The share of the workforce that was long-tenured reached a peak of 53% during COVID (Q2 2020), reflecting the high turnover commonly observed in ECE.

NORC at the University of Chicago

Early Childhood Workforce Careers

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

The early childhood education (ECE) workforce plays a critical dual role in supporting parents' labor force participation and fostering children's development. Yet, policymakers and stakeholders often lack timely, comprehensive, and comparable data to understand workforce dynamics like turnover and to anticipate how policy shifts will impact ECE career pathways. This information gap constrains effective decision-making to build a robust and stable ECE workforce nationwide.

The Early Childhood Education Worker Careers project is a NORC-led, multi-state study funded by the **Alfred P. Sloan Foundation** that examines the career trajectories, earnings, and employment stability of the early care and education (ECE) workforce. Although these preliminary results reflect findings from Illinois alone, the descriptive analysis for this project will present metrics aligned across five neighboring state partners (see map). The team will leverage longitudinal unemployment insurance wage records housed in a secure research facility to describe the workforce and study how policy changes—school-based pre-K expansion and minimum wage increases—have shaped worker retention, tenure, and wages.

DATA AND METHODS

Data. Quarterly unemployment insurance (UI) wage records capture over 90 percent of all jobs and allow individuals, employers, and their relationships to be tracked over time. **Child care workers are identified as employees of providers in NAICS code 624410** (Child Care Services).

Measures. Descriptive analyses describe the ECE workforce over 10+ years, including pre- and post-COVID patterns. Specifically, we compare:

- Trends over time in **workforce dynamics** (entries, exits, and size) and inflation-adjusted **median earnings** *(presented on this poster)*
- Characteristics of **new hires**, including industries of **prior employment**, wages in prior jobs, and **retention** in child care jobs in the industry
- Outcomes for **leavers**, including industry and wages of subsequent job and duration in the industry before leaving

Because UI data report only total quarterly earnings, earnings analyses focus on workers with "stable employment"—those employed in a given quarter plus the quarters before and after—to enable comparable earnings measures.

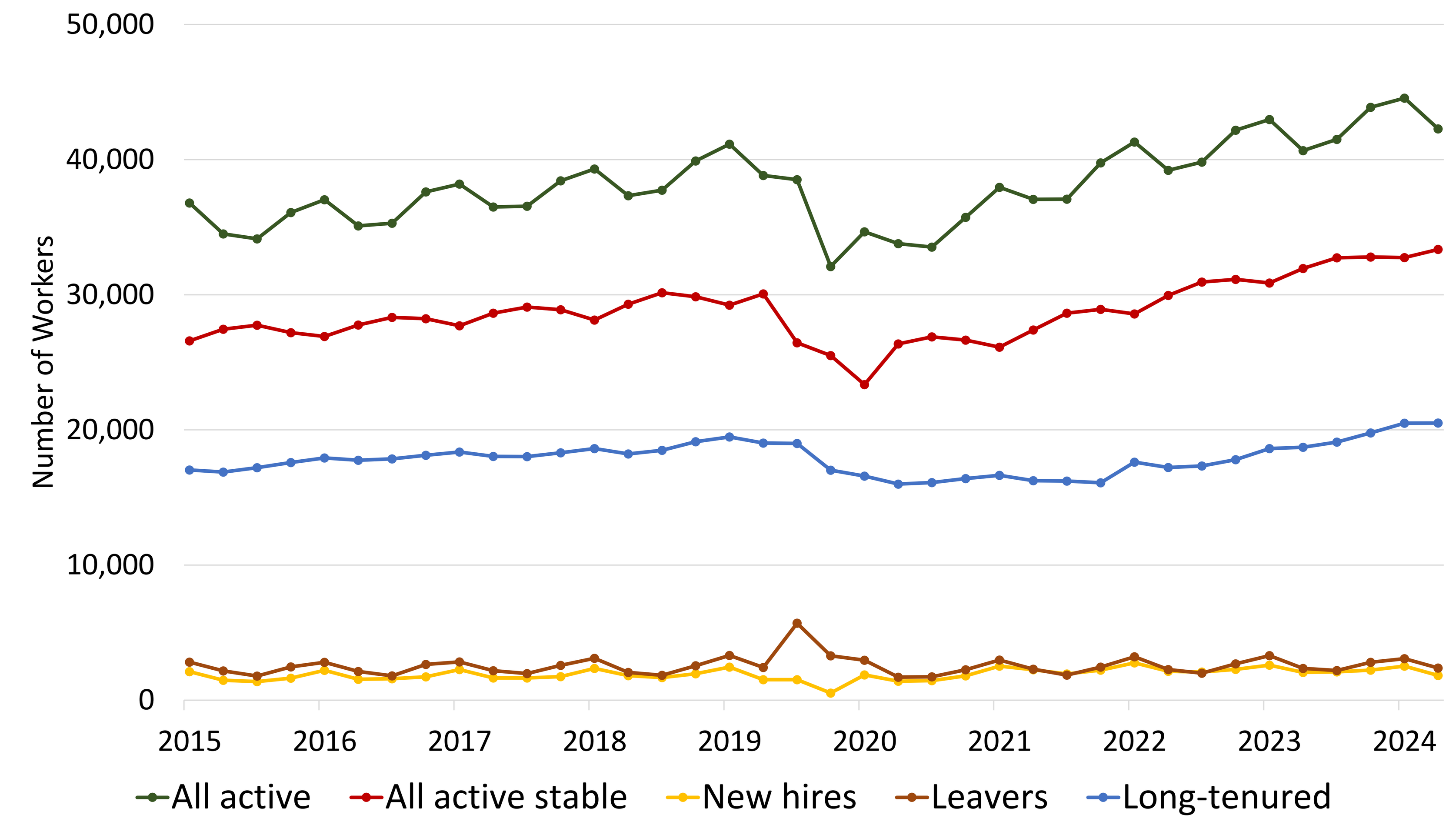
Table 1. Populations Included in "Child Care Services" NAICS Code

	Included in NAICS Code 624410	Excluded from NAICS Code 624410
Overall	Individuals working for day care centers, preschools, and family child care homes	Individuals working outside the state providing the UI wage data
By provider type	Public and privately funded child care centers, including centers funded through school districts	Employers classified as elementary or secondary schools Family child care homes operating as sole proprietors with no employees
By employment status	Part-time and full-time workers	Individuals who are paid informally
By role	All employees, including teachers, administrators, and support staff members (such as kitchen staff, bus drivers, and janitors); classroom staff cannot be distinguished from administrators or support roles	Nannies, babysitters, or other household employees

Derived from Wiegand, E.R., R.M. Goerge, H. Kang, & D. McQuown (2024). *What Were the Wages and Employment Trajectories of Child Care Workers in Illinois over the Last Two Decades?* OPRE Report 2024-017. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project/building-and-sustaining-early-care-and-education-workforce-base

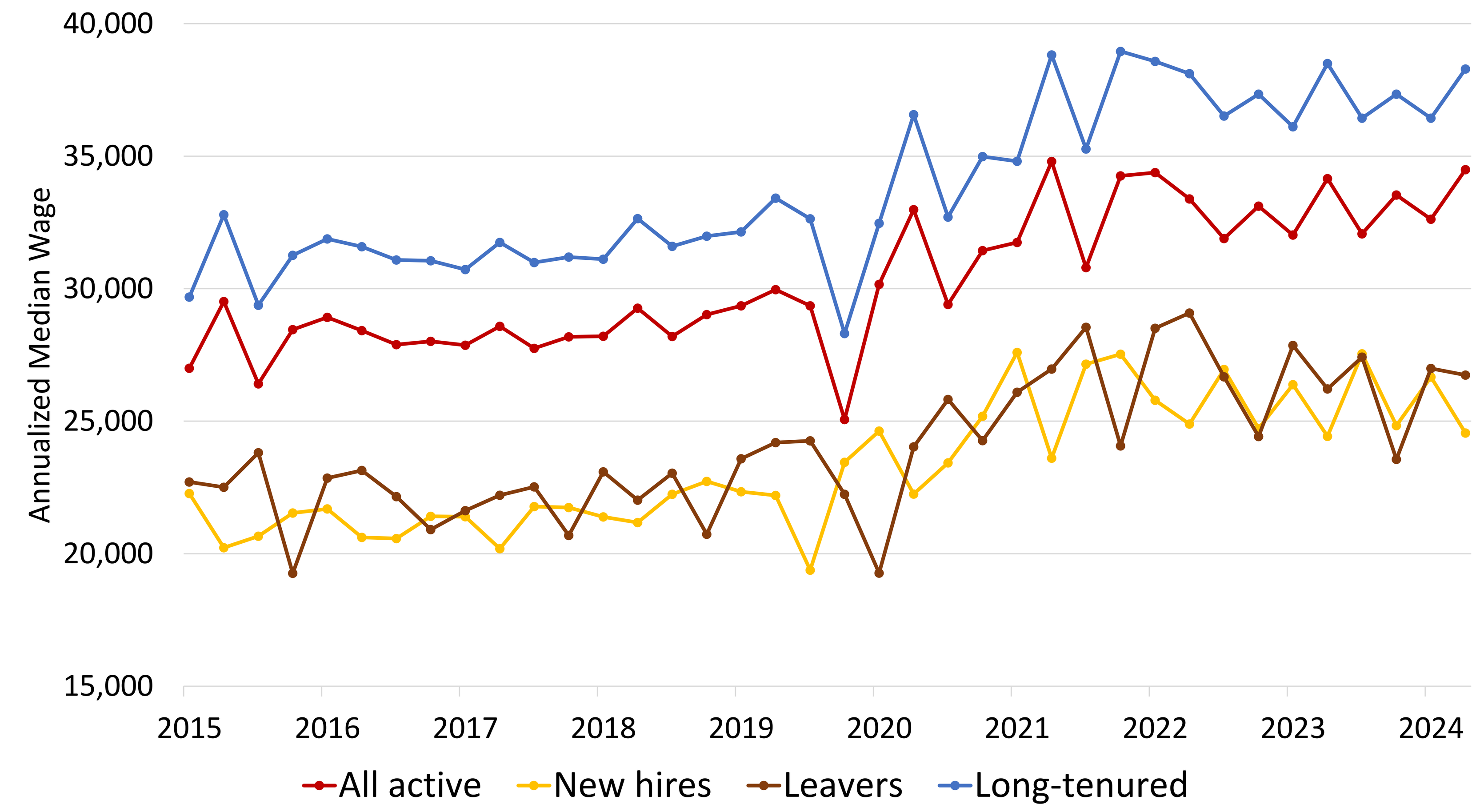
ILLINOIS FINDINGS

Figure 1. Size of Illinois Child Care Workforce over Time



Notes: Stable employees have at least one full quarter of earnings, allowing us to estimate their annualized wage. New hires are limited to those with no child care employment in the prior five years. Leavers are in their last quarter of consecutive child care employment. Long-tenured individuals have been employed in the industry continuously for more than two years.

Figure 2. Median Wages of Illinois Child Care Workforce over Time



Notes: All wages are annualized and inflation-adjusted (2024Q4 $).

DISCUSSION

Workforce size. The Illinois child care workforce has been slowly growing since COVID, although there is some seasonality to this trend. There were 30,065 active workers with stable (full quarter) employment in the fourth quarter of 2019 and 33,356 in 2024.

Tenure. In the fourth quarter of 2024, 20,503 individuals working in child care had two or more years of continuous experience in the field. This represents nearly half of the overall workforce in that quarter (42,274). At the other end, just over 20% of the individuals working in Q4 2024, did not meet our threshold for stable employment (working for at least one full quarter).

The distribution of these worker categories across the workforce has remained fairly consistent. The share of the workforce that was long-tenured reached a peak of 53% during COVID (Q2 2020), reflecting the high turnover commonly observed in ECE.

Median wages. Median wages for all populations have increased since 2019, although quarterly patterns are noisy since COVID.

Table 2. Median Child Care Wages, 2019 and 2024

Population	Q4 2019 Median Wage	Q4 2024 Median Wage	% Change
All active stable	$29,963	$34,492	+15%
Long-tenured	$33,420	$38,292	+15%
New hires	$22,196	$24,555	+11%
Leavers	$24,190	$26,739	+11%

Notes: All wages are annualized and inflation-adjusted (2024Q4 $).

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