

# Intelligence MEMOS



From: Tammy Schirle and Ana Ferrer  
To: Canadians Concerned About Gender Equity  
Date: October 14, 2022  
Re: **HELPING MOMS FIND THEIR WAY BACK TO WORK**

---

More than 900,000 married parents ages 25 to 59 were either unemployed or not participating in the labour force in 2019. Among them, 21 percent were unemployed (actively searching for employment, waiting for a job to start or temporarily laid off) and 6 percent were non-participants who wanted work but were not actively searching at the time they were surveyed.

The remaining parents without jobs (73 percent) were individuals who were not participating in the labour force and reported they did not even want a job at the time of the survey.

When thinking about policies to promote long-term growth, it is useful to look at the experience of people who would like to work in terms of what they were doing before they started searching. And over the past few decades, it is much more common for unemployed fathers than unemployed mothers to have been laid off from a job before looking for work, whether temporarily or permanently. And, indeed, in 2019, 46 percent of unemployed dads had lost their jobs and many would have been eligible for regular Employment Insurance (EI) benefits and its attendant job-search supports.

Moms are clearly different.

Our new C.D. Howe Institute [E-Brief](#) seeks to characterize parents and their efforts to find work, recognizing that the need to care for children is one of most important factors all parents must consider when determining the ways in which they will participate in the paid labour market.

The goal was to improve our understanding of the challenges and obstacles parents face when looking for work – and the extent to which these challenges are different for mothers and fathers.

We focused on the labour market outcomes of parents who are married (including common-law couples) aged 25 to 59, with children under age 18. We restrict our attention to this group for several reasons. First, those aged 25 to 59 are past typical ages for completing post-secondary education, and do not yet qualify for most public pension benefits in Canada. This age restriction thus allows us to focus attention on the role of children in labour market decisions. Second, the negotiations and constraints involved in the labour market decisions of married parents and unmarried parents are very different, and should be analyzed separately.

With the available data, we can offer only a partial picture of jobless parents' circumstances, but are still able to offer a description of married parents who are without work and their transitions into the paid labour market.

Overall, we are left with the impression that mothers with young children in tow might find it very difficult to search for work in a way that fathers typically do not.

Many fathers search for work following job loss with the help of existing EI programs. Many mothers searching for paid work, however, will not find any EI support as they are often re-entering the labour force after time away caring for children and managing their households. Unlike fathers, the presence of young children appears to be an important factor impeding mothers' search for employment.

In the interests of long-term economic growth and productivity, there is value in minimizing barriers to entering the labour market.

With this in mind, we see a role for policy that supports the job search efforts of all parents, and recognizes that the challenges facing married mothers and fathers are often different

Current policy initiatives, such as shared parental leave provisions and expansions of affordable early learning and childcare services, are effective ways to support parents who want to make their way back to paid work.

Policies that improve mothers' potential earnings can also be effective for bringing more mothers into the labour market. For example, policies can work to reduce gender pay gaps or offer training for better-paying jobs. Finally, policies that offer financial support to cover the costs of job search (such as childcare and transportation) would ensure parents have the resources they need to find their way back to the paid labour market.

*Tammy Schirle is a Professor of Economics at Wilfrid Laurier University and C.D. Howe Institute Roger Phillips Scholar of Social Policy. Ana Ferrer is a Professor of Economics at the University of Waterloo.*

*To send a comment or leave feedback, email us at [blog@cdhowe.org](mailto:blog@cdhowe.org).*

*The views expressed here are those of the authors. The C.D. Howe Institute does not take corporate positions on policy matters.*