

Millennials and Gen Z want affordable child care: findings from Next100^[1]

The parents of today and generations of tomorrow agree that child care is a top priority.

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AVAILABILITY

Access online^[2]

EXCERPTS

Child care has quietly been the backbone of our communities and economy, but the recent COVID-19 pandemic has exposed just how critical access to child care is for the functioning of our country. As we consider policies that can get the economy running again and reexamine how our federal, state, and local budgets reflect our priorities, it's increasingly clear we must build a strong, resilient child care infrastructure that can support our families and the economy.

The parents of today and generations of tomorrow resoundingly agree. As revealed in ground-breaking new survey data from Next100 and GenForward, 81 percent of Millennials and Gen Zers identified access to affordable high-quality child care as an important issue, and nearly 3 in 4 (72 percent) of respondents identified the lack of high-quality child care programs and their cost as a barrier to achieving their professional goals. These findings crossed gender, race, ethnicity, and political affiliation. The bottom line is that affordable child care is top of mind for young people in the United States and the lack of it is having a negative impact on their lives.

Over the past decade, there has been an ongoing conversation about the impact of factors such as student loan debt on young people's ability to start a family and a life on their own terms. Now, in one of the first surveys to explore young people's views on child care, the next generation is sending a clear signal that access to child care is a pivotal public policy issue that not only affects the economy, but also shapes personal decisions around when—or whether—future generations have children. For two generations that have been affected by recessions, precarious employment, stagnant wages, and high student loan debt, the cost of child care represents yet one more financial burden they worry about carrying.

Millennials, now in their 20s and early 30s, are the largest generation in the U.S. workforce, making up roughly 35 percent of workers. They are also starting and raising families, with Millennial women now accounting for the vast majority of annual U.S. births. Gen Zers, who represent the generation born in the late 1990s and early 2000s, are beginning to enter the workforce and will make up a greater proportion of those starting families within the decade to come. These generations are also critical parts of our political coalitions going forward, as Millennials are soon to be the largest generation in the American electorate.

Key Findings

The results of this survey indicate that there is a broad coalition of Millennials and Gen Zers, crossing race/ethnicity, gender, and party lines, that want this country to dramatically expand access to affordable, high-quality child care.

The next generations' support for child care consists of a multiracial coalition that crosses traditional ideological differences, even among those without children.

- *Race/ Ethnicity:* More than 8 in 10 Millennials and Gen Zers (81 percent) identify access to child care as "important," with respondents who identify as Asian (85 percent), Black (84 percent), and Latinx (83 percent) slightly more likely than respondents who identify as White (81 percent) to say so. Black (64 percent) and Latinx (53 percent) respondents were the most likely to identify this issue as very important.
- *Gender:* Men and women both identify access to childcare is important. Over 7 out of 10 men and over 8 out of 10 women say that access to affordable, high-quality childcare is important.
- *Political affiliation:* Young Democrats, Republicans, and independents all agree on the importance of child care, with 86 percent of Democrats, 79 percent of Republicans, and 76 percent of independents identifying child care as an important issue.
- *Respondents with children:* Even respondents without children recognized the importance of child care, with over three-quarters (76 percent) of respondents without children identifying child care as an important issue.

The cost of child care, alongside student loan debt and lack of affordable housing, are affecting the next generation's decision to have children.

- **Cost:** Nearly 9 in 10 Millennials and Gen Zers (87 percent) say that the cost of child care is an important factor when determining whether or not to have children. This is higher than the percentage who say student loan debt, a commonly noted challenge facing the next generation, is influencing their decisions of whether to have children.
- Over half of those currently without children say that the cost of child care is a very important factor in whether they choose to have children.
- Even among those with comparatively higher incomes (those earning at least \$75,000), 87 percent of respondents said cost was important, with more than half saying it was very important.
- **Student loan debt:** 73 percent of respondents said that having student loans was an important factor when determining whether or not to have children.
- **Access to affordable housing:** 88 percent of respondents said that housing was an important factor.

Lack of affordable child care is influencing the next generation's career and professional decisions. Three in 4 Millennial and Gen Z women (75 percent) and more than 2 in 3 Millennial and Gen Z men (68 percent) say that the lack of access to affordable child care is a barrier to their professional success.

- Latinx respondents (76 percent) are the most likely to say that the lack of access to affordable child care is a barrier to their professional success, while White respondents (69 percent) were the least. 3 in 4 Black (74 percent) and Asian (74 percent) respondents also said it was a barrier.
- More than 2 in 3 Republicans (65 percent) say that lack of affordable child care is a barrier to their professional success, along with 77 percent of Democrats and 73 percent of independents.

Conclusion

The survey results released today show that Millennial and Gen Z parents—and even those who are not parents—understand the importance of quality, affordable child care. This position is consistent across race and ethnicity, gender, and party affiliation. They care whether they have families or are planning to have families, and it is influencing that critical decision for them. They care because they know access to child care is essential to modern families.

Policy Recommendations

These findings demonstrate that the social welfare net, even with all of its original exclusions, no longer accommodates the diverse needs of young families where both parents need to work in order to meet the rising cost of living. Young parents should have a chance to access the workforce on their own terms, without the worry that having a child could negatively affect their career prospects or their ability to pay their student loans. When they do have a child, they should be given the peace of mind that their children are being cared for in a high-quality program.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into stark relief the importance of child care for families and our economy. These survey results demonstrate that the next generation already deeply understands the challenge we are facing. The federal government has a substantial responsibility to step up and fill this gap; states and localities also have a role to play.

- Congress should pass the Child Care Is Essential Act, introduced in the House by Representative DeLauro, Representative Bobby Scott, and Representative Katherine Clark and in the Senate by Senator Patty Murray, which would appropriate \$50 billion to childcare programs across the country in the midst of COVID-19 to enact the Child Care Stabilization Fund grants program. This would significantly increase the number of child care programs which would be allowed to remain open and increase access for Millennial and Gen Z parents.
- Congress should pass the Child Care for Working Families Act, introduced in the House by Representative Bobby Scott and in the Senate by Senator Patty Murray, which would more than double the number of children eligible for child care assistance, provide incentives and funding for states to create high-quality preschool programs, and ensure the quality of federally funded early learning programs. Similarly, this would significantly increase the number of child care programs which would be allowed to remain open, and increase access for Millennial and Gen Z parents.
- The Senate should approve the Moving Forward Act, which includes a massive investment in child care, with funds to create jobs and in child care facilities. This would allow child care programs to reopen or remain open in the midst of the pandemic and the recovery from the pandemic.
- Congress should appropriate additional funds to the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program and Preschool Development Grants (PDG) so that states and localities can access federal funding in order to expand existing child care and early learning programs.
- Congress should pass paid family and medical leave so that Millennials and Gen Zers have flexibility to start a family when it is right for them.
- States and cities should increase pay for early educators in order to achieve pay parity between child care workers and K-12 teachers so that the early childhood workforce is appropriately valued and compensated for their work.
- States and cities should also provide additional hazard pay to child care workers who are in classrooms during the pandemic. Investing in the early education workforce, which is disproportionately made up of women of color, is a necessary beginning step in expanding access to high-quality child care. See more on this here.

Methodology

The GenForward February survey is a project of Professor Cathy J. Cohen at the University of Chicago. Interviews were conducted with a

representative sample from GenForwardSM, a nationally representative survey panel of adults ages 18–36, recruited and administered by NORC at the University of Chicago.

A total of 3,365 interviews were conducted between February 7 and February 20, 2020 with adults ages 18–36, including completed interviews with 894 African-American young adults, 508 Asian-American young adults, 914 Latinx young adults, 1018 white young adults, and 31 young adults with other racial and ethnic backgrounds. The survey was offered in English and Spanish and via telephone and web modes.

The GenForward survey was built from two sample sources:

Fifty-three percent of the completed interviews are sourced from NORC’s AmeriSpeak® Panel and from the Black Youth Project (BYP) panel of young adults recruited by NORC. AmeriSpeak is a probability-based panel that also uses address-based sample but sourced from the NORC National Frame with enhanced sample coverage. During the initial recruitment phase of the AmeriSpeak panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face). The BYP sample is from a probability-based household panel that uses an address-based sample from a registered voter database of the entire United States. Households were selected using stratified random sampling to support over-sampling of households with African Americans, Latinxs, and Asian Americans ages 18–36. NORC contacted sampled households by U.S. mail and by telephone, inviting them to register and participate in public opinion surveys twice a month.

The AmeriSpeak panel sample was supplemented with respondents from the Dynata nonprobability online opt-in panel. Forty-seven percent of the completed interviews are sourced from the Dynata panel. To help to reduce potential bias in the nonprobability sample, Dynata attempted to balance the nonprobability respondent sample by age, race and ethnicity, gender, and partisanship. In order to incorporate the nonprobability sample, NORC used TrueNorth calibration services, an innovative hybrid calibration approach developed at NORC based on small area estimation methods in order to explicitly account for potential bias associated with the nonprobability sample. The purpose of TrueNorth calibration is to adjust the weights for the nonprobability sample so as to bring weighted distributions of the nonprobability sample in line with the population distribution for characteristics correlated with the survey variables. Such calibration adjustments help to reduce potential bias, yielding more accurate population estimates.

Panelists on both the BYP and AmeriSpeak panels are invited to register for the panel via the web or by telephone to participate in public opinion surveys.

Of the 3,365 completed interviews in the GenForward July survey, 94 percent were completed by web and 6 percent by telephone. The survey completion rate is 19.7 percent. The weighted AAPOR RR3 panel recruitment rate is 15.9 percent and the weighted household panel retention rate is 85.2 percent, for a cumulative AAPOR Response Rate 3 of 2.7 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 2.36 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. Among racial and ethnic subgroups, the margin of sampling error at the 95 percent confidence level is +/- 3.54 percentage points for African Americans, +/- 4.46 percentage points for Asian Americans, +/- 4.71 percentage points for Latinxs, and +/- 5.72 percentage points for whites. Among partisan groups, the margin of sampling error at the 95 percent confidence level is +/- 3.11 percentage points for Democrats, +/- 4.59 percentage points for Republicans, and +/- 5.49 percentage points for Independents.

To encourage cooperation, respondents were offered incentives for completing the survey that ranged from the cash-equivalent of \$3 to the cash-equivalent of \$10.

The interviews from the two probability-based sample sources were combined for statistical weighting and analysis. The combined panel samples provide sample coverage of approximately 97 percent of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box-only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings. The statistical weights incorporate the appropriate probability of selection for the BYP and AmeriSpeak samples and nonresponse adjustments, and also raking ratio adjustments to population benchmarks for 18–64-year-old adults. A poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any non-coverage or under- and over-sampling resulting from the study-specific sample design. The poststratification process was done separately for each racial/ethnic group and involved the following variables: age, gender, education, and census region. The weighted data, which reflect the U.S. population of adults ages 18–36, and the 18–36-year-old populations for African Americans, Latinxs, Asian Americans, and non-Latinx whites, were used for all analyses.

Related link: 87% of millennials and Gen Zers say child-care costs affect their decision to have kids [3]

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