

Background

With major childcare expansion underway in England, there has been mounting pressure on the Welsh Government to improve the support available to families on this side of the border. We asked parents and carers of children under five about their experience of using childcare, the impact this has on their families and what would help them.

The headline findings presented in this briefing are based on an online survey of **780 parents and carers of children under five years old**.¹ The survey was conducted by [Arad](#) on behalf of [Women's Equality Network \(WEN\) Wales](#) and ran from mid-March to mid-May 2025.

Key findings

1. Lack of childcare causes stress at home by negatively affecting parents and home life

- **84%** of respondents said their childcare arrangements have a somewhat or very **positive impact on their child**
- But almost **3 in 10 (28%)** of parents or carers said their **childcare** arrangements have a somewhat or very **negative impact on themselves**
- **41%** said their childcare arrangements have a somewhat or very **negative impact on their home life**.

2. Adjustments and sacrifices to manage childcare make a dent in family finances that is felt by adults and children

- **60%** of respondents had to **reduce their work hours**
- **42%** had to **reduce spending on essentials** like food, rent or heating
- **35%** had to **reduce spending** on non-essentials for their children, like **clothing, toys or activities**.

¹In total, 883 parents and carers responded to the survey. Of these, 103 did not have children aged 0–4. They were given the opportunity to share comments on childcare before exiting the survey.

3. Lack of childcare is hindering parents' work and education

- **89%** of respondents who **do not use any formal childcare (119 responses)** are **unable to work or study** as much as they would like
- Among those respondents who are using formal childcare, the figure of those **unable to work or study** as much as they would like is still as high as **60% (345 responses)**
- Figures are **worse for families with below average income**, with **two-thirds** of respondents unable to work or study as much as they would like (66%), compared to **a little over half (55%)** for families with **above average income**.

4. Childcare costs are hindering work and education, but so are issues with transport and inflexible hours

- **Cost of childcare is the main reason** preventing work or study (**83%**), followed by issues with **drop-offs, pick-ups or transport between settings (35%)** and childcare **not being available at the times needed (32%)**
- Among parents and carers of **three- to four-year-olds**, **almost half (45%)** said **difficulties with drop-offs, pick-ups or transport between settings** are a reason why they cannot work or study as much as they would like
- When asked what would enable them to work or study as much as they wanted, the vast majority said **more affordable childcare (83%)**, with **almost half (46%)** responding **more flexible childcare**, such as irregular hours or part-time care.

5. Families struggle to find clear information on childcare

- Nearly **70%** of all respondents struggle to find **information on financial support** for childcare (**69%**)
- **Almost half (45%)** struggle to find **information on childcare options** in their area.

6. The childcare needs of families who are already using childcare are not met

- **72%** of respondents (478 responses) would use more childcare if it was **affordable and available**
- This figure rose to **81%** among respondents with **children under the age of two** (179 responses).

These initial findings point to the following key areas for action and policy development for the Welsh Government:

- Reduce the costs of childcare for families – especially for children under three years
- Improve information on financial support with childcare costs and on local childcare options
- Simplify the delivery and application process so that families can take up the support they are entitled to
- Work with the childcare sector on offering more flexible hours and improving cost transparency.

Further analysis will take place over the next months, with a final report and detailed recommendations being published in the autumn.

For an initial discussion of these findings, please contact jessica@wenwales.org.uk.

About Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales

Our vision is of a Wales free from gender discrimination where all have equal authority and opportunity to shape society and their own lives. We work with our vibrant coalition of organisational and individual members to transform society. Our work sits under three pillars: we will connect, campaign and champion women so our vision is realised.

This research is funded by the [abrdn Financial Fairness Trust](#).