



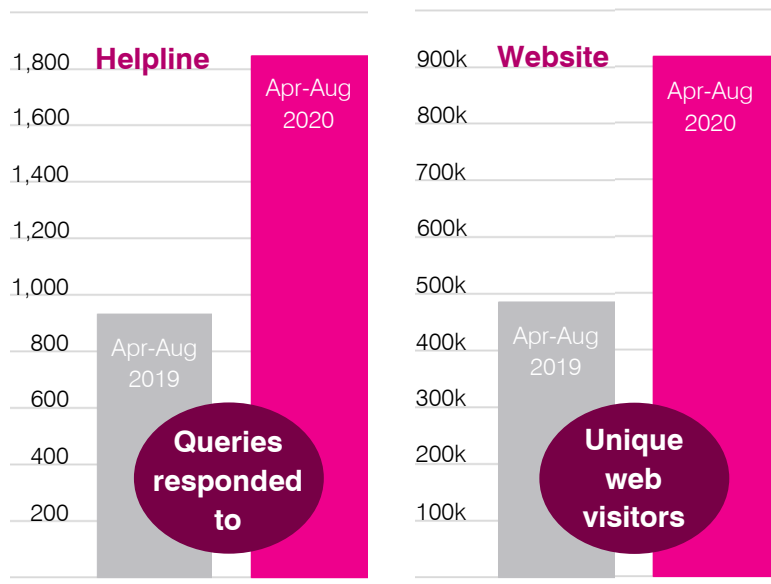
Six months of COVID-19:

The pandemic, working parents, and Working Families



Autumn 2020

COVID-19 demand: helpline and online information



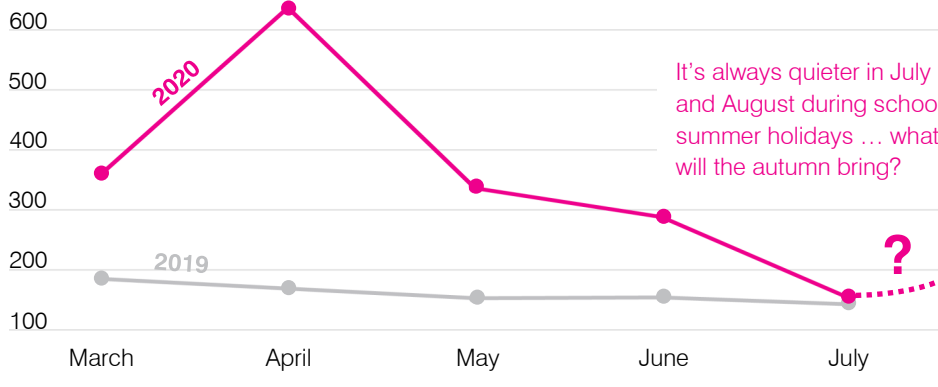
Our helpline

For over 20 years, the UK's work-life balance charity, Working Families, has run an award-winning employment rights helpline for mostly low-income working parents and carers. During COVID-19, online queries to our helpline increased as much as six-fold. Boosted by additional capacity funded by grant income, a surge in volunteer support and a trainee lawyer seconded from Linklaters LLP, between 1 March and 30 September, we responded to around double the number of queries we responded to in the same period last year. Working Families has never been so needed.



Our helpline

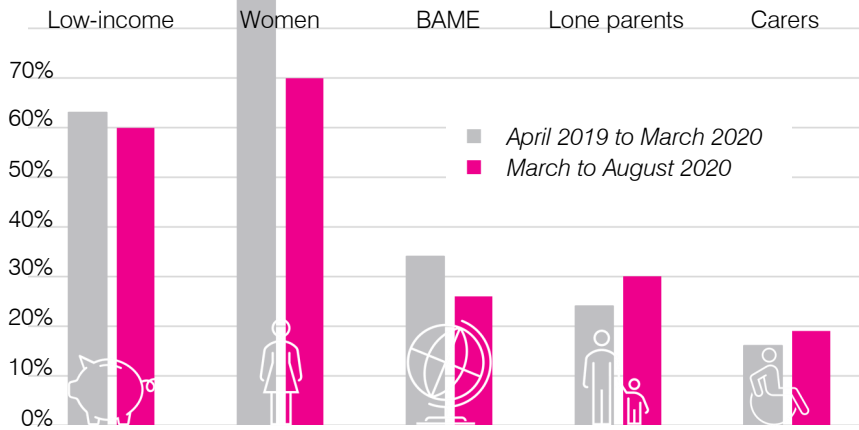
Number of people advised during peak-COVID compared to 2019



"I'm a lone parent with a one-year-old. I work full-time in a hospital and am on a NRPF visa. Due to coronavirus, I have no childcare. And due to my visa, I am not eligible for furlough. I'm using up annual leave but this will run out soon. Because I have no recourse to public funds, we will starve."



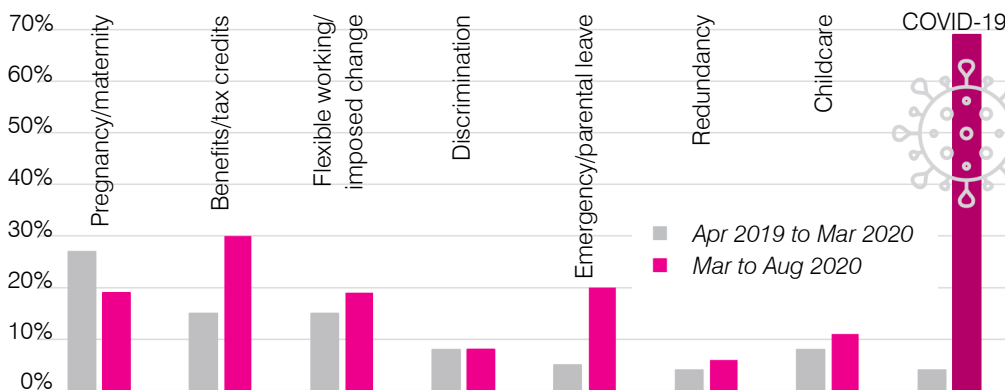
Who's contacted us during COVID-19 compared to 2019?



100%

of our callers say they better understand their rights and options after contacting us, and will act on our advice

What have parents' queries been about during COVID-19?



"My employer wants me back on-site working as of 1 July but I have two young children and no childcare. I've been working from home but they are now saying that's not acceptable and I must be on-site or take unpaid leave."

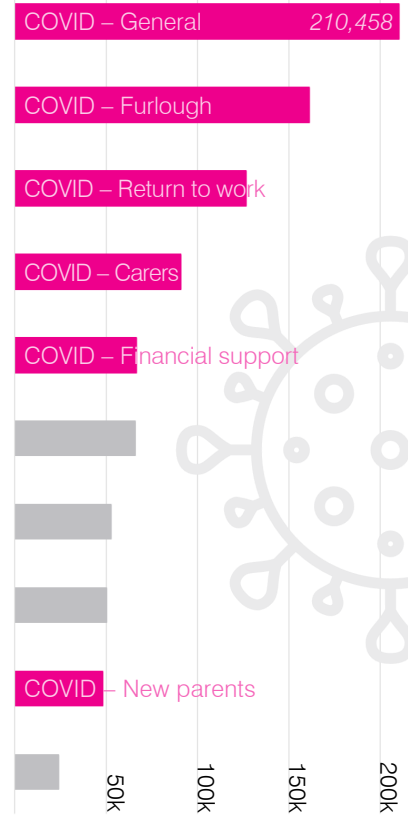
"My furlough ended yesterday and I am expected back in work but have no childcare (I am a single parent), and my son is vulnerable and I don't want to put him at risk."

As the government's pandemic response has evolved, the focus of helpline queries has shifted. Furlough, school closures and parental leave were the biggest concerns in the spring and then, as workers were encouraged to return to work, parents contacted us about issues with lack of childcare and concern for vulnerable family members. Childcare remains a source of concern and, with the winding-down of the furlough scheme, benefits and redundancy queries are rising, with parents feeling unfairly selected due to their caring responsibilities. We anticipate another wave of increased queries and are recruiting several advisers, including a benefits adviser, to boost capacity.

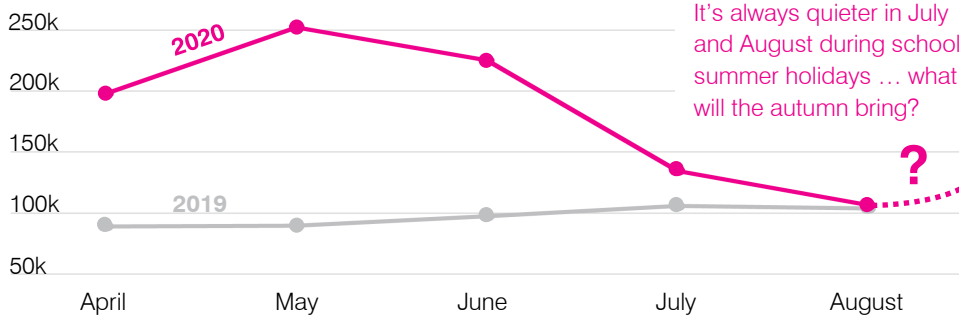
Our website

The pandemic has seen demand for our expertise sky-rocket. Between 1 March and 30 September, unique visitors to our website were almost double in number (1,114,795) compared with the same period last year (660,657). Between 12 March and 5 June, we created [seven COVID-specific web pages](#), providing information and guidance to working parents navigating the crisis. Half our website visitors between 1 March and 30 September (555,080) visited our COVID pages. Six of these pages feature in our top 10 most viewed pages since 1 March (right).

Our top 10 most viewed web pages since March



Monthly unique visitors to our website during peak COVID



It's always quieter in July and August during school summer holidays ... what will the autumn bring?

Visitor feedback:

"Clearly written."

"Excellent, simple advice."

Policy and influencing



"Is there any COVID-19-specific support for working parents with very small children, who are struggling to work and care for toddlers at the same time now that nurseries are closed? I have a stressful job and although I am allowed to work flexibly from home, I am essentially expected to do two full-time jobs at the same time now. Is there no support, like furlough leave, that applies to parents with small children? Older children can entertain themselves to some degree but toddlers can't. Why should I drop my hours and pay when other people will get 80% of their pay through furlough and not have to work at all, even if they have no children?"

Closing schools and childcare settings due to the pandemic brought a host of knock-on effects for working parents. Drawing on the experiences of parents and carers getting in touch via our Legal Advice Service helpline (above), our policy team successfully influenced to allow parents to be put on furlough if their childcare responsibilities prevented them from working, and for the creation of a 'flexible furlough' system that allowed for reduced-hours work around childcare.

In April, we published [Weathering the storm: the COVID-19 pandemic and working families](#), drawing

on our helpline data. We published [COVID-19 and flexible working: The perspective from working parents and carers](#) as part of our #FlextheUK campaign in June. In National Work Life Week in October we published [original Working Families research from surveying best-practice employers](#) (our members and award winners) on how they have made this year's mass flexible working experiment work, and [Flexistability: Building back better for the UK's working parents](#) – our blueprint for labour market and employment rights reform as we look to influence the forthcoming Employment Bill.

Media



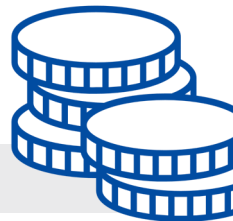
Since March, Working Families has secured extensive media coverage of the issues working parents have been facing throughout the pandemic so far.

We have featured in multiple articles in The Guardian ([*As the lockdown bites, it's women who are taking the strain*](#), [*Happy to work from home for ever? Six ways to win over your boss*](#), [*UK working mothers are 'sacrificial lambs' in coronavirus childcare crisis*](#)), The Telegraph, The Times ([*Women set back by life in lockdown*](#)), The Observer ([*'I feel like a 1950s housewife': how lockdown has exposed the gender divide*](#)), The Financial Times, HR Magazine, and on the BBC website.

Our CEO Jane van Zyl has spoken on BBC News and we've secured wide BBC radio coverage with three of our rights advisers and our joint heads of policy and influencing all being interviewed on various national and regional BBC stations. We have also been interviewed by Sky News.



Our income



We began this financial year on 1 April on the back foot, having already had to cancel several key fundraising events at the end of last financial year due to coronavirus.

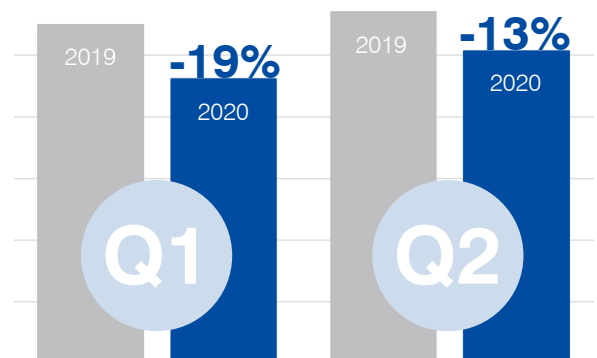
Our ordinarily sustainable earned income from employers, via memberships, training and consultancy, makes up over half of our income. This year, while membership renewals have remained fairly strong (trailing 2019 only slightly) – reflecting that our service to employers is greatly valued – new memberships and training/consultancy sales remain low as employer confidence falters.

This means that at the same time as never being more needed or relevant – and mobilising our largest-ever response to our beneficiary group – we have endured, and continue to endure, a COVID-induced hit to our income; to our ability to respond.

We utilised the government's furlough scheme and have also cut costs by giving up our London office and going fully remote. Some of our senior leadership team have taken a voluntary pay cut. And we have applied to as many relevant COVID-19 response funds as resources have allowed. By the end of Q2, we had secured 50% more grant funding than in the whole of 2019-2020, and our Legal Advice Service is fully funded with grant income to at least 31 March 2021, taking some pressure off our earned income as it recovers.

We wouldn't have been able to mobilise the response we have, and continue to weather COVID-19's financial hit, without such generous support from our funders this financial year – thank you all.

COVID hit to employer income



Working Families' COVID-19 funders:

- Baker McKenzie LLP
- Capital Group
- Clio
- Community Justice Fund
- HM Government in partnership with the National Lottery Community Fund
- Kingsley Napley LLP
- Lloyd's Charities Trust
- London Community Response Fund
- London Legal Support Trust
- Simmons & Simmons Charitable Foundation
- Trust for London

