

# After parental leave

## Incentives for parents with young children to return to the labour market

The [original full study](#)<sup>1</sup> discusses the employment situation of parents with young children (that is, those under the age of 6) in the EU and **factors that facilitate or hinder parents' return to the labour market**. The study identifies incentives and interventions that could help parents return to work after family-related leave, and which could improve employment outcomes for inactive or unemployed parents. The study outlines possible additional actions at the EU level.

### Background

In 2019, nearly [42 million adults in the EU](#) lived in households with at least one child aged 6 under<sup>2</sup>. Only 32% of them (13 million) lived in households where all adults were working full-time. Most – 16 million (39%) – lived in households where **at least one adult was not working**, and one adult was working. A further 9 million (22%) lived in households where **one of all working adults worked part-time**, and nearly 3 million (7%) lived in households where **none of the adults were working**<sup>3</sup>.

While different practices and policies are aimed at supporting parents in returning to work, a number of factors still discourage them from doing so. The study supports the work of the EMPL committee by identifying factors that affect parents' decisions to return to work.

### Key findings

The work patterns of parents with young children in the EU do not change much over time, and show that:

- New **mums are less likely to be in employment** and more likely to be working part-time, compared to women without young children.
- New **dads are more likely to be in employment** than those without young children.
- New parents (both mothers and fathers) are more likely than those without young children to be **self-employed and working from home**.



The factors that affect parents' decisions to return to work can be grouped in four categories: **socio-demographic and household characteristics** (such as gender, education, migrant background, number of children, family type and networks); **societal attitudes and cultural values** (which shape the gender roles and the distribution of unpaid care work among men and women); **employment characteristics** (such as forms of employment, job satisfaction, flexibility and workplace culture); and **policy levers** (mainly family leave, childcare options, job protection and promotion of flexible working).

Check out the [original full study](#) by scanning this QR code!



There is a wide range of **options available for employers** to help parents with young children return to work, including: keeping in touch with parents during leave, career development or coaching upon return, childcare provisions or breastfeeding facilities at the workplace (if feasible), and supporting fathers in taking leave (by offering packages that go beyond statutory requirements or having role models within the organisation).

**Table 1: Factors affecting parents' return to work**

Category	Factor
<b>Socio-demographic and household characteristics</b>	Gender Education Immigration status and migrant background Number of young children Household type (single parents and couples) Family and social networks (informal childcare)
<b>Attitudes and values</b>	Gender roles Distribution of unpaid work
<b>Employment characteristics</b>	Form of employment Job factors (e.g. job satisfaction, flexibility) Employer family-friendly practices Employer/line manager attitudes
<b>Policy levers</b>	Availability and affordability of formal childcare Family-related leave provisions Legislation to promote flexible working Job protection legislation Child and family cash benefits

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The level of managerial support affects parents' experiences at work and – alongside **job quality, work conditions and workplace culture** – can play a role in making a decision to return to work.

Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) support people who are inactive or unemployed to find paid work through training, job-search support, job subsidies or benefits. **ALMPs tend to focus on single parents** as a vulnerable group, but could be failing to recognise the needs of other groups of parents (for example those with migrant backgrounds, with more children or with children with disabilities). As a result, there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of ALMPs for those populations.

## Key recommendations

Areas where the EU might take new or additional actions include:

- Reinforcing efforts to improve gender equality by addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid (care) work and reducing the gender pay gap, both of which would help to increase women's – and therefore mothers' – employment;
- Reviewing the need to further enforce or strengthen leave provision for the self-employed and people in precarious employment; and
- Addressing evidence and knowledge gaps highlighted in this study by conducting additional research to further help different groups of parents with young children.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/658190/IPOL\\_STU\(2020\)658190\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/658190/IPOL_STU(2020)658190_EN.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat (2020), *Working parents with young children in the EU*. Accessed on September 2, 2020: (lfst\_hhwhacc), available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20200501-1>.

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat (2020), *ibid*.

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IP/A/EMPL/2020-26; Manuscript completed: October 2020; Date of publication: November 2020

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