



UNSEEN WORK, UNMET NEEDS: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES FACE SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO FINANCIAL STABILITY AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY.

This isn't a coincidence: it's the result of policies that fail to account for the unpaid labor women disproportionately perform. [Oxfam America](#) and [Prosperity Now](#) released a comprehensive joint research project exploring the dynamics of women's paid and unpaid labor in the US, particularly for women of color, who are disproportionately affected by the dual impact of paid work and unpaid care responsibilities. The relationship between paid and unpaid labor reveals significant challenges, with many facing systemic barriers in accessing essential support such as workplace flexibility, equitable pay, and affordable care services.

While no singular policy can fix the disparities and challenges women experience as they endeavor to care for their families and make financial ends meet, holistic policy solutions can transform the barriers women face. Taken together, the policies below recognize the value of both care and care workers, invest in children and families, strengthen our economy by supporting women's participation, and ensure financial stability and economic opportunity for all families.

Improving the State of Work:

- **Passing Paid Family and Medical Leave: The Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act** would allow workers to take up to 12 weeks off while receiving a percentage of their pay to address a serious health condition (including pregnancy), care for a family member/loved one with a serious health condition, care for a newborn, newly adopted child, or newly placed foster child, or to address a family member's needs arising from sexual or domestic violence.
- **Ensuring Paid Sick and Safe Days: The Healthy Families Act** would create a right for workers to earn up to seven days of paid sick time off per year to recover from illness, care for a sick family member, access preventive care, or attend school meetings related to a child's health or disability. This includes the need for time off to recover from or to address a family member's needs arising from sexual or domestic violence.
- **Promoting Fair and Flexible Schedules: The Schedules That Work Act** would support hourly workers by requiring adequate rest between shifts, advance notice of schedules, a right to request a schedule that fits their needs, and predictability for last-minute changes or canceled shifts.



- **Enhancing Rights to Organize and Collectively Bargain:** Ensuring all workers, in every industry, can democratically elect to join a union and repealing so-called “right-to-work” laws will promote an equitable economy, especially for women of color. Union members enjoy better protections, including higher wages, lower wage gaps, and better access to paid leave and benefits. The **Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act** would protect the right to join a union by empowering workers, holding employers accountable for violating workers’ rights, and protecting safe and fair union elections, among other provisions—all of which support the autonomy of workers.
- **Improving Part-Time Work:** Pay and benefits parity between part-time and full-time workers will support the financial prosperity of many caregivers. The **Part-Time Worker Bill of Rights Act** would require employers to give full- and part-time employees equal pay, benefits, and promotional opportunities. It would also expand access to paid leave. These reforms will support workers who juggle both paid work and unpaid care work at home.
- **Ending Exclusions in Labor Law:** Domestic workers and farmworkers are at heightened risk of economic exploitation, as they are excluded from critical labor protections afforded to other workers. Amending the Fair Labor Standards Act and National Labor Relations Act to provide coverage to excluded workers such as farmworkers and domestic workers would give critical protections like overtime pay to more workers. In the meantime, the **Domestic Worker Bill of Rights Act** would make a monumental difference for these workers and their families by extending pay and leave rights, health and safety standards, as well as protections around fair and fixed scheduling.

Bettering Income and Wages:

- **Increasing the Minimum Wage:** The **Raise the Wage Act of 2023** would raise the minimum wage to \$17 and eliminate the tipped, disability, and youth subminimum wages. This would raise wages for millions of workers across the country and help close the disparities experienced disproportionately by women of color.
- **Passing Guaranteed Income:** A guaranteed income program focused on low- and moderate-income individuals, such as the **Guaranteed Income Pilot Program Act of 2023**, would allow baseline compensation disconnected from their employment to pay for basic necessities, recognize the baseline work every family has to do, and provide economic stability for all families.

- **Advancing Pay Equity:** The **Paycheck Fairness Act** would close loopholes in current equal pay law. These solutions include but are not limited to the prohibition of retaliation for colleagues discussing salaries and a ban on screening job applicants’ salary history, and requiring employers to prove that pay disparities exist for legitimate, job-related reasons.

Providing Care:

- **Improving Child Care:** A reconstruction of child care systems in the U.S. must ensure all families have access to affordable, quality child care. An improved child care system must center the needs of women of color and their children in order to provide high-quality and well-paying jobs to the providers who do incredibly valuable early childhood education. The **Child Care for Working Families Act** and the **Child Care for Every Community Act** would help make child care more accessible and affordable, while increasing pay for child care workers and early learning educators. And in the interim, Congress should permanently expand the Child Tax Credit, including an increase in the amount for each child and making the credit fully refundable.
- **Bettering Adult and Elder Care:** Creating easy, affordable access to care services for the elderly, sick, and disabled would reduce the time women spend managing appointments and other critical aspects of care. Increased access to affordable and quality long-term and home- and community-based care, such as home health aides and similar care services, would also be essential to reducing women’s time spent caring for loved ones. The **Better Care Better Jobs Act** and the **Home and Community Based Services Access Act** would expand care services for the elderly and people with disabilities.
- **Investing in Current Infrastructure:** Increasing federal financial investments in programs and agencies like Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS), before- and after-school programs, and more would help expand essential care services and make them more accessible.

These policies are essential pieces of building an economy rooted in care, empowerment, and solidarity—ensuring all workers have equitable access to protections, benefits, and quality of life. These critical public investments in building a care infrastructure can recognize the value of both unpaid care and care workers, invest in children and families, and, by reducing strain between paid work and unpaid care labor, boost the economic opportunities of women and caregivers.

TO LEARN MORE AND SEE THE FULL REPORT, VISIT

www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/research-publications/unseen-work-unmet-needs

