

## Cross-Regional Webinar

### Professionalization of Early Learning Workforce Insights from Africa and the Arab Region

**Date and Time:** 23 July 12:30 - 11:00 ,2024 EAT/EEST (GMT+3)

**Hosted by:** ANECD and AfECN under the Early Childhood Workforce Initiative (ECWI)

**Zoom link:** [https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAud-yuqjsjGNPZ\\_l6-GCbn14gJqNjroir8](https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAud-yuqjsjGNPZ_l6-GCbn14gJqNjroir8)

**Language:** English (French and Portuguese translations are available)

## Concept Note

### Background

The last two decades have seen increased evidence that investment in early childhood development and education (ECED) lays a strong foundation for positive and better developmental and human capital outcomes manifested in improved health, well-being, learning and productivity in later adult life.

It is estimated that more than 175 million children, which is nearly half of all pre-primary-age children across the globe, cannot access pre-primary education. The situation is worse in low-income countries with only 1 in 5 children enrolled for pre-primary education (UNESCO, 2018). Africa and the Arab region are particularly vulnerable with the continental average gross enrolment ratio in pre-primary education at 33% and 28% respectively, leaving behind millions of pre-primary-age children who do not have early learning opportunities available to them.

Access to pre-primary education has been increasing steadily in Africa from an average Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of below 20% in 2000 to the current continental average GER of 33%. This can be attributed partly to the increased regional and national advocacy effort for policy and investment in ECD. A common policy position across the region has been the inclusion of at least one year of pre-primary education into the formal primary school system.

In the Arab region the GER to pre-primary education has increased from 14% in 2000 to 28% currently. This increase reflects the efforts in enacting policies and intervention programs that advocate for and implement initiatives that ensure children access to educational services despite the unexpected challenges. However, the current rate is considered remarkably low in comparison to the global rate, and at the same time children's access to pre-primary education remains prone to disruption due to conflicts, wars, displacement, disasters, and economic instability that affects multiple countries across the region.

### Current EC Workforce Issues

Currently, there is insufficient attention placed on the early years' workforce, an important factor in quality service delivery. Early childhood teachers can create appropriate environments to improve the overall quality of ECE service provision. ECE teachers need to be well trained, qualified and operate in a supportive and enabling environment supported by adequate policies for them to deliver the child outcomes desired.

While there are more than 9 million pre-primary teachers globally, only 422,000 of them work in low-income countries. More specifically, two million teachers and caregivers are needed for early childhood education, to reach the SDG target of universal coverage in Eastern & Southern Africa by 2030. In the Arab countries, in addition to the multidimensional cross-regional crises that affect the working conditions and development of early childhood workforce, the field is witnessing a shortage in the human resources who can thrive through this critical period. In its 2022 conference report, The International Labour Organization (ILO) reported that investing in early childhood care and education would create 6 millions jobs in 12 Arab countries out of the 22 countries.

The early childhood workforce face many challenges most of which emanate from inadequate institutionalization and professionalization of this workforce. This workforce faces issues of lowered status, poor remuneration and inadequate systems for recruitment, development and supervision etc. Inadequate availability of quality data on the ECED workforce limits policy and workforce planning. The existing gaps in national and cross-regional evidence on early learning workforce compromises effective knowledge exchange and learnings across the continent and across regions. Insufficient data on the early learning workforce to enable evidence based policy formulation and planning is one of the barriers to expansion of quality early childhood education provision in Africa and the Arab region.

## Early Childhood Workforce Initiative (ECWI)

In June 2023, three Early Childhood Regional Networks (namely, the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC), the Arab Network for ECD (ANECD), and the Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN) entered into a partnership for a joint programme on Early Childhood Workforce. The joint Early Childhood Workforce Initiative (ECWI), established by the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) and Results for Development (R4D), aims to spotlight issues affecting the ECD workforce through evidence generation, advocacy and policy engagement for development of a quality early learning workforce. Under the ECWI both AfECN and ANECD, have engaged in evidence generation to contribute to better understanding of the status and issues affecting the early learning workforce and strategies & policy options available across the two regions towards the professionalization of this workforce.

## Workshop Objectives

- Knowledge sharing on the status of the Early Learning Workforce in Africa and Arab regions.
- Leverage on the dissemination of the findings and recommendations from the evidence generated related to the EC workforce issues
- Share experiences and lessons learned from Africa & Arab regions in innovative approaches in programs and policies and best practice in the professionalization of the early learning workforce.
- Identify key areas for future research, innovations, policy advocacy, strategy formulation and programme implementation towards enhancement of the professionalization of the Early Learning Workforce.

## Workshop Outcomes

The expected outcome of the Webinar will be increased knowledge on:

- The status and existing gaps in the professionalization of the early learning workforce in Africa and Arab regions.
- The policy and strategic options available for delivering a professional Early Learning Workforce for enhanced quality in service delivery.

## Methodology

The Webinar will be held through virtual means and consist of power-point presentations, panel discussions and plenary/question and answer session.

There will be keynote speakers from Africa and Arab regions to share evidence generated and implementation experiences in relation to the Early Learning Workforce across the two regions. This will be followed by panel discussions of key stakeholders in the area of Workforce development who will share their perspectives and experiences with regards to the early childhood workforce.

## Participants

The Webinar will bring together members of the 4 Regional Networks (AfeCN, ISSA, ARNEC and ANECD); the AU CESA ECED Cluster Quality Working Group; Teacher Development Cluster, national ECD networks, field level practitioners, researchers, teacher unions, training providers, government policy makers and other stakeholders.