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Unravelling variations in 21st century East Asia's pronatalist family policy through the lens of inclusiveness

Sunwoo Ryu

Lecturer in Social Policy, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, Bristol, United Kingdom
Email: sunwoo.ryu@bristol.ac.uk

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Abstract

Facing dwindling birthrates, East Asia has shown unprecedented fertility-oriented family policy expansion. Despite this shared objective, this research argues that East Asian family policy has varied in 'inclusiveness', namely, the extent to which it equally promotes all births, irrespective of familial socioeconomic status in particular. Firstly, from an inclusiveness-centred perspective, this article builds three different ideal pronatalist family policy approaches: the 'inclusive', where pronatalist family support is provided for almost everyone; the 'selective', where it is more accessible to middle-/upper-income households; and the 'residual', where it is concentrated on low-income classes. Guided by this conceptual framework, it compares Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan. It reveals that Japan and Singapore promoted a selective path, and Taiwan favoured a residual one, whilst South Korea pioneered more inclusive support. However, it also suggests that the other three societies recently adopted more inclusive pronatalist family policies, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: family policy; pronatalism; inclusiveness; East Asia

Introduction

Low fertility is one of the policy exigencies in advanced economies because it increases the proportion of old inactive populations relative to working-age groups, thereby straining the economy and social welfare systems. Among them, East Asian societies have shown the most unprecedented decline in their total fertility rate (TFR) (Figure 1). During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the decline in TFR accelerated in the region. Consequently, in 2022, Hong Kong recorded the world's lowest TFR of 0.70, which was closely followed by South Korea (hereafter Korea) and Taiwan with 0.78 and 0.87, respectively. Singapore (1.04) and China (1.16) recorded their all-time lowest TFR in the same year. Although Japan presents a slightly better fertility situation with a TFR of 1.26 as of 2022, it is lower than what Kohler et al. (2004) called the "lowest-low" TFR (1.30).¹

Against this backdrop, the region is now promoting diverse family policy packages that are explicitly oriented towards increasing childbirth. East Asia's explicit pronatalist stance in its family policy expansion may come from the fact that it tends to be free from the sensitive memory of the fascist ideology of pronatalism, unlike its European counterparts. Looking at family policy configurations, the region has tried to reduce the direct monetary and opportunity costs of having a child by increasing child-related financial support and improving the work–family life balance.

¹The lowest-low TFR implies "a reduction of the birth cohort by 50% and a halving of the stable population size every 45 years" (Kohler et al., 2004: 642).

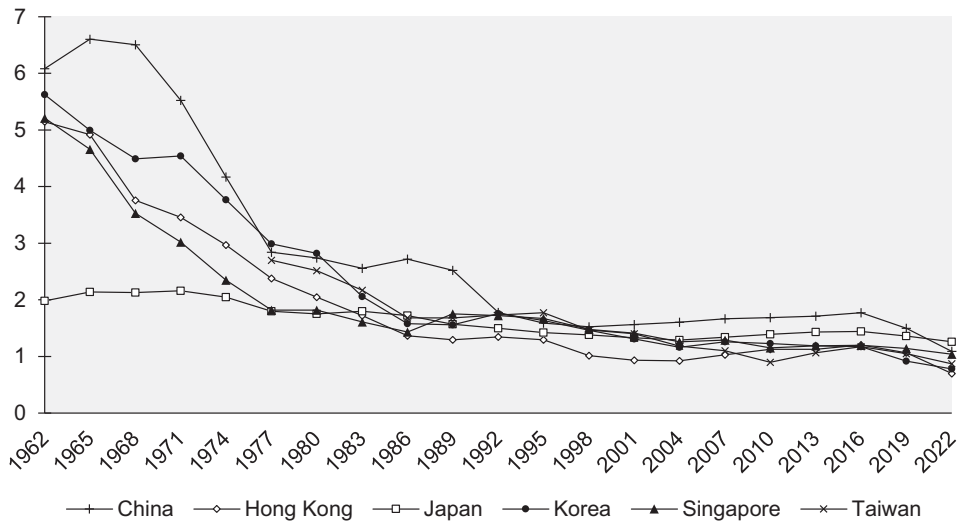


Figure 1. Total Fertility Rates in East Asia, 1960s–2020s.

Sources: Retrieved from the Department of Household Registration (<https://www.ris.gov.tw/app/en/3911>) for Taiwan and from the World Bank (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN>) for the other countries (accessed December 31, 2023).

Of course, despite the pursuit of family policies under the common explicit pronatalist rhetorical framing, recent comparative studies suggest some regional variations in East Asia's family policy portfolio. One key finding is that they have channelled family policy through different policy tools with different levels of policy effort (Tonelli et al., 2021), which has led to different degrees of familialism and de-familisation across the region. The comparative analytical approach to East Asian family policy has been increasing, especially when it comes to gender inequalities (Chau and Yu, 2022). However, existing investigations have focused on the type and degree of policy support for families as a whole, often through macro-level analyses based on aggregate data (such as social expenditure on families and childcare enrolment rates), without paying attention to variations in the support according to eligibility conditions (An and Peng, 2015; Estévez-Abe and Kim, 2013; Frejka et al., 2010).

Problematising that the social rights of families to access such interventions are not necessarily granted to all (despite the promotion of such interventions being couched in the universalist rhetoric), this research focuses on the equality of access to and targeting of pronatalist family policy interventions. Stated differently, the analytical focus lies in understanding and comparing how “inclusive” each country's pronatalist family policy package has been. By tracking changes and continuities in such a package's inclusiveness since the onset of their pro-fertility family policy reforms until today, this research highlights both the cross-regional and cross-familial variations in pronatalist family policy packages in East Asia.

This article begins by defining the concept and scope of pronatalist family policy. A tripartite typology is built based on the literature of inclusiveness and pronatalist family policy practices of different welfare states, which serves as a conceptual framework to guide the analysis. Following the methodological discussion of the adopted cross-national comparative approach and the country-case selection, the subsequent two sections examine the cross-policy and cross-regional variations. Empirically, this article suggests that the region pursued different pronatalist paths, and that it has nevertheless recently expanded more inclusive support in the pronatalist family policy portfolio, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The concluding remarks underline the paper's contributions and suggest

further study on the development of indicators of inclusiveness for larger-*N* cross-national comparisons and on the inclusiveness of the region's pronatalism beyond the field of family policy.

Pronatalism, family policy, and inclusiveness

Conceptualising and delimiting the analytical scope of pronatalist family policy

Pronatalism is difficult to define in an absolute and unequivocal way. This is related to the fact that, as Heitlinger (1993) and Tuttle (2010) suggest, pronatalism is a multifaceted concept that operates at diverse levels such as the socio-cultural (where motherhood is perceived as natural and central to a woman's identity); the ideological (where the motherhood mandate becomes a patriotic, ethnic, and eugenic responsibility); and the policy-related (where the state directly or indirectly intervenes in fertility behaviours). Nevertheless, pronatalism generally refers to the "encouragement of *all births* conducive to individual, family, and social wellbeing, combined with a determination to remove all obstacles to realisation of this vision" (De Sandre, 1978: 145; emphasis added).

Following this conceptualisation, pronatalist policy can be defined as an aggregate of measures that alleviate the monetary and opportunity costs of all births and upbringing, thereby positively influencing fertility dynamics. However, the scope of pronatalist policy is opaque. First, it is inclusive of both the measures that are explicitly designed to influence fertility with some effect. Second, it can encompass those that are not implemented for pro-fertility purposes – and are therefore not couched in the explicit pronatalist rhetoric – but, nevertheless, have important consequences for fertility (pronatalist in output), such as housing and anti-poverty social security policy (Heitlinger, 1993). It may also include a set of policies in which fertility is exclusively reflected as a primary goal but which turn out to be ineffective in their outcomes (pronatalist in intentions only). This creates substantial conceptual confusion around the term and its policy boundaries.

For the analysis, this research concentrates on family policy among many policies with pronatalist intention and/or impact. This is because, although pronatalism operates at multiple levels and fertility behaviours are made in the broad policy context, family policies have been the most obvious policy "home" of addressing population concerns in many countries (Saraceno, 2022) and this has especially been the case in East Asia. However, the scope of family policy is still ambiguous as it has traditionally been spread over many policy areas. Hence, this research focuses on Kamerman and Kahn's (1994) conceptualisation of family policy: (i) general direct and tax-based child-specific income support; (ii) income support for parenting-specific care (paid maternity, paternity and parental leave, and homecare allowances); and (iii) subsidies for early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. This has to do with, firstly, a large volume of empirical evidence demonstrating the positive impact of these three forms of support (money, time, and service) on fertility, despite its effectiveness depending on fertility indicators, policy variables, and geographical coverage among many others (Bergsvik et al., 2021; Thévenon and Gauthier, 2011).² Second, by examining the three fields, this research aims to provide a focused and detailed analysis.

Understanding variations in pronatalist family policy from the inclusiveness perspective

To understand why and how the concept of inclusiveness matters in pronatalist family policy, it is important to first conceptualise it in the broader social policy context. Indeed, inclusiveness, in relation to the concept of conditionality, has been an important concept in the social policy literature in relation to the universalism versus selectivism debate and citizenship (Anttonen et al., 2012). Simply put,

²Although the positive impacts of other time-related policy support, especially flexible working (such as flexitime and reduced working hours), on fertility rates, have been demonstrated, these arrangements are often not formally guaranteed by law but are instead available through individual negotiations. Moreover, in East Asia, flexible working is not commonly practiced. Therefore, this policy is beyond the analytical scope of this study.

inclusiveness is about who is granted access to welfare benefits and services. To borrow from Clasen and Clegg's (2007) explanation, it depends on the lever and level of the conditionality attached to welfare support. More recently, Blum and Dobrotić (2021: 223) have demonstrated how the concept can be effectively applied to analyse family policies by redefining it within the context of parental leave as "the degree to which rights are available to all parents irrespective of (forms or previous length) of their employment, citizenship, or other criteria based on family, gender, or further personal characteristics" (see also Dobrotić and Blum, 2019, 2020). This perspective has been increasingly adopted in other comparative family policy studies that are concerned with how the policy perpetuates or challenges existing social hierarchies and inequalities (e.g., Daly, 2023).

Applying the definition of inclusiveness to the three different types of pronatalist family policy (general and parental caring-specific income support and ECEC services) shows that it has to do with the extent to which all families' childbirth and child-rearing is equally assisted by them irrespective of differences in family profiles. More specifically, social rights to such support are determined by diverse factors, such as the family's legal status (citizenship, residence, and marriage); family types (two-parent, lone-parent, and same-sex-parented families); and familial socio-economic status (type and length of employment and household income) (Dobrotić and Blum, 2020; Daly et al., 2023). Among them, this article focuses on familial socio-economic status, which is the most critical and commonly used eligibility criterion under which social rights to the three core family policy elements are determined.

The following discussion focuses on developing a typology to guide the comparison of the different types and degrees of socio-economic-status-dependent inclusiveness in pronatalist family policy. Typology can be deduced from existing theories or concepts (heuristic typology), or derived from empirical cases or data (empirical typology) (Winch, 1947). Typology development in this section adopts a blended heuristic/empirical approach in that the categories forming the attribute space and their features emerged from a broad scan of existing theoretical debates on the inclusion and exclusion of social and family policy (e.g., Anttonen et al., 2012; Blum and Dobrotić, 2021; Daly, 2023; Daly et al., 2023; Dobrotić and Blum, 2019, 2020; Garritzmann et al., 2023) and were refined based on the review of pronatalist family policy practices in different welfare states. Three different models or approaches are noticeable: the *inclusive*, the *selective* (or *stratified*), and the *residual*.

The inclusive approach is characterised by the universal provision of cash and childcare support so that the reproductive rights of different families are not discriminated because of their different socio-economic status. More specifically, in terms of financial support, cash payments to support parenthood must be provided for both insiders and outsiders of the labour market, as well as over the course of child-rearing. When it comes to childcare support, the services should be publicly funded and available, regardless of household income and parental employment.

This approach is exemplified by Sweden, which has maintained a relatively high TFR based on early pronatalist state intervention dating back to the 1960s. As of 2023, Parental Benefits (*Föräldrapenning*) are provided for the insured (at 77.6% of previous earnings up to kr1116 or US\$108 per day during 195 days and then kr180 or US\$18 per day during 45 days) and those not meeting the eligibility conditions and the unemployed (kr250 or US\$25 per day for 250 days) (Blum et al., 2023). Child Benefits (*Barnbidrag*) are also provided at a modest level for all 0–16 year olds, with Large Family Supplements (*Flerbarnstillägg*) being provided for families with two children or more (Försäkringskassan, 2023). Finally, all 3–5 year olds have access to free ECEC services, while childcare fees are capped for younger children at up to 3% of household income.

Family policy may take a more stratified pronatalist approach, which directs support to more "desirable" parts of populations or makes eligibility conditions so strict that the vulnerable cannot access it. This selective approach incentivises middle- and upper-income working families by providing them with well-compensated parental leaves (in contrast to modest levels of support for low-income families) and publicly subsidised childcare services prioritised for them.

This approach is best exemplified by Germany since the mid-2000s. While the German welfare state traditionally depended on women's unpaid labour in the private realm through the provision of generous cash benefits, it expanded support for working families so as to reverse declining TFR and counteract the

associated welfare state financing challenge. For instance, Germany introduced the Day-care Expansion Act (*Tagesbetreuungsbaugesetz*), stipulating that 0–3 year olds should have the chance of enrolling in daycare programmes if both parents or a lone parent are employed or in education, or want to take up employment (Schober, 2020).³ In parallel with the expansion of childcare services, Parental Leave Benefits (*Elterngeld*) were introduced in 2007 (Henninger et al., 2008). Consequently, the 3-year means-tested flat-rate parental leave scheme was replaced with a 1-year earnings-related one that compensated 67% of the net earnings with a minimum of €300 (US\$325) and a maximum of €1,800 (US\$1,953) per month. This new scheme also granted two bonus months for partners and single parents. This reform disincentivised low-income families since they could receive up to €4,200 over 14 months (US\$4,557) compared to the previous €7,200 (US\$7,812) over 24 months, while middle- and high-income working families could receive up to €25,200 (US\$27,341). Raute's (2019) difference-in-difference analysis found that this reform led to a 23% increase in the probability of having a child for highly educated women who are therefore located in the middle and upper end of the earnings distribution.

The last residual model targets low-income families rather than those with middle and high incomes as the former group is more likely to be faced with financial difficulties in starting a family. This targeted mode of provision is characterised by means-tested cash transfers and granting low-income families priority access to subsidised ECEC, while it may be conditioned by employment as parental non-employment is an important source of poverty. Maternity and/or parental benefits are likely to have more generous coverage than generous benefits. However, targeting the underprivileged for pro-fertility purposes is not a common practice. Indeed, historically, a class-dependent fertility disparity was often a source of concern because poorer classes tended to form larger families. Nevertheless, support for low-income families for anti-poverty purposes has a long history and it often has pronatalist consequences (Heitlinger, 1993).

This pronatalist approach by “outcome” rather than “intention” is best illustrated by the United Kingdom. Traditionally, Malthusian and eugenic ideas were widespread in the United Kingdom, and pronatalist policies were jeopardised for the reason of increasing fertility of the less deserving (Saraceno, 2022). Nevertheless, the United Kingdom traditionally corseted social spending around anti-poverty goals (Daly, 2010), supporting the reproduction of low-income classes. Under New Labour, the country more explicitly targeted children from low-income families in its anti-poverty policy portfolio through a range of “carrots” (introducing the Sure Start Maternity Grant, the Child Trust Fund, and Working Families Tax Credits) and “sticks” (eradicating a single-mother-premium in the Child Benefit). Maternity Allowances for those who were not eligible for the statutory paid maternity leave were also increased by up to 50% in real terms, while their eligibility was widened to benefit more low-income earners (Spencer and Law, 2007). Brewer et al.'s (2012) difference-in-difference analysis evidenced that the increased financial incentives for low-income families between 1999 and 2003 resulted in a 15% increase in births among coupled women. This implies that New Labour's attempt to improve the “quality” of children's lives led to a rise in the “quantity” of children (Hoorens et al., 2012) even if its policy goal did not lie in the fertility quantum.

Methodology

By using the observed variations of pronatalist family policy as a reference point (Table 1), this article describes and pinpoints the overarching trends of different East Asian societies. The focus is placed on illustrating policy reforms regarding who is granted benefits/services and when (coverage), as well as how much of them for how long (generosity).

For the comparison, this article focuses on Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore. This case selection has to do with the fact that these four have a relatively long history of explicit pronatalism, which is appropriate for tracking the changes and continuities over time. This is mirrored in Japan's 1995 Angel

³It should be noted that in 2008, the Child Support Law (*Kinderförderungsgesetz*) stipulated that all children aged above 1 year are entitled to 4–5 hours of childcare per day from August 2013, despite it being abolished in 2015. However, a common practice in many municipalities is giving priority access to children of dual earners or single parents.

Table 1. The three different approaches of pronatalist family policy

	Inclusive approach	Selective approach	Residual approach
Route to pro-fertility	By reducing the direct and opportunity costs of having children for all families	By supporting the labour market participation of women with a middle-income and high-income potential	By reducing the financial burdens of low-income families when having and raising a child
General child-specific income support	Universal payment with additional cash support for low-income families	Universal or means-tested payment	Means-tested payment for low-income families
Income support for parental caregiving	Maternity/parental payment for both the employed and the unemployed	Generous earnings-related maternity/parental payments for labour market insiders	Broad coverage of maternity and/or parental payments to benefit parents with some previous work record
Childcare support	Universal publicly funded childcare services for all	Publicly funded childcare services prioritised for working parents	Publicly funded childcare services prioritised for low-income families

Plan (エンゼルプラン), Singapore's 2001 Marriage and Parenthood Package, Korea's 2006 New Beginning Plan (새로마지플랜), and Taiwan's 2008 Population Policy White Paper (人口政策白皮書). Although Hong Kong has also problematised declining fertility since the early 2000s, it has had negligible development of pronatalist support because of its low taxation rates and the resulting limited fiscal capacity to make meaningful policy reforms (Basten, 2015). In the case of China, it only recently withdrew from the long-standing anti-natalist stance. Moreover, these four societies have also utilised family policy as a core pronatalist tool since the promulgation of fertility-related policy initiatives. This is evidenced by the fact that public spending on families and children as a percentage of GDP has rapidly expanded since their adoption of explicit pronatalism (Appendix Figure A1).

In terms of the scope of the analysis, this research tracks each society's pronatalist family policy in the aforementioned three different forms (general child-specific income support, financial support for parental caregiving and ECEC subsidies) from its onset until 2023. Due to the different timing in which the four societies undertook family policy development for explicit pro-fertility purposes (i.e., the mid-1990s for Japan, the early 2000s for Singapore, the mid-2000s for Korea, and the late 2000s for Taiwan), the analysis of each case spans slightly different time points. The level of analysis only focuses on the central government because the four societies have implemented centralised pronatalist family policy and sub-national data are difficult to obtain and verify. For data collection, both governmental and international policy documents and academic resources on East Asia's relevant policy reforms are utilised.

General child-related income support

The major form of child-income support for families and children in Japan is Child Allowances (児童手当). Introduced in 1972, Child Allowances were initially provided for families meeting eligibility conditions on household income (and the child's age and parity). The coverage has gradually improved and since 2012, ¥10,000–15,000 (US\$67–100) of Child Allowances have been available for all 0–15 years of age unless they have high-income parents (OECD, 2023a).⁴ Nevertheless, due to a generous means test, the allowances are semi-universal, with around 9 out of every 10 children aged 0–15 years receiving

⁴Consequently, Tax Breaks for the Dependent (扶養控除) were abolished for 0–15 year olds.

them. The Child Allowances' recipients also received a COVID-19 bonus of ¥10,000 per child in 2020 and ¥100,000 (US\$665) per child in 2021 (Gentilini et al., 2022).⁵

General child-related income support was underdeveloped in the other three East Asian societies until recently. In the case of Singapore, it was in 2001 when a Baby Bonus began to be offered in the form of a Cash Gift (S\$3,000 or US\$2,233) and a Child Development Account that co-matches parents' savings dollar-for-dollar (up to S\$6,000 or US\$4,466) (Saw, 2016).⁶ It was initially only available for the second and third child but a series of reforms since 2004 have both relaxed the parity condition and improved parity-specific generosity. As of 2023, S\$11,000 (US\$8,188) or S\$13,000 (US\$9,676) of the Cash Gift is provided for all children until they become 6.5 years old, with a bonus of S\$3,000 (US\$2,233) for those born between 2020 and early 2023 (Government of Singapore, 2023a). The government's contribution to the Child Development Account is S\$9,000–20,000 (US\$6,699–14,887). Simultaneously, since 2004, Singapore has offered and expanded the Parenthood Tax Rebate and the Working Mother's Child Relief, both of which were favourable for dual-earner families with mid- and high income (Saw, 2016). As of 2023, all parents and mothers with taxable income are eligible for up to S\$5,000–20,000 (US \$3,722–14,887) of the tax rebate per child and the tax relief between 15% and 25% (depending on the parity).

In Korea, Earned Income Tax Credits (근로장려세제) were introduced in the form of a tax return (up to ₩800,000 or US\$601 per year) in 2008 for low-income households with one or more children (OECD, 2023b).⁷ A major reform did not take place until late 2017 when more inclusive, flat-rate Child Benefits (아동수당) of ₩100,000 (US\$75) per child were finally introduced for preschool children. The top 10% of households in the income distribution were originally excluded as in Japan, but the following year witnessed a full universalisation. As of 2023, they are provided for all children aged under 8 years, irrespective of household income. In 2020, the recipients of Child Benefits and all primary school students also received a total of ₩600,000 (US\$451) and ₩200,000 (US\$150), respectively (Gentilini et al., 2022).

Taiwan's first general child-related income support was also introduced in the form of tax support. Introduced in 2012, the Special Deduction for Preschool Children (幼兒學前特別扣除額) was designed to reduce the taxable income of families with 0–5 year olds who were subject to an income tax rate below 20% (An, 2022).⁸ As of 2023, these eligibility conditions remain the same, despite a 2018 reform increasing it from NT\$25,000 (US\$792) to NT\$120,000 (US\$3,799) for each eligible parent per child per year. In terms of direct general income support, families need to rely on various local-level provisions, except in 2021 where the central government provided NT\$10,000 (US\$317) per child for all children up to primary school age and older children with special needs (Gentilini et al., 2022).

Income support for parental caregiving

Alongside the announcement of the Angel Plan in Japan, the main policy reform in this area was the introduction of Parental Leave Benefits (育児休業給付) in 1995, which provided 25% of the leave takers' previous earnings with a ceiling. Before this reform, Maternity Leave Benefits (出産手当金) were the only form of support in this area. The wage replacement rate of paid parental leaves increased, with a floor and ceiling, to 40% in 2001 and 50% in 2007. Since the 2010s, the pronatalist policy reforms targeted fathers rather than extending their coverage. For instance, in 2010, Japan – like Germany – made them

⁵For single-parent families, in 2020, ¥50,000 (US\$333) was additionally provided with a bonus of ¥30,000 (US\$200) per child for the second and subsequent children.

⁶When introduced, the Baby Bonus scheme was provided for the second and third children only.

⁷These credits later became available for childless families. Hence, Child Incentive Tax Credits (자녀장려금) of up to ₩800,000 per child were introduced in 2014.

⁸As of 2023, the 20% tax rate applies to individuals and families earning more than NT\$1.26 million (US\$39,867) per year. Given the national male and female median annual income, NT\$557,000 (US\$17,626) and NT\$481,000 (US\$15,221) as of 2022, upper-middle-income and high-income families are excluded from this tax benefit.

extendable from 12 to 14 months if both parents requested them, thereby practically granting fathers 2 months of non-transferable leave. Similarly in 2014, the wage replacement rate rose to 67% for the first 6 months for each parent (Blum et al., 2023), while in 2022, 4-week Childbirth Leave Benefits for Fathers (出生時育兒休業給付金) were introduced. Notwithstanding their enhanced generosity (especially for fathers), the remaining strict eligibility conditions have limited their coverage and, therefore, inclusiveness. As of 2023, the recipients of Maternity Leave Benefits should have the Employee's Health Insurance (健康保險). Those claiming paid paternity and parental leave, too, should have contributed to the Employment Insurance (雇用保險) for 1 year or longer during the 2 years preceding the leave, which *de facto* excludes self-employed part-time and casual workers.

In Singapore, the first noticeable reform occurred in 2004, which extended the existing 8-week maternity leave by 4 weeks with the extended period being publicly funded (Saw, 2016). A 2008 reform further expanded this (partially) Government-Paid Maternity Leave to 16 weeks. Consequently, eligible mothers could receive 100% of their previous earnings from their employers during the first half and then from the government (up to S\$20,000 or US\$14,889) during the other half. In the late 2000s onwards, the coverage of motherhood support was also broadened: the minimum length of consecutive employment required to claim paid maternity leave was halved to 90 days in 2008, while a new Government-Paid Maternity Benefit was introduced in 2012 for those who were ineligible for the leave and had worked for any 90 days within a year. Similar patterns of reforms occurred later for fathers, focusing first on generosity and then on coverage (Tan, 2023). Firstly, in 2013, fathers were granted a week of the Government-Paid Paternity Leave and an additional week of the new Government-Paid Shared Parental Leave, which was extended to a total of 6 weeks in 2017. Secondly, in 2021, the Government-Paid Paternity Benefit was introduced for those who were not eligible for paid leave but worked for any 90 days during the 12 months preceding childbirth.

In Korea, before the adoption of a pronatalist stance, the only available form of support in this field was the 3-month Prepartum and Postpartum Leave Payment (출산전후휴가급여) for working mothers. However, the deepening demographic challenge resulted in meaningful leave policy reforms, including the 2011 transition of the Parental Leave Payment (육아휴직급여) from modestly flat-rated to 40% of earnings with a floor and ceiling. The wage replacement level has gradually risen, and as of 2023, the payment replaces 80% of the wage, fixed between ₩700,000 (US \$526) and ₩1.5 million (US\$1,127) per month, for 1 year (Blum et al., 2023). Like in Japan and Singapore, Korea's parental leave reforms in the 2010s and onwards focused on fatherhood support by launching both the Childbirth Leave Payment for Fathers (배우자출산휴가급여) in 2012 and a scheme offering a more generous paid parental leave for fathers in 2014. The generosity of both measures has consistently improved: as of 2023, paid paternity leave is 10 days (as a result of a 2019 reform) and parental leave is paid at 100% for the first 3 months of each parent's leave up to ₩2–3 million (US\$1,502–2,254) depending on how long both parents have taken it. Although parental leave remains exclusive due to it requiring 6 months of both consecutive employment and contribution to the Employment Insurance (고용보험), non-standard working mothers have been granted access to ₩1.5 million (US\$1,155) of the Maternity Payment (출산급여) since 2022 (Blum et al., 2023). Unlike in Japan and Singapore, since 2013, all families have also received ₩100,000–200,000 (US\$75–150) of Homecare Allowances (가정양육수당) per month if they do not use publicly funded ECEC.⁹ On top of these, since 2022, all families with young children have received a gradually increasing new Parenthood Payment (부모급여). As of 2023, this payment provides ₩700,000 (US\$526) per month until the child's first birthday and ₩350,000 (US\$263) per month for the next 12 months.

Together with Korea, Taiwan is another latecomer in this policy field. Although 2-month Maternity Leave Allowances (產假薪資) were institutionalised early in the 1950s, both 2-day paternity leave and unpaid parental leave were only introduced in 2001. However, alongside the adoption of a pronatalist

⁹Homecare allowances were introduced in 2009 for 0–1 year olds from low-income families but were universalised for all preschool children in 2013.

policy in 2008, Parental Leave Allowances (育嬰留職停薪津貼) were introduced and were paid at 60% up to a limit (Tsai, 2012). Since 2021, the wage replacement rate increased to 80% up to NT\$36,640 (US \$1,160) per month. Similarly, the duration of the Paid Paternal Leave for Prenatal Check-up and Childcare (陪產檢及陪產假), equivalent to paid paternity leave, was extended to 3 days in 2008, 5 days in 2016, and then to 1 week in 2022. Despite such improvements in generosity, Taiwan's parental leave system remains in favour of labour market insiders. This is because full-pay maternity leave is available for those with at least 6 months of consecutive employment, while paid parental leave is only available for those who have worked for the same employer for 6 or more months and have joined the Employment Insurance (就業保險) for at least 1 year (Bureau of Labour Insurance, 2023). However, Taiwan has improved the coverage of income support for parental caregiving since 2012, by introducing a Child-rearing Subsidy (未就業家庭育兒津貼), NT\$2,500 (US\$79) per month for single-earner and unemployed families with young children aged 0–2 years, who did not have access to paid parental leave and were subject to lower income tax rates below 20% (Peng and Chien, 2018). The generosity and coverage have gradually increased since its introduction. As of 2023, the subsidy has reached NT\$5,000–7,000 (US\$158–222) per month and is available for all 0–2 years of age not using publicly funded ECEC.

Support for childcare services

In Japan, the expansion of state support for defamilising childcare was sluggish compared to that of the other two types of support. Despite the heightened importance of expanding public ECEC services as a key to raising childbirth, the unsolved issue was the substantial discrepancy between demands for and the availability of childcare facilities. The reforms were therefore focused on the expansion of ECEC service supply. It was only in 2019, upon the implementation of the Free ECEC (幼兒教育・保育の無償化) policy, that all 3–5 years of age and younger children from low-income households using publicly certified childcare facilities were exempted from childcare fees at the national level (OECD, 2023a).¹⁰ Previously, the use of daycare centres was limited to families in need of non-parental childcare due to, for example, employment, which varied across different local authorities, while fully subsidised childcare services were only available for low-income families.

In contrast, Singapore has a relatively long history of subsidising non-parental childcare regardless of household income, although the subsidy's generosity was too low to cover the fee charged by childcare centres. However, in 2004, Singapore increased the monthly subsidy from S\$150 (US\$112) to S\$400 (US \$298) for working mothers with 2–18 months old, while keeping the lower rate, S\$75 (US\$56), for non-working mothers (Saw, 2016). Since 2013, for families with working mothers, Singapore has supplemented this Basic Subsidy with an Additional Subsidy that reduces as household income increases. The policy direction targeting dual-earner families, especially those earning low to middle ranges of household income, remains the same: as of 2023, every month, working mothers with children of 2–18 months of age receive S\$600 (US\$447) as base and a top-up of up to S\$710 (US\$529), and those with older children receive S\$300 (US\$223) with an extra of up to S\$467 (US\$348) (Government of Singapore, 2023b). In contrast, non-working mothers only receive S\$150 of a universal monthly Basic Subsidy.

Korea showed the most rapid improvement in both the coverage and generosity of institutional childcare. Initially, the provision of ECEC subsidies was restricted to families in need. However, alongside the increasing demographic alarm, increasing financial support for ECEC was seen as a prerequisite for lowering the burden of child-rearing and its expansion was prioritised over the other two policies. Unlike its regional neighbours (especially Singapore), Korea's first ECEC reform in 2006 did not target dual-earner families. Instead, Korea adopted a residual approach that provided free childcare services for low-income families and partially subsidised ones for middle-income families, regardless of their working status. The eligibility condition on household income was constantly relaxed over time, and between 2012 and 2013, the Free Childcare (무상보육) programme was established for all age

¹⁰The generosity is different for children using for-profit private childcare services.

groups. This inclusive approach has been maintained since its introduction, even though a 2016 reform introduced a scheme that differentiates the length of free daily ECEC services depending on whether both parents are working.

In Taiwan, one of the significant policy changes in the aftermath of growing concerns about dwindling TFR was the introduction of means-tested Childcare Subsidies (托育補助) for 0–2 year olds. Introduced in 2008, the subsidies were set to support families who had at least one working parent and were subject to an income tax rate below 20%. Yet, the provision of NT\$2,000–3,000 (US\$63–95) – or NT\$4,000–5,000 (US\$127–158) for low-income families – per month was too modest to encourage mothers' labour market participation (Peng and Chien, 2018), although it gradually increased. In the case of older children, the Free Education (學費教育) policy of 2011 universalised free access to ECEC for all 5-year olds and expanded relevant subsidies, up to NT\$10,000 (US\$317) per term, for 2–4 year olds from low- and middle-income households (Leung, 2014). As of 2023, depending on the type of childcare services that children use, the government offers NT\$5,500–8,500 (US\$174–269) per month for 0–2 year olds and caps monthly tuition fees for older children at NT\$1,000–3,000 (US\$31–95) (Executive Yuan, 2022).¹¹ More generous support is available for families with two or more children, while low-income families can use childcare services for free.

Overarching patterns of the pronatalist family policy development

One general pattern is that the inclusiveness of the three family policy areas has dramatically improved in East Asia (Appendix Tables A1–A3 for the latest area-specific policy development). As of 2023, in the area of general income support, Japan, Singapore, and Korea provide regular child-specific cash transfers for (nearly) all families with children despite them having different coverage of age groups. The generosity of this type of support temporarily increased during the COVID-19 pandemic in all three, while Taiwan launched a one-off but universal child-specific cash transfer. In the case of parental caregiving-specific income support, it covers both labour market insiders and outsiders in Korea and Taiwan, as well as Singapore, to some extent, despite remaining generous for insiders. Free ECEC services are also available for all children in Korea and for some age groups in Japan and Taiwan, irrespective of household income levels and parental employment status. However, as discussed above, cross-national variations are also prominent in the starting point and have lasted until very recently. Table 2 summarises the four East Asian societies' major pronatalist family policy reforms over time.

Looking at the overall patterns of Japan's pronatalist family policy development, it used to take a selective approach, targeting and benefitting dual-earner families with middle- and high-income potential. For example, Japan introduced earnings-related parental leave in 1995 and gradually increased its generosity in the 2000s, while prioritising dual earners' access to limited public childcare. The paid parental leave has had strict eligibility conditions on the type and length of employment, which has in practice benefitted those who spend their careers consistently and securely at the core of the labour market. Contrastingly, families who are vulnerable to atypical work and unemployment (and are thus likely to have low income) have had to count on modest monthly child benefits. This selective pronatalist approach was reinforced in the 2010s when the generosity of paid parental leaves further improved regarding both the duration (to 14 months in total) and benefit level (to 67% for the first 6 months for each parent) to incentivise fathers, just as in Germany. Nevertheless, the launch of free ECEC for all 3–5 year olds and low-income families in 2019 signals Japan's transition towards a more inclusive pronatalist approach.

Singapore endorsed and strengthened a more explicitly selective approach in the early years of its pronatalism. This is best illustrated by the expansion of universal, earnings-related tax support (Parenthood Tax Rebate and Working Mother's Child Relief) from 2001 onwards, in addition to the increase in paid maternity leave by 30 days for those with at least 6-month-consecutive employment

¹¹The generosity is different for children using for-profit private childcare services.

Table 2. Timeline of major family policy reforms in East Asia since the acceptance of explicit pronatalism

	Japan	Singapore	South Korea	Taiwan
1990s	1995 Announcement of the Angel Plan 1995 Introduction of paid parental leave	N/A	N/A	N/A
2000s	2001, 2007 Benefit level increases in paid parental leave	2001 Announcement of the Marriage and Parenthood Package; introduction of child benefits and a child savings account 2004 Introduction of tax support for working families (especially dual earners); duration increase in paid maternity leave; introduction of additional ECEC subsidies for working mothers	2006 Announcement of the New Beginning Plan; introduction of free ECEC services for low-income families 2008 Introduction of tax support for low-income working families 2009 Introduction of cash-for-homecare for low-income families with 0–1 year olds	2008 Announcement of the Population Policy White Paper; introduction of paid parental leave; introduction of ECEC subsidies for low-and lower-middle income working families
2010s	2010, 2014 Duration and benefit level increases in paid parental leave for fathers 2012 Introduction of semi-universal child benefits 2019 Introduction of free ECEC services for all 3–5 year olds	2012 Introduction of maternity benefits 2013 Introduction of paid paternity leave; introduction of additional ECEC subsidies for low-income working mothers 2017 Duration increase in paid parental leave for fathers	2011 Benefit level increase in paid parental leave 2012 Introduction of paid paternity leave 2013 Universalisation of free ECEC and cash-for-homecare for all 0–5 year olds 2016 Differentiation of free ECEC hours depending on whether both parents are employed or not 2017/18 Introduction of universal child benefits	2011 Introduction of free ECEC services for all 5 year olds and 2–4 year olds from low-income families 2012 Introduction of tax support for low- and lower-middle-income working families; introduction of cash-for-homecare for 0–2 year olds from low- and lower-middle-income families
2020s	2022 Introduction of paid paternity leave	2021 Introduction of paternity benefits	2022 Introduction of maternity benefits 2022/23 Benefit level increases in cash-for-homecare for all 0–1 year olds	2021 Benefit level increase in paid parental leave 2023 Universalisation of cash-for-homecare for all 0–2 year olds

Notes: For a more effective cross-national comparison, this table used representative policy names: “child benefits” for regular direct child-specific cash transfers; “child savings account” for the government’s contribution to parents’ savings for children (existing only in Singapore); “tax support” for tax-based child-specific support that offers a payment (in Korea) or reduces tax liability (in Singapore); “paid maternity/paternity/parental leave” for cash support for primarily standard employees during their relevant leave; “maternity/paternity benefits” for cash support for working parents ineligible for paid leave; and “cash-for-homecare” for direct cash transfers on the condition of not using publicly funded ECEC services. Small increases in paid paternity leave by 1–3 days (in Korea and Taiwan) were not included in the table.

in 2004. Surely, since 2001, Singaporean families have had access to the generous two-tiered Baby Bonus scheme regardless of their household income and employment status. However, in practice, this scheme has caused the Matthew effect because one of its components, the Child Development Account that co-matches parental savings up to a limit, has not adequately worked for low-income families who have experienced difficulty putting savings into it (Han and Chia, 2012). In contrast, since the early 2010s, Singapore has increasingly adopted a more inclusive stance by introducing maternity and paternity benefits for those with non-standard working patterns, as well as additional ECEC subsidies for low- and middle-income working mothers, despite non-working low-income families remaining neglected.

Korea's pronatalist family policy approach has revealed different patterns. As Table 2 summarises, Korea initially took a residual stance, focusing on unburdening the child-rearing of low-income families by encouraging their labour market participation. For instance, Korea undertook the expansion of free ECEC services for low-income families regardless of parental employment status in 2006, while arranging tax credits for low-income working families with a child in 2008, as the United Kingdom did under New Labour. This strategy was diluted by the selective approach in the early and mid-2010s, when Korea adopted earnings-related parental leave (2011) without relaxing its strict eligibility conditions, extended home care allowances that could encourage low-income mothers to stay at home (2013), and allowed different free hours for ECEC services according to mothers' working status (2016). However, Korea's pronatalist policy reforms during the past 5 years – such as the introduction of universal child benefits and the generosity improvement of income support for parental caregiving for both labour market insiders and outsiders – position this country as the most inclusive in East Asia.

Finally, Taiwan also originally took a residual pronatalist approach by introducing a range of means-tested policies that excluded upper-middle- and high-income earners. More specifically, the introduction of ECEC subsidies in 2008 was also available for families eligible for the two lowest income tax brackets (i.e., those who paid 5% and 12% of income tax). This approach was strengthened in the early 2010s when the same income conditionality was applied to two new policies: free ECEC services for 2–4 year olds and cash-for-homecare for younger children. The new child-specific tax exemption, introduced in 2012, applied the same eligibility condition once again. Although eligible high-income earners are theoretically positioned to benefit more from paid maternity leave (paid at 100%) and paid parental leave (paid at 80%), these policies would not have been as advantageous for them as they could have been because of Taiwan's shorter paid maternity leave of 8 weeks (compared to 3–4 months in the other three countries) and the ceiling on paid parental leave being set at the median wage level.¹² Nevertheless, the universalisation of cash-for-home care in 2023, alongside the gradual expansion of non-means-tested ECEC subsidies, indicates a shift in pronatalist support away from exclusively targeting the financially disadvantaged.

Conclusion

This study adopted the concept of inclusiveness in the context of pronatalist family policy and developed a typology to unravel within-country and cross-country differences in the access to it. The inclusiveness lens allows us to critically examine how East Asia's pronatalist family policy – despite the universalist cast to its rhetoric – has actually been designed in such a way to differentiate between social groups by including some and excluding others and by providing more generous support for some than others.

The analytical direction in this article was oriented towards qualitatively narrating what kind of pronatalist family policy reforms happened over time. The developed tripartite typology helped simplify the complexities of such reforms and served as a valuable conceptual reference point for the comparison of four East Asian societies. Future research could enhance its applicability to larger-*N* cross-national comparisons by developing quantitative analytical indicators, such as an index to score the coverage and generosity of pronatalist family support (e.g., Dobrotić and Blum, 2020). This research also focused on a particular aspect of the inclusiveness of East Asia's pronatalism through the lens of the three core family policy elements in terms of their eligibility conditions on employment status and household income. Admittedly, East Asian societies have increasingly expanded pronatalist support in other policy fields – such as the labour market, housing, education, and healthcare. Social rights to these increasingly diverse forms of pronatalist support do not only depend on a family's socio-economic status but also its legal status and type. Future studies should elaborate further on who is granted more and less social rights to

¹²In 2021, the maximum insured monthly salary increased from NT\$43,900 (US\$1,389) to NT\$45,800 (US\$1,449). This figure is slightly higher than the median income of NT\$43,167 (US\$1,366).

overall pronatalist support, which would help explain the persistent fertility decline despite the expansion of various pronatalist policy packages.

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APPENDIX

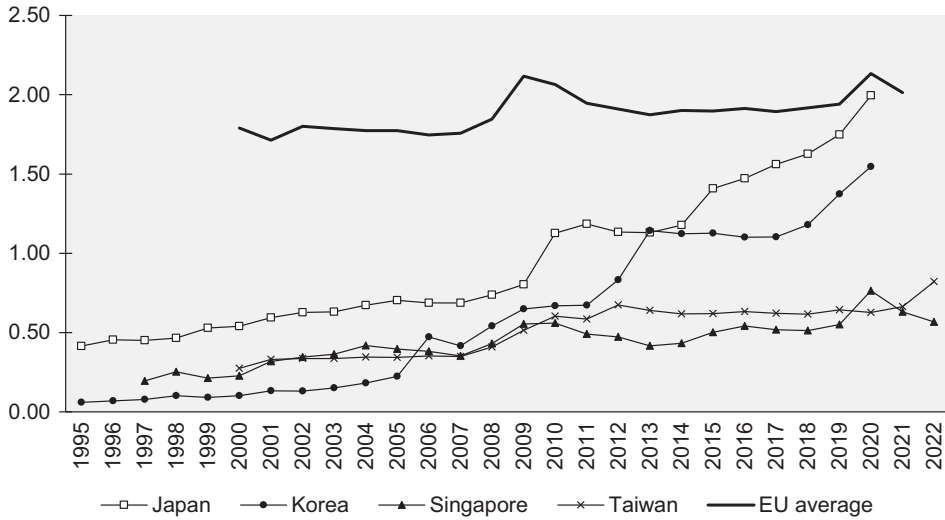


Figure A1. Public Expenditure on Families as a Percentage of GDP in East Asia, 1995–2022.
 Sources: Eurostat (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/main/data/database>); OECD (<https://data.oecd.org/socialexp/family-benefits-public-spending.htm>) for Japan and Korea; author’s own calculation based on data retrieved from the national statistics of Singapore (<https://www.singstat.gov.sg/>) and Taiwan (<https://www.stat.gov.tw/>).
 Note: Public spending on families and children in this figure refers to that of “family benefits” in the case of Japan and Korea, that of “social and family development” in the case of Singapore, and that of “family and children” in the case of Taiwan.

Table A1. State-level general income support in East Asia (as of December 2023, excluding temporary COVID-19 measures)

	Title	Eligibility conditions			
		Employment	Child’s age limit	Means-test	Generosity per child
Japan	Child Allowance	No	0–15 years	Yes	Monthly payment of ¥10,000–15,000 (US\$67–100) depending on the child’s age
Singapore	Baby Bonus’s Cash Gift	No	0–6.5 years	No	Periodic payment of S\$11,000 (US \$8,187) or S\$13,000 (US\$9,676) in total depending on the child’s parity
	Baby Bonus’ Child Development Account	No	0–12 years	No	One-off grant of S\$5,000 (US\$3,721) with a dollar-for-dollar matching of up to S\$4,000–15,000 (US\$2,977–11,164) depending on the child’s parity
	Parenthood Tax Rebate	No	0–18 years	No	One-off payment of S\$10,000–20,000 (US\$7,443–14,883) depending on the child’s parity

(continued)

Table A1. *Continued*

	Title	Eligibility conditions			Generosity per child
		Employment	Child's age limit	Means-test	
	Working Mother's Child Relief	Yes	0–16 years	No	Reduction in taxable income by 15–25% up to S\$50,000 (US\$37,208) depending on the child's parity
Korea	Child Benefit	No	0–8 years	No	Monthly payment of ₩100,000 (US\$75) per month
	Child Tax Credit	Yes	0–18 years	Yes	Annual payment of ₩500,000–800,000 (US\$376–601) depending on household income
Taiwan	Special Deduction for Preschool Children	Yes	0–5 years	Yes	Reduction in taxable income by NT \$120,000 (US\$3,798) per year

Sources: Author's own summary based on the governmental websites of Japan (<https://www.cfa.go.jp/policies/kokoseido/jidouteate/anna/>), Singapore (<https://www.madeforfamilies.gov.sg/support-measures/raising-your-child/financial-support>), Korea (<https://www.gov.kr/portal/service/serviceinfo/135200000120>; <https://www.nts.go.kr/nts/cm/cntnts/cntntsView.do?mi=2451&cntntsId=7782>), and Taiwan (<https://www.etax.nat.gov.tw/etwmain/tax-info/understanding/tax-saving-manual/national/individual-income-tax/k2Jbgrp>).

Table A2. State-level income support for parental caregiving in East Asia (as of December 2023, excluding temporary COVID-19 measures)

	Title	Insurance-based (minimum contribution)	Employment type and minimum length	Child's age limit	Generosity per child
Japan	Maternity Leave Benefits	Yes (none)	E, none	56 days postpartum	67% of previous earnings for 14 weeks ¹
	Childbirth Leave Benefits for Fathers	Yes (1 year) ²	E, 1 successive year ²	56 days postpartum	67% of previous earnings, capped at ¥15,430 (US\$103) per day, for 4 weeks
	Parental Leave Benefits	Yes (1 year) ²	E, 1 successive year ²	0–1 years ³	67% of previous earnings, fixed between ¥55,194 and 310,143 (US \$360–2,063) per month, for the first 180 days and then 50%, fixed between ¥41,190 and 231,450 (US \$274–1,539) per month, for the rest ³
Singapore	Government-Paid Maternity Leave	No	E/S, 3 successive months ⁴	0–1 years	100% of previous earnings for the first 8 weeks and then 100% capped at S\$20,000 (US\$14,884) in total for the next 8 weeks ⁵
	Government-Paid Maternity Benefit ⁶	No	NE/S, 3 months in total ⁴	0–1 years	100% of previous earnings, capped at S\$20,000 in total, for 8 weeks

(continued)

Table A2. Continued

	Title	Insurance-based (minimum contribution)	Employment type and minimum length	Child's age limit	Generosity per child
	Government-Paid Paternity Leave	No	E/S, 3 successive months ⁴	0–1 years	100% of previous earnings, capped at S\$2,500 (US\$1,861) per week, for 2 weeks (with two extra weeks if the employer agrees)
	Government-Paid Paternity Benefit ⁵	No	NE/S, 3 months in total ⁴	0–1 years	100% of previous earnings, capped at S\$2,500 per week, for 4 weeks
	Shared Parental Leave	No	E/S, none ⁷	0–1 years	100% of previous earnings, capped at S\$2,500 per week, for 1–4 weeks
Korea	Prepartum and Postpartum Leave Payment	Yes (6 months)	E, 6 successive months	90 days postpartum	100% of previous earnings for the first 60 days and then 100%, capped at ₩2.1 million (US\$1,578) in total, for the next 30 days
	Maternity Payment	No	NE/S, 3 months in total ⁶	0–1 years	₩500,000 (US\$376) per month for 3 months
	Childbirth Leave Payment for Fathers	Yes (6 months)	E/NE, none	90 days postpartum	100% of previous earnings for 10 days
	Parental Leave Payment	Yes (6 months)	E/NE, 6 successive months	0–8 years	80% of previous earnings, fixed between ₩700,000 and 1.5 million (US\$526–1,128) per month, for 12 months ⁹
	Homecare Allowances	No	None	0–7 years	Monthly payment of ₩100,000–200,000 (US\$75–150) depending on the child's age
	Parenthood Payment	No	None	0–2 years	Monthly payment of ₩350,000 (US\$263) or ₩700,000 (US\$526) depending on the child's age
Taiwan	Maternity Leave Allowance	No	E/NE, none	56 days postpartum	100% previous earnings for 8 weeks for the claimant employed for 6 months or longer; 50% of previous earnings for the claimant employed for less than 6 months

(continued)

Table A2. *Continued*

Title	Insurance-based (minimum contribution)	Employment type and minimum length	Child's age limit	Generosity per child
Paid Paternal Leave for Prenatal Check-up and Childcare	No	E/NE, none	15 days postpartum	100% of previous earnings for 7 days
Parental Leave Allowance	Yes (1 year)	E, 6 months	0–3 years	80% of previous earnings, capped at NT\$36,640 (US\$1,160) per month, for 6 months
Child-rearing Subsidy	No	None	0–6 years	NT\$5,000–7,000 (US\$158–222) per month depending on the child's parity

Sources: Author's own summary based on the governmental websites and/or country reports published by the International Network on Leave Policies and Research of Japan (<https://www.bosei-navi.mhlw.go.jp/glossary/provide02.html>; https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/kodomo/shokuba_kosodate/jigyoyouritsuryouritu.html; https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/annual_reviews/2023/Japan2023.pdf), Singapore (<https://www.profamilyleave.msf.gov.sg/>), Korea (<https://www.moel.go.kr/policy/policyinfo/woman/list5.do>; <https://www.mohw.go.kr/menu.es?mid=a10713020200>; <https://www.mohw.go.kr/menu.es?mid=a10713020400>; https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/annual_reviews/2023/Korea2023.pdf), and Taiwan (<https://www.mol.gov.tw/1607/28690/2282/2284/2294/7259/post>; <https://www.bli.gov.tw/0015003.html>).

General notes: All of the listed income support for parental caregiving is not means-tested. Abbreviations refer to the following: "E" for standard employees, "NE" for non-standard employees (such as casual, part-time, and fixed-term workers), and "S" for the self-employed. The generosity may differ for multiple births, births with a disability, and parents working in public sectors.

¹If the employee has been insured for less than 12 months, she can receive either her average standard monthly remuneration over the most recent continuous months prior to the commencement of the benefit payment or the average standard monthly remuneration of all insured persons (whichever is lower).

²Out of 2 years preceding the date on which the leave started.

³The paid leave can be extended until the child becomes 14 months old if both parents take some of the leave. It can also be extended until the child reaches 2 years of age if the child's admission to a childcare centre is unsuccessful.

⁴Out of 12 months before the childbirth.

⁵Or 100% of ordinary earnings without a cap for the first 16 weeks and then with a cap up to S\$30,220 (\$22,483) for the next 4 weeks if the child's birth order is equal to or larger than three.

⁶Available to those who are not eligible for the Government-Paid Maternity or Paternity Leave.

⁷There is no minimum employment duration to qualify, as long as the recipient's wife meets all the eligibility conditions for Government-Paid Maternity Leave.

⁸Out of 18 months before the childbirth.

⁹If both parents take 1 month each, the wage replacement rate increases to 100% for the first 3 months of the leave for each parent, capped at ₩2 million (US\$1,503) per month. If both parents take 2 months each, the ceiling increases to ₩2.5 million (US\$1,878) per month. If both parents take 3 months each, the ceiling increases to ₩3 million (US\$2,254) per month.

Table A3. State-level support for childcare services (as of December 2023, excluding temporary COVID-19 measures)

	Title	Eligibility conditions			Generosity per child
		Employment	Child's age limit	Means-test	
Japan	Free ECEC	No	0–5 years	Yes and no	100% for all 3–5 year olds and younger children from low-income families ^{1,2}
Singapore	Basic Subsidy	No	0–6 years	No	41% for 2–18 month olds with working mothers or 10% for those with non-working mothers; 29% for 1.5–6 year olds with working mothers or 14% for those with non-working mothers ³
	Additional Subsidy	Yes	0–6 years	Yes	3–48% for 2–18 month olds depending on household income; 8–45% for 1.5–6 year olds depending on household income ⁴
Korea	Free Childcare	No	0–5 years	No	100% for all 0–5 year olds
Taiwan	Free Education	No	0–5 years	Yes and no	100% for all 5 year olds and younger children from low-income families ⁵

Sources: Author’s own summary based on the government websites and/or country reports on OECD tax-benefit database of Japan (<https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/TaxBEN-Japan-latest.pdf>), Singapore (<https://www.madeforfamily.gov.sg/support-measures/raising-your-child/preschool/subsidies-for-preschool>), Korea (<https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/TaxBEN-Korea-latest.pdf>), and Taiwan (<https://www.ece.moe.edu.tw/ch/subsidy/public-non-profit/>).

General notes: The generosity refers to the national-government-paid childcare subsidies as a percentage of childcare fees paid by families to certain publicly authorised childcare centres. The generosity differs for children using other private childcare facilities.

¹If families with two or more children simultaneously send them to a kindergarten, day-care centre or community-based childcare centre, the childcare fee for the second child is halved and that for the third child onwards is free of charge.

²Parents are subject to the payment of non-childcare fees such as meals, transportation, and extracurricular activities.

³These are estimated values based on the 2023 national statistics (<https://www.ecda.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/operator/statistics-on-ecdc-services-.pdf>) where the average full-day childcare fee is S\$1,472 (US\$1,095) per month for 2–18 month olds and S\$1,045 (US\$778) for older children, while children with working mothers receive S\$300 (US\$223) or S\$600 (US\$447) of Basic Subsidies per month (depending on their age), and those with non-working mothers receive S\$150 (US\$112) per month.

⁴These are estimated values based on the aforementioned national statistics. As of 2023, eligible 2–18 month olds receive S\$40–710 (US\$30–528) of Additional Subsidies per month depending on household income, while eligible older children receive S\$80–467 (US\$60–348) per month depending on household income.

⁵Other 0–2 year olds are eligible for NT\$5,500–8,500 (US\$174–269) per month depending on the type of childcare service that they use. For older children, monthly tuition fees are also capped at NT\$1,000–3,000 (US\$31–95).