

Should the Government Help Provide Child Care?



Any working parent knows child care is an economic issue. The ability to find and pay for good daycare has a big influence on whether parents work for pay and [how many children](#) they decide to have.

A growing number of governments around the world are waking up to that fact. In Japan, leaders worried about boosting sluggish fertility rates while also bringing more women into the workforce have decided to spend \$225 million to expand day-care facilities, says this [recent article](#) in Bloomberg Business Week. Japanese economists calculate that raising women's employment rate from the current 67.5% would boost consumer spending enough to create an additional \$70 billion in wealth, as measured by the combined value of stocks in the [Nikkei 225 index](#).

In France, leaders have stimulated a sharp increase in low fertility rates, by subsidizing day care and giving financial support to families with infants and toddlers, says the [article](#). French women now give birth to an average 1.96 children each, up from 1.78 a decade ago, easing worries that future shrinkage in the population of productive workers will hurt the economy and the government's ability to support pensioners.

Parents' stories are remarkably similar worldwide. In the [Business Week article](#), a 33-year-old Japanese mother of a two-year-old daughter says she would love to have another baby, but finding day care is so difficult that she can't imagine handling that juggle. Already, the nursery in her apartment complex in Yokohama is too full to accept her daughter, forcing her to take two trains and a long walk to get to daycare and work each morning. "I realize that the clock is ticking," she says, "but unless I get more backup from the government, it's difficult to imagine having a second child."

Another working mother, a 28-year-old public relations executive, says she is worried that she won't be able to find daycare for her two-year-old son after he turns three, when he will become ineligible for her employer's nursery. She would like to keep her job, but "it would almost be a miracle for my child to get into any of the government-run centers," she says.

A California mother told a similar tale to a Congressional committee in November. In [testimony](#) before the U.S. House Education and Labor Subcommittee, Claudia Zamorano said she wanted to finish training as a cosmetologist and work full-time, but her inability to

find and pay for child care for her two kids kept her confined to a low-paying part-time job as a nanny. "If I had child care, I could work more and I could pay more taxes ... (and) help my local economy," she said in testimony to the committee.

Many U.S. parents know what it is like to see their children shuffled to the bottom of a [long waiting list](#) for child care. What's more, child-care costs here are rising steadily. Center-based care for an infant cost \$4,560 to \$15,895 last year, and center care for a four-year-old ranged from \$4,055 to \$11,680 a year, according to the nonprofit [National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies](#).

[Child-care advocates](#) in the U.S. have called on government to increase support for high-quality child care. The 2008 economic-stimulus package contained \$2 billion in child-care aid, bringing total federal child-care aid to \$7 billion last year.

Many people, however, prefer that government stay out of early-childhood care, leaving responsibility to families and holding down costs to taxpayers.

Readers, would you have made different career or family decisions if high-quality child care were cheap and widely available? Should government in the U.S. provide more financial support for child care? Or do you believe families should manage their own child-care responsibilities?