America’s Women and the Wage Gap

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Nationally, the median annual pay for a woman who holds a full-time, year-round job is $41,554 while the median annual pay for a man who holds a full-time, year-round job is $51,640. This means that, overall, women in the United States are paid 80 cents for every dollar paid to men, amounting to an annual gender wage gap of $10,086.¹

The wage gap can be even larger when broken down by race. Among women who hold full-time, year-round jobs in the United States, Black women are typically paid 63 cents and Latinas just 54 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.² White, non-Hispanic women are paid 79 cents and Asian women 87 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, although some ethnic subgroups of Asian women fare much worse.³

The wage gap also varies by state and congressional district but spans nearly all corners of the country. In Louisiana and Utah for example, women are paid 70 cents for every dollar paid to men (a gap of 30 cents for every dollar), while in New York, women are paid 89 cents for every dollar paid to men (a gap of 11 cents) (see chart).⁴ In 422 of the country’s 435 congressional districts (97 percent), the median yearly pay for women who work full time, year-round is less than the median yearly pay for men.⁵

What Does the Wage Gap Mean for America’s Women?

On average, women employed full time in the United States lose a combined total of nearly $900 billion every year due to the wage gap.⁶ These lost wages mean women and their families have less money to support themselves, save and invest for the future, and spend on goods and services. Families, businesses and the economy suffer as a result.
If the annual gender wage gap were eliminated, on average, a working woman in the United States would have enough money for approximately:

- Fourteen more months of child care;\(^7\)
- More than one additional year of tuition and fees for a four-year public university, or the full cost of tuition and fees for a two-year community college;\(^8\)
- Seventy-four more weeks of food for her family (1.4 years’ worth);\(^9\)
- Nearly seven more months of mortgage and utilities payments;\(^10\)
- More than 10 additional months of rent;\(^11\) or
- Up to 8.7 additional years of birth control.\(^12\)

Women, Families and the Country Cannot Afford Discrimination and Lower Wages

- In the United States, mothers are breadwinners in half of families with children under 18. This includes half of white mothers, 53 percent of Latina mothers, 81 percent of Black mothers and 44 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander mothers.\(^13\) Yet the wage gap for mothers is larger than for women overall. Mothers with full-time, year-round jobs are paid 71 cents for every dollar paid to fathers.\(^14\)
- More than 15 million family households in the United States are headed by women.\(^15\) About 27 percent of those families, or 4,101,385 family households, have incomes that fall below the poverty level.\(^16\) Eliminating the wage gap would provide much-needed income to women whose wages sustain their households.

The Wage Gap Cannot Be Explained by Choices

- **The wage gap persists regardless of industry.** In the civilian industries that employ the most full-time employees – health care and social assistance, manufacturing, retail trade and educational services – women are paid less than men. In the health care and social assistance industry, women are paid just 72 cents for every dollar paid to men. In manufacturing, just 77 cents. In retail trade, 79 cents. And in educational services, 87 cents. Across all industries, women are paid lower salaries than men.\(^17\)
- **The wage gap is present within occupations.** Among the occupations with the most people working full time, year-round – sales, production, management, and office and administrative support – women are paid less than men. In sales, women are paid just 62 cents for every dollar paid to men. In production, just 70 cents. In management, 77 cents. And in office and administrative support occupations, 88 cents.\(^18\)
- **The wage gap exists regardless of education level.** Women with master’s degrees working full time, year-round are paid just 73 cents for every dollar paid to men with master’s degrees who work full-time, year-round. Further, among full-time, year-round workers, women with doctoral degrees are paid less than men with master’s degrees, and women with master’s degrees are paid less than men with bachelor’s degrees.\(^19\)
Discrimination and bias still contribute to the wage gap. Statistical analysis shows that 62 percent of the gender wage gap can be attributed to occupational and industry differences; differences in experience and education; factors such as region and unionization; and race-based discrimination. That leaves 38 percent of the gap unaccounted for, leading researchers to conclude that factors such as discrimination and unconscious bias continue to affect women’s wages.

America’s Women Are Concerned About Unfair Pay

Women consider equal pay a top workplace issue. Nearly six in 10 women (58 percent) in the United States identify equal pay as one of the most important issues facing women in the workplace. When compared to women in most other high-wealth countries, a substantially higher share of U.S. women list equal pay as one of the most important issues women face at work.

Less than one-third of women believe they are paid fairly. Just 28 percent of U.S. working women say they are confident they are paid the same salaries as their male counterparts. Forty-three percent say they do not believe they are paid the same – a substantially higher share than in most other high-wealth countries.

Women are more likely to support a candidate for office who supports pay equity. Seventy percent of Republican women, 83 percent of independent women and 88 percent of Democratic women say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports equal pay for women.

A Path Toward Closing the Wage Gap

Despite the federal Equal Pay Act of 1963 and other protections for women, experts warn that women and men will not reach pay parity until 2059 – unless something changes. Right now, the lack of supportive policies and bias combine to make fair pay elusive. But there are federal policy solutions that would help:

Fair pay protections and practices. The Paycheck Fairness Act, now before Congress, would prohibit employers from retaliating against employees who discuss their wages and make it easier to demonstrate that discrimination has occurred. It would also prohibit screening of job applicants based on their salary histories. The Fair Pay Act would diminish wage disparities that result from gender-based occupational segregation.

A higher minimum wage and elimination of the tipped minimum wage. The Raise the Wage Act would increase the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour over a seven-year period and gradually eliminate the subminimum wage for tipped workers. Greater access to overtime pay through updated U.S. Department of Labor regulations would also help make wages more fair for millions of working people.

Stronger protections against and remedies for workplace harassment. Federal policy solutions must be advanced that would: require employers to adopt prevention strategies, including robust harassment policies, climate surveys and mandatory workplace training; improve protections in existing laws; increase transparency about
harassment that has occurred, including through the end of forced arbitration; and improve enforcement.

- **Family friendly workplace standards.** The Healthy Families Act would guarantee paid sick days, and the Family And Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act would establish a national paid family and medical leave standard for women and men. Both proposals would help keep women attached to the workforce, resulting in higher wages over time. Pregnancy discrimination protections, access to quality, affordable child care and predictable schedules are also essential for retention and advancement of women in the workforce.

- **Full funding for federal agencies that investigate and enforce fair pay.** The Equal Pay Act and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, as well as executive branch initiatives to collect pay information and promote fair pay, are critically important to uncovering and eliminating discriminatory workplace practices that harm women.

- **Comprehensive reproductive health care.** Access to comprehensive reproductive health care enables women to pursue education and career opportunities and can increase workforce attachment and wages over time.25 Defending policies like the Affordable Care Act’s guarantee of copay-free coverage for the full range of FDA-approved contraceptives and more adequately funding our nation’s Title X family planning program are critical to ensuring women get the contraceptive care they need. Passage of the Equal Access to Abortion Coverage in Health Insurance (EACH Woman) Act would help reduce barriers to abortion care.

Together, these policies will help close the gap between the wages paid to women and men by improving women’s access to good and decent-paying jobs, providing the support women need to stay and advance in their careers, and helping ensure fair and nondiscriminatory treatment wherever women work and in whatever jobs they hold.

*Learn more about fair pay at [NationalPartnership.org/Gap](http://www.nationalpartnership.org/Gap).*


2 Ibid.

3 Ibid. Despite an overall wage gap for Asian women in the United States that is smaller than for other groups of women of color, there are substantial variations in the wage gap between particular ethnic groups of Asian women and white, non-Hispanic men, with many subpopulations of Asian women facing significantly greater wage penalties. For more information, see: [http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/workplace-fairness/fair-pay/asian-women-and-the-wage-gap.pdf](http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/workplace-fairness/fair-pay/asian-women-and-the-wage-gap.pdf)


7 Child Care Aware of America. (2017). Parents and the High Cost of Child Care. Retrieved 15 March 2018, from [https://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2017_CCA_High_Cost_Report_FINAL.pdf](https://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2017_CCA_High_Cost_Report_FINAL.pdf) (Unpublished calculation of $8,670 based on the average cost of center-based child care for a four-year-old. This average is not representative of the mean and is an approximation calculated by weighting state child care cost averages by the number of programs by type reported by each state. It is not to be considered a “national average.”)


12 Center for American Progress. (2012, February 15). The High Costs of Birth Control: It’s Not As Affordable As You Think. Retrieved 15 March 2018, from https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/pdf/BC_costs.pdf (Calculated from a survey of retail costs of oral contraceptives for the uninsured and average copays, combined with the average cost of doctor visits to obtain the prescription. While the Affordable Care Act greatly advanced access to birth control by requiring coverage of contraceptives without cost sharing, many women still must pay out of pocket because they lack insurance, because their plan is grandfathered and does not cover contraceptives without a copay, or because their plan only covers generics.)


16 U.S. Census Bureau. (2017). American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2016. Geographies: United States. Table DP03: Selected Economic Characteristics. Retrieved 15 March 2018, from http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tabs/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_16_1YR_DP03&prodType=table (To determine whether a household falls below the poverty level, the U.S. Census Bureau considers the income of the householder, size of family, number of related children, and, for one- and two-person families, age of householder. The poverty threshold in 2017 was $19,749 for a single household and two children under 18.)


21 Thomson Reuters Foundation. (2015). The key issues facing women working in the G20. Retrieved 15 March 2018, from http://www.womenatworkpoll.com/ipxos Global @svisor conducted an international survey among 9,501 women across 19 countries. Surveys were conducted from July 24 – August 7, 2015. The margin of error between two country sample sizes of 500 is roughly 6 percent at the 95 percent confidence interval. Data are weighted to match the population profile of each country by age, region and household income.)

22 Ibid.

