

7 October 2020

PRESS RELEASE

The need for childcare is greater than ever

“The figures are stark. Working parents trying to give their best to their jobs and help the recovery are fighting on another front – poor availability of childcare,” says Geraldine McGahey, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission.

“We know that 72% of workers in Northern Ireland with children under 16 live in a household where all adults work, meaning that they are likely to need childcare. And we also know that almost 20% of childcare facilities have not re-opened since lockdown was lifted – a small number of these are closed for non-COVID related reasons. There seems to be an increasing demand and a dwindling pool of childcare providers.”

The Commission’s Discrimination Advice Line has had calls from parents who have been struggling to balance the demands of work and childcare. Some employers are responding well, accommodating where possible requests for flexible working and working from home, but other people have sought advice because they are threatened with redundancy if they don’t come into the workplace.

The impact of even less availability of all forms of childcare, paid or unpaid, due to the coronavirus could mean that parents and carers may struggle to keep their jobs and be able to support their families. Good childcare provision is key to increasing women’s economic participation and women’s independence and in promoting equality between men and women.

“The need for a strategy to ensure affordable, good quality, accessible childcare has never been greater,” said Ms McGahey. “It is a matter of great concern to us that the Minister for Education has told the Assembly that there is no certainty of timescales for delivery and work on the Strategy and currently no funding to develop an Executive Childcare Strategy or early education and childcare for children aged 3-4, something that was committed to in New Decade, New Approach.

“Whilst of course we recognise the particular problems posed by the pandemic and that a revised Childcare Strategy will require Executive approval and significant new and sustained funding, it is also the case that the response to the COVID-19 crisis has added to, not diminished, the need for appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare provision. It is our view that better childcare provision is fundamental to both supporting the workforce to deliver economic recovery and maximising economic participation, and we need it sooner rather than later.”

Notes for editors

- The Equality Commission's new [Childcare Infographic is online](#) (pdf)
- Read our policy update on [Childcare in the context of COVID-19](#) (pdf, 2020)
- [Family Support NI](#) has up-to-date information for childcare providers and for parents looking for childcare and advice about childcare costs.