

Korea

Population: 45.9 m. **Fertility rate:** 1.3 X1.16 (2005). **GDP per capita:** USD 20 300. **Children under 6 years:** almost 4 million (2005).

Female labour force participation: 53.9% of women are employed, 11.9% of whom are in part-time employment (male part-time is 5.9%). A significant percentage of women in employment are in non-regular work, and do not benefit from parental leave rights, child benefits or pension rights. Labour participation rates of women with a child under age 6 are low by OECD standards, with national statistics indicating that a sharp drop in female employment until children are reared.

Remunerated maternity and parental leave: A system of limited-allowance and parental leave for birth and child-rearing (0-5 years) was incorporated into legislation with adjustments from 1987 to 2001. Three months of maternity leave is paid at approximately USD 400 monthly. The take-up has been extremely low among women and negligible among men.

Duration of compulsory school education: 6-15 years, that is, 9 years.

Social expenditure: 6.1% of GDP **Child poverty rate:** Not available.

Funding of kindergartens (ISCED Level 0): 0.16% of GDP (0.05% public and 0.11% private) (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2005). Expenditure on kindergartens corresponds to 2% of the education budget, but kindergartens cater for approximately 5% of educational enrolments.

Unit cost per child in kindergartens (in USD using PPP): USD 2 497 (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2005).

Funding of services for children under age 3: Percentage of GDP not available.

Average costs to parents: In kindergarten, 78% of enrolled children are in the private sector where parents pay 100% of the costs. In the formal child care sector, parents bear 66% of total child care costs.

Legal entitlement to a free service: Free child care and early education are offered in principle from the age of 5 years, but demand far outstrips supply. About 30% of 5-year-olds, mainly those from lower income families, receive this benefit.

Major service types and duration: Kindergartens for 3- to 6-year-olds operate traditionally on a half-day basis, but more recently, 51% offer extended services and 30% open full day for the academic year. 85.6% of child care centres for 0- to 6-year-olds offer 12 hours/day for the full year. *Hakwons* (private educational academies) offering various learning curricula normally open 8-10hours/day for the full-year, catering for children from age 3 to 12 years.

Rate of access to regulated services: Children 0-3 years: 19.6%; 3-6 years (including child care): 68.3%; 78.9% of children 5-6 years attended ECEC services in 2005. Out-of-school provision is being developed but figures are not available.

Designation and qualifications of lead staff: In public kindergartens, 66% of teachers hold a 4-year university degree; in private kindergartens, 88% of teachers hold a 2-year college diploma. In child care centres, about 15% of teachers have a 4-year degree; around 60% a 2-year college award; and about 25% have received a one-year child care training after high school or tertiary education.

Child-staff ratios: There are no required or recommended child-staff ratios for the kindergarten system, but cities and provinces recommend child-teacher ratios for kindergarten classes. The average in 2005 was 20:1. In child care, infants 3:1, 1 year 5:1, 2 years 7:1, 3 years 15:1, 4-6 years 20:1.

Maximum group size: Kindergarten: ages 4-5: 25-30; age 3: 15-25; mixed age: 20-30 children per group.

Auspices

Legislative responsibilities for government acts, decrees and resolutions on ECEC are vested mainly with two ministries: the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF), the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MOE). In addition, the Ministries of Health and Welfare; Labour; Government Administration and Home Affairs; and Agriculture and Forestry are also involved in ECEC policy and legislation, mainly because their departments attend to the increased participation of women in the paid labour market and the subsequent expansion of child care provision. Research activity on ECEC in Korea is under the auspices of two government-funded institutes: the Korean Education Development Institute (KEDI); and the Korea Women's Development Institute (KWDI); respectively linked to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. A new institute KICCE (Korea Institute of Child Care and Education) was established in 2005 to research early childhood education and care policy in a more unified way. Researchers specialised in ECEC policy in KEDI, KWDI and KIHASA (Korean Institute for Health and Social Affairs) have been assigned to work in the new institute.

In June 2004, the Ministry of Gender Equality took responsibility for services providing a child care focus, for children aged 0-6. This Ministry is charged with the establishment and mediation of plans for children's services, in particular the development of a public child care system. This is the result of a paradigm shift by government, from selective child care (which supports children from families with low income and with parents in the paid workforce), to general child care (providing equal opportunities to every young child). The Ministry's responsibility includes maintenance and revision of the Child Care Act and related laws; research on child care; establishment and delivery of various functions related to child care services, for example, subsidy standards and financial support; facilities standards; staff training and credentialing; child care curriculum; and support of child care information centres.

The MOE is responsible for kindergarten services with an educational focus for children aged 3-6 years, as well as for all other school services. The Ministry's major tasks include: the establishment and revision of the Early Education Act and related laws; the establishment and mediation of comprehensive plans for early childhood education; teacher training and qualifications management; the development and delivery of curriculum; the planning and delivery of free-education for 5-year-olds as well as children with special needs, and fee payment support for younger children targeting low-income families.

Within the remaining group of involved ministries, several departments are specifically engaged. These include the Office of Policy on Women within the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs, the Office of Policy on Women within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry; and the Gender Equality Policy Division in the Ministry of Labour. These departments are engaged with child care policy and the new directions being led by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family.

Private academic institutions for young children, called *Hakwon* (Learning Places), existed outside these administrative processes. In 2001 the National Assembly approved the educational functions of *Hakwons* although they are excluded from processes which allow the use of a government vouchers for free ECEC education, indicating that they are not official ECEC institutions in Korea and therefore not eligible for funding from government. In 2004, the Korean government offered voucher funding to the quality *hakwon* system (private learning academies), if providers accept the national kindergarten curriculum, kindergarten teacher certification, and the national supervisory and environmental regulations.

Context

Labour force rates: In 2004, the labour participation rate for women aged 15-64 was 53.9%, increasing from 49.9% in 1990. Of those, 11.9% work part-time, while 5.9% of men work part-time (OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2005). In 2002, 68% of adults over 15 were in the workforce with 49.8% of women reported as taking part. Almost 78% of women in the workforce are married (Background Report, 2003), and carry the greatest burden of household work in addition to engagement in paid employment. This proportion has been increasing over time. Workplace culture and practice militate against the employment of women with young children. Just over 20% of Koreans live in double income environments, relatively small by OECD standards.

Parental leave: A system of parental leave was institutionalised in 2001 with the parental leave allowance and job protection. However, few working parents take up this leave as workplace culture does not encourage parental leave (not least for men), or family-friendly measures. In addition, large numbers of women are in casual employment and are therefore unable to access this leave. Furthermore, the allowance offered to parents taking leave is too low to sustain a family. Some commentators link the difficulties faced by young women seeking to raise a family with the low fertility rate (1.3) in Korea. The participation rate of women in the formal labour market continues to show an M shaped distribution for women in the period between age 25 and 34, the typical child-bearing age. Linked to the unsatisfactory nature of parental leave is the high demand for infant care services that appear inadequate both in environmental and pedagogical quality.

Access and provision

ECEC provision in Korea is predominantly private. In the child care sector covering children from birth to elementary school entrance, private services constitute 93.9% of provision. Approximately 21% of children 0-6 attend child care settings. These private services, both kindergarten and child care, are mainly run by not-for-profit or for-profit entities even if they legally appear as not-for-profit entities. In the kindergarten sector catering for children from 3-6 years, although there are more public (50.8%) than private (49.2%) kindergartens, “72% of the classes, 79% of the teachers and 78% of the enrolled children fall within the private kindergarten sector” (Background Report for Korea, 2003,

p. 30). In rural areas only, public kindergartens form over 50% of the enrolment. Although 59% of 3- to 6-year-olds and 10% of 0- to 2-year-olds in Korea make use of ECEC services, the total percentage of public child care provision and kindergarten is relatively low.

Rates of provision

0-3 years: Approximately 19.6% of infants and toddlers attend child care facilities. Of this group, 13% attend public child care facilities and 86.9% attend private centres. There is high, unmet demand for child care places for children between 0-3 years (see “parental leave” above).

3-5 years: Services are increasingly differentiated by age. Those children of age 3-4 who access services predominately receive child care programmes. Some 44.9% of 3-year-olds are in child care settings with a further 14.6% in kindergartens. Most of these children are in private facilities. At age 4, kindergarten participation increases to 29.7% of this age cohort and 36.7% in child care. A third of 4-year-olds do not obtain any place, although they may attend *hakwon* sports centres and other programmes.

5-6 years: At age 5, 78.9% of children are enrolled either in child care (31.7%), or kindergarten (47.2%).

Children with diverse needs

Children with disabilities: The Special Education Promotion Act accords free education to those with physical or mental handicaps. Older children with handicaps are screened and well catered for in special education schools although data on the overall number of such children are difficult to obtain. A relatively small number of ECEC facilities focus on the needs of very young children with special needs. About 1% (14 978 children) with special needs were enrolled in kindergartens and child care centres in 2005.

Children from low-income families: Although priority is given in cost-support structures to low-income families, this type of support does not alleviate the burden of parents who cannot find suitable places for their children. Approximately 18.8 % of families in 2005 received some support to purchase a place, having met strict criteria based on the number of family members, total income and total assets. Many kindergartens and child care facilities view government funding for a low-income family as insufficient to deter them from offering the place to the child of a family who can pay fees and extras.

Ethnic and bilingual children: Because immigration from other countries is not common, there is very little variation from the dominant primary culture.

Quality

Licensing and regulatory regimes: Kindergartens function under the Primary and Secondary Education Act (2002) and the Early Childhood Education Promotion Act (2001) and child care centres function under the Child Care Act (2001). However, since 1997 Korea has been under great pressure to rapidly expand its ECEC services. As a result, the system – with the exception of the public kindergartens – works on reported activity rather than through licensing and accreditation. The licensing of centres has become a simple process of notification whereby new child care services can start up by simply reporting their opening to the local child care office. Many private providers are said to have facilities that supply a smaller amount of space per child although public and private centres have the same legal requirements. With more focus being now given to high quality, there is some

consideration at present to reverting to a more focused system of licensing. Systematic external evaluation of curriculum and pedagogy is limited in practice to kindergartens, which benefit from a school inspection system. Visits are made by local area superintendents twice per year.

Funding: Expenditure on pre-primary educational institutions (kindergartens only) as a percentage of GDP is 0.16%. 31.8% of this expenditure came from public sources and 68.2% from private sources including 65.1% from parental contributions. 2.2% of total expenditure on education is allocated to pre-primary whereas 4.8% of the children are enrolled at this level of education (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2005). The Background Report for Korea (2003) indicated that in 2002, government support of early childhood education and child care amounted to 44.6% of the total costs of ECEC, this allocation being 0.13% of GDP. Approximately 30% of this allocation derives from central government funds and the remainder from the sixteen local authorities. Local authorities have direct taxation powers, and obtain proportional augmentation of their funding from the national government.

Staffing: The staffing of ECEC varies according to the regulatory requirements. The main details are outlined in the overview above. Kindergarten teachers in public kindergartens, in addition to their early childhood qualification, must meet the requirements to be a public official. The level of adult support (teacher aide, assistant) available to teachers in ECEC programmes is unclear.

Training requirements: Fixed statutory requirements set the standards of qualification for early education in ECEC in Korea. Four levels of kindergarten qualification exist: principal, vice-principal, 1st grade teacher, and 2nd grade teacher. To be a 2nd grade teacher, one should have, at least, a two-year college diploma in early childhood education area. First grade teachers normally hold a four-year university degree in early childhood. 70% of kindergarten staff are 2-year college graduates and 30% are 4-year university graduates. In child care, staff may graduate with two- or four-year college diplomas, specialising in early childhood education or child welfare. Almost 60% of child care staff have two-year college diplomas, with a further 15% holding 4-year college awards. With one-year training in ECEC programmes, high school graduates or persons in tertiary education may also work in child care. Requirements are not set for assistants, who may be trained *in situ* as they work.

Work conditions: Although most staff work full-time, the exact percentage of part-time staff in ECEC settings is unknown. Statutory working hours are 44 hours, but many staff work longer hours. A statutory requirement exists to fund a minimum level of staff development and recommendations regarding annual hours of in-service training, for example, new kindergarten teachers must take 60 hours and child care teachers 40 hours of professional development every 3 years. In addition, a set number of days of further training are necessary when staff wish to be promoted, *e.g.* a level-2 teacher must take 30 days (180 hours) further training to gain level-1 status. The status of ECEC staff in non-school services is low. Compared with teachers in kindergartens, child care staff have longer contact hours (60 vs. approximately 40/week), greater responsibility, fewer holidays, less planning time and lower wages. Men are hardly represented in care services or pre-school. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family wishes the participation of men in child care; to help nurture children in gender equality from the early stages and to support women and men in making home and work compatible.

Child-staff ratios: The Korean system focuses on space per child, facilities and equipment standards both for indoors and outdoors spaces, while cities and provinces recommend child-staff ratios for kindergartens. Nationally, group sizes for 4- to 6-year-olds, 3-year-olds and mixed-age groups are 25-30, 15-25 and 20-30 respectively. In child care facilities the child-staff ratios are: infants 3:1, 1 year 5:1, 2 years 7:1, 3 years 15:1, 4-6 years 20:1. Child care facilities including children with special needs must maintain a 5:1 ratio.

Curriculum and pedagogy: Korea has a National Kindergarten Curriculum that serves as a broad framework. It was first issued by the Ministry of Education in 1969 with new editions being developed about every five years. Specific guidelines for curricula vary according to the discretion of each city/provincial Office of Education. Local guidelines stipulate annual school-dates and hours, including the availability of extended- and full-day programmes, places in each district, special education provision, parent education and continuity arrangements with local elementary schools (Background Report, 2003). Although the curriculum clearly sets the scene for rich learning experiences, the OECD review team visiting in 2003 noted some centres using pre-set activities and colouring sheets downloaded from web-sites. In child care centres, a planning framework, based on nutrition, health, safety and community welfare, was issued by the Ministry of Health and Welfare in 1993. Again, the review team observed that thematic choice, activities and procedures in centres visited were generally based on teacher decisions, to the detriment of child agency and choice.

Monitoring, evaluation and research: National monitoring and reporting at population level is available in the education sector from two sources: the Annual Statistics on Education data-set; and Current State of Kindergarten. Workforce and child access details through these sources are publicly posted on the Web site of the Ministry of Education. Statistics on child care are available on a web-site through the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. Hence, two separate sets of information are gathered. At the services level, there is no overall system to evaluate the quality of ECEC programmes.

Parent and community involvement: Families are encouraged to participate in services by becoming a volunteer assistant in some sessions or by taking part in parent education programmes. The Early Childhood Education Promotion Act allows volunteer assistants to receive 20 hours training and in turn, two assistants may work with classes having a child-adult ratio of 26:1 (Background Report for Korea, 2003, p. 90). Parent education programmes are encouraged in order to maximise the effects of ECEC, and enable kindergarten staff to share knowledge and skills on child development with parents. Na and Moon (*Integrating Policies and Systems for Early Childhood Education and Care: The Case of the Republic of Korea*, Paris, UNESCO, 2003) indicated that in 2002, 57% of parents reported participating in kindergartens. As most parent education is conducted during the day, many parents are not able to take part (Background Report for Korea, 2003).

OECD policy issues

Among the issues for policy attention identified in 2003 by the OECD review team for Korea were:

- *Place the best interests of children at the centre:* The perception of ECEC as a separate domain encourages Korean parents and providers to see this area as preparation for school. In

this context, the review team encouraged emphasis on the participation rights and needs of young children.

- *Focus on a family-friendly society sustained by law and public policy:* The review team encourages the re-examination of this complex but critical area from a gender equity perspective, especially with regard to workplace culture, irregular versus formal employment, and flexibility in work practices for parents. It was thought that the public services, which are major employers of women, should take the lead.
- *Increase public funding and steering, and incorporate the quality private providers into the public system:* Although expenditure in this area is increasing steadily, the review team considered that low-cost solutions adopted to sustain a system of private service providers may not ensure a strong, high quality system in the long term. Certain high-quality, private forms of provision should be brought within the public network and funding system.
- *Rationalise the government management of early childhood services:* The team encouraged the Office of Government Policy Coordination to continue efforts to bring ministries together and work towards improving the integration of services at local level.
- *End the conceptual and training rift between education and care:* This conceptual division impacts strongly on the status and training of staff, especially child care professionals. Many practical issues are involved, including low public investment in young children, the presence of a large private sector which operates outside government financing and control, convenience and affordability for parents and the prevailing culture of education competition.
- *Further democratise the system through decentralisation and parent participation:* A proactive programme to engage parents in the life and organisation of centres could have a number of benefits, such as: promoting positive attitudes among parents to more active and creative learning contents and processes; fostering continuity between children's learning at home and in the early childhood centres; providing information and referrals to other support services; and supporting community involvement in early education and care matters.
- *Raise the quality of all programmes, including in the hakwons:* The review team encouraged staff development in team-work and quality improvement processes in all services, linking training, critical reflection and evaluation.
- *Establish a regular policy review/research cycle:* The team noted the research capacity already in place through government research institutes engaged in ECEC research. The establishment of a regular policy review cycle, linked to a planned research and evaluation agenda, was encouraged.

Developments

The transfer of child care administration from the Ministry of Health and Welfare to the Ministry of Gender Equality was enacted in June 2004. This change prompted positive responses from some sectors because it draws attention to the issue of equal opportunity for women in the labour market and in Korean society in general. However, others pointed out that the change does not make progress on the fundamental issue of cross-ministry collaboration and service integration at the field level, in the interests of children. In sum, direct collaboration between the education and care sectors needs to be encouraged.

Since the OECD review, significant progress has been made in the area of gender equality and parental leave – policies that are extremely important for the well-being of infants and families as a whole. Parental leave has been significantly extended and remuneration has increased.

In parallel, the past several years have shown rapid expansion of child care services. This is due to increased demand (increasing numbers of women do not wish to leave the workplace after the birth of children), but the growth in the percentage of children covered may also be explained by the significant decline in the total number of children.

Korea has also increased financial support for low-income families to access the services; extended opening hours to more than 12 hours of care every day; and loosened regulatory requirements. The latter has encouraged many private providers to enter the field, but has lowered quality. As a result, current policy has become more focused on quality assurance and improvement, although expansion still remains an imperative.

To address concerns over the quality of the child care centres, the Child Care Act of 2004 has been revised to introduce several mechanisms to ensure high-quality care. First, the government is moving away from a “report system” to a “licensing system” for running child care centres. Regulatory requirements for establishing and operating child care centres are to be more stringent. Each child care educator will take care of smaller number of children and working conditions will be strictly monitored by the government. A National Accreditation System for the child care centres is to be introduced from 2005 and a National Child Care Curriculum is now in development to be set in place by 2005. In early 2004, the Early Childhood Education Act (ECE Act) was established. Without an “independent” ECE Act in the past, the legal basis of early childhood education was totally bound to the Primary and Secondary Education Act. The new Act has brought into being a new system of Basic Education Law, consisting of 4 parts: Early Childhood Education, Elementary and Middle School Education, Higher Education, and Lifelong Education. The ECE Act also provides a legal foundation for spending public funds on private kindergartens and long-day programmes, and establishing Centres for ECE Promotion to conduct research, training, evaluation and other activities to develop programmes in ECE.

In Korea, investment in child care has been increasing by USD 100 million per year since 2002, and by USD 200 million in 2005, a 50% increase from 2004. The government also changed in 2005 its support system to child care from a direct subsidy system (payment of salaries and some capital costs) to support in the form of subsidies to parents to meet the costs of child care. In parallel, the budget subsidising kindergarten fees, including free education for 5-year-olds, was increased in 2005 by 150% compared to the budget of 2004. With this increase, 30% of 5-year-olds in kindergartens and child care centres will benefit.

A ground-breaking initiative has been taken by a Presidential advisory committee towards the integrated model of early childhood education and care – for example, in the form of the establishment of a joint research centre. In 2004, this committee made a president-addressed report on support for early childhood education and care and plans to provide a second report on how to combine child care and education in the second quarter of 2005. After the second report, government policy on Korean child care and education will comply better with the aim of raising healthy young children.