

► 10 Years of the ILO Policy Guidelines on ECE personnel

Decent work for ECE personnel for high-quality ECE

Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) has a positive impact on children's health, learning ability and future employment prospects. The availability of ECE also supports greater gender equality by facilitating women's access to employment. As a growing sector, it provides employment opportunities for both women and men. Due to unevenness in quality and inadequate working conditions among the ECE workforce, there has been a longstanding need for international policy guidance in the sector. This gap was addressed in 2013 with the adoption of the [ILO Policy Guidelines on promotion of decent work for early childhood education personnel](#), the first international text to deal with the status of ECE personnel. 15 November 2023 marks the tenth anniversary of the Guidelines, which was adopted by experts appointed by governments and employers' and workers' organizations.

ECE workers are key determinants of quality education, which itself depends on quality teacher training and development, support and recognition and decent working conditions. Many teachers, however, lack adequate qualifications and training, remuneration and professional status. They also lack collective voice and input in the decisions impacting their work. Such conditions contribute to ECE workforce shortages and impede the provision of quality ECE services. Recognizing the persistence of and the need to address these conditions, the Guidelines form a roadmap towards achieving decent work in the ECE sector that can be applied in various cultural, social, economic and political contexts. They cover factors such as conditions of work and employment, education and training and social dialogue and are designed for states to apply at their own pace as they advance policy, legislation,

strategies and social dialogue mechanisms in the ECE sector.

In creating conditions that support quality ECE, the Guidelines support progress towards realizing target 4.2 of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on quality education, which aims to: *By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.* Furthermore, the Guidelines set out the principle that ECE is a public good and a fundamental part of the right to education, and thus should be accessible to every child of eligible age and supported with adequate funding levels to ensure appropriate levels of service.

The principle of ensuring decent work for the ECE workforce as set forth by the Guidelines is reflected in the recently adopted UNESCO [Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action for Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education](#), which calls for transformation of early learning policies and practices, including through better training and working conditions for its workforce. With the Tashkent Declaration's commitment to transforming ECE through a qualified and well-supported workforce, the ILO Policy Guidelines are more relevant than ever for ensuring high quality services.

The aim of this short guide to the Policy Guidelines is to commemorate their ten-year anniversary by providing an overview of the key principles that promote good practices for decent work and quality services in ECE.

Training and development

Education and training

High-quality ECE provision is dependent on adequate



investments in the education, training and continuous development of the ECE workforce. It should be designed to ensure that ECE personnel are trained comparably to primary school teachers, with a minimum of a first-level tertiary education degree or equivalent. Initial education and training should involve practical experience, be supported through mentorship and be understood as part of a continuum of training and development. Initial training should be funded by public investment and/or a mix of public and private funding. Training institutions should be regulated and an ECE licensing and accreditation authority should be established to regulate the profession.

Early support for ECE personnel

To ensure a successful start to the teaching career as well as integration and retention into the profession, an effective induction period is essential. This should involve supports such as mentorships led by experienced and trained staff who themselves are provided with adequate time to undertake support activities. It would be beneficial to develop the training program in cooperation with new teachers. A strong induction period is particularly important for teachers assigned to remote and rural or minority population areas.

Professional and career development

Quality ECE services require career-long continuous professional development (CPD) for ECE personnel. Policies and sufficient investments are needed to ensure that CPD is available and accessible, including through free of charge professional development and designated time for development activities, and should be provided equitably to all regions, particularly in remote and disadvantaged areas. To support career mobility, pathways within the profession should be achievable through transparent and equitable criteria and procedures. CPD can play a role in supporting access to career pathways.

Reflective practice

Reflective practice, or “iterative critical reflection on past practice and adaption of practice in light of lessons learned”, should be prioritized to establish quality ECE learning practices. This should be reinforced by instituting professional development initiatives with the backing of ECE leaders, as well as opportunities for ECE personnel and support staff to network and exchange good practice. Reflective practice requires non-contact time for reflection within work hours, a designated adviser or pedagogical coordinator to support development of professional competences and leave time to participate in knowledge sharing.



Recruitment, deployment and retention strategies

A comprehensive strategy for recruitment, deployment and retention of ECE personnel at the national level should first and foremost cover an adequate career structure, proper remuneration, benefits and respect for professional autonomy. A safe and healthy working environment, appropriate equipment and a low child-staff ratio in classrooms are also paramount.

Recruitment strategies should be comprehensive, utilizing stakeholders in the ECE community to promote the profession. A comprehensive strategy can include professional development, career or workplace incentives that encourage recruitment and retention from a variety of potential workers with experience in ECE, such as teaching assistants, retirees and former ECE personnel.

Primary or secondary school teachers, where there is an adequate supply, can be targeted for recruitment and given appropriate ECE training. Rural-urban imbalances in staffing levels should be addressed by using strategies like subsidized housing, provision of childcare and transportation to attract educators.

Ensuring diversity

Recruitment strategies should work to address gender disparities in the sector, which has been historically female, including benchmarks to account for male personnel. Care based activities, validating previous experience, scholarships and promoting ECE as a profession for men are all critical. Access to high quality education for children of minority, multi-ethnic, migrant and indigenous and tribal peoples can boost diversity as well. Planning recruitment benchmarks that are monitored for underrepresented groups in conforming to established professional standards can go a long way in creating a diverse ECE ecosystem. Identifying and addressing personnel shortages and gender imbalances can work to increase diversity.

Supporting retention of workers

Non-monetary awards to recognize the value and hard work of ECE personnel should be implemented where appropriate. To encourage retention of a qualified ECE workforce, a professional identity must be developed and maintained by promoting professional standards based on respect and a positive image of ECE workers.

Employment and working conditions

Remuneration

Remuneration is indicative of the importance and the status of the ECE profession. Salaries should therefore provide a decent standard of living, be established at the same level as those of other comparable professions and reflect principles of gender equity. Salaries should be determined through collective bargaining or other social dialogue mechanisms, with employment contracts clearly setting out wages. Excess working hours should be compensated with overtime pay and working time should include weekly rest periods.

Employment relationships and contracts

Quality ECE requires stable and secure employment relationships for ECE personnel. Employment contracts should therefore comply with national regulations and be offered on a permanent basis. Opportunities for re-training should be provided when necessary and protections against unjustified termination should be maintained. Part-time ECE personnel should share the same rights as their full-time counterparts.

Leaves and working time

Paid leave and working time that supports work-life balance are important components of decent working conditions. Paid leave should include annual leave, medical leave, maternity and paternity leave, parental leave and professional development leave, among others.

Social protection in the form of maternity and paternity leave is needed as part of a decent work and gender equity strategy in the profession. In order to avoid excessive workload and to support work-life balance, hours of work should normally not exceed 40 hours per week. Leave provisions and working time arrangements should be established by law and/or developed through collective bargaining or other forms of social dialogue.

Safety, health and environments conducive to teaching and learning

Policies and procedures must be put in place to ensure safe and healthy teaching and learning environments that are free of violence and harassment. Creating an environment conducive to teaching and learning requires appropriate and relevant infrastructure and equipment, teaching materials and supports.

Social dialogue

Social dialogue, through consultation, information sharing and/or negotiation, between education authorities, public and private employers' organizations and workers' organizations representing ECE personnel is critical to quality education and decent working conditions for ECE workers. Social dialogue supports ECE policy formulation, implementation and evaluation and can be adopted to account for diversity in national-level experiences, institutions and priorities. To realize the benefits of social dialogue, it should be organized and sustained by law and formal regulations or through

collective agreements and should be supported by legally enforceable dispute prevention and resolution mechanisms. Social dialogue should be accessible to all individuals and should promote gender equality and non-discrimination, including by prioritizing the interests of marginalized communities, as well as those in disadvantaged, remote or conflict settings.

Relevant resources

ILO. 2023. *The Benefits of Investing in Transformative Childcare Policy Packages Towards Gender Equality and Social Justice*, ILO Brief, 26 October 2023.

ILO. 2022. *Care at Work: Investing in Care Leave and Services for a More Gender Equal World of Work*.

ILO. 2016. *Women at Work: Trends 2016*.

ILO. 2014. *ILO Policy Guidelines on the Promotion of Decent Work for Early Childhood Education Personnel*.

ILO and UNESCO. 1966. *ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers*.

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