

Mums need cash for childcare - to get out of career quarantine ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

It possibly came as a surprise to many parents in Dublin that the average crèche fees per month are €750.

Clearly rates in more rural areas pulled down the average cost. The reality for Dubliners is that their fees are more like €900 or up to €1,000 a month per child.

If you actually break down the per hour cost of minding your most precious thing on earth, it is actually less than the minimum wage. €750 divided by four 40 hour weeks works out at less than €4.70 per hour. At €1,000 per month, it works out at just €6.25.

It sounds like small change, but when you multiply all of those hours out per year, no matter where you live it's expensive, costing up to €18,000 or more annually for two children, with not a single cent of a tax credit or break.

No wonder when women, and it is mostly women, take out the abacus and factor in the cost of going to work (the transport, clothing, lunches, taxes) it's not within a country mile of being worth their while.

All families need better access to affordable, high-quality child care. But the debate about childcare costs in this country often revolves around the squeezed middle - the coping classes.

What about lone parents, mostly women, on social welfare, who lose more and more of their benefits the higher their earnings become.

It must feel like the state literally punishes them for their efforts to lift themselves out of poverty.

You try to get off social welfare, but may end up not better off. Effectively paying for the privilege of working, it's also known as the welfare trap.

Just last month a European Commission report highlighted that a lack of child care provision meant low levels of female participation in the workplace and if affordable childcare was provided for women it would ultimately reduce poverty levels and social exclusion for children.

Parents who currently stay at home to care for their children would be able to work if they wished to do so.

The report said this would increase family incomes and reduce dependence on benefits.

The bottom line is that the current system here is not working for parents. It isn't helping women, children, the taxpayer or the economy.

Now that we appear to be getting out of the recession, isn't it time the government looked at helping mothers?

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