

UK government rejects request by thousands of women to examine childcare costs The Guardian, 8 March 2022 ^[1]

On International Women's Day petitioners are told there are no plans to look into issue

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EXCERPTS

Tens of thousands of women who asked the government to look into crippling expensive childcare costs in the UK had their demands for an inquiry rejected by the government on International Women's Day.

A petition calling for an independent review of childcare funding and affordability gathered 113,713 signatures, and triggered a debate on childcare in parliament.

But at 3.36am on International Women's Day those that had signed the petition were told the government had no plans to look into the cost and availability of childcare in an email from the petitions committee, which published the government's response to its report on the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on new parents.

In September last year a survey shared with the Guardian revealed that 96% of more than 20,000 working parents said ministers were not doing enough to support parents with the cost and availability of childcare while 97% said childcare in the UK was too expensive.

The survey revealed low-income parents and those on universal credit were resorting to using food banks as a result of the high cost of childcare.

The petitions committee stated that government response also "fails to commit" dedicated catch-up funding to deal with the backlog in parental mental health and health visiting services and "repeats the government's commitment, originally given in its response to the committee's first report on this issue, to strengthening redundancy protections for new and expectant mothers, but again fails to set a timetable for doing so".

The government said it had announced £500m in the 2021 autumn spending review for early years services, including mental health services for new parents. It added: "Tax-free childcare is a great offer for working parents."

In its response to the committee, the Department for Education said the need for a review had been debated twice and while the government "recognised the need for ongoing collaboration and discussion on the issue" it had been "collectively concluded that a formal review is not needed".

Joeli Brearley, the founder of Pregnant Then Screwed, said it was "quite astounding" that the news had been delivered on International Women's Day.

"Affordable childcare is a critical component of gender equality. Without it hundreds of thousands of mothers are forced out of their jobs, whilst 84% say that the cost of childcare has had a negative impact on their ability to progress their career," she said. "We will never have gender equality whilst women cannot afford to go to work. Happy International Women's Day to you too!"

According to data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the UK has the third most expensive childcare system in the world, behind only Slovakia and Switzerland; a full-time place costs £12,376 a year on average.

Analysis released on Tuesday by Scottish Widows reveals that women retiring after 65 will save half as much money as men. Time out of the workplace and part-time work mean the average woman will need to work an extra 37 years to give her the same pension pot as a male counterpart.

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: child care costs ^[4]

affordability ^[5]

child care funding ^[6]

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