

# Women's Work Is Undervalued, and It's Costing Us Billions

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In 2021, women were typically paid just 77 cents for every dollar paid to men – a gap that amounts to nearly \$12,000 in lost income over the course of a year. Even when looking just at women and men who worked full time, year round, women were paid just 84 cents for every dollar paid to a man. And these gaps are especially large for many women of color. In 2021, white, non-Hispanic women were paid 73 cents; Black women 64 cents; Latina women 54 cents, Native American women just 51 cents; and Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander women as little as 52 cents, in the case of Burmese and Nepalese women, and overall just 80 cents, for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.<sup>1</sup>

The biggest driver of these gaps is "occupational segregation"<sup>2</sup> – the fact that people of different races and genders are unevenly represented in different kinds of jobs, which have very different wages, benefits and working conditions. And that's not an accident. Starting long before the United States was founded and continuing into the present day, racism, sexism and ableism have shaped the basic structure of our economy, our laws and policies, and the day-to-day culture of workplaces. Gender segregation among occupations and industries accounts for half of the gender wage gap.<sup>3</sup>

This new National Partnership for Women & Families analysis documents the persistence of occupational segregation: women tend to hold jobs that are paid less than those men are likely to hold, and jobs in which women of color are overrepresented pay less than those primarily filled by white, non-Hispanic men. This is because the jobs primarily filled by occupations women of color work in are devalued, women of color are pushed out of or away from higher-paid occupations dominated by men, and women of color continue to face discrimination, including pay inequities, within virtually all occupations.<sup>4</sup>

We estimate the high costs of this occupational segregation for women and their families, including finding that:

- If the top 10 occupations employing the most women had the same average wages<sup>5</sup> as men's top 10 occupations, the 12 million women working full time, year round in those occupations would have taken home an additional \$96 billion in wages in just one year (see Table 1).
- Across the 10 occupations in which Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander women are most overrepresented, the average wage for full-time, year-round workers is \$63,000 – compared to \$80,500 for white, non-Hispanic men in the occupations in which they are most overrepresented, or a gap of \$17,500. For multiracial women, the gap is \$46,500; for Black women, \$50,300; for Native women, \$54,200; and for Latinas, \$55,200 (see Table 2).
- The 10 occupations employing the most disabled women pay, on average, \$41,200 per year – \$15,800 less than the average annual wage across the 10 most-common occupations for non-disabled men (see Table 3).
- Women make up just 30 percent of workers in the 20 highest-paid occupations. Even within these occupations, women working full time, year round are typically paid less than men, collectively losing \$44.4 billion to the wage gaps within these occupations (see Table 5).
- Women make up nearly two-thirds (63.6 percent) of workers in the 20 lowest-paid occupations. Across these occupations, average wages for women working full time, year round are just \$22,500 per year, or only \$11 per hour (see Table 6).

These findings underscore how urgent it is for policymakers to take action, including through implementation of the bipartisan infrastructure law, the CHIPS Act and the Inflation Reduction Act, to ensure that women are equitably represented in high-paying jobs; to raise wages and improve the quality of all jobs, including those dominated by women; and to strengthen anti-discrimination laws and enforcement to end pay discrimination and all forms of discrimination and harassment in the workplace.

In the sections below, this brief first outlines the history and persistence of white supremacy and its role in undervaluing the labor of women of color; the factors that push women out of higher-paying, male-dominated jobs; and the persistence of pay inequities within occupations. It then shares a new data analysis showing the scale and impacts of occupational segregation, including estimates of the financial impact on women.

## **The Past and Present of Racism, Sexism and Ableism Undercut Pay and Opportunities for Women of Color**

Long legacies and continuing structures of racism, sexism and ableism shape the kinds of jobs women of color are likely to have in several intersecting ways:<sup>6</sup>

**Occupations more often held by women – especially women of color – are underpaid and undervalued.**

From the earliest days of European colonization of what is now the United States, the labor of women of color has been essential but exploited. For centuries, an economy and legal system built around white supremacy enslaved millions of Black women and advanced a genocide against Native women – stolen labor and land that formed the basis for the young country's wealth.<sup>7</sup> Asian women were excluded from lawfully entering the U.S. or obtaining citizenship until 1952; still, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander women worked difficult, low-paid jobs in agriculture, laundries, factory work and domestic work with limited legal status or protections.<sup>8</sup> Colonization – and later, racially restrictive immigration policies – also exploited and excluded Latinas.<sup>9</sup>

Even after the Civil War ostensibly ended slavery, white supremacists and others who benefited from a white supremacist system continued to use the law, public policies, discrimination and even vigilante violence to push Black, Native, Asian and Latina women into work outside their homes while preventing them from winning full legal and economic equality. Most notably, Black women have consistently had higher labor force participation than white women since the end of the Civil War.<sup>10</sup> Yet women of color were largely restricted to low paid, and often dangerous work, in laundries, on farms and in factories – in addition to child care. Meanwhile, people with disabilities<sup>11</sup> were seen as "unfit" for paid work and relegated to institutions – where they often nonetheless were forced to work.<sup>12</sup> The wealthy families and business owners who benefited from the labor of women of color often fought hard to keep pay low and working conditions poor. For example, when the Black women laundry workers of Atlanta went on strike in 1881 to demand higher pay and more respect, city leaders arrested and fined them.<sup>13</sup>

Similar dynamics continue to play out today. As our analysis details, fields in which women of color make up large shares of workers, such as in child care, home health care, agricultural production, and laundry and textile work, are essential to the economy. Yet they tend to have low pay and poor working conditions because they are undervalued. A recent study of workers in human services jobs – in which women of color are overrepresented – found that they were paid 30 percent less than comparable workers with similar training and job responsibilities in non-care sectors.<sup>14</sup>

## **Women – and especially women of color – are pushed out of higher-paid occupations or discouraged from entering them in the first place.**

Numerous factors drive women away from male-dominated fields. Gender- and race-based stereotypes about who is best suited to do babysitting versus home repairs, or who belongs in math and science clubs in grade school, can limit children's and teen's early experiences, the skills they build and the future careers they even imagine having.<sup>15</sup> And while training programs like registered apprenticeships are a common pathway for young men to enter higher-paying occupations like the construction trades, young women are much less likely to join these programs.<sup>16</sup>

Women have had some success integrating into traditionally male-dominated fields over the past several decades, particularly in certain professional and managerial jobs. But this has primarily benefited more highly educated women, who are more likely to be white.<sup>17</sup> For example, our analysis finds that while men make up the majority of workers in the 20 highest-paying occupations (see Table 4 below), there are four high-paid jobs where women are the majority. Yet these are largely white, non-Hispanic women, including 84 percent of women nurse anesthetists, 62 percent of women pharmacists, 60 percent of women optometrists and 76 percent of women physician assistants.

Women who succeed in entering male-dominated fields often encounter sexist and racist harassment and discrimination. These issues exist in all occupations and industries, but are especially prevalent in male-dominated industries including manufacturing and construction.<sup>18</sup> Among tradeswomen who have seriously considered leaving the field, nearly half cite harassment and lack of respect as a very important reason for doing so.<sup>19</sup>

Women still continue to do the majority of unpaid family caregiving. And the United States lacks adequate caregiving policies providing paid family and medical leave, access to high-quality, affordable child care, home- and community-based service or paid sick leave. Without policies that guarantee these supports for every worker, no matter their job, even women who begin a career into many male-dominated fields can be pushed out if they have a child or other family caregiving needs.<sup>20</sup>

## **Even within occupations, gender- and race-based pay discrimination persists.**

Nearly 60 years have passed since the enactment of the Equal Pay Act, which outlawed paying unequal wages to men and women who perform substantially similar work. But, as our analysis shows, there are still gender wage gaps within nearly every occupation.<sup>21</sup> In fact, statistical analysis finds that after accounting for other factors that contribute to the gender wage gap – including occupational segregation and caregiving-related career interruptions that impact work experience – an estimated 38 percent of the wage gap is still unexplained,<sup>22</sup> pointing to the persistence of pay discrimination.

Pay inequities can stem from employer practices like making lower salary offers to women at hiring, basing initial salary offers on previous pay (which carries forward any pay discrimination women experienced in the past) and inequitable distribution of bonuses, raises and promotions. Inequities are maintained in part by a culture of secrecy around pay: 52 percent of women working full time say that their employer either discouraged or had banned discussing wages,<sup>23</sup> even though discussing wages with fellow employees is legally protected activity for workers covered by the National Labor Relations Act.<sup>24</sup>

## **Occupational Segregation Has High Costs for Women and our Economy**

This analysis examines the current state of occupational segregation in the United States and its economic impact on women and their families. In order to focus on the specific impacts of occupational segregation, we limit our analysis to women and men working full time, year round. However, it is important to note that some of the same racist, sexist and ableist factors that influence women's job choices also impact how many hours they are able to work as they try to balance caregiving and other obligations. Thus, because women are more likely than men to work part time or for only part of the year, the data for full-time, year-round workers in many cases understates the size of overall gender and racial wage gaps.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Most Common Jobs for Women Pay Less than Those for Men**

The 10 most-common jobs for women – those employing the most women working full time, year round – employ just under 12 million women. On average, women working full time, year round in these occupations are paid \$48,500.<sup>26</sup> Compared to men, women are much more likely to work in nursing and education occupations, as well as customer-facing jobs in the retail and service sectors. Men's 10 most-common occupations employ about the same number of men – just over 12 million – but those men are paid on average \$56,500.<sup>27</sup> If the 12 million women in their 10 most-common occupations had been paid at men's average rate for men's most-common occupations, they would have taken home an additional \$96 billion in 2021.

Table 1.

Occupations Employing the Most Women and Men					
Women	Number employed	Median wages, women	Men	Number employed	Median wages, men
Registered nurses	2,102,000	\$68,300	Driver/sales workers and truck drivers	2,353,200	\$46,400
Elementary and middle school teachers	1,820,900	\$52,600	Managers, all other	1,814,700	\$95,900
Secretaries and administrative assistants	1,619,400	\$39,200	First-Line supervisors of retail sales workers	1,237,500	\$50,000
Customer service representatives	1,229,000	\$35,000	Laborers and freight, stock, and hand material movers	1,144,300	\$33,000
Managers, all other	1,098,500	\$72,100	Janitors and building cleaners	1,073,800	\$32,300
First-Line supervisors of retail sales workers	1,025,500	\$36,600	Software developers	1,025,100	\$112,000
Accountants and auditors	894,100	\$62,400	Construction laborers	996,700	\$36,100
Nursing assistants	792,400	\$28,000	Retail salespersons	920,800	\$40,700
Office clerks, general	701,000	\$36,000	Sales representatives, wholesale and manufacturing	790,200	\$74,300
Cashiers	691,200	\$21,600	Cooks	714,000	\$25,000
<b>Average wage*</b>		<b>\$48,500</b>			<b>\$56,500</b>
<b>Total lost to wage gap in these occupations</b>					<b>\$96,312,475,800</b>

\* Average of median wages for each occupation weighted by the number of people employed in each occupation  
Source: Authors' calculations using 2016-2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates via IPUMS. Figures are for full-time, year-round workers age 16 and older. See methodological note for additional information.

## Jobs in which Women of Color Are Overrepresented Pay Less

As described earlier, generations of racist and sexist laws, policies and practices push women – especially women of color – out of higher-paying jobs, and allow the work that they do to be underpaid and undervalued. Our analysis examines the occupations in which various demographic groups are especially overrepresented. (For example, white, non-Hispanic men are 35 percent of full-time, year-round workers overall, but 80 percent of aircraft pilots and flight engineers.)

As our analysis shows, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) women; Black women; Native women; Latinas and multiracial women are each overrepresented in a different set of occupations. But for each group, these tend to be much lower-paid occupations than those in which white, non-Hispanic men are overrepresented. For every group of women of color, the average wage across their 10 most-represented occupations is far less than white, non-Hispanic men's average wage in their most-represented occupations. If that gap were closed, women of color in these occupations would have been paid an additional \$79 billion in one year.

Table 2.

Occupations with the Most Overrepresentation			
White, non-Hispanic men	Share of employment	AANHPI women	Share of employment
Overall share	34.7%	Overall share	2.8%
Tool and die makers	89.1%	Manicurists and pedicurists	58.1%
Millwrights	83.0%	Skincare specialists	26.6%
First-line supervisors of firefighting and prevention workers	80.4%	Gambling services workers	16.7%
Aircraft pilots and flight engineers	79.9%	Medical scientists	15.6%
Small engine mechanics	79.7%	Tailors, dressmakers, and sewers	14.5%
Electrical power-line installers and repairers	78.1%	Software quality assurance analysts & testers	13.5%
Surveying and mapping technicians	74.8%	Pharmacists	12.7%
Firefighters	74.6%	Massage therapists	12.1%
Power plant operators, distributors, and dispatchers	74.2%	Other mathematical science occupations	12.0%
Sales engineers	74.1%	Physical scientists, all other	11.5%
<b>Average wage:*</b>	<b>\$80,500</b>		<b>\$63,000</b>
<b>Wage gap (vs. white, non-Hispanic men):</b>			<b>\$17,500</b>
<b>Total lost to wage gap in these occupations:</b>			<b>\$3,295,190,900</b>
* Average of median wages for each occupation weighted by the number of people employed in each occupation Source: Authors' calculations using 2016-2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates via IPUMS. Figures are for full-time, year-round workers age 16 and older. See methodological note for additional information.			

Occupations with the Most Overrepresentation			
Black women	Share of employment	Latinas	Share of employment
Overall share	6.2%	Overall share	6.9%
Nursing assistants	33.2%	Graders and sorters, agricultural products	45.0%
Home health aides	32.2%	Maids and housekeeping cleaners	37.4%
Passenger attendants	23.7%	Pressers, textile, garment, and related materials	30.4%
Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses	23.4%	Hand packers and packagers	29.2%
Personal care aides	22.1%	Interpreters and translators	28.8%
Residential advisors	21.7%	Laundry and dry-cleaning workers	27.3%
Dietetic technicians and ophthalmic medical technicians	20.9%	Medical assistants	27.0%
Phlebotomists	20.8%	Sewing machine operators	26.9%
Telephone operators	20.5%	Dental assistants	26.2%
Postal service mail sorters, processors, and processing machine operators	20.4%	Packaging and filling machine operators and tenders	24.7%
<b>Average wage:*</b>	<b>\$30,200</b>		<b>\$25,300</b>
<b>Wage gap (vs. white, non-Hispanic men):</b>	<b>\$50,300</b>		<b>\$55,200</b>
<b>Total lost to wage gap in these occupations:</b>	<b>\$35,839,366,100</b>		<b>\$33,909,785,100</b>
* Average of median wages for each occupation weighted by the number of people employed in each occupation Source: Authors' calculations using 2016-2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates via IPUMS. Figures are for full-time, year-round workers age 16 and older. See methodological note for additional information.			

## Occupations with the Most Overrepresentation

Multiracial women	Share of employment	Native women	Share of employment
<i>Overall share</i>	1.0%	<i>Overall share</i>	0.2%
Executive secretaries and executive administrative assistants	2.7%	Social and human service assistants	1.2%
Pharmacy technicians	2.3%	Teaching assistants	0.9%
Preschool and kindergarten teachers	2.3%	Cashiers	0.8%
Librarians and media collections specialists	2.2%	Maids and housekeeping cleaners	0.8%
Child care workers	2.1%	Nursing assistants	0.8%
Medical assistants	2.1%	Child care workers	0.7%
Dental assistants	2.1%	Personal care aides	0.7%
Social and human service assistants	2.1%	Billing and posting clerks	0.6%
Nursing assistants	2.1%	Social workers, all other	0.6%
Social and community service managers	2.0%	Preschool and kindergarten teachers	0.6%
<b>Average wage:*</b>	<b>\$34,000</b>		<b>\$26,300</b>
<b>Wage gap (vs. white, non-Hispanic men):</b>	<b>\$46,500</b>		<b>\$54,200</b>
<b>Total lost to wage gap in these occupations:</b>	<b>\$3,295,571,900</b>		<b>\$2,241,302,300</b>

\* Average of median wages for each occupation weighted by the number of people employed in each occupation

Source: Authors' calculations using 2016-2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates via IPUMS. Figures are for full-time, year-round workers age 16 and older. See methodological note for additional information.

## Occupations with the Most Overrepresentation

White, non-Hispanic women	Share of employment
<i>Overall share</i>	26.9%
Speech-language pathologists	77.8%
Dental hygienists	71.5%
Audiologists	69.7%
Nurse practitioners	69.3%
Occupational therapists	68.5%
Legal secretaries and administrative assistants	68.1%
Medical transcriptionists	68.0%
Court reporters and simultaneous captioners	66.9%
Secretaries and administrative assistants	66.9%
Veterinary technologists and technicians	65.7%
<b>Average wage:*</b>	<b>\$47,100</b>
<b>Wage gap (vs. white, non-Hispanic men):</b>	<b>\$33,400</b>
<b>Total lost to wage gap in these occupations:</b>	<b>\$52,242,794,400</b>

\* Average of median wages for each occupation weighted by the number of people employed in each occupation

Source: Authors' calculations using 2016-2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates via IPUMS. Figures are for full-time, year-round workers age 16 and older. See methodological note for additional information.



## Disabled Women Are Also More Likely to Work in Low-Paid Jobs

Disabled women face steep challenges to full and equitable participation in the labor force, including barriers to competitive integrated employment, disability discrimination, concerns about losing life-saving benefits and difficulty accessing reasonable accommodations and job supports, such as paid leave.<sup>28</sup> Many of these concerns create barriers for disabled women in advancing in their careers.<sup>29</sup> And people with disabilities who are employed are more likely to be working part time than those without disabilities.<sup>30</sup> But even when looking only at disabled women working full time, year round, we find that they are harmed by occupational segregation. Disabled women are also quite literally segregated into noncompetitive employment. Approximately 120,000 disabled people are employed in "sheltered workshops"<sup>31</sup> that pay less than the federal minimum wage – half of whom are paid less than \$3.50 per hour.<sup>32</sup>

The 10 occupations employing the most disabled women pay, on average, \$41,200 per year – \$15,800 less than the average annual wage across the 10 most-common occupations for non-disabled men. If that gap were closed, disabled women in these 10 occupations would make \$9 billion more in a year.

Table 3.

Most Common Occupations by Gender and Disability Status					
Nondisabled men	Number employed	Median wages, nondisabled men	Disabled women	Number employed	Median wages, disabled women
Driver/sales workers and truck drivers	2,220,900	\$46,400	Secretaries and administrative assistants	85,600	\$38,000
Managers, all other	1,734,100	\$96,500	Registered nurses	78,500	\$69,800
First-Line supervisors of retail sales workers	1,181,900	\$50,000	Customer service representatives	68,700	\$32,300
Laborers and freight, stock, and hand material movers	1,075,500	\$33,000	Elementary and middle school teachers	58,500	\$52,700
Software developers	998,000	\$113,000	First-Line supervisors of retail sales workers	51,600	\$33,000
Janitors and building cleaners	990,200	\$32,300	Nursing assistants	49,200	\$26,800
Construction laborers	956,600	\$36,100	Personal care aides	46,300	\$24,200
Retail salespersons	873,700	\$41,100	Cashiers	45,700	\$21,600
Sales representatives, wholesale and manufacturing	759,700	\$75,000	Managers, all other	43,900	\$60,500
Cooks	678,500	\$25,000	Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks	42,800	\$39,800
<b>Average wages*</b>		<b>\$57,000</b>			<b>\$41,200</b>
<b>Wage gap (vs. nondisabled men)</b>					<b>\$15,800</b>
<b>Total lost to wage gap in these occupations</b>					<b>\$9,030,256,500</b>
* Average of median wages for each occupation weighted by the number of people employed in each occupation					
Source: Authors' calculations using 2016-2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates via IPUMS. Figures are for full-time, year-round workers age 16 and older. See methodological note for additional information.					

Women with disabilities are the most overrepresented in low-paid health care, clerical and social service jobs (compared to their share of all full-time, year-round workers). The occupations in which disabled women make up an especially large share of the workforce have an average wage of just \$31,000 – equivalent to an hourly wage of less than \$15 per hour.

Table 4.

Occupations with the Most Overrepresentation		
Disabled women	Share of employment	Median wages, disabled women
<i>Overall share:</i>	2.1%	
Personal care aides	6.8%	\$24,200
Home health aides	6.5%	\$25,700
Medical records specialists	6.3%	\$37,900
Eligibility interviewers, government programs	6.1%	\$45,000
Interviewers in medical, educational, and other administrative roles	5.8%	\$33,200
File clerks	5.7%	\$35,300
Legal secretaries and administrative assistants	5.7%	\$37,900
Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks	5.5%	\$39,800
Nursing assistants	5.5%	\$26,800
Data entry keyers	5.4%	\$34,700
<b>Average wages:*</b>		\$31,000

\* Average of median wages for each occupation weighted by the number of people employed in each occupation

Source: Authors' calculations using 2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates via IPUMS. Figures are for full-time, year-round workers age 16 and older. See methodological note for additional information.

## Women Hold Few of the Highest-Paid Jobs, but Most of the Lowest-Paid Jobs

The 20 occupations with the highest median wages overall are largely in medical and STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), and employ 4.9 million people with average annual pay of \$137,000. Yet women make up slightly less than 30 percent of workers in these occupations. As noted earlier, even in the high-paid occupations where women are better-represented, these gains have disproportionately gone to white, non-Hispanic women. For example, among women working full time as lawyers, nearly three-quarters (72.9 percent) are white, non-Hispanic women, only 8.8 percent are Black women, 7.4 percent are AANHPI women, 7.3 percent are Latinas and 3.1 percent are multiracial. (The number of Native women lawyers is too small to provide reliable data.)

Table 5.

Occupations with the Highest Pay		
	Median wages, all workers	Women's share of employment
Surgeons	\$367,600	19.0%
Other physicians	\$206,100	39.6%
Nurse anesthetists	\$174,900	56.2%
Podiatrists	\$156,500	*
Chief executives	\$154,100	27.4%
Architectural and engineering managers	\$141,600	10.3%
Dentists	\$140,200	39.1%
Lawyers	\$129,200	42.4%
Pharmacists	\$125,900	55.3%
Petroleum engineers	\$125,600	13.8%
Actuaries	\$121,500	33.5%
Optometrists	\$121,500	50.1%
Computer and information systems managers	\$111,400	27.9%
Economists	\$111,400	30.3%
Astronomers and physicists	\$110,100	16.3%
Software developers	\$109,600	17.5%
Physician assistants	\$109,300	63.4%
Sales engineers	\$109,300	8.6%
Aerospace engineers	\$107,800	12.8%
Computer and information research scientists	\$107,600	25.3%
Total		29.8%

\* Sample size too small.

Source: Authors' calculations using 2016-2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates via IPUMS. Figures are for full-time, year-round workers age 16 and older. See methodological note for additional information.

At the same time, women make up close to two-thirds (63.6 percent) of workers in the 20 occupations with the lowest median wages for full-time, year-round workers. More than 5.7 million people are employed in these occupations, many of which are public-facing service-sector jobs. As shown above, many of these are occupations where women of color have long been overrepresented – child care, laundry service and cleaning. In addition to low wages, these occupations are less likely to have basic work and health supports like paid sick days and paid family and medical leave.<sup>33</sup>

Table 6.

Occupations with the Lowest Pay		
	Median wages, all workers	Women's share of employment
Fast food and counter workers	\$21,000	62.2%
Dishwashers	\$21,100	21.0%
Hosts and hostesses, restaurant, lounge, and coffee shop	\$21,500	79.9%
Food preparation workers	\$22,100	55.9%
School bus monitors	\$22,200	80.3%
Cashiers	\$22,600	70.8%
Dining room and cafeteria attendants and bartender helpers	\$22,600	42.3%
Ushers, lobby attendants, and ticket takers	\$22,600	43.4%
Child care workers	\$22,700	92.8%
Laundry and dry-cleaning workers	\$23,700	66.2%
Cooks	\$23,700	37.5%
Manicurists and pedicurists	\$24,000	80.6%
Maids and housekeeping cleaners	\$24,000	82.4%
Pressers, textile, garment, and related materials	\$24,300	55.0%
Graders and sorters, agricultural products	\$24,300	60.5%
Waiters and waitresses	\$24,700	64.6%
Hotel, motel, and resort desk clerks	\$25,000	62.4%
Teaching assistants	\$25,300	83.2%
Food servers, nonrestaurant	\$25,700	65.9%
Hand packers and packagers	\$25,900	56.9%
TOTAL		63.6%

*Source: Authors' calculations using 2016-2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates via IPUMS. Figures are for full-time, year-round workers age 16 and older. See methodological note for additional information.*

## **Policymakers Must Take Action to Ensure All Labor Is Valued and All Jobs Are Good**

To finally close gender and racial wage gaps, policymakers must take the following steps:

### **Ensure that women of color, and all women, are equitably represented in high-paying jobs.**

- Center gender and racial equity and the creation of good, high-paying union jobs in implementing the bipartisan infrastructure law (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act), the CHIPS Act and the Inflation Reduction Act.
- Expand the use of targeted and local hire provisions, pre-apprenticeship programs and supportive services to take advantage this once-in-a-generation opportunity to bring women, especially women of color, into high-wage jobs.

- Create strong partnerships with labor and community organizations; set clear, high standards for accountability; and monitor compliance to ensure these efforts are successful.

**Raise wages and improve the quality of all jobs, especially those in which women of color are overrepresented.**

- Enact the Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act, which would create a national paid family and medical leave program to allow workers to earn a portion of their pay while they take a limited amount of time away from their jobs to care for a newborn or newly adopted child or newly placed foster child; care for a family member with a serious health condition; address their own serious health condition; or manage certain military caregiving responsibilities.
- Enact the Healthy Families Act, which would establish a national paid sick days standard, allowing workers to earn up to seven paid, job-protected sick days each year to use to recover from their own illnesses, access preventive care, provide care to a sick family member, or attend school meetings related to a child's health condition or disability.
- Enact the Raise the Wage Act to increase the federal minimum wage and eliminate subminimum wages for tipped, youth and disabled workers.
- Enact the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act to strengthen workers' ability to unionize and bargain collectively, impose stronger remedies when employers interfere with those rights, and address employers' misclassification of workers as contractors which denies them the opportunity to organize.

**Fight pay inequities and other forms of discrimination and harassment in the workplace.**

- Enact the Paycheck Fairness Act, which would make it harder for employers to engage in sex-based wage discrimination, prohibit employers from forbidding their workers from discussing wages and institute data collection that will help inform future enforcement efforts.
- Significantly increase funding for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Department of Labor and Department of Justice to support increased enforcement of civil rights and employment discrimination laws, including increasing the number of corporate management reviews (often called "glass ceiling reviews") conducted by the DOL-Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs.

*Methodological note:* This analysis uses the 2016–2020 American Community Survey accessed via IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org). We use a five-year dataset to have a sufficient sample size to analyze demographic subgroups. Full-time, year-round workers are defined as people 16 and older who are currently employed, are not self-employed, and who reported working for 50 or more weeks and an average of 35 or more hours per week in the previous year. Racial categories in this analysis exclude women who identify as Latina and/or Hispanic, who are analyzed separately. People are identified as having a disability in this analysis if they responded that they have difficulty in one or more of the following realms: vision, hearing, cognitive, ambulatory, self care, and independent living. This is a limited definition of disability that excludes a substantial portion of disabled people. For more information on how disability is measured in the American Community Survey please see U.S. Census Bureau, (2021, November 2). *How Disability Data are Collected from The American Community Survey*. Retrieved 6 March 2023 from U.S. Census Bureau website: <https://www.census.gov/topics/health/disability/guidance/data-collection-acs.html>.

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<sup>5</sup> In this analysis "average wages" across occupations refers to the average of the median wages for each occupation, weighted by the number of people employed per occupation.

<sup>6</sup> See also Zavoronkova, M., Khattar, R., & Brady, M. (2022, March 29). *Occupational Segregation in America*. Retrieved 6 March 2023, from Center for American Progress website: <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/occupational-segregation-in-america/>; Hegeswich, A., & Hartmann, H. (2014, January 23). *Occupational Segregation and the Gender Wage Gap: A Job Half Done*. Retrieved 6 March 2023, from Institute for Women's Policy Research website: <https://iwpr.org/iwpr-issues/esme/occupational-segregation-and-the-gender-wage-gap-a-job-half-done/>

<sup>7</sup> Baptist, E. E. (2014). *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*. New York: Basic Books.

<sup>8</sup> Pearce Rotundi, J. (2021, March 19). *Before the Chinese Exclusion Act, This Anti-Immigrant Law Targeted Asian Women*. Retrieved 6 March 2023, from: <https://www.history.com/news/chinese-immigration-page-act-women>; U.S. House of Representatives, Office of the Historian. (n.d.). *Asian and Pacific Islander Americans in Congress: Exclusion and Empire, 1898–1941*. Retrieved 6 March 2023, from: <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/APA/Historical-Essays/Exclusion-and-Empire/First-Arrivals/>

<sup>9</sup> López Green, V., & Vargas Poppe, S. (2021, April). *Toward a More Perfect Union: Understanding Systemic Racism and Resulting Inequity in Latino Communities*. Retrieved 6 March 2023, from UnidosUS website: <https://unidosus.org/publications/2128-toward-a-more-perfect-union-understanding-systemic-racism-and-resulting-inequity-in-latino-communities/>

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<sup>11</sup> In this brief, we use both person-first and identity-first language. We recognize that many people within the disability community are working to reclaim identity-first language ("disabled women") to celebrate disability as a part of identity. At the same time, people within the disability community have diverse experiences and perspectives, and some prefer person-first language ("women with disabilities").

<sup>12</sup> Rose, S. F. (2017). *No Right to Be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s–1930s*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

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<sup>14</sup> Wage Equity Study Team. (2023). *Wage Equity for Non-profit Human Services Workers: A study of work and pay in Seattle and King County*. University of Washington School of Social Work Publication. Retrieved 6 March 2023, from: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5410d51fe4b01475ae262210/t/63f663d82997bb3273b414aa/1677091802512/UW+Report+with+forward+2.22.23.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> See note 4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> See note 2.

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- <sup>19</sup> Hegeswisch, A., & Mefferd, E. (2022, February). *A Future Worth Building: What Tradeswomen Say about the Change They Need in the Construction Industry*. Retrieved 6 March 2023, from Institute for Women's Policy Research website: [https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/A-Future-Worth-Building\\_What-Tradeswomen-Say\\_FINAL.pdf](https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/A-Future-Worth-Building_What-Tradeswomen-Say_FINAL.pdf)
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> In fewer than 5 percent of occupations for which there is adequate data, women working full time, year round are paid \$1.00 or more for every dollar paid to men.
- <sup>22</sup> See note 2.
- <sup>23</sup> Sun, S., Rosenfeld, J., & Denice, P. (2021, January). *On the Books, Off the Record: Examining the Effectiveness of Pay Secrecy Laws in the U.S.* Retrieved 2 March 2023, from Institute for Women's Policy Research website: <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Pay-Secrecy-Policy-Brief-v4.pdf>
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- <sup>26</sup> Based on the average of women's median wages for these occupations, weighted by the number of women in each occupation.
- <sup>27</sup> Based on the average of men's median wages for these occupations, weighted by the number of men in each occupation.
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The National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, access to quality health care and policies that help all people meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at [NationalPartnership.org](https://NationalPartnership.org).

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