

# 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 \$47,299 while the median annual pay for a man who holds a full-time, year-round job is \$57,456. **This means that, overall, women in the United States are paid 82 cents for every dollar paid to men, amounting to an annual gender wage gap of \$10,157.<sup>1</sup>**

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.<sup>2</sup>

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, Black women are typically paid 63 cents, Native American women 60 cents and Latinas just 55 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.<sup>3</sup> White, non-Hispanic women are paid 79 cents and Asian American women 87 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, and Asian American and Pacific Islander women of some ethnic and national backgrounds fare much worse.<sup>4</sup>

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, women are paid 91 cents for every dollar paid to men (a gap of 9 cents) (see *chart*).<sup>5</sup> In 424 of the 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.<sup>6</sup>

## **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 **more than \$956 billion every year** due to the wage gap.<sup>7</sup> 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;<sup>8</sup>
- 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;<sup>9</sup>
- Nearly seven additional months of premiums for employer-based health insurance;<sup>10</sup>
- Nearly 65 weeks of food (more than one year's worth);<sup>11</sup>
- More than six more months of mortgage and utilities payments;<sup>12</sup>
- More than nine additional months of rent;<sup>13</sup>
- Up to 8.4 additional years of birth control;<sup>14</sup>
- Or enough money to pay off student loan debt in just under three years.<sup>15</sup>

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

- In the United States, mothers are breadwinners in nearly half of families with children under 18. This includes 45 percent of white mothers, 47 percent of Latina mothers, 74 percent of Black mothers, 58 percent of Native American mothers and 42 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander mothers.<sup>16</sup> Yet the wage gap for mothers is larger than for women overall. Mothers with full-time, year-round jobs are paid 70 cents for every dollar paid to fathers.<sup>17</sup>
- Thirty-four million households in the United States are headed by women, more than six million of them with children under 18.<sup>18</sup> Nearly 8.2 million of those households – including more than two million with minor children – have incomes that fall below the poverty level.<sup>19</sup> 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 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.<sup>20</sup>
- **The wage gap is present within occupations.** Among the occupations with the most people working full time, year-round – sales, production, management, service, and office and administrative support – women are paid less than men. In sales, women are paid just 68 cents for every dollar paid to men. In production, just 68 cents. In management, 77 cents. In service occupations, just 79 cents. And in office and administrative support occupations, 88 cents.<sup>21</sup>
- **The wage gap exists regardless of education level.** Women with master’s degrees working full time, year-round are paid just 70 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.<sup>22</sup>
- **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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup>

## America’s Women Are Concerned About Unfair Pay

- **Women consider equal pay a top workplace issue.** Ninety-one percent of women voters say that Congress should strengthen equal pay laws for women.<sup>25</sup>
- **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 countries with leading economies.<sup>26</sup>

○ **Women want Congress to enact policies that would help close the wage gap.**

Eighty-four percent of women voters want Congress to pass paid family and medical leave legislation. Eighty-one percent want Congress to protect the Affordable Care Act, especially provisions that protect individuals with pre-existing conditions and provide coverage for preventive health services and access to birth control services. Seventy-seven percent want Congress to protect *Roe v. Wade*, which allows women to make their own personal reproductive health care decisions.<sup>27</sup>

## 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<sup>28</sup> – 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 Family And Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) 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.

- **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.<sup>29</sup> Defending policies like the Affordable Care Act’s guarantee of a full range of contraceptives without co-pay, increasing funding for 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 Woman) 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](https://nationalpartnership.org/gap).**

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplement: Table P1NC-05: Work Experience in 2019 – People 15 Years Old and Over by Total Money Earnings in 2019, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex, and Disability Status*. Retrieved 15 September 2020, 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 2019)

<sup>2</sup> Glynn, S. J. (2018, April). *Gender wage inequality: What we know and how we can fix it*. Retrieved 15 September 2020 from Washington Center for Equitable Growth website: <https://equitablegrowth.org/research-paper/gender-wage-inequality/?longform=true>

<sup>3</sup> See note 1; 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 22 September 2020, 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. The median annual pay of a Native American women in this source was \$36,577 and the median annual pay of white, non-Hispanic men was \$61,233.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid; The overall wage gap for Asian American women in the United States is smaller than for other groups of women of color, but there are substantial variations in median annual pay among Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women of different ethnic and national

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backgrounds, meaning that many subgroups of AAPI women face significantly greater wage penalties. For more information, see: <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/fair-pay/asian-women-and-the-wage-gap.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> 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 17 September 2020, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=b20017&tid=ACSDT1Y2019.B20017>

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2018, 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 2018 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) for the Population 16 Years and Over with Earnings in the Past 12 Months*. Retrieved 19 March 2020, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=B20017&tid=ACSDT1Y2018.B20017>; (In 424 out of 435 congressional districts, women who work full time, year-round are paid less than men. In the other 11 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.)

<sup>7</sup> See note 1; U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *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 2019, Work Experience in 2019, Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex*. Retrieved 15 September 2020, 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 2019, multiplied by the total number of women working full time, year-round in 2019)

<sup>8</sup> Child Care Aware of America. (2019). *The U.S. and the High Price of Child Care: An Examination of a Broken System*. Retrieved 15 September 2020, from <https://info.childcareaware.org/hubsfs/2019%20Price%20of%20Care%20State%20Sheets/Final-TheUSandtheHighPriceofChildCare-AnExaminationofaBrokenSystem.pdf>; Estimate of \$9,254 based on the average cost of 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."

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2018, November). *Digest of Education Statistics: 2017* (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 2018-19), Chapter 3. Retrieved 15 September 2020, from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19\\_330.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_330.10.asp) (The average total annual cost of undergraduate tuition and required fees is \$9,212 for a four-year public college or university or \$3,313 for a two-year college)

<sup>10</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation. (n.d.) Average Annual Single Premium per Enrolled Employee For Employer-Based Health Insurance, 2018. Retrieved 15 September 2020, from <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/single-coverage/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Employee%20Contribution%22,%22sort%22:%22desc%22%7D>

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020, September). *Consumer Expenditures - 2019*. Retrieved 15 September 2020, from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cesan.pdf> (Calculation uses overall average "food" cost.)

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2018, Table DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics*. Retrieved 15 March 2020, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=dp04&g=&lastDisplayedRow=28&table=DP04&tid=ACSDP1Y2018.DP04&hidePreview=true> (Calculation uses median monthly owner costs, housing units with a mortgage)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. (Calculation uses median gross rent, occupied units paying rent)

<sup>14</sup> Center for American Progress. (2012, February 15). *The High Costs of Birth Control: It's Not As Affordable As You Think*. Retrieved 15 September 2020, from [https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/02/pdf/BC\\_costs.pdf](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.)

<sup>15</sup> Siegel Bernard, T., & Russell, K. (2018, July 11). "The New Toll of American Student Debt in 3 Charts." *The New York Times*. Retrieved 15 September 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/your-money/student-loan-debt-parents.html> (The average debt load at graduation for a student receiving a bachelor's degree was \$30,301 in 2015-2016.)

<sup>16</sup> Anderson, J. (2020, April). *Breadwinner Mothers by Race/Ethnicity*. Retrieved 15 September 2020 from Institute for Women's Policy Research website: <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/QF-Breadwinner-Mothers-by-Race-FINAL-46.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.)

<sup>17</sup> Fins, A. (2020, May). *Effects of COVID-19 Show Us Equal Pay Is Critical for Mothers*. Retrieved 15 September 2020, from National Women's Law Center website: <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Moms-EPD-2020-v2.pdf>

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- 18 U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2019, Table DP02: Selected Social Characteristics in the United States*. Retrieved 17 September 2020, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=dp02&tid=ACSDP1Y2019.DP02&hidePreview=false> (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)
- 19 U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2019, Geographies: United States, Table DP03: Selected Economic Characteristics*. Retrieved 17 September 2020, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=dp03&tid=ACSDP1Y2019.DP03&hidePreview=false> (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.)
- 20 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 17 September 2020, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=s2414&tid=ACSST1Y2019.S2414>
- 21 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 15 September 2020, from <http://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-06.html>
- 22 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 15 September 2020, from <http://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-03.html>
- 23 See note 2; Levanon, A., England, P., & Allison, P. (2009). Occupational Feminization and Pay: Assessing Causal Dynamics Using 1950–2000 U.S. Census Data. *Social Forces* 88(2), 865-891. doi.org/10.1353/sof.0.0264; Paul, M., Zaw, K., Hamilton, D., & Darity, Jr., W. (2018, August). *Returns in the labor market: A nuanced view of penalties at the intersection of race and gender*. Retrieved 15 September 2020 from Washington Center for Equitable Growth website: <https://equitablegrowth.org/working-papers/intersectionality-labor-market/>
- 24 Blau, F. D., & Kahn, L. M. (2016, January). *The Gender Wage Gap: Extent, Trends, and Explanations*. IZA Discussion Paper No. 9656. Retrieved 15 September 2020, from <http://ftp.iza.org/dp9656.pdf> (See Table 4: *Decomposition of Gender Wage Gap, 1980 and 2010 (PSID)* for the full breakdown of explanatory variables.)
- 25 YWCA USA. (2018, September). *What Women Want 2018*. Retrieved 15 September 2020, from [https://www.ywca.org/wp-content/uploads/WhatWomenWant2018\\_final.pdf](https://www.ywca.org/wp-content/uploads/WhatWomenWant2018_final.pdf) (Lake Research Partners and American Viewpoint conducted a national survey, commissioned by the YWCA USA, among 1,038 adult women with oversamples of 100 Black women, 100 Latinas, 100 Asian/Pacific Islander women, and 100 Native American women. The survey was conducted from Aug. 27 – Sept. 6, 2018. The margin of error for the sample as a whole is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points but was higher for subgroups.)
- 26 Thomson Reuters Foundation. (2015). *The 5 key issues facing women working in the G20*. Retrieved 15 September 2020, from <http://www.womenatworkpoll.com> (Ipsos Global @dvisor 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.)
- 27 See note 25.
- 28 Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2019, September). *Women's Median Earnings as a Percent of Men's, 1985-2018 (Full-time, Year-Round Workers) with Projections for Pay Equity, by Race/Ethnicity*. Retrieved 15 September 2020, from [https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Q076\\_Wage-Gap-Update-2019.pdf](https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Q076_Wage-Gap-Update-2019.pdf)
- 29 Bailey, M. J., Hershbein, B., & Miller, A.R. (2012, July). The Opt-In Revolution? Contraception and the Gender Gap in Wages. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 4(3), 225-254. doi: 10.1257/app.4.3.225; Reproductive Health Technologies Project. (2015, August). *Two Sides of the Same Coin: Integrating Economic and Reproductive Justice*. Retrieved 15 September 2020, from <http://rhtp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Two-Sides-of-the-Same-Coin-Integrating-Economic-and-Reproductive-Justice.pdf>

The National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, reproductive health and rights, access to quality, affordable health care and policies that help all people meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at [NationalPartnership.org](http://NationalPartnership.org).

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