Child day-care centres – Staffing and group sizes

In the reporting year 2016/17 a total of 61,877 persons were employed in the child care sector. This means that the ratio of staff to children was 1:5.8. The number of children cared for by a nursery assistant (the care ratio) increases with the age of the children. For the youngest children, i.e. at crèches and infant care centres, the care ratio is 1 caregiver to 3.5 children. At the mixed-age childcare facilities this was 1:5.7, at nurseries 1:6.1 and at day care centres 1:7.9.

The group sizes follow a similar pattern to the care ratios: the younger the children, the smaller the groups. In 2016/17 a crèche or infant group consisted on average of 12.4 children and a mixed-age care facility of 18. Nursery groups were attended by 19.2 children and day care groups by 20.7. There was on average a total of 3.1 nursery assistants to one child care group. The mean values for crèches and nurseries were slightly above this figure at 3.5 and 3.2 respectively, while at 3.1 it was more or less average in the case of mixed-age child care. Child day care centres however fell short of this figure at just 2.6 nursery assistants per group.

It is interesting to note that only a small proportion of child care staff are men. In 2016/17 the highest percentage of male staff, 5.4%, was to be found at the day care centres, while at 2.4% only half as many were employed in the mixed-age child care sector. Not even two in a hundred caregivers at nurseries (1.7%) or crèches and infant groups (1.9%) were men. The overall percentage of men working at all child care facilities was 2.3%.

Staffing – all day-care centers for children
Percentage of male child care staff

Source: Statistics Austria, Statistics on child care

Staff by type of care facility

Source: Statistics Austria, Statistics on child care

Group sizes

Source: Statistics Austria, Statistics on child care
Austria has also seen a rise in staffing levels in this sector. This is due to the fact that the total number of all children attending child day-care centres has continuously increased, namely from around 150,000 in 1972/73 to 360,000 today, i.e. a rise of more than four-thirds, or +138% to be precise. Total staffing levels for child care however showed a disproportionate growth rate, increasing almost sixfold from 10,634 employees to 61,877 (+481.9%).

The number of nursery workers of all kinds employed at child care centres has continuously increased, in all cases surpassing the rise in the number of children attending each facility.
The smallest increase observed here was at the nurseries, with this figure rising from 8,588 in 1972/73 to 36,067 in 2016/17, i.e. growing by a factor of four (+319.9%). Over the same period staffing levels at child day care centres rose from 1,215 to 7,315, a sixfold increase (+502.1%). The largest increase seen here was at the crèches and infant care centres. While 831 employees were working in this sector in 1972/73, by 2016/17 this had multiplied by a factor of more than twelve to reach 10,119 or +1,117%.

Mixed-age childcare facilities were not included in the statistics until 1997/98, but since then staffing levels have increased from 250 to 8,376.

At almost 4% at the beginning of the 1970s, the proportion of men working in the child care sector was considerably higher than is the case today. By the turn of the millennium it had dropped with fluctuations to little more than 1%, before temporarily rising to 2% and then falling again to 1.6% in 2009/10. Since then a steady increase has been observed, standing at 2.3% in the reporting year 2016/17. From 1972/73 to 2016/17 the number of men working at day care centres always significantly exceeded that for the other types of child care. Initially, the percentage of male staff was almost 10%, before falling to around 4% in 1985/86 and then settling at 4-6% (2016/17: 5.4%). In the crèches, infant care centres and nurseries, staffing levels developed more or less in line with the overall trend, merely hovering slightly below it. There was a similar picture for mixed-age childcare (not recorded until 1997/1998), although here the figure was slightly higher than the overall trend.

Given the disproportionate increase in staffing levels in relation to child attendance, it was possible, despite falling group sizes, to continuously improve the care ratio for the groups. In 1972/73 the average group size at a child care facility was around 30 children. Only in the crèches was this average markedly lower at 17 children per group. Since then an overall reduction in group size to 18.2 children was observed in the reporting year 2016/17, i.e. a drop of some 40%. Since the turn of the millennium there has been no significant fall in this level for the individual types of care facilities. The further drop in the overall average can be attributed to the above-average growth in the number of crèches, which are characterised by smaller group sizes.

From 1972/73 to 2016/17 group sizes by type of child care facility showed the following development: In the crèches the group size fell from initially 17 to 12.9 in 2000/01 and then to 12.4 children, with minor fluctuations: a total reduction of 27.3%. In the nurseries this figure dropped from 31.4 to 21.3 in 2000/01 and then further to 19.2 children: a total reduction of 38.9%). At the child day care centres there was likewise a fall from 27.4 to 20.4 in 2000/01, although since then this level has remained remarkably constant (20.7 children in 2016/17: a total reduction of 24.6%). Since their introduction mixed-age groups have developed in a similar manner to the group sizes for all child care facilities.

The steady improvement in the care ratio did not however just result from the fall in group sizes, but also because more staff were increasingly assigned per group. The lowest rise was seen in the average staffing level/group at the crèches, which at 2.9 in 1972/73 was already relatively high. By 2016/17 this figure had increased by 21% (3.5 per group). In the same period the number of staff employed at child day care centres was up 36.7%, rising from 1.9 to 2.6, while at 50.6% the most marked increase was seen at the nurseries, increasing from 2 to 3.15 per group.