

KICCE POLICY BRIEF

December, 2023 Issue 28

ECEC Statistics of KOREA: Recent trends of Services, Enrollment, and Workforce¹

I. Early Childhood Education and Care(ECEC) System in Korea

In Korea, childcare centers accommodate children aged 0-5 years, while kindergartens cater to those aged 3-5 years (**Table 1**).

- The Standard Childcare Curriculum is in place for children aged 0-2 years, and the Nuri Curriculum is adopted for children aged 3-5 years, implemented in both childcare centers and kindergartens.
 - The Nuri Curriculum is the common curriculum for 3-5 year-old children that integrates standardized child care and the education curriculum of childcare centers and kindergartens.
- Kindergartens follow a daily schedule that includes a basic curriculum and an after-school program. Meanwhile, childcare centers divide their daily operations into a basic and an extended childcare program.
 - The after-school program in kindergartens has steadily expanded, and since 2020, childcare centers have introduced extended services to enhance the quality of childcare services².

The administration of the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system in South Korea is divided between two departments: the Ministry of Education, responsible for kindergartens, and the Ministry of Health and Welfare, responsible for childcare centers.

- Despite some overlap in the targeted ages of children and functions covered by the ECEC, significant differences exist in the service organization, competent ministries, and teacher qualifications due to the historical and social foundations of the two departments.
- As part of the national agenda, the President has proposed a plan to integrate ECEC with the aim of providing quality education opportunities for all children and reducing the burden of parental care³.
 - The fundamental need for ECEC integration is to ensure that irrespective of where education or care is received, whether kindergartens or childcare facilities, private or public, there will be no discrimination or difference in content, tuition, or environment, and that homogeneous and high-quality education and care will be provided.
 - For more details about the integration policy of early childhood care (ECC) and early childhood education (ECE) refer to 「KICCE Policy Brief Issue No. 27」⁴.

1. This manuscript has been updated based on the KICCE Policy Brief Issue No. 22 (2021).

2. Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2019. 9. 19. Press release.

3. <https://www.opm.go.kr/opm/info/government05.do>.

4. <https://url.kr/lkx642>

[Table 1] Comparing early childhood education and care systems in Korea

	Early Childhood Education	Early Childhood Care
Department in Charge	Ministry of Education	Ministry of Health and Welfare
Legal Basis	Early Childhood Education Act (Enacted in 2004)	Child Care Act (Enacted in 1991)
Target children's age	Age 3-5 years	Age 0-5 years
Daily School Hours	Basic curriculum (4-5 hours) + After-school	12 hours: Basic (9:00-16:00) + Extended hours
Teacher Qualification (Minimum criteria)	Kindergarten teacher levels 1, 2 (Associate degree)	Childcare center teacher levels 1, 2, and 3 (High school graduate + 1-year training)
Teacher to Child Ratio	Varied across provinces; the ratio is decided by the superintendent of education In the case of Seoul, the ratio is as follows: Age3 (1:17), Age 4 (1:23), Age 5 (1:27), Mixed-age class (1:22)	Based on Article 10 of the Child Care Act, the ratio is: Age 0 (1:3), Age 1 (1:5), Age 2 (1:7), Age 3 (1:15), Age 4-5 (1:20)
Financial Support for Parents with Children (monthly voucher)	Age 3-5 years: Nuri Curriculum: KRW 100,000~280,000 After-school program: KRW 50,000~70,000	Age 0 years: KRW 514,000 + KRW 599,000* Age 1 years: KRW 452,000 + KRW 326,000* Age 2 years: KRW 375,000 + KRW 221,000* Age 3-5 years: KRW 280,000 * Government subsidies for childcare centers for children with disabilities and children aged 0-2 years
Education and Care Curriculum	Nuri Curriculum (Age 3-5 years)	Standardized Childcare Curriculum (Age 0-2 years) Nuri Curriculum (Age 3-5 years)

Source: 1) Kim, D. (2021). ECEC statistics of Korea: Services, enrollment, workforce, and financial resources. KICCE Policy Brief, Issue No. 22.

2) Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education (2023). 2023 Seoul early childhood education plan.

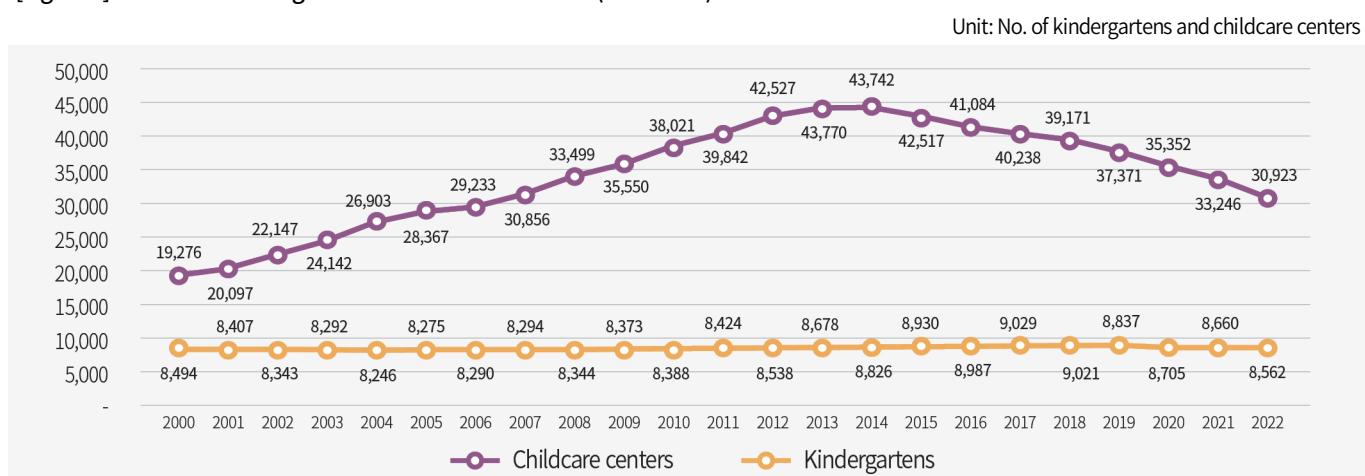
3) <http://www.bokjiro.go.kr>

II. Current Status of ECEC Services

As of 2022, there are 8,562 kindergartens and 30,923 childcare centers in Korea.

- Since 2000, the number of kindergartens exhibited a fluctuating pattern, initial growth and subsequent decline. It increased from 2012 to 2017, then after reaching a peak of 9,029 in 2017, there has been a consistent decrease since 2018.
- The number of childcare centers witnessed growth from 2000 to 2013, reaching 43,770. However, from 2013 onwards, there has been a continuous yearly decrease. The reason for the decrease in the number of childcare centers is that there is a decreasing number of infants and toddlers.

[Figure 1] Number of Kindergartens and Childcare Centers (2000-2022)



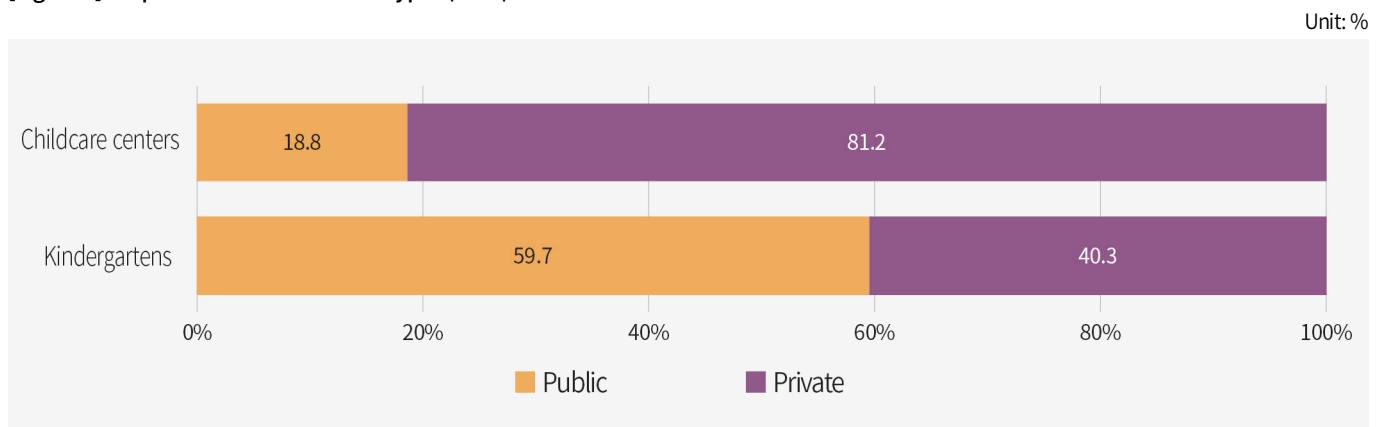
Source: 1) Korean Educational Development Institute(2022). Education Statistics.

2) Ministry of Health and Welfare(2022). Childcare Statistics.

The proportion of public kindergartens and childcare centers is gradually increasing.

- The proportion of public kindergartens (59.7%) is higher than that of private kindergartens (40.3%).
 - The Ministry of Education promoted the expansion of public kindergartens in 2019 to increase the national commitment to early childhood education⁵.
- The proportion of public childcare centers, however, is only 18.8% of the total number of childcare centers.
 - Private childcare centers consist of the following facilities: family childcare centers (39.2%), private childcare centers⁶ (31.5%), childcare centers of social welfare corporations, organizations, etc. (6.1%), workplace childcare centers (4.2%), and cooperative childcare centers (0.4%).

[Figure 2] Proportions of ECEC service types (2022)



Note: Private institutions are also similar to semipublic ones, as they receive government support.

Source: 1) Korean Educational Development Institute (2022). Education Statistics.

2) Ministry of Health and Welfare (2022). Childcare Statistics.

Financing ECEC Services: The budget for the Nuri Curriculum is 3,989,359 million KRW, and that for the childcare is 3,395,239 million KRW.

- In 2017, the 「Act on the Early Childhood Education Support Special Account」 was enacted to establish special accounts for early childhood education support and prescribe matters concerning the operation thereof to stably promote policies for the Nuri Curriculum⁷.
- The budget for the Nuri Curriculum decreased between 2018 and 2019, but has been increasing again since then. This is because as the unit price of parental financial support for the Nuri Curriculum increased in 2020, the Nuri Curriculum budget also increased significantly.
- The budget for the childcare was on the rise, but decreased to 3,202,771 million KRW in 2022 from the previous year.

[Table 2] Budget for Childcare and Nuri Curriculum (2018-2022)

	Unit: One hundred million KRW				
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Childcare	3,257,470	3,405,282	3,416,221	3,395,239	3,202,771
Nuri Curriculum	3,942,051	3,791,917	3,961,764	3,989,359	-

Note. The budget for the Nuri Curriculum for 2022 has not yet been announced.

Source: 1) Guide to Early Childhood Care, <https://www.mohw.go.kr>

2) Local Educational Financial Statistics Information System, <https://eduinfo.go.kr>

5. Ministry of Education, 2018. 12. 6. Press release.

6. Private childcare centers are centers not falling under any of the subtypes of childcare centers.

7. The childcare budget is determined by both central and local finances, while the early childhood education budget is determined by central finance and local education finance. The special accounts for early childhood education support is included within local education finances.

III. Enrollment rates

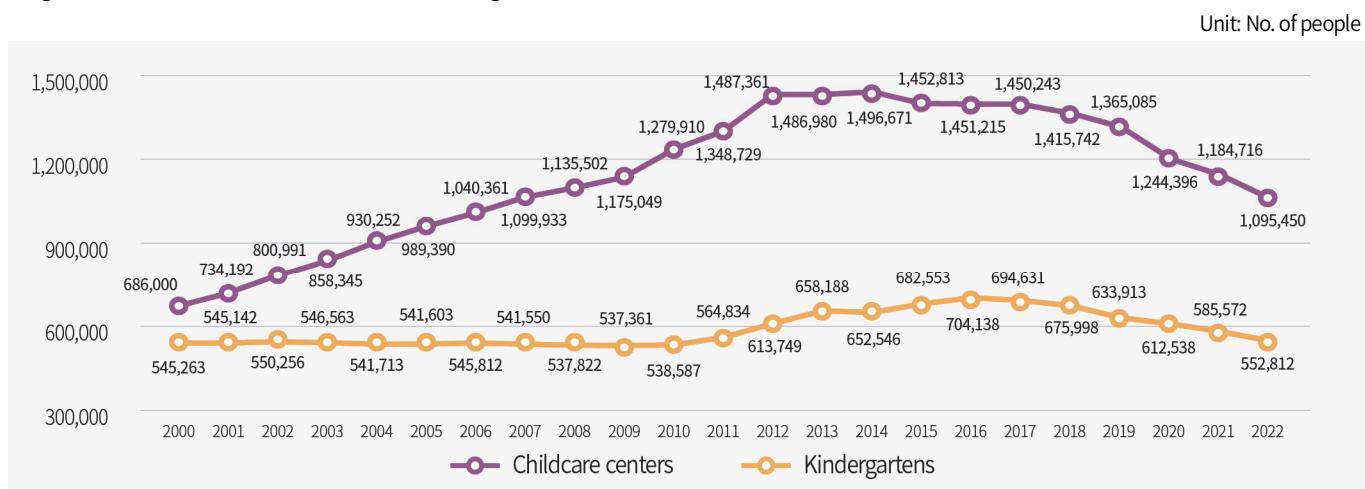
The enrollment in kindergartens and childcare centers was 1,648,262 in 2022, of whom 552,812 were enrolled in kindergartens and 1,095,450 in childcare centers.

- Enrollment in kindergartens and childcare centers has increased since 2000, but recently has seen a downward trend.
 - The enrollment in kindergartens has decreased from 2017 to the present.
 - For childcare centers, enrollment increased from 2000 to 2014 since when the number has been decreasing each year.

More children are enrolled in private than in public kindergartens and childcare centers.

- Regarding kindergartens, 30.3% and 69.7% of children were enrolled in public and private kindergartens, respectively.
- For childcare centers, 25.3% of children were enrolled in public childcare centers.

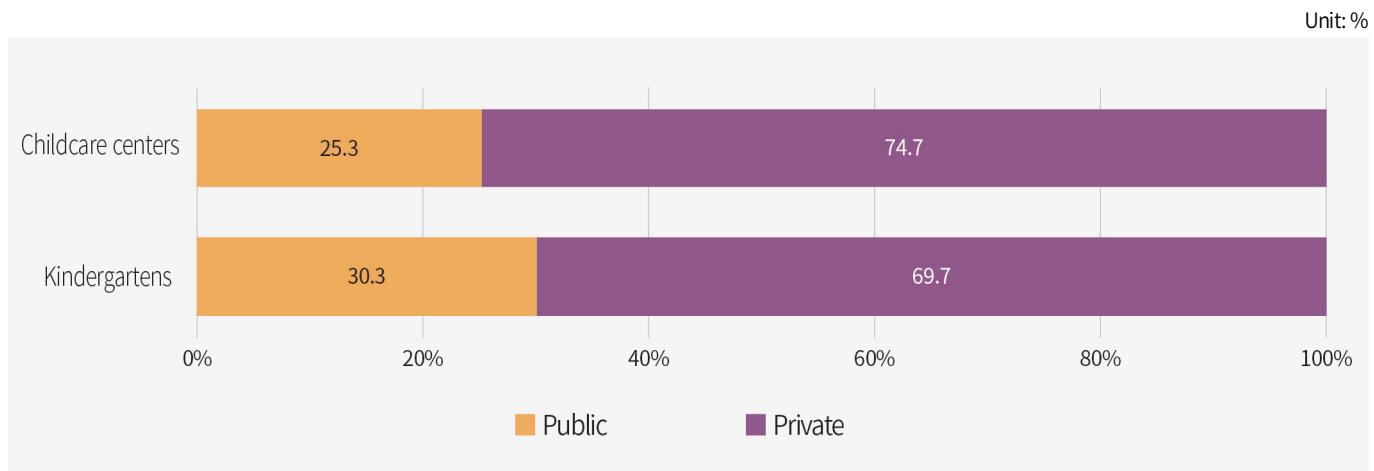
[Figure 3] Number of children enrolled in kindergartens and childcare centers (2000-2022)



Source: 1) Korean Educational Development Institute (2022). Education Statistics.

2) Ministry of Health and Welfare (2022). Childcare Statistics.

[Figure 4] Proportion of children enrolled in kindergartens and childcare centers by service type (2022)



Note: Private institutions are also similar to semipublic ones, as they receive government support.

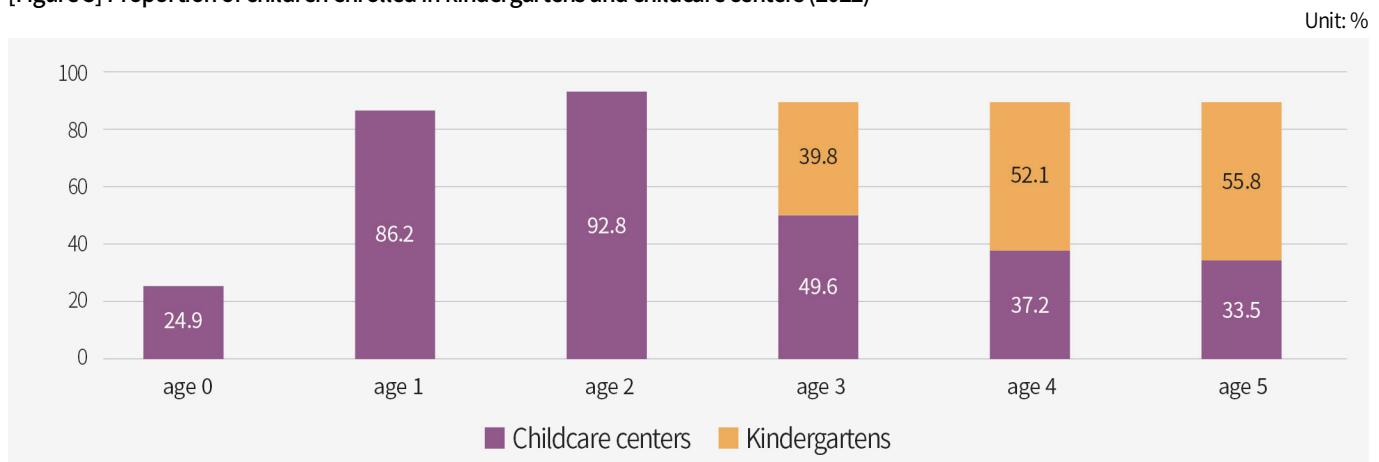
Source: 1) Korean Educational Development Institute (2022). Education Statistics.

2) Ministry of Health and Welfare (2022). Childcare Statistics.

The enrollment rate for children under the age of six in kindergartens and childcare centers was 74.5% in 2022⁸.

- When broken down by age, enrollment rates were as follows: 24.9% for 0-year-olds, 86.2% for 1-year-olds, and 92.8% for 2-year-olds in childcare centers, and 89.4% for 3-year-olds, 89.3% for 4-year-olds, and 89.3% for 5-year-olds in either kindergartens or childcare centers.
 - Among the 1,094,542 children aged 0-2 years, 651,700 children were enrolled in childcare centers.
 - Of the 1,110,408 children aged 3-5 years, 439,070 were enrolled in childcare centers and 552,619 in kindergartens.

[Figure 5] Proportion of children enrolled in kindergartens and childcare centers (2022)



note. Age 0 implies children born in 2021 and 2022.

Source: 1) Korean Educational Development Institute (2022). Education Statistics.

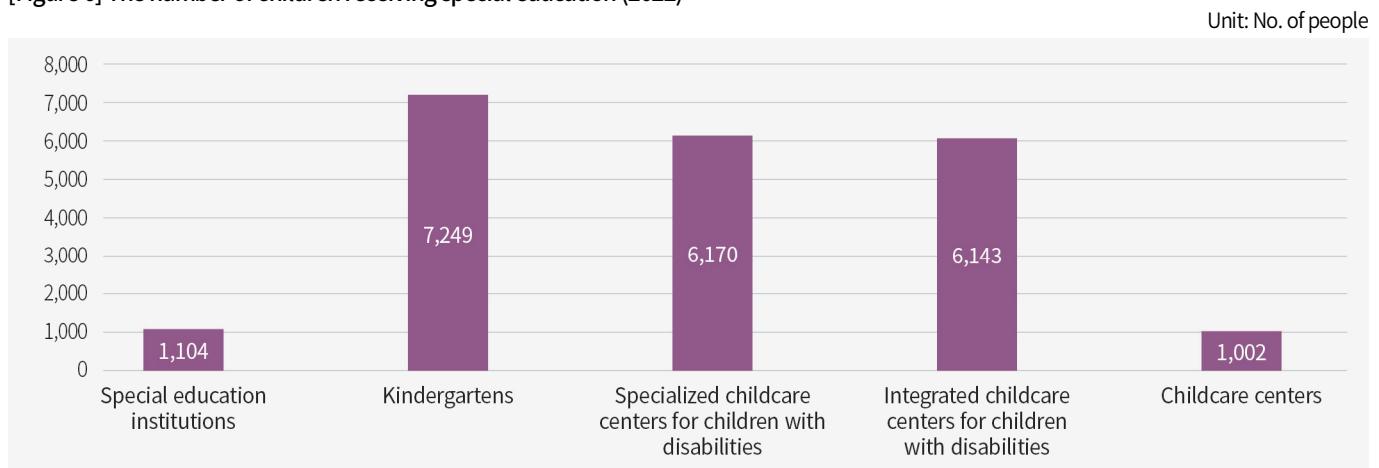
2) Ministry of Health and Welfare (2022). Childcare Statistics.

3) Ministry of the Interior and Safety (2022). Population Statistics Based on Resident Registration.

In Korea, the number of children receiving special education or childcare for disabled children at kindergartens and childcare centers is 21,668.

- They are enrolled in special education institutions, special classes, specialized childcare centers for children with disabilities, integrated childcare centers for children with disabilities, and regular childcare centers.

[Figure 6] The number of children receiving special education (2022)



Source: 1) Korean Educational Development Institute (2022). Special education statistics.

2) Ministry of Health and Welfare (2022). Childcare Statistics.

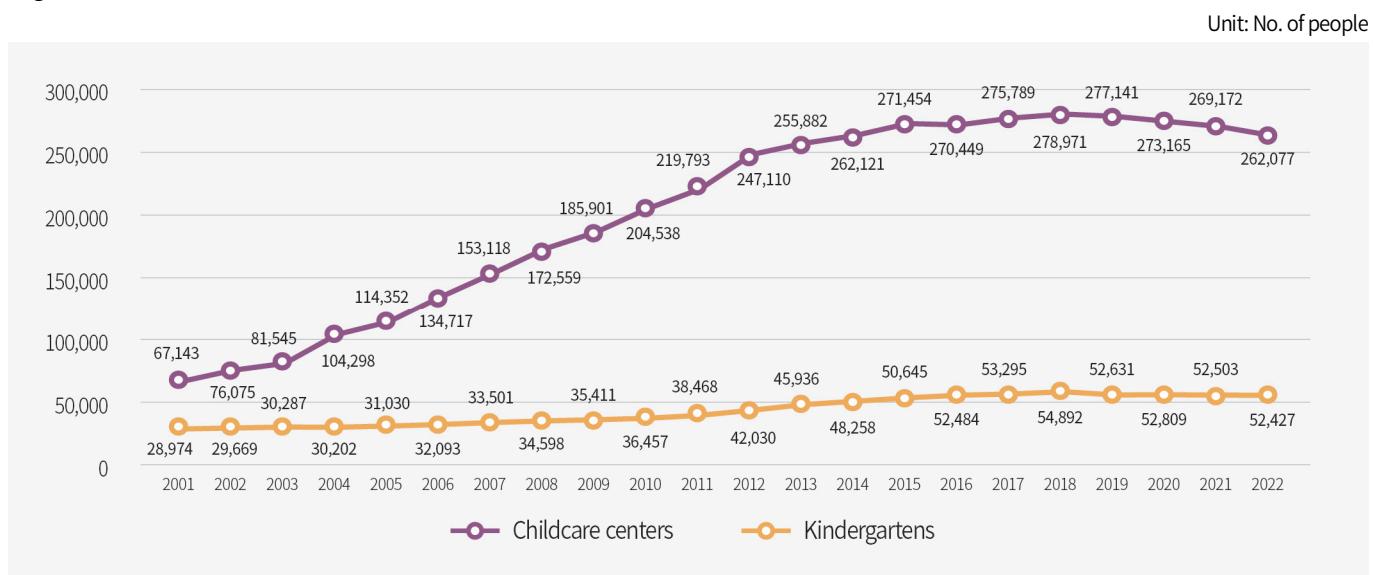
8. Ministry of the Interior and Safety (2022). Population Statistics Based on Resident Registration.

IV. ECEC Workforce

While the staff at kindergarten and childcare center (ECEC teachers) has increased over the years, a decreasing trend has been observed recently.

- Since 2001, the number of childcare center staff has increased more rapidly than that of kindergarten staff. However, as the children's participation rate in kindergartens and childcare centers decreased, the number of staff members also saw a decreasing trend.
- In 2022, the total number of staff in kindergartens was 52,427, while that in childcare centers was 262,077.

[Figure 7] Number of ECEC staff (2000-2022)



Source: 1) Korean Educational Development Institute (2022). Education Statistics.

2) Ministry of Health and Welfare (2022). Childcare Statistics.

The staffing structures in kindergartens and childcare centers are different. Here is a breakdown of staff positions in each:

- Kindergarten staff: principals, vice-principals, advanced skills teachers, full-time and part-time teachers(master teachers, teachers, and temporary instructors).
- Childcare center staff: principals, childcare teachers, teachers in extended hours (after-school teachers, etc.), substitute teachers, and teaching assistants.
 - Basic childcare hours are overseen by regular teachers, but from 4:00 PM to 7:30 PM (extended childcare hours), dedicated extended childcare teachers are assigned to enhance the quality of services. This is expected to reduce the workload for teachers, provide them with more break and preparation time, and ultimately improve working conditions⁹.
 - The 'Substitute Teacher Support' program is designed to support childcare centers by providing substitute teachers when teachers are unable to attend work because of leave or educational commitments, thereby ensuring the safe care of children. The Ministry of Health and Welfare improved the guidelines related to substitute teachers in 2018 and has continued to expand support since then¹⁰.

9. Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2019. 9. 19. Press release.

10. Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2018. 3. 18. Press release.

[Table 3] Number of kindergarten staff by position (2022)

	Total	Principals	Vice Principals	Advanced Skills Teachers	Master Teachers	Teachers	Temporary Instructors	Unit: No. of people
Total	52,427	3,734	2,065	20	2,793	38,742	5,073	

Source: Korean Educational Development Institute (2022). Education Statistics.

[Table 4] Number of childcare center staff by position (2022)

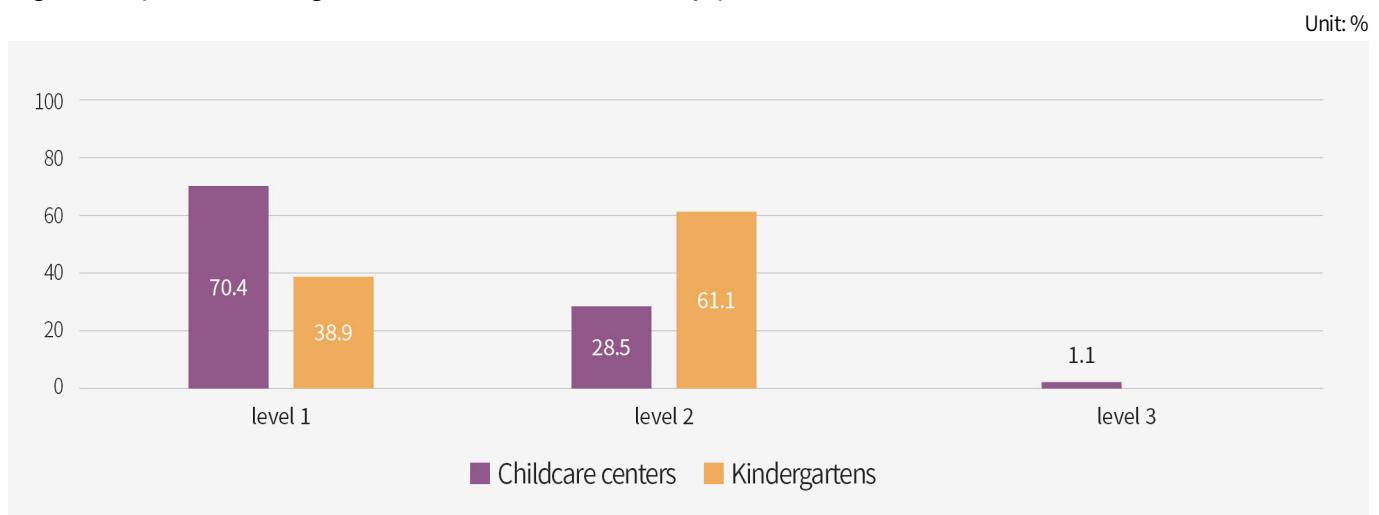
	Total	Principals	Teachers	Teachers in extended hours	Substitute teachers, Teaching assistants, etc.	Unit: No. of people
Total	262,077	30,773	166,177	22,074	43,053	

Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare (2022). Childcare Statistics.

The ECEC teacher certifications are composed of three levels for childcare center teachers (teacher levels 1, 2, and 3) and two for kindergarten teachers (teacher levels 1 and 2).

- The minimum education level for kindergarten teachers is the 2-3-year associate degree (teacher level 2), while childcare center teachers are required to have at least a high school diploma and 1-year vocational training (teacher level 3).

[Figure 8] Proportion of kindergarten and childcare center teachers by qualification (2022)



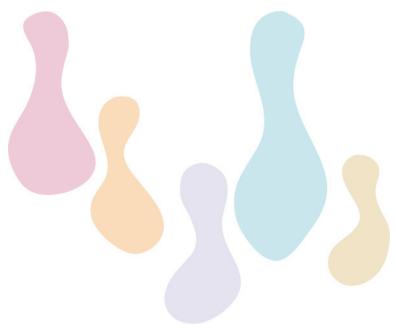
Source: 1) Korean Educational Development Institute (2022). Education Statistics.

2) Ministry of Health and Welfare (2022). Childcare Statistics.

Yun-Jin Bae, Ph. D.

Research Fellow

bjj@kicce.re.kr



Korea Institute of
Child Care and Education

Post Tower, 9F, 70, Sogong-ro, Jung-gu, Seoul, Korea Tel 82-2-398-7700 Fax 82-2-398-7798 www.kicce.re.kr/eng