and turnover.

## Recruitment & responsibilities

- **Expanding the professional profile of *acompañantes técnicos*, by relaxing education and work experience requirements, has helped to ensure sufficient applicants and contributed to a more diverse cohort.** The program previously recruited only professionals, primarily in education or social protection, but faced persistent shortages of qualified individuals willing to work in the field or travel significant distances. The program now also hires those with technical backgrounds which, as regional staff shared, has created a more diverse pool of candidates who often have more experience working in rural contexts.
- **Confusing and occasionally overlapping roles and responsibilities at the local level can create a burden for community actors.** Conversations with community actors, and the regional staff who support them, revealed the structure of the program at the local level to be confusing, particularly between *comités de gestión* – who administer program resources and monitor local operations – and *consejos de vigilancia* – an optional body communities can establish to then monitor the *comités*. Given their volunteer status, confusing roles and demands placed on these individuals may have implications for the consistency of local service delivery.

## Workload & resources

- **The heavy workload of community actors, particularly *facilitadoras*, and regional staff can prevent them from fully carrying out their responsibilities or doing so effectively.** *Facilitadoras* work twice the number of hours stipulated by the program, effectively working part-time despite their voluntary status and limited compensation. *Acompañantes técnicos* work long and intensive hours in the field each month, which can hamper their ability to practice with their own families the behaviors they promote in their work. Turnover in this role remains an issue with wide-reaching consequences for other regional staff, who must train replacements or take on additional communities until a vacancy is filled, and community actors, who see a significant reduction in support. Finally, expansion of the scope of *formadores'* and *especialistas'* roles limits the support they can provide. Relying on individuals to continually work extra hours and take on more responsibilities can be problematic for long-term sustainability.

- **Insufficient and/or inadequate materials and resources create challenges and a financial burden for volunteer community actors, especially facilitadoras.** Incomplete or deteriorating educational and play materials can lead to *facilitadoras* feeling frustrated, spending additional time making materials from scratch, and even spending their own money on supplies. Together with other limited resources (i.e. weather gear and uniforms), these challenges highlight the importance of relatively small inputs for supporting and motivating community volunteers.
- **Traveling to remote communities is expensive, and paying out of pocket to initially cover these costs creates additional burden for acompañantes técnicos.** While *formadores* and *especialistas* receive transportation funds prior to carrying out field work each month, *acompañantes técnicos* must pay out of pocket and submit receipts for reimbursement that account for each *sol* spent, alongside proof they accompanied each *facilitadora* on a visit twice that month. Whereas the program uses these transportation funds as an accountability measure, *acompañantes técnicos* need these resources to carry out their day-to-day work effectively.

## Training & support

- **Regional staff and community actors value the training and support model for the rich content and engaging delivery of training sessions, and emphasis on continuous support and supervision.** In addition to standalone training sessions, *facilitadoras* and *acompañantes técnicos* both participate in group planning or refresher sessions each month, and receive individual technical assistance in the field. *Formadores* and *especialistas* participate in in-person workshops that convene staff from different regions and receive both virtual and in-person technical assistance from central program staff.
- **Improvements to the training and support model are still needed.** Community actors, particularly *facilitadoras*, expressed the need for more training and support to onboard new families into the program, as families frequently misunderstand the program's purpose and reject services temporarily or altogether. For regional staff, the frequency of technical assistance in the field can be uneven, and may be reduced by changes to staff ratios and workloads.

## Compensation & incentives

- **Regional staff and community actors perceived compensation to be attractive when first joining the program, but long hours, significant travel, challenging contexts, and job instability detract from this initial appeal.** This reveals the limitations of an attractive salary or stipend, which can pose challenges for motivating and retaining a workforce that experiences adverse working conditions.
- **Opportunities for career advancement and professional development are limited.** The program has no clear career ladder for its workforce: no *facilitadora* in either region visited had become an *acompañante técnico* and the limited quantity of positions available above the level of *acompañante técnico* constrains opportunities for individuals in this role to advance. Within the home visiting workforce, only *formadores* received a one-time opportunity in 2013 and 2014 to complete a diploma with the program. It is important to note that, despite these limitations, regional staff expressed growing both personally and professionally just by working with the program.



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CUNA MÁS

The Cuna Más home visiting service has reached an inflection point in its development after a few years of rapid scaling and early, positive effects on child outcomes. By further strengthening and supporting the workforce, the program can improve efficiency and sustainability to achieve even greater impact and scale. Many helpful changes may require little or no financial resources to implement, such as:<sup>16,17</sup>

- Offer regional staff longer contract lengths (six months, the maximum allowed),
- Improve and monitor processes for purchasing educational materials, uniforms, and weather apparel, and
- Provide additional training and support to community actors to clarify roles and responsibilities and improve onboarding of new families.

## SCENARIO A

In the short-term, Cuna Más may choose to focus on easing the workload of overburdened staff, an issue with more immediate implications for sustainability. Specifically, this scenario (“Scenario A”) envisions adopting two reforms with cost implications:

- Reduce the number of *acompañantes técnicos* that each *formador* oversees (from 40 to 25), and
- Reduce the number of *comités* with which each *acompañante técnico* works (from two to one).

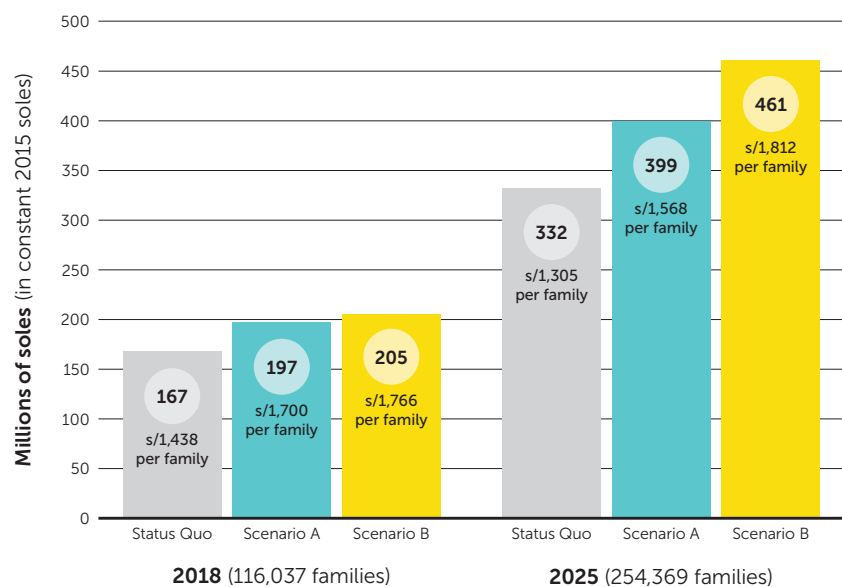
## SCENARIO B

A second scenario (“Scenario B”), centers around improving compensation and incentives for the workforce, which in turn makes the program a more competitive, attractive employment option. This scenario envisions reforms that may be logistically complicated for a large, public program such as Cuna Más to enact and best implemented in the long-term. In addition to those considered in Scenario A, this option recommends four recommendations with cost implications:

- Offer scholarships for 50 outstanding *facilitadoras* to study ECD (or a related field),
- Gradually increase *facilitadoras*’ stipends (from S/380 per month) to match those of their peers in non-formal preschools (to S/559 per month)<sup>18</sup>
- Raise the starting salary for *formadores* and *especialistas* (from S/2,900 to S/3,300 per month), and
- Establish junior- and senior-level positions within regional staff roles to allow for greater career and salary progression.

**FIGURE 2.**  
Annual projected costs<sup>19</sup>

Figure 2 depicts the annual financial resources required to implement these scenarios in 2018 and 2025.<sup>20,21,22</sup>



# LESSONS FOR POLICYMAKERS AND PROGRAM MANAGERS

As one of few home visiting programs operating – and having been evaluated – at scale in low- and middle-income countries, Cuna Más holds valuable workforce lessons that may resonate more broadly with ECD programs and policymakers seeking to reach young children and families around the world:



**Supervision in the field is critical for the home visiting workforce**, particularly in rural contexts where many workers have limited training or experience and work independently much of the time. Maintaining reasonable workloads (especially ratios of supervisors to supervisees) is critical to ensuring support can be truly continuous.



In addition to delivering important content, **educational materials are critical for empowering community home visitors** who may not have the training or experience to otherwise provide guidance to young children and families. These materials provide structure and support and, along with uniforms and other resources that may seem like small inputs, can be powerful tools and incentives for a volunteer workforce.



Working in remote contexts can be stressful and present challenges to which early childhood practitioners may not be accustomed, especially for those not from the communities in which they work. It is important to **identify workers' principal travel-related barriers** and find ways to address these. This can help to improve the motivation of and quality of life for this workforce, and allow them to focus on providing quality services.



An attractive stipend or starting salary is not enough to motivate and retain workers alone; individuals may opt for more stable employment or reasonable hours when faced with challenging working conditions. However, **career ladders and pay scales can reward both professionals and volunteers** for their dedication, retain and leverage the experience of high-performing individuals, and encourage strong candidates to see working in ECD as a viable career path, rather than temporary employment.

# ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> ILO. (2013). *ILO policy guidelines on the promotion of decent work for early childhood education personnel*. Geneva: International Labour Office, Sectoral Activities Department.
- <sup>2</sup> Jaskiewicz, W. & Tulenko, K. (2012). "Increasing community health worker productivity and effectiveness: a review of the influence of the work environment." *Human Resources for Health* 10(38).
- <sup>3</sup> Davis, R. (2009). *Human capacity within child welfare systems: the social work workforce in Africa*. Washington, D.C.: USAID.
- <sup>4</sup> Neuman, M. J., Josephson, K., & Chua, P.G. (2015). *A Review of the Literature: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Personnel in Low- and Middle-Income Countries*. Paris: UNESCO.
- <sup>5</sup> Between 2013 and 2015, the IDB conducted an impact evaluation of the home visiting service to measure its effect on child development, leveraging the program's expansion to randomly assign children to treatment and control groups. Despite positive findings, the IDB did identify ongoing challenges to implementing this program at scale (Araujo et al., 2016). See section IV of the full report.
- <sup>6</sup> "Crean el Programa Nacional Cuna Más." (2012). *El Peruano*.
- <sup>7</sup> PNCM. (2015b). *Plan Operativo Institucional (POI) 2016 (Reformulación): Resumen Ejecutivo*. Lima: MIDIS.
- <sup>8</sup> Local authorities monitor these operations and hold **comités** accountable for their use of program funds. However, when necessary authorities do not exist, communities have the option to form *consejos de vigilancia* (supervisory councils).
- <sup>9</sup> In early 2017, the program approved a small increase in *facilitadoras'* stipends, from S/360 to 380 per month.
- <sup>10</sup> For the five main roles studied, this report uses their Spanish titles to maintain fidelity to program terminology, while the author's English translations are used for remaining program terms.
- <sup>11</sup> Icon in figure is "Motherhood" by Gan Khoon Lay from the Noun Project.
- <sup>12</sup> Approximately US\$ 40.5 million, based on the World Bank's official 2015 exchange rate (LCU per US\$) of S/3.18 per 1 USD.
- <sup>13</sup> Correspondence with the program.
- <sup>14</sup> Schodt et al. (2015).
- <sup>15</sup> See section VII of the full report for more detail on the methodology and limitations of this study.
- <sup>16</sup> Other recommendations which require little or no financial resources include: improve communication between program headquarters and communities around the intended use and timing of different funds, provide funds upfront for *acompañantes técnicos'* travel each month, improve communication to regional staff around the evolving training model, and clarify criteria for determining compensation levels for regional field staff.
- <sup>17</sup> Three recommendations are provided for which costs could not be estimated by the research team: expand partnerships with higher education institutions to accredit trainings and re-establish the diploma opportunity for all three regional staff roles; provide greater administrative support to help *facilitadoras* access volunteer benefits; and develop a system for tracking turnover at regional and community levels.
- <sup>18</sup> *Promotores* or *animadores* are volunteer educators in PRONOEI (non-formal early childhood education) centers. Using a similar co-management model to Cuna Más, these educators are selected from their community, often in rural or remote areas.
- <sup>19</sup> Annual per-family costs are estimated by dividing the projected budget by the number of families reached. Actual costs may be lower as this estimate includes full central program costs and actual spending has historically been lower than budget allocations.
- <sup>20</sup> For 2025, it is assumed central program costs will remain the same, with increased resources channeled to regional and local levels.
- <sup>21</sup> For the purpose of comparison, projected costs do not account for inflation.
- <sup>22</sup> These projections are likely an overestimation given efficiencies that can be gained from reducing turnover and associated costs of recruitment and initial training. Moreover, while official ratios are considered (e.g. 1 AT:10 *facilitadoras* in the "status quo" scenario), this study found regular, and at times significant, vacancies among *acompañantes técnicos*. This may, in part, be due to program or coverage changes. However, significant vacancies may lead to overestimating costs and, over time, contribute to overburdening this workforce.

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