

# Childcare in a global crisis: The impact of COVID-19 on work and family life <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

[Access full brief \[PDF\]](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

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## Excerpts from introduction

The COVID-19 crisis that has engulfed the world during 2020 challenges children's education, care and well-being. Many parents struggle to balance their responsibilities for childcare and paid employment, with a disproportionate burden placed on women. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation of families had been described as 'a global childcare crisis'.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that over 35 million children under five years old are sometimes left without adult supervision, a factor often linked to economic pressures on parents to work. With the arrival of the pandemic, 99 per cent of the world's 2.36 billion children found themselves in a country with some movement restrictions, including 60 per cent under some form of lockdown. This has made childcare an even greater challenge for parents.

Globally, the work of childcare is done predominantly by women. This includes mothers and also other female caregivers such as grandmothers, siblings and workers in the childcare sector. In 2018, 606 million working-age women considered themselves to be unavailable for employment or not seeking a job because of unpaid care work, compared to only 41 million men.<sup>2</sup> This imbalance has major implications for women's employment and income opportunities and for children's development and well-being. UNICEF has previously called for a set of four family-friendly policies for children in the early years, comprising paid parental leave; breastfeeding support; accessible, affordable and good-quality

UNICEF has previously called for a set of four family-friendly policies for children in the early years, comprising paid parental leave; breastfeeding support; accessible, affordable and good-quality childcare; and child benefits.<sup>3</sup> We have shown that even some of the world's richest countries fare poorly in terms of these policies, which is a reflection of their policy priorities rather than available resources.

This brief takes a global perspective on one of these four aspects – childcare in the early years. In the current context of lockdown and school closures, lack of childcare is likely to be one of the worst affected services available to families. This paper paints a picture of current progress towards ensuring that all families have access to affordable and high-quality childcare, and considers the implications of the current COVID-19 crisis for childcare globally. We show how governments and employers can help parents to address the global childcare crisis through paid parental leave, followed by accessible, affordable and high-quality childcare. COVID-19 economic recovery packages have, to date, directed the vast majority of resources to firms rather than to households. This can be changed through public provision of childcare, subsidies, social protection floors and tax incentives.

## Related link:

**Region:** International <sup>[4]</sup>

**Tags:** mother's labour force participation <sup>[5]</sup>

[access](#) <sup>[6]</sup>

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