

U.S. Mothers Leave Workforce at Fastest Rate in 40 Years as New 2026 Childcare Index Ranks Every State and 250 Cities

A new 100-point Childcare Index ranks all 50 states and the 250 largest U.S. cities. None scored above 80 — and mothers are leaving work in record numbers.

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, UNITED STATES, May 5, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- American mothers of young children are leaving the workforce at the fastest pace in four decades, even as a year of infant center-based care now costs the typical American family more than median annual rent, according to the 2026 State of Childcare Report released today by Beverly Research. The first-of-its-kind composite scored all 50 states and the country's 250 largest cities on a 100-point Childcare Index; not a single city scored above 80, and the country is losing an estimated \$172 billion a year in lost parent earnings and productivity to a childcare market the report concludes "no longer clears."

Between January and June 2025, the labor force participation rate for mothers ages 25-44 with children under 5 fell from 69.7 percent to 66.9 percent — a 2.8-point drop in six months and the steepest decline in more than 40 years for mothers of young children, according to Census Current Population Survey data analyzed by the University of Kansas Care Board. Over the same window, U.S. infant center-based care averaged \$17,163 a year — about \$1,000 more than median annual gross rent and more than in-state public college tuition in 38 states — while the workers minding those infants earned a median wage of \$15.41 an hour, a level so low that 43 percent of early-educator households now rely on public assistance at an annual taxpayer cost of \$4.7 billion.

KEY FINDINGS

The Index revealed stark disparities. None of the 250 cities scored above 80 — Pearland, Texas topped the ranking at 74, while Sunrise Manor, Nevada finished last at 14. Among 50 states plus the District of Columbia, only North Dakota (71) reached the "Strong" tier; Nevada (23) and Indiana (30) finished in "Crisis." The Las Vegas metropolitan area accounted for five of the ten worst-scoring U.S. cities: Sunrise Manor (14), Paradise (15), Las Vegas (21), North Las Vegas (25), and Spring Valley (26). Counterintuitively, policy generosity did not rescue big states from cost — four of the five most policy-rich states (New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Maryland) finished in the "Strained" tier, and Boston, the most policy-supported large city in the report, scored 43.

Family-side data underscored the strain. The U.S. total fertility rate fell to 1.626 births per woman — the lowest ever recorded — and 71 percent of Americans now say raising children is unaffordable, a 13-point jump in a single year per the 2025 American Family Survey.

The full 2026 State of Childcare Report — all 50 state pages and 250 city rankings [can be found here](#), along with a detailed ranking of [all the states](#).

METHODOLOGY

The Childcare Index is a 0-100 composite weighted across five dimensions: Affordability (30 points), Supply (25), Workforce Health (15), Family Strain (15), and Policy Support (15). Inputs include the U.S. Census ACS 2019-2023, the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau National Database of Childcare Prices, BLS OEWS (May 2024) and QCEW, the [childcaregap.org](#) dataset (September 2025), the NIEER State of Preschool Yearbook 2024, and HHS Administration for Children and Families CCDF reports. Full methodology at [beverly.io/research/methodology](#).

ABOUT BEVERLY RESEARCH

Beverly Research is the independent research arm of Beverly ([beverly.io](#)), founded to help our society understand the current dynamics impacting parents today, and discover insights to raise our kids better. Beverly Research intends to refresh the Index annually to track the composite score across all states and cities. Current Beverly Research team combines backgrounds in early childhood education, HR operations, finance and research.

Ismail Colak

Beverly US LLC

+1 2038049179

[email us here](#)

Visit us on social media:

[LinkedIn](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Facebook](#)

[X](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/910331254>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2026 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.