

## **Consensus points of the Forum**

### **Introduction**

1. Government, Employer and Worker representatives participated in the Global Dialogue Forum on Conditions of Personnel in Early Childhood Education, held at the ILO, Geneva, on 22–23 February 2012. The Forum examined strategies and policies to help constituents in ILO member States to improve the provision of universally accessible and quality early childhood education (ECE) services, the status and conditions of personnel in early childhood education.
2. The Forum exchanged a wide range of views and experiences on: the importance of early childhood education (ECE) and key trends, issues and policies determining access and quality for all learners; initial training and professional development of educators; ECE employment terms and conditions; and social dialogue to determine policies and working conditions in early childhood education. The Forum also recommended future actions by constituents and the ILO to strengthen ECE policies and measures.

### **Policies determining access and high quality of early childhood education**

3. The evidence is clear that early years education is a good investment for all further educational development, social inclusion and development, recognition and respect of children's rights and improved economic returns for individuals and society. Considerable progress has been made in enrolling more children in early childhood education programmes. To achieve universal access and quality objectives, governments, who have the major responsibility for organization and funding of ECE, should devote more resources and policy attention to ECE as the foundation level of education. Recognizing the existence of public and private providers, in order to complement government investment, alternative funding and delivery models could be considered within the necessary regulatory, quality and accountability frameworks expected of any level of education.

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4. Stronger leadership by government and greater cohesion in ECE policy, ensuring coordination and good governance across levels of ECE provision – national, regional, local, public and private – are vital to the further development of quality ECE programmes. Participation of constituents and stakeholders is essential to realizing this objective. Access can be improved with targeted programmes for vulnerable groups.
  5. There is a need for more comprehensive research and data, particularly concerning educators and other staff, to more effectively develop, apply, evaluate and reform ECE policy and practice.

## **Initial training and professional development of ECE educators**

6. Quality improvements require a greater policy focus on curricula as the basis for developing professional training and appropriate pedagogy.
7. High-quality ECE provision is dependent on adequate investments and respect for teacher education as a continuum – initial training, induction and continual professional development (CPD) that is constructed on sound foundations, of which:
  - initial education for all educators, comparable with that of school teachers, based on the highest qualification levels, certified by authorities, in relation to curricula;
  - sound induction plans and management support for new educators.
8. Educator training policies and programmes need to increase provision to all ECE staff, especially in remote and disadvantaged areas, and better link CPD with initial training and appropriate pedagogical approaches. Professional development and practice require adequate non-contact time. Professional development should also be extended to ECE leaders, administrators and support staff.

## **Early childhood education employment terms and conditions**

9. Excellence in ECE requires a high professional and material status for educators and other staff, in effect the construction of a decent work framework for the sector. Successful recruitment and retention of adequate numbers of qualified ECE educators to meet the expanding enrolments and quality demands of the sector requires a comprehensive recruitment and development strategy developed at the national level focusing on a number of key policies:
  - quality and relevant initial training and continual professional development as the basis for recruitment and continued employment;
  - a career structure responding to individual staff needs and motivations, built around an agreed teacher appraisal system;
  - respect for professional, managerial and institutional autonomy;
  - remuneration and other benefits comparable to other occupations with equivalent professional qualifications;

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- attractive teaching conditions that emphasize low child–staff ratios, a safe working environment, and the necessary infrastructure and equipment to support high learning outcomes.
10. A recruitment strategy should especially target urban–rural and gender disparities, as well as ethnic–minority diversity, so as to ensure qualified staff for all regions of a country, and to encourage more men to take up the profession. To this end, special career and other incentives may be necessary.
  11. High professional status depends on a certain level of job stability to underpin quality service provision, job satisfaction, recruitment and retention.
  12. Current remuneration levels of ECE educators and other staff do not reflect the importance of work in this increasingly vital education sector. Salary levels should rely on agreements between employers and employees or their representatives, where applicable.
  13. Workload in ECE should be designed to account for the full range and variety of teacher responsibilities, particularly ensuring adequate non-contact time for professional development and reflective practice, especially important in rural areas. It is vital that employers, public and private, ensure a safe and healthy teaching and learning environment in line with national laws and regulations.

## **Social dialogue in early childhood education**

14. There is a general consensus that social dialogue – all forms of information sharing, consultation and negotiation–collective bargaining between representatives of governments, employers and workers on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy – is essential to healthy ECE policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. Social dialogue on the broad policy and operational issues of ECE should fully engage the social partners, and where relevant, should provide a greater collective voice for stakeholders, including parents. It should also apply within ECE systems and institutions between employers, public or private, and trade unions representing educators and other ECE staff on such issues as professional development and terms and conditions of employment.
15. The diversity of national experiences implies diversity in the frameworks or processes for social dialogue in ECE.
16. Effective social dialogue depends on respect for the 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

## **Recommendations for future actions by constituents and the ILO**

17. The Forum recommends to the Governing Body that the ILO, in consultation with its constituents and relevant international organizations, draft policy guidelines on the promotion of decent work for early childhood education personnel, and in this regard to convene within the biennium 2012–13 a meeting of experts, which will consider, with a view to adopting, these draft policy guidelines. The Forum recognizes that, should this proposal be adopted by the Governing Body, the adopted programme of activities for the education and research sectors will have to be amended to accommodate and reflect this emerging priority.

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The proposed guidelines may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- ECE as a public good and fundamental right;
- ECE financing as an investment to ensure quality, equity and sustainability;
- ECE governance and inter-sectoral coordination, management systems and leadership, including institutional autonomy;
- establishing and maintaining high teacher qualifications and licensing standards in relation to curricula and teaching/learning requirements;
- developing and maintaining continual professional development, reflective practice and professional autonomy, including for leaders and managers;
- evaluating educators and practitioners to support quality practice;
- policies to enhance staff recruitment and retention-addressing gender and geographic imbalances and cultural and linguistic diversity;
- remuneration levels consistent with raising the status of ECE, promoting recruitment and retention;
- employment terms and conditions;
- promoting social dialogue and decent work in accordance with the 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

**18.** The Forum also encouraged the ILO to consider methods for sharing and evaluating good practices and to identify gaps and challenges in the promotion of decent work for early childhood education personnel.