

Nursery for under-twos costs parents in England 65% of wage ^[1]

Number of women not working to look after family has risen by 5% in past year

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Source: The Guardian

Format: Article

Publication Date: 7 Oct 2022

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Full-time nursery for children under the age of two costs almost two-thirds of a parent's weekly take-home pay in England, according to new analysis.

Parents in Scotland fare slightly better, paying half (51%) of one salary for childcare, while in Wales the figure is 63%, and in England 65%, according to analysis by Business in the Community (BITC), the Prince's Responsible Business Network.

The analysis, which uses the Coram family and childcare survey results alongside Office for National Statistics (ONS) income data, shows parents in the east of England and inner London spend the greatest percentage of their take-home pay on childcare, handing over 71% of their weekly earnings.

But parents in towns and cities outside the capital also face crippling childcare costs. In Blackpool, with a median weekly take-home pay of £344, a full-time nursery place costs £238 a week or 69% of a parent's weekly take-home pay. In Newport, Wales, the median weekly pay is £396 and nursery costs £247 or 62% of the wage packet.

Figures from the ONS show that the number of women not working to look after family has risen by 5% in the past year, the first sustained increase in at least 30 years.

The figures should be a "wake-up call", said Katy Neep, the gender director at Business in the Community. "Childcare costs on top of rising household bills are putting working parents, particularly women, in a very difficult position. Many working women are having to decide whether working is even worth it when they look at what is left in their bank accounts after paying for childcare."

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The analysis comes as research suggests mothers are falling into debt to cover the cost of childcare, with one in 10 who responded to a survey on the website workingmums.co.uk saying they are in £20,000 or more worth of debt, while 49% were in debt of some kind, excluding their mortgage.

The survey, which garnered responses from 2,264 users of the site, found:

- 51% of mums said the cost of living was affecting their childcare decisions
- 58% of mums were looking to change jobs, increase their hours or do an additional job, but 49% said lack of childcare was stopping them working more hours
- 49% had not had a pay rise in line with inflation
- 68% said their careers had stalled after having kids

Mandy Garner, a spokesperson for workingmums.co.uk, said the chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng's pledge to tighten benefit rules for part-time workers to force them to increase their hours just wasn't possible for many mothers.

"Increasing hours isn't actually possible if you don't have childcare support," she said. "What the chancellor is proposing will only push the very mums who need support the most into more debt and more worry. It's time the government lifted mums out of this never-ending cycle."

Pressure is growing for the government to help parents with childcare costs, as the cost of living crisis hits. More than 10,000 mothers and families are expected to join the writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the actors Bronagh Waugh and Sarah Solemani on the UK-wide March of the Mummies on 29 October.

Joeli Brearley, CEO and founder of Pregnant Then Screwed, said a decade of neglect had created a "unaffordable, inaccessible and dysfunctional childcare" sector.

"If parents are unable to financially contribute to the economy then we miss out on skills and income, whilst dishing out benefits to keep families from destitution. It makes no sense," she said.

“The recent mini budget made it very clear that this government neither understands or cares about the challenges mothers are experiencing. Women’s economic empowerment hinges on a system that works for us, and the government needs to start taking this, us, seriously.”

Region: Europe ^[3]

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