

Workforce Definition and Typology - The Early Childhood Workforce¹

Definition

The early childhood workforce consists of the volunteers, paraprofessionals, and professionals who promote the healthy growth, development, and learning of young children (under age 8). This diverse workforce, which is supported by a broad ecosystem of actors, is defined as the frontline workers who deliver services to young children and families, as well as those who directly train and supervise these practitioners.² Whether employed by government or non-state actors, this workforce operates within and across a variety of sectors, including education and care, health and nutrition, sanitation and hygiene, and social and child protection. While these workers may share common objectives, the specific sectors and settings in which they work, as well as their functions, training, and remuneration can vary significantly by context.

Typology

Primary sector ³	Role ⁴	Description of role and settings (specific to ECD)	Other titles
	Auxiliary nurses & midwives	Auxiliary nurses and midwives are paraprofessionals with more limited training than their professional counterparts. They are typically trained at the secondary level, have basic	<i>Nurse's assistants or aides</i>

¹ The development of this definition and typology was led by Results for Development Institute (R4D) and benefitted from the following individuals' guidance and input: Emily Vargas-Barón (The RISE Institute), Joan Lombardi (Bernard van Leer Foundation), Aaron Emmel (American Academy of Pediatrics), Tina Hyder (Open Society Foundations), Rachel Machefsky (Bernard van Leer Foundation), 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.

² Except when fulfilling the role of trainer or supervisor, policymakers/government actors and academics are not explicitly included in this definition or typology, despite a recognition of their essential role in developing and supporting early childhood systems that employ this workforce. In addition, while invaluable to the day-to-day operations of early childhood development services, those who provide secondary support (such as cleaners and cooks) are not covered here.

³ "Primary sector" refers to the sector where a professional or worker traditionally receives training and is often, though not always, employed. Many of these professionals/workers are employed in secondary or allied sectors (e.g. nurses or psychologists in preschool settings) or are cross-sectoral in nature (e.g. early intervention specialists, increasingly home visitors).

⁴ Where available, "Role" refers to existing terms established by international bodies, such as the International Labour Organization, the Global Health Workforce Alliance, and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance. As such, these may not be the exact titles used in many countries or regions, but rather are umbrella terms for similar roles and professions (variations in these titles are included in the last column, "Other titles").

Primary sector ³	Role ⁴	Description of role and settings (specific to ECD)	Other titles
HEALTH AND NUTRITION ⁵		nursing skills and/or midwifery competencies, and assist in the provision of maternal and newborn health care.	
	Community health workers	Community health workers (CHWs) help link local communities with the formal health system by increasing access to essential health and social services. CHWs are typically adults educated at the primary or secondary level that are selected from and work in the community from which they come. Depending on the context, they provide a range of health promotion, disease prevention and treatment interventions to the residents of the communities in which they work. In most contexts CHWs focus on young children and mothers and, with respect to ECD, provide orientation to families (through group education and home visiting) promoting key family practices for maternal, newborn and child health and nutrition (such as exclusive breastfeeding, immunizations), as well as refer young children and pregnant women with signs of severe illness or complications to the formal health system. In some contexts, CHWs are responsible for community case management of illness and acute malnutrition. CHWs have also been supported to work with parents to promote early stimulation and to implement community-based therapeutic interventions for women with mental health problems.	<i>Health extension workers, lay health workers, community health promoters, traditional birth attendants, village health workers</i>

⁵ Health workers, including all roles listed here, often provide care throughout the life course. In many places, health workers are the caregivers most likely to interact with pregnant women and children during the earliest years of life, when brains are being formed and appropriate interventions can contribute to school readiness, resilience to toxic stress, good nutritional status, and lifelong health and wellbeing.

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	Home visitors	Home visitors/parent educators may be paraprofessionals educated at the secondary level or professionals trained at the university level (in many contexts nurses or CHWs may work as home visitors). They make frequent and regular visits to at-risk families (often the primary caregiver) and young children (often under 3 years) to promote positive parenting practices and healthy child development within the home environment. Home visitors have often focused on maternal and child health and nutrition, but increasingly incorporate parenting practices, care, and early childhood stimulation activities.	<i>Parent educators, caregiver educators, health visitors</i>
	Nurses & midwives	Nurses and midwives are registered professionals who play a core role across all tiers of formal health systems (including extension services, health posts and primary hospitals, and the tertiary level). Nurses provide a continuum of health services but, specific to ECD, nurses and midwives may provide antenatal, essential obstetric, and postnatal care to women and newborns; support well-child visits, immunization, growth monitoring, and case management of acute illnesses; and counsel parents on key family practices for their children's healthy development.	<i>Registered nurses, nurse practitioners, health visitors</i>
	Medical doctors (generalists, specialists such as pediatricians, neonatologists)	Doctors are registered professionals that work at all levels of the formal system and, in many countries, they also help to define systems of care and provide training to health workers at all levels. With respect to ECD, they are responsible for providing antenatal care, essential and emergency obstetric and newborn care, and for the treatment of acute illness. They are often responsible for well-child visits and may use these as opportunities to counsel parents on responsive care and early stimulation. They also conduct developmental screenings and refer children at risk of developmental delay and/or disability for	<i>Physicians, dentists, clinicians</i>

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		specialized early intervention services, where these exist. In many contexts they are part of child protection mechanisms, and are trained to identify and refer children victims of abuse, neglect or domestic violence. They may also provide mental health services, including for maternal and paternal depression.	
	Nutritionists	Nutritionists are experts in the field of nutrition and food that advise what people should eat to be healthy. With respect to ECD, nutritionists may conduct nutrition assessments or support child growth monitoring; provide counselling to parents on maternal nutrition and infant and young child feeding (including exclusive breastfeeding, complementary feeding, and the consumption of micronutrients); provide technical oversight to therapeutic feeding programs for children with acute malnutrition as well as pre-school feeding programs. Nutritionists may be employed by health services, and are increasingly incorporated into early education and multi-sectoral ECD programs. Depending on the country context, a nutritionist can often be an accredited or registered professional.	<i>Feeding specialists, dieticians, growth monitoring specialists, lactation specialists/consultants</i>
	Health educators & trainers	Many of the health workers listed above provide health education as part of their work. Health educators, as a specific category, are professionals who deliver individualized services and group sessions in higher education settings, as well as in and outside of health facilities. These individuals may also prepare educational and training materials.	
	Health services directors,	Health services directors, managers, and supervisors oversee the operations of health facilities or programs, and supervise early childhood personnel in these settings.	

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	managers, and supervisors		
EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION ⁶	Early intervention specialists	Early intervention specialists are professionals trained at the post-graduate level who work in integrated early childhood intervention services that function at the intersection of the health, education, and protection sectors to provide individualized and intensive services to parents and infants/toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities, often through home visits. Early intervention specialists, among others, conduct developmental screenings and refer children to early intervention services. With the full participation of parents/caregivers, they conduct comprehensive assessments, individualized family service plans to identify eligible children, conduct regular visits, and prepare transition plans to inclusive preschool and primary education.	<i>Child development specialists, professional home visitors</i>
	Resource specialists for inclusive education for children with disabilities and delays	A wide variety of professional therapists, rehabilitation specialists and special educators assist with inclusive education at the preschool and primary school level. In addition, non-professionals, working under the guidance and supervision of professionals, support children, parents and teachers in the school environment. However, increasingly all teachers and caregivers in preschools and primary schools are being trained in essential elements of working effectively with children with developmental delays, disabilities or various disorders, such as autism spectrum disorder.	<i>Special needs assistants, inclusion specialists,</i>

⁶ Early Childhood Intervention (ECI), while multi-sectoral in nature, is included here as its own sector to capture some of the roles that are unique to these services.

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	Special education teachers	Special education teachers are education professionals who work at preschool and primary school levels where they teach children with developmental delays, disabilities, and behavioral disorders. This classification includes teachers who provide specialized therapeutic sessions as well as teach basic academic and life processes skills to the mentally impaired.	<i>Special educators</i>
	Therapists (e.g. speech/language, physical, occupational)	All early childhood intervention programs employ an array of therapists trained at the post-graduate level who, with early intervention specialists, provide the full range of ECI services and also supervise trained ECI home visitors and others who work at the paraprofessional level.	
	ECI program directors/managers	ECI program directors and managers oversee the operations and staff of integrated ECD centers. These centers offer multi-sectoral services from preconception to transition to primary education.	
EDUCATION AND CARE	Child care workers	In many countries, child care workers have limited education or training in child development. Child care workers provide non-parental care to young children, which allows for parents (and mothers in particular) to work during the day. These services provide comprehensive care and early learning opportunities including stimulation and play activities, promotion of good hygiene practices, provision of nutritious meals. While child care workers often care for the youngest children (0-3), depending on local needs, they may care for children until they enter primary school. Child care workers may be employed in community- or center-based settings (often called child care centers, crèches, nurseries, or playgroups) or in groups in family homes.	<i>Daycare workers, childminders, caregivers, playgroup workers, paraprofessionals, nursery workers, crèche workers</i>

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	Early childhood teachers	Early childhood teachers work directly with young children in early learning settings to foster their cognitive, physical, language, and socioemotional development, and prepare children and parents for a successful transition to formal primary schooling. These teachers usually work with children from 36 months to primary school entry, but may cater to children under 3 as well. Teachers may be employed by center-, community-, or faith-based programs, crèches, preschools, pre-primary programs or kindergarten/ preparatory year classrooms. In many contexts, these teachers are trained separately and often less than primary school teachers, though it is increasingly recognized that these teachers play similar roles in fostering the initial development and learning of young children.	<i>Pre-primary teachers, preschool teachers, ECE teachers, ECCE teachers, ECD teachers, kindergarten teachers, early childhood educators, infant teachers, nursery teachers</i>
	Primary school teachers	Primary school teachers are often educated at the post-secondary level. Within early childhood development, these teachers are responsible for children in the early years of primary school (often grades 1 through 3). While the starting age for primary school varies by country, these teachers normally work with children 5 to 8 years old.	<i>Elementary school teachers, early grade teachers</i>
	Teacher assistants	Teacher assistants are adults who work under the direct supervision of a teacher, and perform some duties that are instructional in nature. Teacher assistants can work independently in a teacher's absence, but for the vast majority of the time work directly with the teacher in the same space and with the same group of children. Some provide extra assistance to children with developmental delays or disabilities.	<i>Teacher aides, pedagogues, auxiliary teachers/staff, classroom aides, instructional aides</i>
	Teacher coaches	Teacher coaches provide specialized, intensive support to an individual or group of teachers in early education and care settings to develop specific skills and practices. The	<i>Instructional coaches</i>

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		coaching process is collaborative and often takes place on-site, over a series of sessions.	
	Teacher trainers	Teacher trainers are qualified professionals or individuals, usually trained at the post-secondary level, who provide pre-service and/or in-service training to teachers and educators. In many settings, teacher trainers are employed by institutions of higher education (such as universities or colleges) where students prepare to become early childhood or primary school teachers.	<i>Teacher educators, teacher preparers, master teachers</i>
	Education service directors/managers	Individuals typically responsible for the day-to-day planning and directing of an ECD program or center, preschool, primary school, daycare or child care center, etc. These individuals may also supervise other workers, such as teachers. In some cases, local government workers (such as district education officials) or school boards may also be closely involved in the registration, oversight, or management of these services.	<i>ECD program managers/directors, child care managers/directors, school directors, principals</i>
SOCIAL AND CHILD PROTECTION	Social service workers	The social service workforce is an overarching term for the workforce comprised of a variety of workers – paid and unpaid, governmental and nongovernmental – who staff social service systems and contribute to the care, support, promotion of rights and empowerment of vulnerable populations.	<i>Case workers, child welfare officers, social welfare officers, children's officers, child protection coordinators, child protection specialists, counselors, para social workers, social worker, auxiliary social worker, social services worker, community child workers, community caregivers, community mediators</i>
	Community child protection	A subset of the social service workforce that focuses on promoting well-being and preventing and responding to a	<i>Child welfare officers, social welfare officers,</i>

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	officers and workers	variety of risks, including violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect, family separation, and foster care.	<i>children's officers, child protection coordinators, child protection specialists</i>
	Mental health professionals/specialists	Professionals who have received formal post-graduate training in psychology or social work and may be employed within education (e.g. schools), health (e.g. hospitals), or social service systems. Within early childhood, these specialists work with young children and families who are experiencing or at risk for emotional or behavioral challenges.	<i>Psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, clinical social workers, counselors</i>
	Residential care staff	Residential care staff members provide 24-hour support in non-family-based group settings to children living without parental care, on a short- or long-term basis. Staff may be employed in a variety of institutions, such as residential child care centers or facilities, orphanages, or children's homes. Increasingly they are serving and supporting deinstitutionalized children and the families or transitional small group caregivers who have received them.	<i>Carers, caregivers, childcare staff</i>
	Social services educators & trainers	Social work educators and trainers are trained at the graduate level. They serve as trainers of trainers, supervisors and monitors in social and child protection services.	
	Social service managers	Social service managers supervise practitioners and provide direction to the supervisee to enable them to apply theory, standardized knowledge, skills, competency, and applicable ethical content in the practice setting.	<i>Program managers, social work managers/supervisors, child welfare managers/supervisors</i>

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