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Early years childcare is expanding - but is it enough?

Ginnette Gantschuk, NEC and national women's forum member explores the lack of affordable childcare in early years settings and how free childcare could make a difference to working parents and grandparents.

The childcare sector is in crisis. It's a vital part of our infrastructure and should be an enabler for women to go to work. But frequently we see women struggle to remain in employment. Failure from the employer to give enhanced support to women members not only affects our work prospects and our ability to fulfil our ambitions but equally impacts on the development of our children and, more widely, the productivity of the organisation and our economy.

Early years support is expanding. The proposed plans to increase free childcare provision for early years is welcome, especially given the struggle to make ends meet. But without investment in the childcare sector to address pay and conditions to retain staff, the plans threaten to overburden a sector that is already in crisis!

Our women members need stronger workplace policies to support those who want to remain employed. Increasingly, we are seeing mothers' and grandmothers' requests denied if they urgently ask for time off to cover gaps when childcare support breaks down. Ultimately this lack of support forces women to consider their employment position. The [TUC](#) is calling for a comprehensive strategy to address the care sector workforce crisis in England. As women reps and members, we need to press the case to our own employers for more effective support to help women stay in employment.

Our members need to be able to access flexible working from day one, including home working. We also demand additional time off to cover breakdowns in childcare provision as well as planned and unforeseen building closures such as the current reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) crisis in our schools and public buildings.

Organising in our branches is crucial in achieving these gains for women!