

# To attract more childcare workers better labor conditions, pay needed <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

A new system to support children and child rearing will be launched by the government next month. To continue remedying the problem of long waiting lists for admission to daycare centers, both the central and local governments must reinforce measures to secure a sufficient number of childcare workers once the new system is in place.

For the fiscal years 2013-2017, the government has set a target of expanding childcare facilities so as to admit 400,000 more children and eventually bring the number of names on waiting lists down to zero. To achieve that goal, 463,000 childcare workers will be needed. If things remain as they are today, there is expected to be a staff shortage of 69,000 in the final target year.

In preparation for the new system, many local governments are building additional childcare facilities in their communities.

The ratio of effective job openings to job seekers in childcare services topped 2 in December. In Tokyo, the ratio exceeds 5, showing that the conditions are a far cry from what is desirable.

Every year, about 50,000 people obtain a national qualification as a childcare worker.

The problem is that more than 700,000 potential childcare workers, despite holding a professional license, do not hold jobs in the industry. Among graduates of schools specializing in childcare, only half actually enter the field. High job turnover is also common.

Low pay and long work hours are the reasons why so many shun this profession. A childcare worker at a private facility earns an average of ¥216,000 a month, at least ¥100,000 less than the average salary for all businesses.

This profession involves frequent overtime and working on holidays during special occasions. To secure an adequate number of workers, it is vitally important to improve labor conditions.

### Bigger pay hikes needed

The operating expenses of childcare facilities are mainly covered by subsidies from the central and local governments. Under the new system, the government will implement a plan to raise the salaries of workers at private childcare facilities by an average of 3 percent. It is important for operators of such facilities to improve pay conditions for workers without fail.

The government had originally studied the possibility of a 5 percent pay hike, but the figure shrunk due to fiscal difficulties. Further raising pay is a task that must be addressed in the future. By increasing the number of staff, the work burden can also be reduced.

The Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry has urged local governments to take measures to prevent childcare workers from quitting their jobs and to help qualified workers return to work in the sector. The results of those efforts have been insufficient.

In January, the government drew up a new plan to secure more childcare workers. In the plan, the government stipulated it will offer subsidies to prefectural governments that conduct a national certification exam twice a year.

Among other things, more efforts should be made to utilize qualified people.

At some centers that were set up by prefectural governments to support childcare workers and facilities, practical job training has been given to potential staff, such as how to administer first aid or how to deal with the parents of the children under their care. Other centers help coordinate between staff and facilities in such matters as desired working hours.

In both of these cases, there have been tangible results in securing more workers at childcare facilities.

These successful cases should serve as a useful reference for other local governments.

Under a policy that encourages women to play more active roles in society, which has been championed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's administration, it is vital to build a system in which working women can leave a child in someone else's care without anxiety.

To enhance the attractiveness of jobs in childcare services, further efforts to develop better ideas are called for.

**Region:** Asia <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** accessibility <sup>[4]</sup>  
staffing <sup>[5]</sup>

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