

# KICCE POLICY BRIEF

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## An Overview of Child and Family Policy Priorities under the Lee Jae-myung Administration of the Republic of Korea

### I . Introduction: National Policy Tasks and the Policy Framework for Children and Families

**The National Policy Tasks of the Lee Jae-myung administration outline a comprehensive reform agenda that aimed at reshaping Korea’s policy landscape across multiple sectors in response to pressing demographic, economic, and social challenges.**

- Following its assumption of office in June 2025, the Lee Jae-myung administration has used the national policy task framework to clearly articulate its policy priorities in response to structural challenges, including demographic change, economic transformation, and growing demands for social protection.
- Korea’s rapidly changing demographic landscape—marked by ultra-low fertility, accelerated population aging, and increasingly diverse family forms—has intensified the need for a more inclusive and government-supported model of childrearing and family policy. The administration’s agenda reflects this shift by underscoring stronger public responsibility across the life course, with particular emphasis on early childhood and early schooling.

#### **Positioning within National Goal 4: “A Society Built on Strong Foundations”**

- Child- and family-related initiatives are primarily anchored under National Goal 4 but are intentionally distributed across multiple strategies, including demographic response, labor reform, family support, and education innovation. This distribution signals the government’s recognition that child and family well-being is not confined to a single administrative domain and instead requires coordinated action across sectors.

#### **A Cross-Sectoral and User-Centered Approach**

- The policy represents a shift from a provider-centered approach toward a more user-centered and integrated support system. It aligns services across ministries to reduce fragmentation and ensure continuity from pregnancy through the early years of education. This integrated design reflects the administration’s commitment to improving the lived experience of families by addressing structural constraints related to childcare, labor conditions, and- access to education.

## II. Enhancing the Public Education System to Promote Educational Equity

### Government-Responsibility ECEC Integration

- The ECEC integration initiative, which previously pursued full ministerial integration under the former administration, has been restructured under the Lee Jae-myung administration as a policy task focused on government-led responsibility for early childhood education and care.
- The revised approach aims to ensure healthy development and learning for all young children through an integrated education and care system. Key measures include improving child–teacher ratios starting from infancy, the phased implementation of free education and care for children aged 3 to 5, the expansion of flexible care services, and the introduction of demand-responsive education and after-school programs.
- Given that earlier ECEC integration roadmaps faced repeated delays due to field-level resistance and conflicts of interest, the current policy task places greater emphasis on urgent and user-centered priorities for children and parents. Rather than focusing on institutional restructuring, the approach prioritizes practical changes that can enhance feasibility and user satisfaction under existing conditions. Simultaneously, ensuring long-term sustainability will require a clear medium- to long-term roadmap and a phased implementation strategy alongside continued quality improvement.

### School–Local Government Collaboration for After-School and Community Care

- The policy approach to school-age care is shifting away from school-centered models, such as “Nulbom Schools,” to community-based models in which schools and local governments share governance and implementation responsibilities. Schools focus on program quality and management, while local governments expand physical care infrastructure through community care centers. This collaboration aims to reduce fragmentation, improve equitable access, and enhance continuity of care from early childhood to primary school.

## III. Work–Family Balance and Reorganization of the Care Ecosystem

### Working-Time Reduction as a Structural Reform

- Working-time reforms—such as piloting a 4.5-day workweek and legislating reductions in actual working hours—function as structural policies that reshape the time architecture of work for the entire labor force. By improving overall work–life balance, these reforms create an enabling environment for caregiving participation and reduce reliance on long-hours institutional care for young children.
- Working-time reduction can contribute to restoring family-based care, improving Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) teachers’ and staff working conditions, and enhancing the overall quality of early childhood care, in addition to reducing individual labor burdens.

### Family-Friendly Labor Policies Targeting Intensive Care Needs

- Complementing structural reforms, targeted policies support parents during periods of intensive caregiving. Measures include automatic transition from maternity leave to parental leave, enhanced benefits for reduced working hours, expanded partner leave relate to pregnancy and childbirth, and extended paid leave for infertility treatment. Enhanced subsidies for SMEs and improved replacement worker programs help reduce employer barriers and expand equitable access to family-friendly practices.

## IV. Supporting Diverse Families and Expanding Community-Based Care

### Strengthening In-Home Childcare Services

- In-home childcare services have played a crucial role in complementing institutional childcare by addressing gaps in childcare provision and diversifying care options. However, these services have faced limitations related to income-based differentiated subsidies, service quality assurance, and inadequate working conditions for care providers.
- The current policy task relaxes income eligibility criteria and increases subsidy rates, thereby reducing users' financial burden. The abolition of differentiated support between pre-school and post-school-age children, together with the introduction of nighttime and emergency care services, significantly enhances responsiveness to diverse and urgent care needs.
- Measures to improve care providers' working conditions—including higher allowances and greater job stability—are being implemented to attract qualified workers. Additionally, a registration system for private providers extends public oversight to private in-home childcare services, improving accessibility, quality assurance, and overall system coherence.

### Inclusive Support for Diverse and Vulnerable Families

- Support for single-parent households, grandparent-led families, and migrant families has been expanded through increased child-rearing allowances, revised eligibility thresholds, and targeted supplementary benefits. These measures are intended to mitigate inequalities arising from family structure and promote social inclusion.

### Strengthening Community-Based Child and Family Services

- The government plans to strengthen educational support for children from migrant backgrounds through family centers, including academic support and career guidance. This approach positions the academic gaps and adaptation challenges of migrant children as matters of shared public responsibility rather than solely private concerns. From an inclusive social policy perspective, the expansion of such support carries significant implications.

## V. Building a Society Supportive of Childbirth and Child-Rearing

### Maternity Services and Early Childhood Health Support

- This policy task seeks to expand government responsibility from childbirth through early childhood. It aims to reduce the costs and health risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth and to alleviate caregiving burdens on parents.
- Key initiatives include strengthened health support before, during, and after pregnancy; the continued expansion of early childhood health management<sup>1</sup> and sustained clinical care for premature infants<sup>2</sup>; and early identification of risk factors to reduce health and developmental disparities.

1. The Early Childhood Health Management Program is a government initiative that provides home-based health management services for up to two years after pregnancy and childbirth, including health and infant development counseling, parenting education, and psychosocial support delivered by public health nurses and social workers.

2. The Sustained Clinical Care Program for Preterm Infants provides ongoing clinical monitoring for infants born weighing less than 1,500 grams or before 32 weeks of gestation through scheduled and as-needed consultations at key corrected ages. (Retrieved December 10, 2025, from <https://babyhealth.kr/>)

### Expanding Child Allowances

- The child allowance benefit is being gradually expanded from coverage of children under age 8 to include those up to age 13, with the age limit increasing by one year annually. This expansion applies to children born in 2017 or later, resulting in an additional benefit of approximately KRW 6 million per child over time.
- Although the expansion of the child allowance was initially framed within the campaign vision of building “a society where children’s rights are guaranteed,” it is addressed in the national policy tasks primarily as a measure to strengthen childrearing support. This framing reflects a policy compromise between the normative principle that the government should guarantee children’s basic living conditions and the practical need to alleviate families’ childrearing burdens.
- The government has announced plans to link the allowance with parental education and awareness-raising programs to strengthen parenting capacity. This approach combines financial support with efforts to improve the quality of the caregiving environment.

### Building a Government-Led Child Protection System

- The National Policy Tasks emphasize the institutionalization of the principle that the government bears responsibility for every child. Key policy directions include a transition to a government-led adoption system, the introduction of a public guardianship model, strengthened child abuse prevention and response mechanisms, the expansion of foster care, and the enhancement of professional standards for child protection workers.

## VI. Policy Implications and Future Directions

### Building an Integrated Life-Course Care System

- The administration’s agenda reflects a move toward a life-course model of care that links early childhood services with school-age care, family support, and labor policies. Such integration is key to achieving continuity, equity, and sustainability in child and family policy.

### Ensuring Governance Capacity, Sustainability, and Regional Equity

- Effective implementation will require strong inter-ministerial coordination, long-term planning for ECEC integration, sustainable financing, and measures to reduce regional disparities. Continued emphasis on community-based service delivery and cross-sectoral alignment will be essential to strengthening the national child and family policy framework in response to ongoing demographic change.

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