

Family-friendly policies and the motherhood employment gap during the COVID-19 recovery ^[1]

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Abstract

The lockdowns and school closures caused by COVID-19 have underscored the critical need for both family-friendly policies—such as paid parental leave and affordable childcare—and labor-friendly and equal rights policies. In September 2021, the existing childcare system—which relies on private financing by parents—was deemed unworkable by the US Treasury due to several market failures, making a strong case for federal childcare investment to support both women and a thriving economy.

However, to date, Congress has failed to enact national legislation to offer long-term relief for families. As a result, family-friendly policies remain determined by state. They can thus vary widely from state to state and, when considered alongside state labor market policies, yield starkly different employment results for women and families depending on where they live.

A new Roosevelt Institute issue brief finds that state adoption of family-friendly policies has had a positive impact on female labor force participation, demonstrating the impact state-level policies can have on both women and the economy as a whole. Not only does increased women's labor force participation increase household incomes for families and help address gender imbalances in the labor market; but as more women join the workforce, overall wages tend to rise, GDP increases, and the economy grows.

- By analyzing the motherhood employment gap, which measures the difference in employment rates between women with young children (0-13) and women with older children (14-19), across states during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue brief shows that:
- Family-friendly policies play a larger role in the lives of women with younger children compared to those with older children;
- The correlation between the motherhood employment gap and the availability of family-friendly policies persists even when accounting for education, race, and age, but is particularly wide for young women of color with lower levels of education, indicating that they might benefit the most from these policies; and
- There is a positive correlation between states with family-friendly policies and those that protect women's reproductive rights.

Related link: 2 maps show how childcare access and parental leave are worse in states that have restricted abortions ^[5]

Region: United States ^[6]

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