

Fears young mothers will lose their jobs as many crèches go to the wall during crisis

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A **CHILDCARE** shortage looms as crèches close down and others will not reopen after the Covid-19 crisis.

Children's Minister Katherine Zappone said the Government is doing all it can to avoid widespread closures.

But in an internal department briefing document, she warns that capacity will be lost in the sector due to the coronavirus crisis.

Ms Zappone said the current crisis was a blow to parents, providers, educators and children who use early years and education services.

Ms Zappone said the wage subsidy scheme that had been set up for the sector – although complex, rigid and far from perfect – tried to deliver something unique.

In the document drawn up last week, she also said that although a lot had been done to improve the childcare sector, a lot more remained.

Childcare for health workers has been a contentious issue in recent weeks. Meanwhile, many parents who work in other sectors have been left wondering how the economy can be reopened without functioning childcare.

Private sector workers will not be entitled to pay if they do not turn up for work because they have no childcare when Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

Parents may face a very harsh economic landscape as the lockdown ends if they have to return to work before crèches and schools have reopened.

Employment solicitor Richard Grogan said the issue of childcare and the return to work was likely to pose a huge problem for private sector workers in the months ahead.

"There is a really serious issue that nobody has addressed," he said.

Priorities:
Children's
Minister
Katherine
Zappone says
more work is
still needed



"It's very simple. You are either an essential service or a business that's reopening that's not an essential service. The employer says, 'we are open for business', and the employee says 'I can't come to work because I don't have anybody to mind my child, I'm afraid to get on the bus, or I would prefer to work remotely'.

"The position is, you don't turn up to work, you don't get paid."

He said without childcare supports it would mainly be younger women who might end up being dismissed and would not be entitled to redundancy payments.

Mr Grogan said a worker in this situation would have to wait longer to qualify for welfare payments.

"Some businesses may offer unpaid leave, but that's only likely to last for a week or two. A lot are not going to hold jobs open forever," he added.

He said this scenario was unlikely to happen in the public service, where he believes staff in this predicament will remain on full pay.

Chief executive of Isme Neil McDonnell said it would be a conundrum for businesses and employees if childcare and the return to work did not go hand in hand.

He said public health experts would have to guide the process and that would be welcome soon. "In the same way health care workers are stymied if they have no childcare solution, the exact same thing is going to apply elsewhere," added Mr McDonnell.

He said employers may try to keep jobs open as long as possible but staff were unlikely to be paid.

Though childcare fees in Ireland are among the highest in the world, a recent EC report said that substantial progress had been made in implementing reforms.

Over warn 'avoid peopl new g

At-risk group from shops and

Philip Ryan
POLITICAL EDITOR

OVER-70s are being told to avoid other people and not to touch anyone in new guidelines on exercising while cocooning.

They will also be told to keep their distance and avoid touching family and friends when rules on visiting are lifted next month.

People who have been asked to cocoon for the past three weeks can from tomorrow leave their homes for daily exercise.

However, new regulations on how older people should act when they are in public insist they "avoid touching people on surfaces".

They are also told to "strictly adhere" to the two-metre social distancing measure and "avoid other people as much as possible".

They are also advised to stay away from shops.

The Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) guidelines for those cocooning have been updated after the Government lifted the ban on older and vulnerable people leaving their homes.

Cocooning recommendations are advisory rather than mandatory, but health officials have insisted older people should remain in their homes because they are most at risk of dying from the virus.

"You are strongly advised to stay at home and avoid any face-to-face contact at the time," the HPSC says.

"However, you may go out for a short walk or exercise beyond your garden or yard."

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