

America's Women and the Wage Gap

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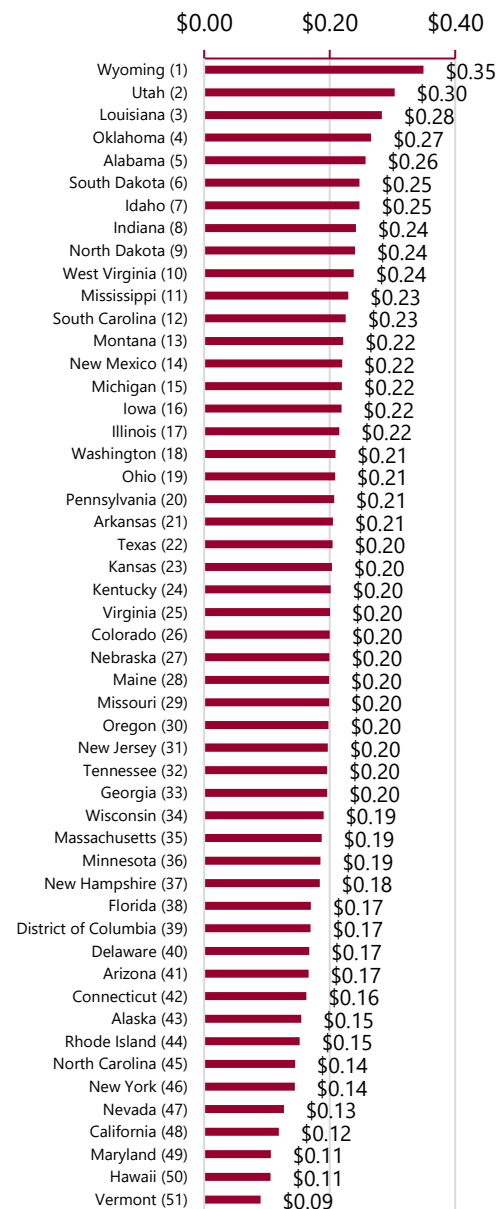
Nationally, the median annual pay for a woman who holds a full-time, year-round job is \$50,982 while the median annual pay for a man who holds a full-time, year-round job is \$61,417. **This means that, overall, women in the United States are paid 83 cents for every dollar paid to men, amounting to an annual gender wage gap of \$10,435.¹**

These numbers are more than facts and figures; they represent the tangible consequences of sexism and white supremacy in the United States and how our country systematically devalues women of color and their labor. This persistent, pervasive wage gap is driven in part by gender and racial discrimination, workplace harassment, job segregation and a lack of workplace policies that support family caregiving, which is still most often performed by women.²

Data for 2020 reflect the unprecedented economic shock of the coronavirus pandemic, including mass layoffs – especially in many low-wage, women-dominated occupations – and increased family caregiving demands that pushed many women out of jobs or into part-time work. Women of color experienced these pressures disproportionately.³ Those who were able to remain employed full-time throughout the year tended to be in higher-paid jobs, skewing the wage gap relative to a typical year.

The gender wage gap is a measure of just how far our nation still has to go to ensure that women can participate fully and equally in our economy – and it is widest for many women of color. Among women who hold full-time, year-round jobs in the United States, white, non-Hispanic women are paid 79 cents, Black women are typically paid 64

Wage gap between men and women by state, per dollar



cents, Native American women 60 cents, Latinas just 57 cents, and Asian American and Pacific Islander women are paid as little as 52 cents, as Burmese women are, and just 85 cents overall for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.⁴

The wage gap also varies by state and congressional district but spans nearly all corners of the country.* In Wyoming, for example, women are paid 65 cents for every dollar paid to men (a gap of 35 cents for every dollar), while in Vermont are paid 91 cents for every dollar paid to men (a gap of 9 cents) (see chart).⁵ In 420 out of 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.⁶

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 \$930 billion every year** due to the wage gap.⁷ 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. Women, their 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:

- More than 13 additional months of child care;⁸
- 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 college;⁹
- Nearly seven additional months of premiums for employer-based health insurance;¹⁰
- More than 74 weeks of food (more than one year's worth);¹¹
- More than six more months of mortgage and utilities payments;¹²
- More than nine additional months of rent;¹³
- Up to 8.6 additional years of birth control;¹⁴
- Or enough money to pay off student loan debt in just under four years.¹⁵

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

- In the United States, mothers are breadwinners in 40 percent of families with children under 18 each year – and about 70 percent will be the primary earner at some point in their first 18 years of motherhood.¹⁶

* Due to pandemic-related disruptions in data collection, the Census Bureau will not release its standard 1-year estimates for the 2020 American Community Survey. As a result, this fact sheet provides the previous year's data for state- and congressional district-level wage gaps and other ACS-based analyses.

- Each year, 48 percent of white mothers, 49 percent of Latina mothers, 79 percent of Black mothers, 64 percent of Native American mothers and 43 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander mothers are breadwinners in their households.¹⁷ Yet the wage gap for mothers is larger than for women overall. Mothers with full-time, year-round jobs are paid 75 cents for every dollar paid to fathers.¹⁸
- Thirty-four million households in the United States are headed by women, more than six million of them with children under 18.¹⁹ Nearly 8.2 million of those households – including more than two million with minor children – have incomes that fall below the poverty level.²⁰ 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, women are paid less than men. In the health care and social assistance industry, women are paid just 70 cents for every dollar paid to men. In manufacturing, just 75 cents. In retail trade, 77 cents. And in educational services, 87 cents. Across all industries, women are paid lower salaries than men.²¹
- **The wage gap is present within occupations.** Among the occupations with the most people working full time, year-round, women are paid less than men. In transportation and material moving, women are paid just 70 cents for every dollar paid to men. In sales and production, 72 cents. In service occupations, 74 cents. In management, 75 cents. And in office and administrative support occupations, 82 cents.²²
- **The wage gap exists regardless of education level.** Women with master's degrees working full time, year-round are paid just 71 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 associate's degrees are paid less than men with just a high school diploma, and women with master's degrees are paid less than men with bachelor's degrees.²³
- **Numerous causes contribute to the wage gap, including discrimination and bias.** Compared to men, women tend to hold lower-paying jobs, work in lower-paying industries, and spend less time in the formal workforce. These trends result from factors ranging from pervasive stereotypes and social norms about gender and work, to a lack of workplace support for family caregiving, to gender and racial discrimination, to the devaluation of work when it is primarily done by women – and the effects are both starker and qualitatively different for women of color.²⁴ Statistical analysis shows that even after controlling for factors like occupational and industry

differences, differences in experience and education, and region and unionization – which themselves are not solely the result of women’s choices – 38 percent of the gap is unaccounted for, leading researchers to conclude that factors such as discrimination and unconscious bias continue to affect women’s wages.²⁵

America’s Women Are Concerned About Unfair Pay

- **Women consider equal pay a top workplace issue.** Nine in ten women voters say strengthening equal pay laws is important.²⁶
- **Less than one-third of women believe they are paid fairly.** Just 30 percent of U.S. women in the workforce say they are very sure their employer pays men and women equally for the same work. Nearly six in 10 women (58 percent) say they have faced gender or racial discrimination or barriers to a better job.²⁷
- **Women want Congress to enact policies that would help close the wage gap.** More than eight in ten women voters want Congress to enact permanent paid family and medical leave legislation (83 percent) and paid sick days legislation (81 percent).²⁸ Sixty-two percent want Congress to protect the Affordable Care Act, while eighty percent want provisions that protect individuals with pre-existing conditions and provide coverage for preventive health services and access to birth control services to be protected.²⁹ Seventy percent want Congress to protect *Roe v. Wade*, which allows women to make their own personal reproductive health care decisions.³⁰

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 2059³¹ – 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 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 and workers with disabilities. 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.** The Ending the Monopoly of Power Over Workplace Harassment through Education and Reporting (EMPOWER) Act would address certain issues related to workplace harassment, including by prohibiting nondisclosure and non-disparagement clauses as a condition of employment, promotion and in other circumstances and requiring companies to disclose the number of harassment claims they settle each year and the amount paid out. Congress should advance additional workplace harassment policy solutions, such as protection of workers not currently protected by federal civil rights laws.
- **Family friendly workplace standards.** The Healthy Families Act would allow workers to earn job-protected paid or unpaid sick days, and the Build Back Better Act would establish a national paid family and medical leave insurance program for women and men. Both proposals would help keep women attached to the workforce, resulting in higher wages over time. Pregnancy discrimination protections, as provided in the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, and access to quality, affordable child care and predictable schedules are also essential for retention and advancement of women in the workforce.
- **Stronger protections for workers' right to organize.** Unions have been proven to provide women with higher wages and better benefits and to close gender and racial wage gaps.³² The Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act would 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.
- **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, including abortion care and contraceptives, allows women to plan out and control their lives, enabling them to pursue education and career opportunities, and can increase workforce attachment and wages over time.³³ Defending policies like the Affordable Care Act's guarantee of a full range of contraceptives without co-pay, increasing for funding our nation's Title X family planning program and reversing the domestic gag rule for Title X-funded clinics are critical to ensuring women get the reproductive health care they need. Passage of the Equal Access to Abortion Coverage in Health Insurance (EACH) Act would help reduce barriers to abortion care, improving women's health and economic security.

Together, these policies will help ensure that women and all working people are free from wage and employment discrimination, have support to meet their responsibilities at work and at home and have the tools to be able to decide whether and when to become a parent or grow their family, and finally help close the gap between the wages paid to women and men.

Learn more about fair pay at NationalPartnership.org/Gap.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). *Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplement: Table PINC-05: Work Experience in 2020 – People 15 Years Old and Over by Total Money Earnings in 2020, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex, and Disability Status*. Retrieved 17 November 2021, from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-05.html> (Unpublished calculation based on the median annual pay for all women and men who worked full time, year-round in 2020)

² Glynn, S. J. (2018, April). *Gender wage inequality: What we know and how we can fix it*. Retrieved 17 November 2021, from Washington Center for Equitable Growth website: <https://equitablegrowth.org/research-paper/gender-wage-inequality/?longform=true>

³ Mason, J., & Molina Acosta, P. (2021, March). *A Racially Just Recovery Demands Paid Family and Medical Leave*. Retrieved 17 November 2021, from National Partnership for Women & Families website: <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/economic-justice/reports/called-to-care-a-racially-just-demands-paid-family-and-medical-leave.html>

⁴ See note 1; Bleiweis, R. (2021, March). *The Economic Status of Asian American and Pacific Islander Women*. Retrieved 17 November 2021, from Center for American Progress website: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2021/03/04/496703/economic-status-asian-american-pacific-islander-women/>; U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2019. Tables B20017C and B20017H: Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) by Sex by Work Experience in the Past 12 Months for the Population 16 Years and Over with Earnings in the Past 12 Months*. Retrieved 16 March 2021, from <https://data.census.gov/>. Note: The Current Population Survey does not provide disaggregated data for Native American women's earnings. This calculation is based on a comparison of the median earnings of white, non-Hispanic men working full time, year-round with that of Native American women working full time, year-round as reported in the American Community Survey. Due to pandemic-related disruptions in data collection, the Census Bureau will not release its standard 1-year estimates for the 2020 American Community Survey. The median annual pay of a Native American women in 2019 was \$36,577 and the median annual pay of white, non-Hispanic men was \$61,233.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2019, Geographies: All States within United States and Puerto Rico, Table B20017: Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Work Experience in the Past 12 Months (in 2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) for the Population 16 Years and Over with Earnings in the Past 12 Months*. Retrieved 16 March 2021, from <https://data.census.gov/>

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2019, Geographies: All Congressional Districts (116th Congress), Table B20017: Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Work Experience in the Past 12 Months (in 2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) for the Population 16 Years and Over with Earnings in the Past 12 Months*. Retrieved 5 March 2021, from <https://data.census.gov/>; (In 420 out of 435 congressional districts, women who work full time, year-round are paid less than men. In the other 15 districts, women are either paid the same or more than men, or the margin of error is large enough and the earnings ratio is close enough to one that it cannot be said with at least 90 percent confidence that there is a gender wage gap.)

⁷ See note 1; U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). *Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplement: Table PINC-01. Selected Characteristics of People 15 Years and Over, by Total Money Income in 2020, Work Experience in 2020, Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex*. Retrieved 17 November 2021, from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-01.html> (Unpublished calculation based on the mean annual pay for all women and men who worked full time, year-round in 2020, multiplied by the total number of women working full time, year-round in 2020)

⁸ Child Care Aware of America. (2020). *Picking Up the Pieces: Building a Better Child Care System Post COVID-19*. Retrieved 20 October 2021, from <https://www.childcareaware.org/picking-up-the-pieces/>. The authors note that the price of child care varies significantly across the United States, but estimate that the average price is between \$9,200 and \$9,600. This analysis uses the midpoint of that range, \$9,400, as the average price for child care.

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- ⁹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). *Digest of Education Statistics: 2020* (Table 330.10, Average undergraduate tuition and fees and room and board rates charged for full-time students in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution: 1963-64 through 2019-20), Chapter 3. Retrieved 17 November 2021, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20_330.10.asp (The average total annual cost of undergraduate tuition and required fees is \$9,349 for a four-year public college or university or \$3,377 for a two-year college)
- ¹⁰ Kaiser Family Foundation. (n.d.) Average Annual Single Premium per Enrolled Employee For Employer-Based Health Insurance, 2020. Retrieved 17 November 2021, from <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/single-coverage/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Employee%20Contribution%22,%22sort%22:%22desc%22%7D>
- ¹¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020, September). *Consumer Expenditures - 2019*. Retrieved 16 March 2021, from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cesan.pdf> (Calculation uses overall average “food” cost.)
- ¹² U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2019, Table DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics*. Retrieved 15 March 2020, from <https://data.census.gov/> (Calculation uses median monthly owner costs, housing units with a mortgage)
- ¹³ Ibid. (Calculation uses median gross rent, occupied units paying rent)
- ¹⁴ Center for American Progress. (2012, February 15). *The High Costs of Birth Control: It's Not As Affordable As You Think*. Retrieved 17 November 2021, from https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/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.)
- ¹⁵ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal Student Aid. (n.d.) *Federal Student Loan Portfolio: Federal Student Aid Portfolio Summary*. National Student Loan Data System Publication. Retrieved 17 November 2021. (Average dollars outstanding for recipients of direct loans as of Q2 2021, \$37,143.)
- ¹⁶ Glass, J. L., Raley, R. K., & Pepin, J. R. (2021, November 15). Children's Financial Dependence on Mothers: Propensity and Duration. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*. doi: 10.1177/23780231211055246
- ¹⁷ Shaw, E., Mason, C., Lacarte, V., & Jauregui, E. (2020, May). *Holding Up Half the Sky: Mothers as Workers, Primary Caregivers, & Breadwinners During COVID-19 (Table 1)*. Retrieved 2 March 2021 from the Institute for Women's Policy Research: <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Holding-Up-Half-the-Sky-Mothers-as-Breadwinners.pdf> (Breadwinner mothers are defined as single mothers who head a household or married mothers who generate at least 40 percent of a household's joint income.)
- ¹⁸ National Women's Law Center. (2021, May). *Motherhood Wage Gap for Mothers Overall*. Retrieved 17 November 2021, from <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Motherhood-Wage-Gap-Overall-Table-2021.pdf>
- ¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2019, Table DP02: Selected Social Characteristics in the United States*. Retrieved 16 March 2021, from <https://data.census.gov/> (Calculation uses households headed by females with no spouse/partner present, and households headed by females with own children under 18 and no spouse/partner present)
- ²⁰ U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2019, Geographies: United States, Table DP03: Selected Economic Characteristics*. Retrieved 16 March 2021, from <https://data.census.gov/> (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 2019 was \$20,598 for a single householder and two children under 18.)
- ²¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2019, Table S2414: Industry by Sex and Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) for the Full-Time, Year-Round Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over*. Retrieved 16 March 2021, from <https://data.census.gov/>
- ²² U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplement: Table PINC-06: Occupation of Longest Job in 2019--People 15 Years and Over, by Total Money Earnings in 2019, Work Experience in 2019, Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex*. Retrieved 16 March 2021, from <http://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-06.html>
- ²³ U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplement: Table PINC-03. Educational Attainment--People 25 Years Old and Over, by Total Money Earnings in 2019, Work Experience in 2019, Age, Race,*

Hispanic Origin, and Sex. Retrieved 16 March 2021, from <http://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-03.html>

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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.

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