

Roundtable: Motherhood Penalty and the Gender Pay Gap

4th February 2026

Working Families



Secretariat for the
APPG on flexible and
family-friendly
working

Discussion points

- ✦ The [Office for National Statistics](#)' long-term study shows a £65k loss of earnings for women in the first five years of being a mother. The analysis showed variations depending on age, ethnicity, income level and region, with younger women and women in London showing the biggest gaps, and those in lower-income jobs more likely to leave jobs after having a baby. An increase in women returning to work when their child reaches three suggests women's decisions are impacted by the availability of childcare.
- ✦ [Make Mothers Matter](#), in partnership with Pregnant Then Screwed, has conducted research comparing the experience of mothers of under-fives in Europe. The study found the UK mothers experience the biggest negative impact on their careers when they become mothers.
- ✦ Rather than personal choice, women face structural barriers in returning to work. Many don't return because their employer won't accommodate their flexible working request, or they experience discrimination or feel unsupported on their return, leading to their decision to leave the workplace.
- ✦ The picture is worse for single parents, parents of multiples, parents of disabled children and parents who are disabled themselves, all of whom are more likely to reduce their hours or change roles.
- ✦ According to a TUC report, there is an increase in the number of women being refused flexible working, and a rise in women reporting being harassed, bullied or sidelined at work after having a child. In addition, [TUC polling](#) found there has been a rise in men feeling they have been treated unfairly at the point where they asked for shared parental leave or paternity leave.
- ✦ Transitioning to becoming a mother and returning to work is when women lose income, but also status and progression, which jeopardises their long-term financial security.
- ✦ The inability to earn as much and opting out of workplace pensions to afford childcare contributes to a pension pay gap, estimated at men having an average private pension pot of £155k and women have £88k, as identified by [Women's Budget Group](#) research.

- ✦ The gender gap creates financial pressure on men and limits their ability to be active fathers, impacting the mental health of both parents and affecting family relationships.

Suggested actions

For Government

- ✦ The Government's Gender Pay Gap Action Plans offer an opportunity to promote inclusive and family-friendly working polices to millions of workers. To ensure this policy has the intended impact the government should ensure that employers have guidance on what best practice looks like in their industries.
- ✦ Following the review of parental leave, improving statutory paternity leave would enable fathers to step up to equal parenting from the off, improving relationships and normalising shared childcare, as well as supporting mothers' recovery and wellbeing.
- ✦ Childcare reform should ensure the cost of childcare isn't at a level that pressures women to reduce their hours.
- ✦ Reviewing pension policy to ensure schemes aren't discriminatory and those with caring responsibilities are supported. For example, reviewing the level of pension auto-enrolment and lowering the age at which women contribute, and introducing mechanisms to recognise unpaid care work in pension entitlements.

For employers

- ✦ Gender equality action plans are a mechanism for employers to do more to close the gap, but only if they are ambitious and robust enough. An action planning framework could help employers get the most out of these, and possible inclusion of a risk assessment.
- ✦ Considering the 'glass middle' that prevents mothers working part-time from progressing into management, employers should be encouraged to provide think about pathways into senior positions – this could be though job shares or training opportunities with Skills England.
- ✦ Employers should review salary ranges regularly and scrutinise to ensure consistency between genders. Pay and benefits should be transparent so prospective candidates, aren't put off applying for job openings or inadvertently disadvantaged during the recruitment process.
- ✦ Employers can demonstrate a commitment to family-friendly working and continuous development with a Working Families [membership](#) or by becoming a certified [Family Inclusive Workplace](#), where benefits of family-friendly working are promoted to both men and women.