

UK childcare costs soar by more than £2,000 in a decade, TUC says ^[1]

Analysis shows average nursery fees for children under two have risen by £185 month since Tories took office

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPT

The cost of childcare has soared over the past decade and is now more than £2,000 a year higher than it was in 2010, according to analysis from the Trades Union Congress (TUC).

As people in the UK struggle with the cost of living crisis, parents face some of the highest childcare costs among leading economies, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The TUC said its analysis showed the average annual nursery bill for a family with a child under two had increased by 44% since 2010, from £4,992 to £7,212 in 2021.

It said nursery fees for under-twos had risen by £185 a month – or £2,200 a year – since the Conservatives took office. Statutory maternity pay has fallen in value at the same time. It was worth £151.97 a week in 2021/22, £5 a week less than in 2010/11, it said.

“Childcare should be affordable for all, but parents are spending a massive chunk of their pay packets on childcare bills while their wages stagnate,” said the TUC’s general secretary, Frances O’Grady.

Availability is also shrinking. Only 57% of local authorities report sufficient childcare places available for children under two.

A TUC poll of working parents with preschool children published in March revealed that 32% spent more than a third of their wages on childcare.

Joeli Brearley, the founder of Pregnant Then Screwed, which wants an independent review of childcare funding and affordability, said: “This is a cost parents are absorbing so that they can work and financially contribute to the economy, but extortionate costs are pricing them out of the labour market and back into the home.”

The TUC is calling for the childcare sector to receive financial help from the government to make it more affordable and increase wages for childcare workers, and criticised the government’s mooted plans to cut staffing ratios.

O’Grady said it was “the last thing we need”. “It would just put more pressure on underpaid and undervalued childcare workers,” she said.

Ellen Broome, the managing director of the Coram Family and Childcare charity, said the service had to be seen as infrastructure to boost economic recovery and narrow the attainment gap between the richest and poorest children.

UK parents can get “tax-free childcare” for children and working parents can get 30 funded hours of childcare a week for three and four-year-olds for 38 weeks of the year. It emerged in November, however, that just a fraction of the parents eligible for help were taking up the offer. Figures showed a £2.37bn underspend on tax-free childcare since 2017.

“We want the government to reallocate the billions of pounds in underspend from the tax-free childcare scheme to ease the burden on low-income families,” Broome said.

A Department for Education spokesperson said it was working across government to improve cost, choice and availability of childcare and had created a package of support for the most vulnerable children worth more than £1bn.

“The education secretary and prime minister have been clear that supporting families with the cost of living and access to childcare is a priority,” they said.

Region: Europe ^[3]

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