

# 42 Million Parents Whose Households Didn't Move to Teleworking May Face Difficult Trade-Offs

*Families Can Face Challenges in Finding Safe, Affordable Child Care*

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**Fewer than two in five parents** had any adult in their household move to telework because of the pandemic.

Only **one in six parents with household incomes under \$50,000** report that any adult in their household moved to telework.

**Less than a third of Black and Latinx parents** report that any adults in their household moved to telework compared with close to half of white and Asian American parents. Income differences largely explain these variations across groups.

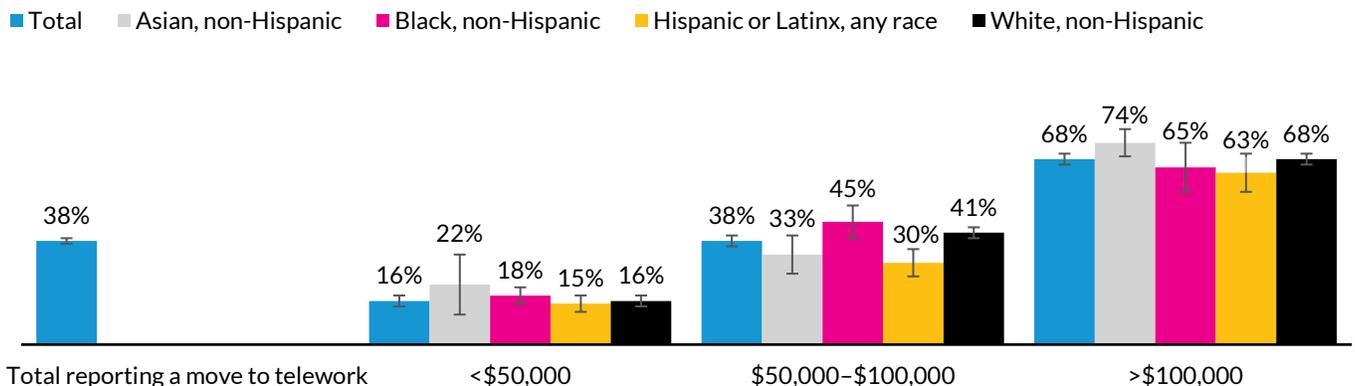
Despite the media focus on the challenges of telecommuting parents, 42 million American parents—including the vast majority of those with low incomes—have not had an adult in their household move to telework during the COVID-19 pandemic. These parents can face challenging trade-offs between earning a living to support their family, protecting their family from COVID-19, and ensuring their children have the care and education they need to thrive. Such trade-offs can have serious consequences for their family's health and well-being and can be even harder given many child care programs and schools are closed or partially open.

## WHICH FAMILIES SWITCHED TO TELEWORKING?

Telework is unevenly spread across adults in households with at least one child younger than 18. According to data from the Federal Household Pulse Survey conducted in early September,

- **Only 38 percent of parents report that any adult in their household moved to teleworking because of the pandemic.** This translates into about 42 million parents reporting that no adults had switched to telework.
- **Only 16 percent of parents with household incomes below \$50,000 a year report that any adult in their household moved to telework.** In contrast,

## Share of Parents Reporting Moving to Telework Because of the COVID-19 Pandemic, by Income and by Race and Ethnicity



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**Source:** Federal Household Pulse Survey, September 2–14, 2020. **Notes:** Data shown are people who responded “Yes” to the question, “Did any adults in this household substitute some or all of their typical in-person work for telework because of the coronavirus pandemic, including yourself?” People who responded “no” are counted as households where no adult switched to telework. Vertical lines indicate margins of error.

those with incomes above \$100,000 are more than four times as likely (68 percent) to report that an adult in their household moved to telework because of the pandemic.

- **Less than a third of Black and Latinx parents** (31 and 27 percent, respectively) **report that any adult in their household moved to telecommuting**, compared with 43 percent of white and 50 percent of Asian American parents. Income differences seem to drive this finding; racial and ethnic differences largely disappear within each income level.
- **Only about a quarter of single parents reported moving to telecommuting** compared with almost half of married parents. The proportion was even lower (22 percent) for single parents living with no other adult in the household.

## MANY WORKING PARENTS FACE DIFFICULT CHILD CARE TRADE-OFFS

Parents who must go to work each day need someone supervising and supporting their children's learning and safety. Yet they can face very tough trade-offs in simultaneously meeting their need to work outside the home, protecting their family's safety and health, and supporting their children's development.

- **The stakes are high for parents with low incomes**, particularly Black and Latinx families. On top of significant financial challenges, these families face the highest risks of COVID-19 exposure because of structural inequities. Any choice they make risks jeopardizing their family's and children's well-being.
- **The lack of safe affordable child care options makes these trade-offs much harder.** Large numbers of child care programs have closed or reopened with reduced enrollment and higher costs during the pandemic. Many schools are operating **online**, and child caregivers and providers face serious **financial challenges** as well as hard choices about protecting their health or continuing to care for children.
- **Many parents are likely struggling to find and afford care.** Some parents are seeking child care centers, others are seeking **smaller, home-based settings or care by family and friends**. This may be because they want a caregiver they trust who is close by and can care for all their children, are concerned about health risks in group settings, and/or are unable to find or afford other options. And many parents, particularly mothers, are **no longer working** because of child care challenges, with resulting financial hardships.

## HOW POLICYMAKERS CAN HELP NON-TELECOMMUTING WORKING FAMILIES

Federal, state, and local policymakers can take many steps to help parents face these difficult trade-offs.

- **Significantly expand investments in child care assistance** so more eligible families can get help paying for care across the full range of child care settings, including family, friends, and neighbors.
- **Significantly expand investments in the child care sector** to stabilize and support providers and help address the financial and health and safety challenges presented by COVID-19.
- **Make these investments and resources available to the full range of providers**, from family, friend, and neighbor caregivers and small informal providers to family child care homes and center-based programs.

All parents need better support to meet the needs of their children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Helping with child care, in the settings that parents feel are the best for their families, is an essential first step.

## ADDITIONAL READING

### *Meeting the School-Age Child Care Needs of Working Parents Facing COVID-19 Distance Learning*

Gina Adams and Margaret Todd, [urban.is/2ZXsGoE](https://urban.is/2ZXsGoE)

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