

Women

In the last 30 years, the key structural change to the American labor force has been the increased participation of women. During this time, there have been dramatic decreases in gender wage gaps and women have increased their share of quality jobs. Because of declines for men in these areas, the performance of women in the labor market has been essential to many families' ability to maintain living standards from a generation ago. Despite gains, data show there remains plenty of room for improvement:

Wages, income, and benefits

84%

The median hourly wage gap between men and women has been halved since 1973. In 2011, the median hourly wage earned by women was 84 percent of the male wage, compared to 63.1 percent in 1973.

\$7.50

A female college graduate in 2011 earned \$24.31 an hour, which was \$7.50, or about 24 percent, less than a male college graduate that same year, and roughly \$3.00, or 11 percent, less than a male college graduate in 1979.

\$11.06/hr.

Nearly one-third (32 percent) of women earned a wage at poverty level or below (less than \$11.06 an hour; the wage needed for a full-time, full-year worker to support a family of four at the poverty level) in 2011, significantly higher than the 24.3 percent of males who did.

24.2%

From 1979–2011, wages for women at the median grew 24.2 percent. At the 95th percentile, wages grew nearly 67 percent. At the bottom 10th percentile, however, wages *declined* a little more than 2 percent over the period.

90%

For 90 percent of women (namely those with a college degree but no advanced degree, and those without a college degree), wages peaked in 2003 and have stagnated or declined since.

522

From 1979–2007, married women in the middle fifth increased their yearly hours worked by 58.5 percent, or 522 hours—the equivalent of three months of full-time work.

49.9%

In 2010, 49.9 percent of women had health insurance provided by their employer, a 9.5 percentage-point reduction from 1979.

42%

Nearly 42 percent of women had employer-provided pension coverage in 2010, a modest 0.6 percentage-point increase from 1979. Women were the only demographic group not to experience erosion in employer-provided pension coverage over the period.

54.5%

A majority (54.5 percent) of those who would benefit from increases to the minimum wage are women, greater than their 48.3 percent share of the workforce.

Jobs

Spotlight GOOD JOBS

John Schmitt and Janelle Jones of the Center for Economic and Policy Research provide a modest definition of a “good job” as one that meets three criteria:

1. It must pay at least \$18.50 per hour (the median male hourly wage in 1979 adjusted to 2010 dollars)
2. It must offer health insurance
3. It must offer a retirement plan of some kind

21.1%

27.4 percent of workers had good jobs in 1979, a share that declined 2.8 percentage points by 2010 despite the value of the output of the average worker increasing 48 percent over the period. In 2010, 21.1 percent of women held good jobs, compared to 27.7 percent of men.

50.0%

Women hold roughly half of all payroll jobs, and reached a peak of 50.0 percent in August 2009.

Men experienced greater job losses at the onset of the Great Recession. The greater share of job losses is entirely explained by the disproportionate male share of employment in industries that experienced heavy losses, such as construction and manufacturing. However, even after controlling for industry, men have seen a disproportionate share of job gains in the recovery.

Poverty

40.7%

40.7 percent of female-headed families with children lived in poverty in 2010.

55.1%

55.1 percent of poverty-level wage workers were women in 2011.