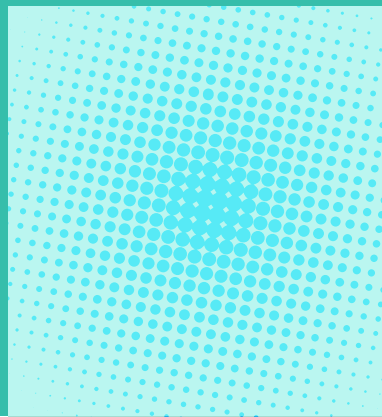
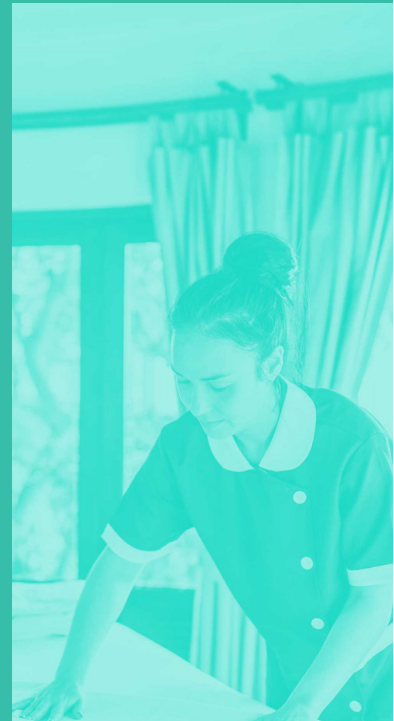




Hard Work Is Not Enough

WOMEN IN LOW-PAID JOBS



JULY 2023



Acknowledgments

ABOUT THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S LAW CENTER

The National Women's Law Center fights for gender justice—in the courts, in public policy, and in our society—working across the issues that are central to the lives of women and girls. We use the law in all its forms to change culture and drive solutions to the gender inequity that shapes our society and to break down the barriers that harm all of us—especially women of color, LGBTQI+ people, and women and families with low incomes. For more than 50 years, NWLC has been on the leading edge of every major legal and policy victory for women.

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Introduction

All working people—regardless of race, class, or gender—want jobs that allow them to support their families and live with dignity.

But far too often, employers do not provide the wages, hours, or benefits that people need to achieve economic security and stability.

This was true before the COVID-19 pandemic began and it remains true today—especially for women, and for women of color most of all. Although women make up just under half of the workforce in the United States, they represent nearly two-thirds (64.1%) of the workforce in the 40 lowest-paying jobs (referred to generally in this analysis as “low-paid jobs”).¹

It was the women working in these jobs—as restaurant servers and bartenders, fast food workers, hotel clerks, housekeeping cleaners, and staff in entertainment venues and retail stores—who were most likely to become unemployed in 2020, as restaurants and storefronts shuttered and travel came to a halt.² And many others—the personal care and home health aides caring for people managing illness in their homes, the cashiers staffing grocery stores, and the child care workers caring for the children of health care workers and first responders—found their work to be newly deemed essential but still undervalued, with decent pay and basic benefits out of reach.

Fortunately, policymakers acted quickly in 2020 and early 2021 to stem job losses and prevent economic devastation. The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), signed by President Biden in March 2021, and the relief legislation that preceded it provided critical assistance that helped families make ends meet, dramatically reduced child poverty, stabilized the child care sector, and helped create the conditions for robust job growth. By the end of 2021, overall unemployment was close to pre-pandemic levels (where it has since remained).³ And low-paid workers—especially women and people of color—experienced real wage gains. Between 2019 and 2022, hourly wage growth was strongest at the bottom of the wage distribution, with typical wages increasing by 9% for workers in the lowest-paying jobs (compared to about 2%, for example, for workers in the middle of the wage distribution).⁴

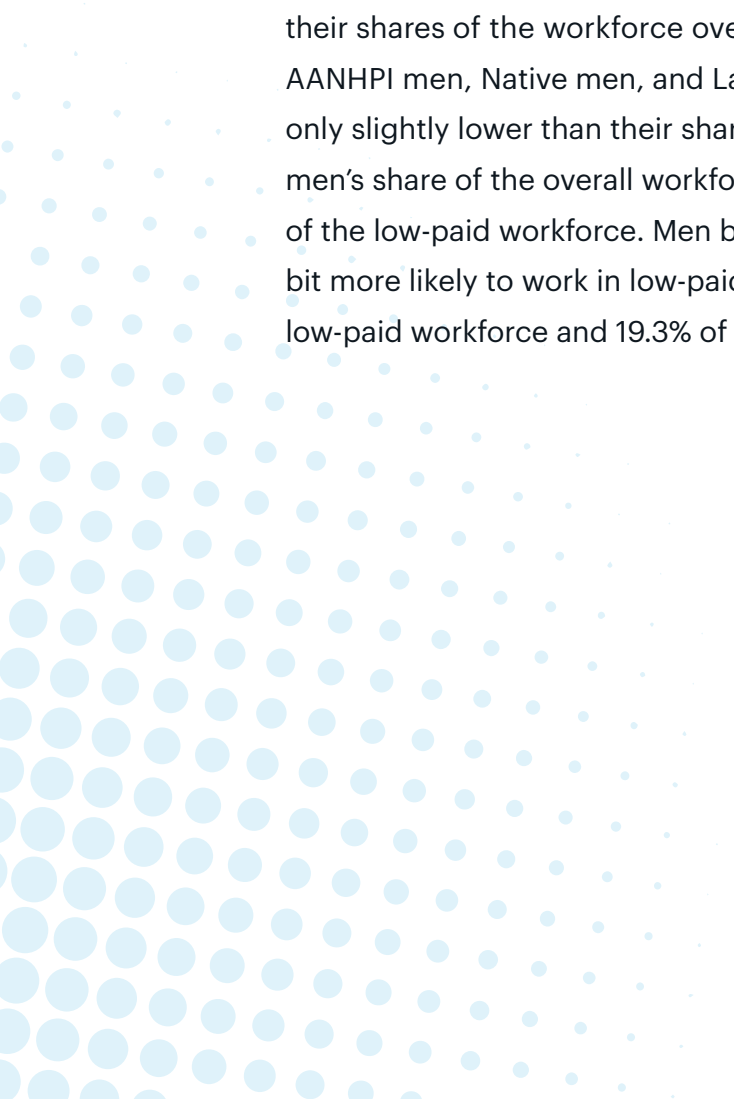
But while the federal pandemic relief measures provided critical support for struggling families and set the stage for a strong jobs recovery, they were temporary. Most have come to an end and others are sunseting soon. Lawmakers did not make the permanent structural changes needed to address longstanding inequities or ensure widespread job quality. And in the face of the loss of these supports, rising costs, savings depleted by periods of unemployment, and ongoing caregiving challenges, modest wage gains were not sufficient for many people working in low-paying jobs to achieve economic security.

The analysis that follows examines who women in low-paid jobs are and how they were faring in 2021, the most recent year for which national data on poverty and income are available—with a focus on women of color and women supporting children, who face the highest risk of economic hardship. It confirms that in 2021, millions of women were still struggling to pay their bills and support their families, despite their education, experience, and hard work in essential jobs. And it makes clear what a low unemployment rate often obscures: in the absence of structural reforms to enable all working people to thrive, **having a job is no guarantee of having enough income to make ends meet.**



Who are the women working in low-paid jobs?

- Across the United States, **nearly 21 million people work in the 40 lowest paying jobs—and women make up the great majority of this workforce: 64.1%.**⁵ The work they do is vitally important to our economy and our society, but employers typically pay people who hold these jobs less than \$15 per hour. See **Appendix I** for median wages, size of the workforce, and share of the workforce who are women in each of the 40 lowest-paying jobs.
- Women working in low-paid jobs are also typically paid less than men working in the same occupations. Among people working full time, year-round in low-paid jobs, women are paid just **83 cents** for every dollar paid to their male counterparts.⁶

- 
- While women of every race are overrepresented in low-paid jobs compared to their share of the overall workforce, this disproportionate representation is especially stark for women of color and immigrant women.
 - For example, the **shares of Latinas and Native women in the low-paid workforce are roughly double their respective shares in the workforce overall**, and Black women’s share of the low-paid workforce is nearly 1.5 times larger than their share of the overall workforce.
 - **Women born outside of the United States** are also overrepresented in the low-paid workforce, making up 14.7% of the low-paid workforce but 8.0% of the overall workforce. See **Figure 1**.
 - In contrast, **men of every race—especially white, non-Hispanic men—are underrepresented in the low-paid workforce** relative to their shares of the workforce overall. While the shares of Black men, AANHPI men, Native men, and Latinos in the low-paid workforce are only slightly lower than their shares of the overall workforce, white men’s share of the overall workforce is 1.8 times larger than their share of the low-paid workforce. Men born outside the United States are a bit more likely to work in low-paid jobs; they represent 21.7% of the low-paid workforce and 19.3% of the workforce overall. See **Figure 2**.

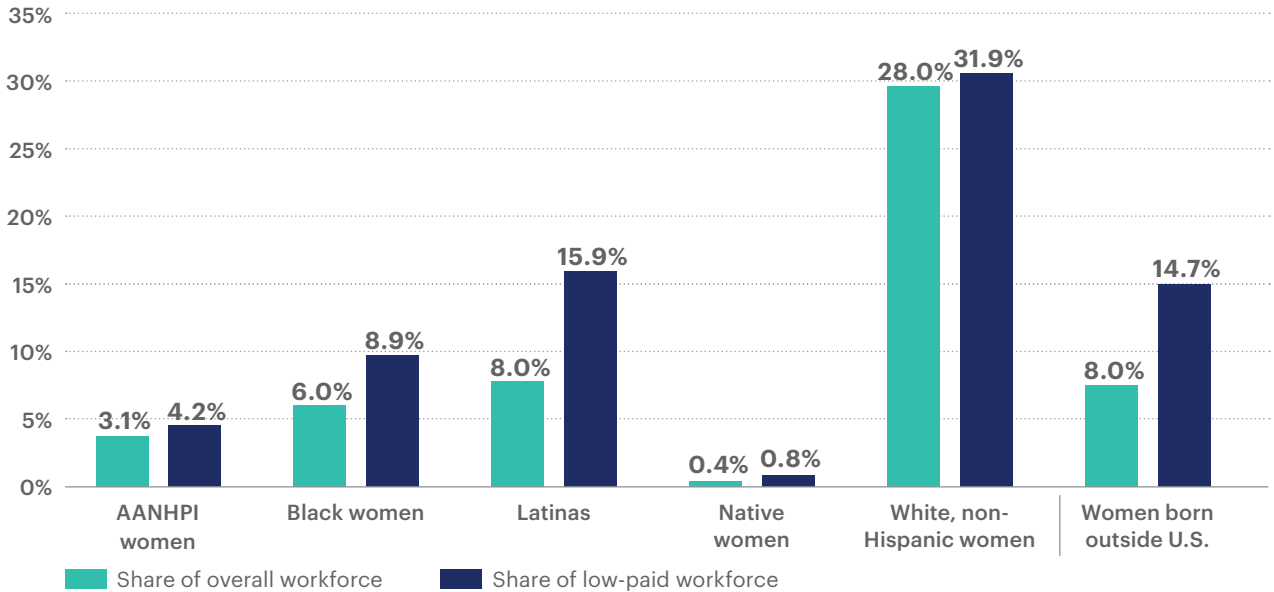
DISABLED WOMEN FACE SUBSTANTIAL BARRIERS TO FAIR EARNINGS AND EMPLOYMENT.

An economy in which overall unemployment is low often masks not only the quality of the jobs people hold but also the disparities in employment rates—as well as labor force participation rates—among different groups. This disparity is stark for the roughly one in four people in the United States living with a disability,⁸ who faced an unemployment rate that was nearly twice that of the workforce overall and who participated in the labor force at less than half the rate of the total population in 2021.⁹ While the recent increase in the availability of remote work has made it easier for some disabled people to work and begun to narrow some of the employment gaps that existed prior to the pandemic,¹⁰ in 2021, just 18.9% of women with a disability were in the labor force—compared to 61.3% of women without a disability, 73.2% of men without a disability, and 24.0% of men with a disability.¹¹

The factors impacting employment opportunities for disabled individuals are varied and complex,¹² but research makes clear that stigma and discrimination play a role: one study, for example, found that employers were less likely to respond to applications from job candidates who disclosed disabilities, even when the candidates had qualifications equal to those without disabilities.¹³ Despite important protections like the Americans with Disabilities Act,¹⁴ federal and state policies too often still reflect and reinforce harmful assumptions about people with disabilities. In one striking example, the federal Fair Labor Standards Act and the law in most states allows employers to pay below minimum wage to people with disabilities working in segregated environments known as “sheltered workshops.”¹⁵ Policymakers have also failed to ensure that housing and transportation are affordable and accessible for people with disabilities, or to provide the additional services and supports necessary for disabled people and their families to thrive.¹⁶ As a result of these structural barriers to employment and economic security, disabled people—particularly women and people of color—typically have lower incomes and face a higher risk of poverty and economic hardship than people without disabilities.¹⁷

Figure 1.

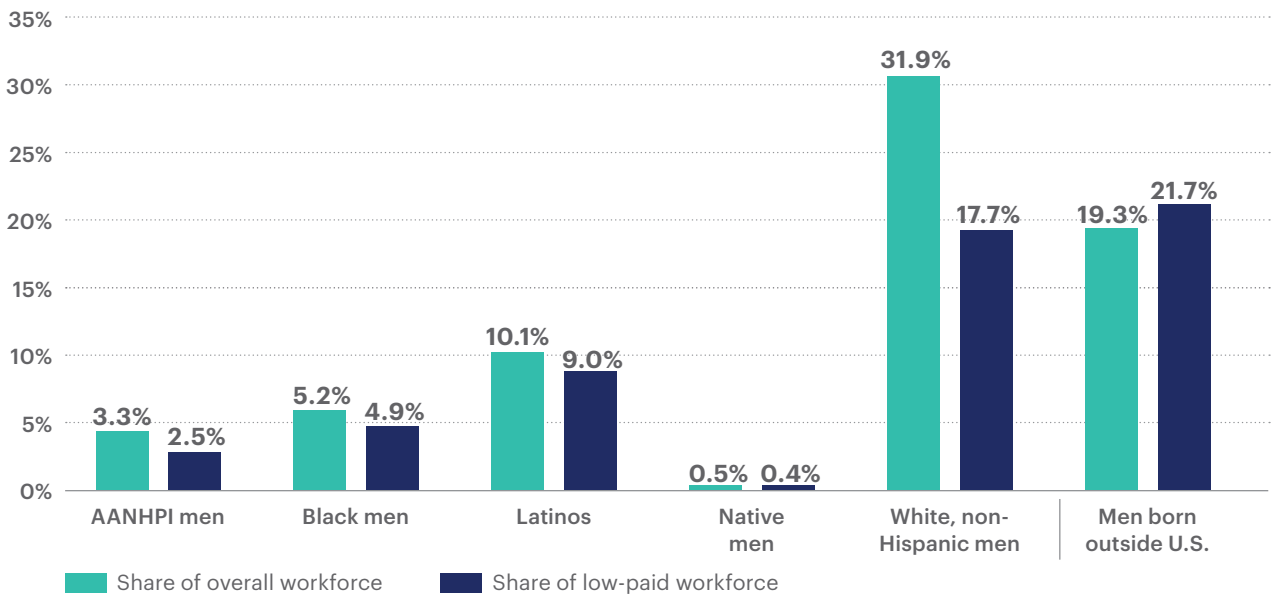
Women in the Overall and Low-Paid Workforces by Race/Ethnicity and Nativity, 2021



Source: NWLC calculations with 2021 American Community Survey one-year sample using IPUMS-USA. Respondents self-identify their race, ethnicity, gender, occupation, and place of birth.

Figure 2.

Men in the Overall and Low-Paid Workforces by Race/Ethnicity and Nativity, 2021

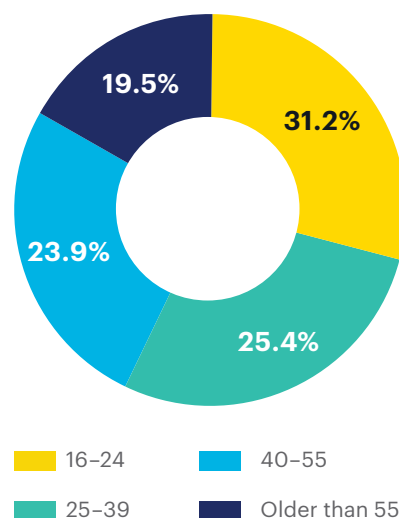


Source: NWLC calculations with 2021 American Community Survey one-year sample using IPUMS-USA. Respondents self-identify their race, ethnicity, gender, occupation, and place of birth.

→ **Over one in 12 women in the low-paid workforce (8.8%) have a disability,** compared to 6.7% of women in the workforce overall.⁷ While the share of women with disabilities in low-paid jobs is roughly similar to their representation in the overall workforce, many women with disabilities are shut out of the workforce altogether (see “*Disabled women face substantial barriers to fair earnings and employment,*” page 8).

→ The overwhelming majority of low-paid working women are adults, and many are prime working age. **Over 85% of women in the low-paid workforce are age 20 or older.** Millennials (ages 25 to 39) make up more than one in four women in the low-paid workforce (25.4%). Gen Xers (ages 40–55) are almost one in four women in the low-paid workforce (23.9%), and nearly one in three women in the low-paid workforce (31.2%) are Gen Zers (ages 16–24).¹⁸ See **Figure 3**.

Figure 3.
Women in the Low-Paid Workforce by Age, 2021

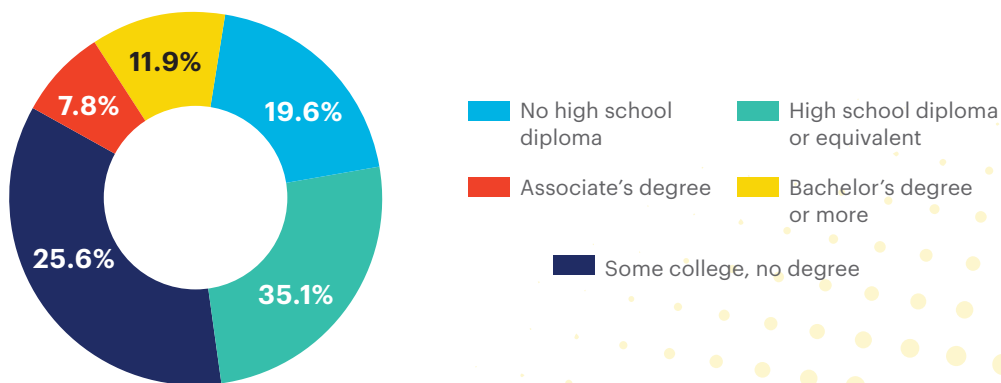


Source: NWLC calculations with 2021 American Community Survey one-year sample using IPUMS-USA. Respondents self-identify their gender, age, and occupation.

→ More than eight in 10 women in the 40 lowest-paying jobs (80.4%) have a high school diploma or a higher education level, and **close to half have at least some college education**. Over one-quarter of women in low-paid jobs (25.6%) have some college education yet no degree, 7.8% have an associate’s degree, and more than one in 10 (11.9%) holds a bachelor’s degree or higher. See **Figure 4**.

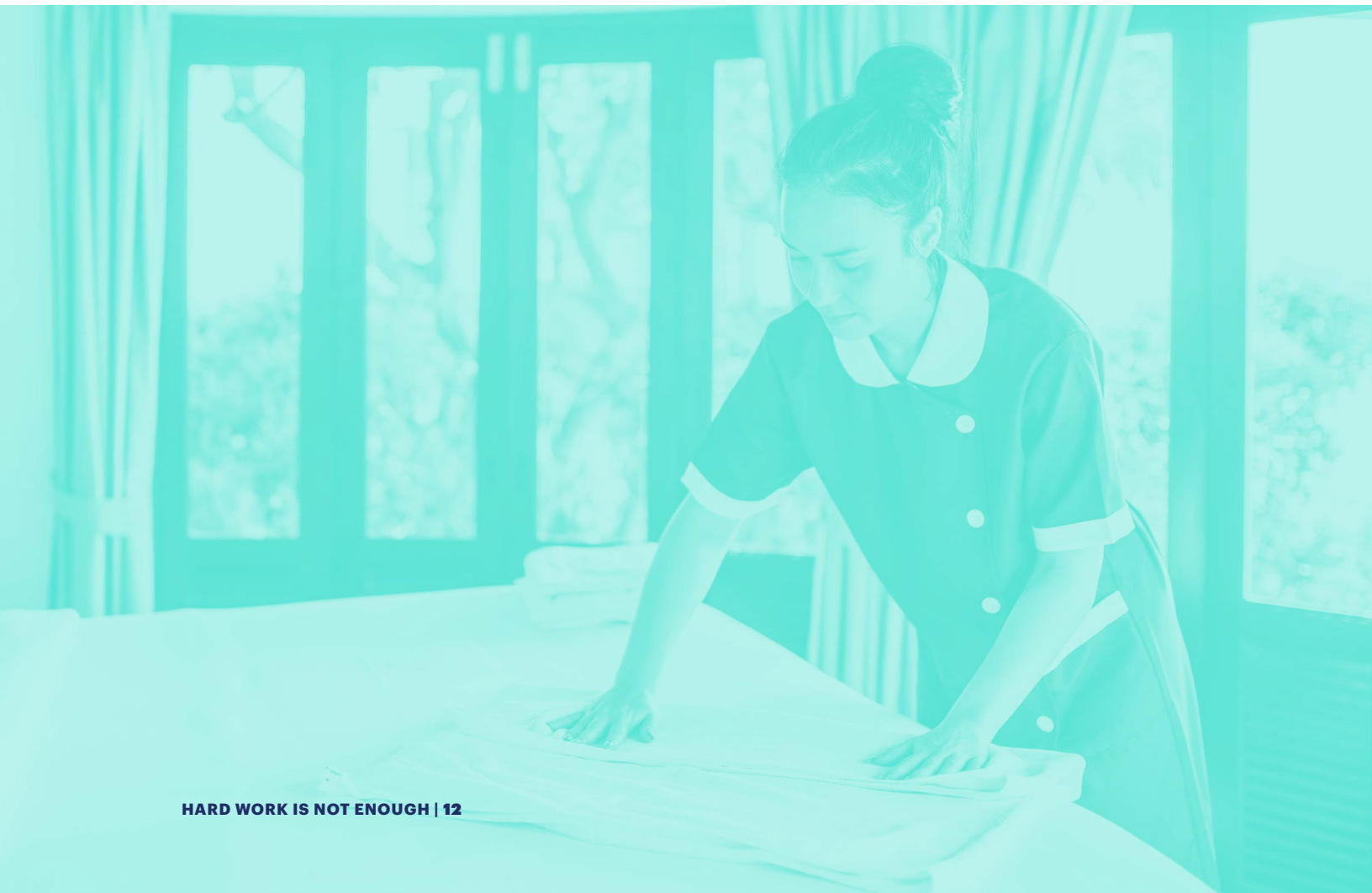
Figure 4.

Women in the Low-Paid Workforce by Education Level, 2021



Source: NWLC calculations with 2021 American Community Survey one-year sample using IPUMS-USA. Respondents self-identify their gender, occupation, and the highest level of education they have completed.

- Nearly half of women in the low-paid workforce (46.4%) work full time, and close to two in five (37.3%) work full time, year-round.¹⁹
 - ◆ More than half of women in low-paid jobs (53.6%), however, work part time,²⁰ compared to 26.6% of women in the workforce overall.
 - ◆ **Many part-time workers would prefer to work more hours but cannot do so** because their employer only rarely offers full-time positions—a scenario that is common in many low-paid service sector jobs—or because the “choice” of part-time work is forced by, for example, the unaffordability or unavailability of child care.²¹ Research from the Center for Law & Social Policy shows that up to 40% of all people working part time would prefer more hours, including half of people working part time in service occupations.²²



Women in low-paid jobs struggle to make ends meet, even if they are able to work full-time hours.

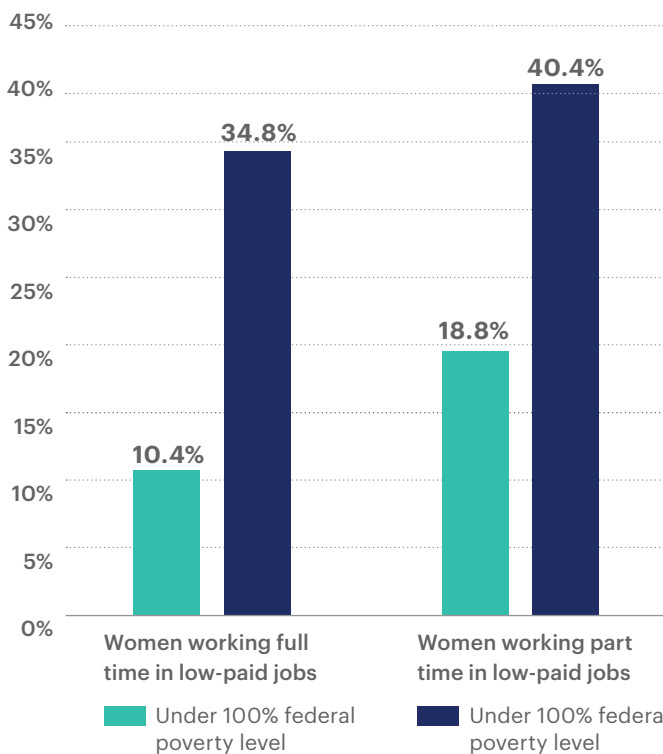
For millions of women in low-paid jobs and their families, education and hard work are simply not enough to boost their incomes above the poverty line. And millions more live near poverty (defined here as household income below twice the federal poverty line), where a medical emergency, a car breakdown, or a few cut shifts can mean that families won't have enough to pay for basics, like food, rent, utilities, or child care. In fact, most families have to earn much more than twice the federal poverty line to make sure they can make ends meet. For example, while the official poverty line for a parent with two children in 2021 was \$21,831,²³ the Economic Policy Institute estimates that a family of that size living in Columbus, Ohio, would need more than three times a poverty-level income (\$70,190) to maintain a basic but adequate standard of living—and far more is necessary in higher cost regions.²⁴

→ **Women in low-paid jobs typically are major contributors to their household’s income.** But even when they work full time, women in low-paid jobs and their families face a high risk of falling below or near the poverty line—and those odds are greatest for women of color.

- ◆ More than one in three women working full time in low-paid jobs in 2021 (34.8%) had household incomes below twice the poverty line, including 10.4% who lived in poverty. See **Figure 5**.
- ◆ **Among women working full time in low-paid jobs, 38.8% of all women of color lived in or near poverty in 2021**, compared to 30.0% of white, non-Hispanic women. Nearly four in 10 Latinas (38.9%), and more than four in 10 Native women (42.3%) and Black women (45.1%), working full time in low-paid jobs had household incomes below twice the poverty line. See **Figure 6**.

Figure 5.

Poverty and Near-Poverty Rates Among Women in Low-Paid Jobs and Workers Overall, 2021



Source: NWLC calculations with 2021 American Community Survey one-year sample using IPUMS-USA. Respondents self-identify their gender, occupation, and the usual number of hours they worked weekly.

- **Women in low-paid jobs who work part time because they can't find full-time work or need to manage other obligations face an even higher risk of poverty and economic insecurity.**
- ◆ About two in five women working part-time in low-paid jobs (40.4%) lived in or near poverty in 2021. See **Figure 5**.
 - ◆ Nearly half (47.2%) of women of color working part-time in low-paid jobs had household incomes below twice the federal poverty line in 2021—much higher than the rate faced by white, non-Hispanic women in these jobs (34.4%).
 - ▷ **Among Black and Native women working part time in low-paid jobs, over half had household incomes below twice the poverty line.** Over one in four Black women working part time in low-paid jobs (28.0%) lived in poverty, along with nearly one in four Native women (24.6%).
 - ▷ Among Latinas working part time in these jobs, nearly half (48.1%) had incomes below twice the poverty line, including more than one in five who lived in poverty. See **Figure 7**.

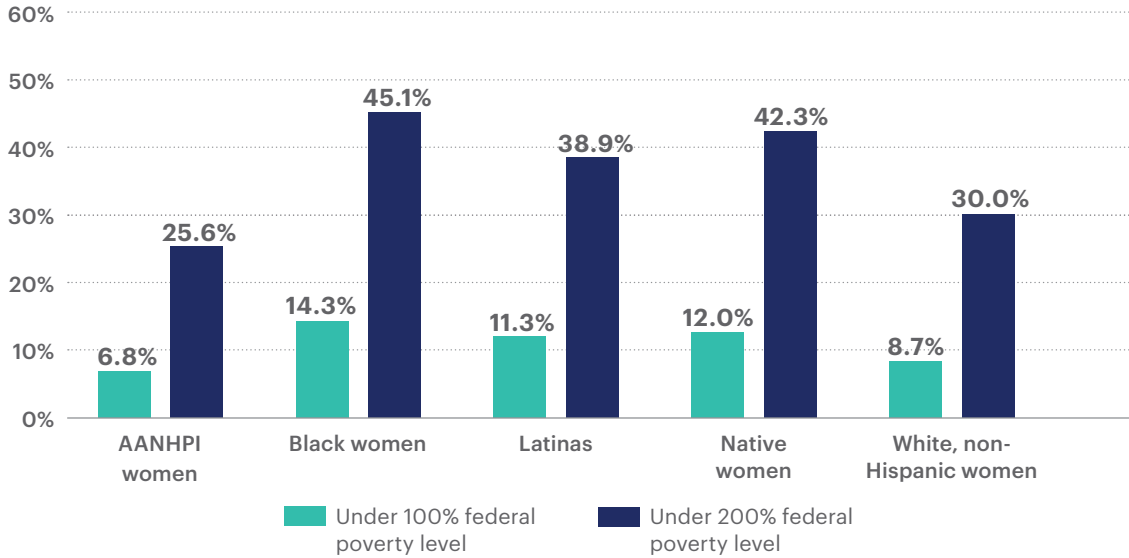
FOR MANY PEOPLE WORKING IN LOW-PAID JOBS, INADEQUATE WAGES ARE JUST ONE OF THE CHALLENGING CONDITIONS THEY FACE.

These jobs also frequently lack health insurance or other benefits—like paid sick days and paid family and medical leave—and feature work schedules with unstable, inadequate hours that produce unstable, inadequate income; this is particularly true for people who work part-time hours.²⁵

In states that have not expanded Medicaid, people working in low-paid jobs may have incomes that are above Medicaid eligibility limits but below the eligibility threshold for tax credits to help pay for health insurance through the state Marketplace, leaving them without a source of affordable coverage. And when employers pay low wages and deny benefits to the people who need them most, workers have to live paycheck to paycheck, with little ability to build wealth and retire with dignity.

Figure 6.

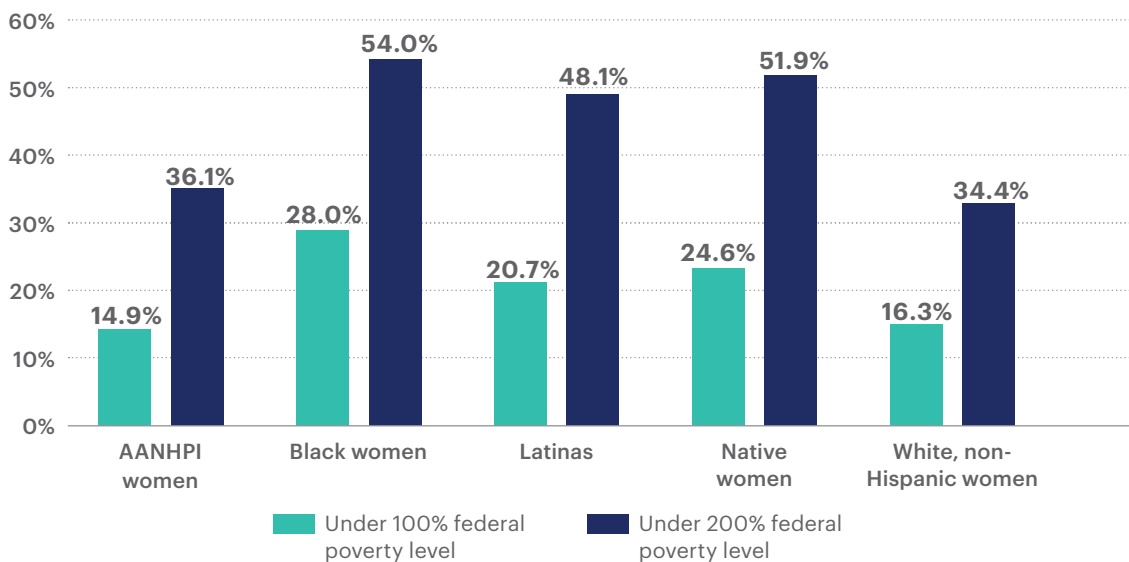
Poverty and Near-Poverty Rates Among Women Working Full Time in Low-Paid Jobs, by Race/Ethnicity, 2021



Source: NWLC calculations with 2021 American Community Survey one-year sample using IPUMS-USA. Respondents self-identify their race, ethnicity, gender, occupation, and the usual number of hours they worked weekly.

Figure 7.

Poverty and Near-Poverty Rates Among Women Working Part Time in Low-Paid Jobs, by Race/Ethnicity, 2021



Source: NWLC calculations with 2021 American Community Survey one-year sample using IPUMS-USA. Respondents self-identify their race, ethnicity, gender, occupation, and the usual number of hours they worked weekly.

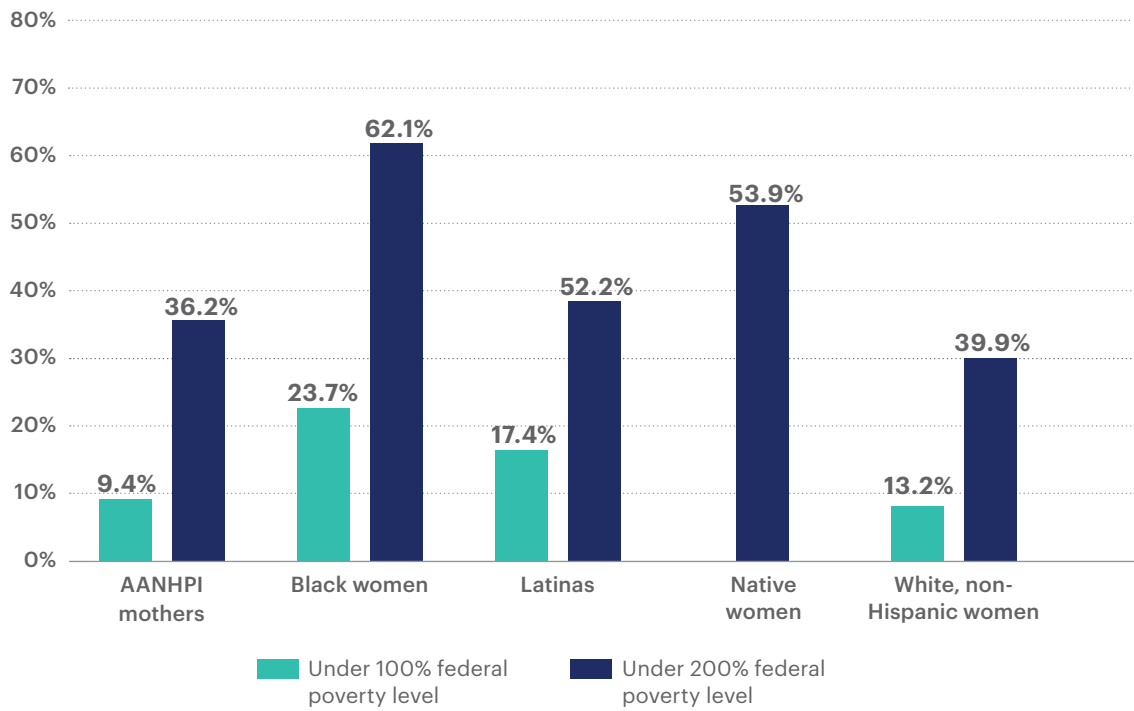
**Low-paid jobs
make it especially
hard for women
who are caring for
children to support
themselves and
their families.**



- Many women in the low-paid workforce are working to support themselves and their families, often as primary earners for their households. **More than one in four women in the low-paid workforce (25.5%) have at least one child under 18 at home**, including 8.9% who have at least one child under age 5. And mothers in low-paid jobs—especially Black mothers—are frequently the sole or primary breadwinners for their families.²⁶
- Among parents in low-paid jobs with children under age 18 who live with them, nearly three in four (72.8%) are mothers. While all working mothers face a higher risk of economic insecurity than working fathers, mothers in low-paid jobs are especially likely to struggle to make ends meet. **Over half of mothers in low-paid jobs (52.4%) had household incomes below twice the poverty line in 2021**, compared to 43.0% of fathers in the low-paid workforce, 23.9% of mothers in the workforce overall, and 19.1% of fathers in the workforce overall.
- Mothers who are women of color are even more likely to be poor, or near poor. Overall, nearly six in 10 mothers of color in the low-paid workforce (58.1%) had household incomes near or below the poverty line in 2021.
 - ◆ **Even when working full time, more than six in 10 Black mothers working in low-paid jobs (62.1%) had household incomes below twice the poverty line in 2021**; nearly one in four (23.7%) experienced poverty.
 - ◆ More than half of Latina mothers (52.2%) and Native mothers (53.9%) working full time in low-paid jobs lived in or near poverty in 2021, as did roughly four in 10 white mothers (39.9%) and AANHPI mothers (36.2%) who worked full time in these jobs. See **Figure 8**.

Figure 8.

Poverty and Near-Poverty Rates Among Mothers Working Full Time in Low-Paid Jobs, by Race/Ethnicity, 2021



**Sample size for Native mothers working full time in low-paid jobs is too small to determine the share in households under 100% of the federal poverty level.*

Source: NWLC calculations with 2021 American Community Survey one-year sample using IPUMS-USA. Respondents self-identify their race, ethnicity, gender, occupation, and the usual number of hours they worked weekly. Mothers are women with children under 18 in their home.

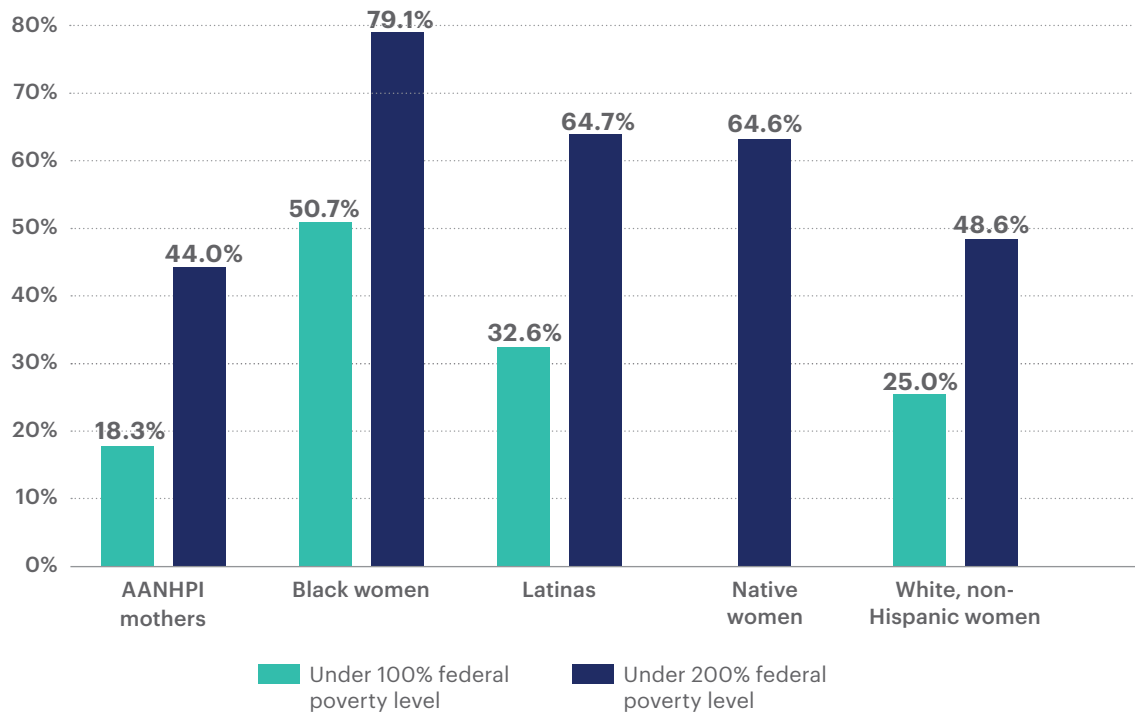
→ In the low-paid workforce, nearly half of mothers (46.8%) work part time, compared to 21.5% of fathers; in the overall workforce, close to one-quarter of mothers work part time, compared to just 6.5% of fathers. **Mothers—especially mothers who are women of color—who work part time in low-paid jobs face an extraordinarily high risk of poverty and economic insecurity.**

See **Figure 9**.

- ◆ Overall, nearly two in three women of color who are mothers working part time in low-paid jobs (64.9%) had household incomes below twice the poverty line in 2021, compared to just under half (48.6%) of white, non-Hispanic mothers working part time in these jobs.
- ◆ **Among Black mothers working part time in low-paid jobs, close to eight in 10 (79.1%) lived in households with incomes below twice the poverty line in 2021, and about half (50.7%) experienced poverty.**
- ◆ Just under two-thirds of Latina mothers (64.7%) and Native mothers (64.6%) working part time in low-paid jobs lived near or in poverty in 2021.
- ◆ AANHPI mothers working part time in low-paid jobs experienced economic insecurity at lower rates than their Black, Latina, and Native counterparts—but more than four in 10 (44.0%) still had household incomes below twice the poverty line (slightly below the rate for white, non-Hispanic women).

Figure 9.

Poverty and Near-Poverty Rates Among Mothers Working Part Time in Low-Paid Jobs, by Race/Ethnicity, 2021



**Sample size for Native mothers working full time in low-paid jobs is too small to determine the share in households under 100% of the federal poverty level.*

Source: NWLC calculations with 2021 American Community Survey one-year sample using IPUMS-USA. Respondents self-identify their race, ethnicity, gender, occupation, and the usual number of hours they worked weekly. Mothers are women with children under 18 in their home.



POLICY MATTERS:

Pandemic investments reduced hardship for women in low-paid jobs—but they are expiring.



In 2021, many people working in low-paid jobs—especially women of color—were struggling to put food on the table and pay the rent. **But there were also reasons for optimism.** Working people in the United States were emerging from the most brutal phase of the COVID-19 pandemic with more demand for their labor, especially in historically low-paid service sector jobs, leading to wage gains.²⁷ Minimum wages went up in 26 states.²⁸ And pandemic relief legislation temporarily provided workplace benefits that many had lacked, including paid sick days and paid leave to care for loved ones for pandemic-related reasons, as well as a far more robust federal Child Tax Credit (CTC) and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), more generous Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and rental assistance, investments to make child care more affordable and accessible, expanded eligibility for unemployment insurance, student loan relief, and direct payments to individuals.

Without these supports, poverty surely would have been higher and our economic recovery slower. Instead, poverty among children fell to a record low in 2021, and poverty rates for Black women, Latinas, and disabled women under the supplemental poverty measure—which takes into account the value of federal benefits like the CTC, EITC, and SNAP—were markedly lower in 2021 than poverty rates for these groups under the official poverty measure, which does not account for these benefits.²⁹ Even under the official measure, poverty was lower in states that put policies in place to help families make ends meet. Women in low-paid jobs were less likely to experience poverty, for example, in states with higher minimum wages, including higher wages for tipped workers.³⁰ In addition, the funds made available to states through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to stabilize the child care sector during the pandemic helped more than 220,000 child care providers across the country keep their doors open, benefiting many as 9.6 million children and helping their parents work.³¹

Today, however, most pandemic-era relief measures have ended. Two that remain—the ARPA child care stabilization grants and increased funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant—are set to expire in September 2023 and September 2024, respectively, risking widespread child care program closures and potentially cutting off services for millions of children and their families.³² Poverty among children has spiked since the CTC expansion expired in January 2022.³³ The federal minimum wage remains a shockingly low \$7.25 per hour while the cost of living continues to rise. And access to the basic supports that workers and caregivers need remains largely determined by income, employer, and geography, with no federal guarantee of paid family and medical leave, paid sick days, or affordable child care. Without these supports—and with calls for further austerity mounting in the wake of federal budget cuts extracted in recent debt ceiling legislation—women in low-paid jobs, and the families who depend on them, will continue to face severe hardship.

Conclusion

Many of the low-paid jobs featured in this analysis—such as home health aides and personal care aides, restaurant servers, bartenders, fast food workers, cooks, and maids and housekeeping cleaners—are also among the occupations with the most growth anticipated over the next decade.³⁴

To consistently attract and retain people to fill these critically needed jobs, they cannot continue to be jobs that leave families struggling to get by. And they don't have to be. Federal and state policymakers can cement and build upon the gains that low-paid workers have made since 2020 by setting higher standards for employers, so that every job—whether full-time or part-time—pays fair wages and provides working people with the input and stability in their work hours, as well as the paid time off, that they need to balance their jobs with the rest of their lives.

Policymakers can also invest in public goods that benefit all of us—like education, child care, health care, infrastructure, and income support programs—to ensure that everyone has access to high-quality services and that families can put food on the table, get the medical care they need, and keep a roof over their heads when they are facing tough economic times. And they can raise tax revenue from the wealthy and corporations to fund these needed investments.

The pandemic has shown us that government policies can meaningfully boost incomes, expand employment opportunities, and reduce pervasive race and gender disparities. When we commit to making the permanent changes needed to ensure that all jobs are good jobs, we will build an economy that works for all of us—**not just the wealthy few.**

APPENDIX I: The 40 Lowest-Paying Jobs

	Low-paid occupation ¹	Median hourly wage, 2021 ²	Number of workers, 2021 ³	Share of workers who are women, 2021 ³
1	Entertainment Attendants and Related Workers, All Other	\$11.62	192,000	46%
2	Cooks, Fast Food*	\$11.63	1,905,000	40%
3	Ushers, Lobby Attendants, and Ticket Takers	\$11.75	29,000	-
4	Shampooers*	\$11.75	26,000	-
5	Hosts and Hostesses, Restaurant, Lounge, and Coffee Shop	\$11.83	282,000	84%
6	Fast Food and Counter Workers	\$12.07	775,000	66%
7	Waiters and Waitresses	\$12.50	1,631,000	68%
8	Bartenders	\$12.67	362,000	57%
9	Dining Room and Cafeteria Attendants and Bartender Helpers	\$13.06	243,000	47%
10	Cashiers	\$13.11	2,601,000	73%
11	Childcare Workers	\$13.22	974,000	95%
12	Hotel, Motel, and Resort Desk Clerks	\$13.50	119,000	70%
13	Dishwashers	\$13.52	243,000	24%
14	Laundry and Dry-Cleaning Workers	\$13.63	116,000	67%
15	Animal Caretakers	\$13.75	272,000	82%
16	Pressers, Textile, Garment, and Related Materials	\$13.79	17,000	-
17	Food Servers, Nonrestaurant	\$13.81	172,000	74%
18	Food Preparation Workers	\$13.84	872,000	58%
19	Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	\$13.84	1,357,000	89%
20	Telemarketers	\$13.90	33,000	-
21	School Bus Monitors	\$13.99	28,000	-
22	Food Preparation and Serving Related Workers, All Other	\$14.00	2,000	-
23	Baggage Porters and Bellhops*	\$14.00	84,000	28%
24	Retail Salespersons	\$14.00	2,750,000	49%
25	Ambulance Drivers and Attendants, Except Emergency Medical Technicians	\$14.00	7,000	-

Low-paid occupation ¹		Median hourly wage, 2021 ²	Number of workers, 2021 ³	Share of workers who are women, 2021 ³
26	Manicurists and Pedicurists	\$14.05	247,000	83%
27	Parking Attendants	\$14.06	71,000	13%
28	Cleaners of Vehicles and Equipment	\$14.08	301,000	17%
29	Taxi Drivers	\$14.09	337,000	12%
30	Automotive and Watercraft Service Attendants*	\$14.10	89,000	11%
31	Door-to-Door Sales Workers, News and Street Vendors, and Related Workers	\$14.13	104,000	73%
-	Home Health and Personal Care Aides**	\$14.15	-	-
32	<i>Home health aides</i>		570,000	87%
33	<i>Personal care aides</i>		1,411,000	80%
34	Library Assistants, Clerical	\$14.16	88,000	84%
35	Dietetic Technicians*	\$14.19	66,000	83%
36	Sales and Related Workers, All Other	\$14.22	410,000	54%
37	Personal Care and Service Workers, All Other	\$14.24	101,000	72%
38	Graders and Sorters, Agricultural Products	\$14.25	53,000	71%
39	Hairdressers, Hairstylists, and Cosmetologists	\$14.26	713,000	92%
40	Recreation Workers	\$14.27	139,000	69%

1. Low-paid occupations can be defined in a variety of ways. For this analysis, NWLC defines low-paid jobs as the 40 occupations with the lowest hourly median wages, according to U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), May 2021 National Occupational Employment & Wage Estimates (NOWES), https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm. To conduct a thorough demographic analysis of the workforce in these jobs, NWLC uses data from U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) data using IPUMS-USA along with 2021 Annual Averages from Table 11 of the BLS Current Population Survey (CPS). In the NOWES table, several occupations that are considered low-paid could not be matched to a corresponding 2021 ACS occupation code and did not have a matching occupation name in BLS CPS Table 11. Thus, to reach 40 occupations for analysis, several additional occupations from the NOWES table were substituted for those that did not have a matching ACS occupation code and matching occupation name in BLS CPS Table 11. Those occupations were excluded from this analysis and include: amusement and recreation attendants; gambling dealers; lifeguards, ski patrol, and other recreation protective services workers; gambling and sports book writers; cooks, short order; shoe machine operators and tenders; locker room, coatroom, and dressing room attendants; gambling change persons and booth cashiers; gambling service workers, all other; physical therapist aides; funeral attendants; drivers/sales workers; motion picture projectionists; gambling cage workers; tire repairers and changers; farmworkers and laborers, crop, nursery, and greenhouse; farmworkers, farm, ranch, and aquaculture animals.

2. U.S. Department of Labor, BLS, May 2021 NOWES, https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm.

3. Data on the number of workers and share of workers who are women are from U.S. Department of Labor, BLS, CPS, Household Data, 2021 Annual Averages, Table 11, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.htm>. Dashes indicate data is unavailable.

* In a few instances, the two BLS sources required for this table—i.e., the NOWES and CPS Table 11—define occupations in slightly different ways. Specifically, fast food cooks in the NOWES are part of “cooks” in CPS Table 11; shampooers in the NOWES are included in “other personal appearance workers” in CPS Table 11; baggage porters and bellhops in the NOWES are identified as “baggage porters, bellhops, and concierges” in CPS Table 11; automotive and watercraft service attendants in the NOWES are “transportation service attendants” in CPS Table 11; and dietetic technicians in the NOWES are “dietetic technicians and ophthalmic medical technicians” in CPS Table 11. In each of these cases, the figures for the number of workers and share of workers who are women reflect the occupation as defined by CPS Table 11.

** In the NOWES table, BLS lists home health and personal care aides as a singular occupation, but in CPS Table 11 (and in the 2021 ACS), these two occupations are listed separately and thus have separate numbers of workers and shares of workers who are women listed here.

APPENDIX II: Women in Low-Paid Jobs, State by State

TABLE 1: Women’s Share of the Low-Paid Workforce, 2021

	Low-Paid Workforce			Overall Workforce		
	Total Number of Workers	Number of Women Workers	Women’s Share	Total Number of Workers	Number of Women Workers	Women’s Share
United States	20,838,984	13,363,663	64.1%	157,815,522	74,462,136	47.2%
Alabama	286,789	197,464	68.9%	2,218,543	1,069,252	48.2%
Alaska	42,169	26,854	63.7%	352,179	158,266	44.9%
Arizona	461,432	287,193	62.2%	3,343,145	1,542,905	46.2%
Arkansas	166,433	110,507	66.4%	1,332,081	635,128	47.7%
California	2,610,994	1,631,386	62.5%	18,337,222	8,369,871	45.6%
Colorado	357,943	220,803	61.7%	3,042,125	1,397,931	46.0%
Connecticut	223,955	139,570	62.3%	1,817,535	878,477	48.3%
Delaware	61,722	38,474	62.3%	474,029	235,042	49.6%
District of Columbia	29,884	18,682	62.5%	358,738	185,247	51.6%
Florida	1,468,681	899,158	61.2%	10,074,035	4,767,358	47.3%
Georgia	631,923	425,456	67.3%	5,099,930	2,462,335	48.3%
Hawaii	104,461	60,885	58.3%	684,898	321,338	46.9%
Idaho	123,219	80,455	65.3%	909,538	415,369	45.7%
Illinois	776,347	498,896	64.3%	6,102,522	2,912,062	47.7%
Indiana	393,961	259,055	65.8%	3,252,569	1,529,257	47.0%
Iowa	202,204	138,909	68.7%	1,627,370	765,296	47.0%
Kansas	185,162	117,979	63.7%	1,449,556	677,045	46.7%
Kentucky	242,112	167,553	69.2%	2,013,830	959,064	47.6%
Louisiana	278,514	194,875	70.0%	1,972,056	967,336	49.1%
Maine	80,992	54,800	67.7%	676,188	329,717	48.8%
Maryland	343,710	224,093	65.2%	3,117,114	1,527,855	49.0%
Massachusetts	435,776	277,450	63.7%	3,610,117	1,766,448	48.9%
Michigan	604,228	394,521	65.3%	4,611,939	2,173,199	47.1%
Minnesota	377,318	239,479	63.5%	2,971,030	1,429,202	48.1%
Mississippi	155,492	107,592	69.2%	1,240,252	612,279	49.4%
Missouri	391,757	250,149	63.9%	2,979,410	1,429,486	48.0%
Montana	70,576	42,453	60.2%	531,283	248,776	46.8%
Nebraska	126,861	83,993	66.2%	1,028,745	486,484	47.3%
Nevada	252,788	146,294	57.9%	1,438,993	665,438	46.2%
New Hampshire	94,747	57,691	60.9%	744,428	349,860	47.0%
New Jersey	521,803	326,133	62.5%	4,520,798	2,138,626	47.3%
New Mexico	130,108	87,821	67.5%	889,844	421,371	47.4%
New York	1,353,778	858,551	63.4%	9,267,375	4,537,451	49.0%
North Carolina	626,152	402,500	64.3%	5,004,760	2,383,078	47.6%
North Dakota	54,093	35,317	65.3%	410,644	184,819	45.0%

	Low-Paid Workforce			Overall Workforce		
	Total Number of Workers	Number of Women Workers	Women's Share	Total Number of Workers	Number of Women Workers	Women's Share
Ohio	704,262	463,315	65.8%	5,627,114	2,695,844	47.9%
Oklahoma	244,692	162,044	66.2%	1,803,879	853,402	47.3%
Oregon	288,213	179,452	62.3%	2,008,236	947,750	47.2%
Pennsylvania	822,031	526,902	64.1%	6,213,898	2,980,950	48.0%
Rhode Island	72,685	45,286	62.3%	551,416	270,085	49.0%
South Carolina	319,205	209,025	65.5%	2,365,584	1,134,519	48.0%
South Dakota	65,272	44,031	67.5%	454,992	211,696	46.5%
Tennessee	417,801	272,511	65.2%	3,263,460	1,550,345	47.5%
Texas	1,946,098	1,254,224	64.4%	13,910,930	6,325,311	45.5%
Utah	193,304	118,421	61.3%	1,663,199	731,170	44.0%
Vermont	35,558	21,704	61.0%	326,305	159,286	48.8%
Virginia	496,623	325,520	65.5%	4,342,570	2,043,376	47.1%
Washington	458,487	293,611	64.0%	3,760,064	1,717,675	45.7%
West Virginia	109,063	73,463	67.4%	727,350	344,979	47.4%
Wisconsin	358,508	246,676	68.8%	3,003,934	1,434,277	47.7%
Wyoming	39,098	24,487	62.6%	287,770	128,803	44.8%

Source: National Women's Law Center (NWLC) calculations are based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 1-year estimates using IPUMS. Low-paid occupations can be defined in a variety of ways. For this analysis, NWLC defines low-paid jobs as the 40 occupations with the lowest hourly median wages, according to U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), May 2021 National Occupational Employment & Wage Estimates (NOWES), https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm.

TABLE 2: Poverty and Near-Poverty Rates Among Women in Low-Paid Jobs and Workers Overall, 2021

	Low-Paid Workforce		Overall Workforce	
	<i>Share of Women in Low-Paid Workforce Living Under 100% of the Federal Poverty Line</i>	<i>Share of Women in Low-Paid Workforce Living Under 200% of the Federal Poverty Line</i>	<i>Share of Overall Workforce Living Under 100% of the Federal Poverty Line</i>	<i>Share of Overall Workforce Living Under 200% of the Federal Poverty Line</i>
United States	14.9%	37.8%	5.5%	17.1%
Alabama	17.2%	43.9%	6.6%	21.6%
Alaska	-	-	4.6%	13.5%
Arizona	15.1%	38.3%	5.7%	18.8%
Arkansas	18.2%	51.0%	6.8%	23.6%
California	12.1%	33.9%	5.0%	16.3%
Colorado	15.3%	31.6%	4.9%	14.3%
Connecticut	10.6%	28.8%	4.2%	12.7%
Delaware	-	41.9%	5.3%	15.7%
District of Columbia		-	4.3%	9.5%
Florida	14.1%	39.9%	5.9%	20.1%
Georgia	17.1%	40.5%	6.2%	18.9%
Hawaii	-	27.7%	4.5%	12.7%
Idaho	16.9%	40.7%	6.4%	21.1%
Illinois	14.8%	37.5%	5.2%	15.8%
Indiana	15.3%	38.7%	5.2%	17.2%
Iowa	16.5%	37.1%	5.9%	16.6%
Kansas	18.0%	45.3%	6.1%	19.8%
Kentucky	18.3%	45.0%	6.7%	20.5%
Louisiana	22.5%	50.4%	8.6%	22.9%
Maine		31.7%	3.9%	13.8%
Maryland	12.0%	32.2%	4.0%	11.9%
Massachusetts	11.5%	29.3%	4.2%	11.1%
Michigan	15.6%	38.0%	5.6%	17.3%
Minnesota	13.7%	33.9%	4.4%	14.0%
Mississippi	20.2%	47.9%	7.7%	23.9%
Missouri	18.2%	42.1%	6.0%	18.4%
Montana	-	43.0%	6.2%	20.1%
Nebraska	13.7%	36.5%	5.1%	16.9%
Nevada	13.4%	36.5%	5.5%	19.1%
New Hampshire	-	20.0%	2.6%	8.8%
New Jersey	12.5%	29.9%	4.0%	12.1%

	Low-Paid Workforce		Overall Workforce	
	<i>Share of Women in Low-Paid Workforce Living Under 100% of the Federal Poverty Line</i>	<i>Share of Women in Low-Paid Workforce Living Under 200% of the Federal Poverty Line</i>	<i>Share of Overall Workforce Living Under 100% of the Federal Poverty Line</i>	<i>Share of Overall Workforce Living Under 200% of the Federal Poverty Line</i>
New Mexico	21.4%	56.7%	9.0%	26.1%
New York	15.0%	36.7%	5.2%	15.0%
North Carolina	17.4%	42.3%	6.0%	19.0%
North Dakota	-	34.1%	5.5%	16.9%
Ohio	15.0%	36.8%	5.5%	16.9%
Oklahoma	20.9%	43.7%	7.5%	23.1%
Oregon	15.9%	42.2%	6.0%	18.2%
Pennsylvania	12.7%	31.1%	4.6%	14.3%
Rhode Island	-	27.5%	4.4%	13.0%
South Carolina	16.4%	41.0%	6.5%	20.2%
South Dakota	-	39.0%	6.0%	17.1%
Tennessee	15.6%	42.2%	5.9%	19.8%
Texas	16.8%	44.2%	6.5%	20.8%
Utah	11.4%	26.4%	4.9%	16.5%
Vermont	-	-	4.0%	13.7%
Virginia	16.2%	37.1%	4.6%	14.1%
Washington	10.3%	30.4%	4.2%	12.9%
West Virginia	23.9%	45.6%	7.2%	21.6%
Wisconsin	13.1%	32.5%	5.2%	14.9%
Wyoming	-	36.0%	6.5%	19.2%

Dashes indicate data is unavailable due to insufficient sample sizes. Source: National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) calculations are based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 1-year estimates using IPUMS. Low-paid occupations can be defined in a variety of ways. For this analysis, NWLC defines low-paid jobs as the 40 occupations with the lowest hourly median wages, according to U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), May 2021 National Occupational Employment & Wage Estimates (NOWES), https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm.

ENDNOTES

1. Low-paid occupations can be defined in a variety of ways. For this analysis, the National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) defines low-paid jobs as the 40 occupations with the lowest hourly median wages, according to U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), May 2021 National Occupational Employment & Wage Estimates (NOWES), https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm, because these jobs particularly illuminate women’s overrepresentation at the low end of the pay spectrum. See Appendix 1 for detailed information regarding the 40 lowest-paying jobs.
2. See, e.g., Claire Ewing-Nelson, “After a Full Month of Business Closures, Women Were Hardest Hit by April’s Job Losses,” NWLC, May 2020, <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Jobs-Day-April-Factsheet.pdf>; “A Year of Strength & Loss,” NWLC, March 2021, https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Final_NWLC_Press_CovidStats.pdf.
3. In February 2020, the overall unemployment rate in the United States was 3.5%; in December 2021, it was 3.9%, and in May 2023, it was 3.7%. BLS, “(Seas) Unemployment Rate, 2013-2023,” *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*, accessed June 20, 2023, <https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14000000>.
4. Elise Gould & Katherine deCourcy, “Low-Wage Workers Have Seen Historically Fast Real Wage Growth in the Pandemic Business Cycle,” Economic Policy Institute (EPI), March 2023, <https://files.epi.org/uploads/263265.pdf>. In this EPI resource, the authors divide the wage distribution into five groups to examine wage trends at different wage levels; “workers in the lowest-paying jobs” refers to wage growth at the 10th percentile, while “workers in the middle of the wage distribution” refers to the average of the 40th–60th percentiles. See *id.* at 2-3.
5. NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) one-year sample, accessed through Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, Erin Meyer, Jose Pacas and Matthew Sobek, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series USA (IPUMS USA): Version 12.0 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V12.0>. Unless otherwise noted, all data points in this analysis regarding women’s representation in the low-paid workforce and in the workforce overall, as well as rates of poverty/near poverty, are calculated from the 2021 ACS using IPUMS USA, based on the definition of low-paid jobs in note 1, *supra*.
6. NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 ACS one-year sample using IPUMS USA and the definition of low-paid jobs in note 1, *supra*.
7. Figures are for 2021 and include ACS respondents who self-identified as having at least one of the following physical or cognitive difficulties: hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty including remembering or decision-making, disability limiting mobility, disability limiting independent living, or personal care limitation.
8. “Disability Impacts All of Us,” Disability and Health Data System, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last modified May 15, 2023, <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html>.
9. NWLC calculations using “Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics—2021,” BLS, February 2022, https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/disabl_02242022.pdf (Table 1).

10. Joelle Gamble & Megan Dunn-Paul, "COVID-19 and Employment Trends for People with Disabilities," U.S. Department of Labor Blog, January 3, 2023, <https://blog.dol.gov/2023/01/03/covid-19-and-employment-trends-for-people-with-disabilities>.
11. "Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics—2021" (Table 1).
12. See generally, e.g., Rebecca Vallas, Kimberly Knackstedt, Hayley Brown, Julie Cai, Shawn Fremstad & Andrew Stettner, "Economic Justice Is Disability Justice," The Century Foundation, April 2022, <https://tcf.org/content/report/economic-justice-disability-justice/>; Azza Altiraifi, "Advancing Economic Security for People with Disabilities," Center for American Progress, July 2019, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/disability/reports/2019/07/26/472686/advancing-economic-security-people-disabilities/>.
13. Mason Ameri et al., "The Disability Employment Puzzle: A Field Study on Employer Hiring Behavior," NBER Working Paper no. 21560, September 2015, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w21560>.
14. The Americans with Disabilities Act established important protections, but its implementation and enforcement has yet to fulfill its promise. See generally, e.g., "The Americans with Disabilities Act at 25: Cause for Celebration and Renewed Resolve," National Disability Rights Network (NDRN), July 2015, https://www.ndrn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ADA_at_25_Final.pdf; "2020 Progress Report on National Disability Policy: Increasing Disability Employment," National Council on Disability, July 2020, https://ncd.gov/sites/default/files/NCD_Progress_Report_508_0.pdf.
15. See "14(C) Certificate Holders," Wage & Hour Division, U.S. Department of Labor, last modified June 1, 2023, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/workers-with-disabilities/section-14c/certificate-holders>; Rabia Belt & Doron Dorfman, "Subminimum Employment for People with Disabilities," *SLS Blogs: Legal Aggregate*, Nov. 1, 2018, <https://law.stanford.edu/2018/11/01/subminimum-employment-for-people-with-disabilities/>. See also, e.g., "2020 Progress Report on National Disability Policy: Increasing Disability Employment" at 40.
16. See, e.g., Altiraifi, "Advancing Economic Security for People with Disabilities."
17. See generally, e.g., Nanette Goodman, Michael Morris & Kelvin Boston, "Financial Inequality: Disability, Race and Poverty in America," National Disability Institute, September 2017, <http://www.advancingstates.org/sites/nasud/files/Disability-Race-Poverty-in-America.pdf>; Altiraifi, "Advancing Economic Security for People with Disabilities;" Vallas et al., "Economic Justice Is Disability Justice."
18. Age ranges refer to respondents' ages in 2021.
19. People who worked full time are those who reported usually working 35 hours or more per week. Those who worked full time, year-round are those who reported usually working 35 hours or more per week for 50 or more weeks of the year.
20. People working part time are those who reported usually worked between one and 34 hours per week.
21. Brooke LePage, "Part-Time Workers Are Facing Heightened Uncertainty Due to COVID—and Most Are Women," NWLC, February 2022, <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Part-time-workers-factsheet-v2-2.1.22.pdf>.
22. Lonnie Golden & Jaeseung Kim, "The Involuntary Part-Time Work and Underemployment Problem in the U.S.," Center for Law & Social Policy, August 2020, https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2020/08/GWC2029_Center%20For%20Law.pdf.

23. "Poverty Thresholds, 2021," U.S. Census Bureau, last modified April 21, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html>.
24. "Family Budget Calculator," EPI, March 2022, <https://www.epi.org/resources/budget/>. Data are in 2020 dollars.
25. See generally, e.g., "Collateral Damage: Scheduling Challenges for Workers in Low-Paid Jobs and Their Consequences," NWLC, December 2020, <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Collateral-Damage-2020-12.18.20.pdf>; LePage, "Part-Time Workers Are Facing Heightened Uncertainty Due to COVID"; "Time to Care: Paid Family and Medical Leave and the FAMILY Act," NWLC, May 2023, <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/pfml-2023-5.15.23-v2.pdf>; "Paid Sick Days and the Healthy Families Act," NWLC, May 2023, <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/psd-2023-5.15.23-v2.pdf>.
26. See Sarah Jane Glynn, "Breadwinning Mothers Are Critical to Families' Economic Security," Center for American Progress, March 2021, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/breadwinning-mothers-critical-familys-economic-security/>; Jasmine Tucker & Julie Vogtman, "When Hard Work Is Not Enough: Women in Low-Paid Jobs," NWLC, April 2020, at 6, https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Women-in-Low-Paid-Jobs-report_pp04-FINAL-4.2.pdf.
27. Gould & deCourcy, "Low-Wage Workers Have Seen Historically Fast Real Wage Growth in the Pandemic Business Cycle."
28. "State Minimum Wages," National Conference of State Legislatures, last modified August 30, 2022, <https://www.ncsl.org/labor-and-employment/state-minimum-wages>. Nine states (Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, Ohio, South Dakota, and Washington) automatically increased their minimum wage rates in 2021 based on cost of living. Seventeen states (Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Virginia) raised wages due to previously approved legislation or ballot initiatives. Rhode Island and Delaware also enacted new legislation in 2021 to raise their minimum wages to \$15 per hour by 2025.
29. Shengwei Sun, "National Snapshot: Poverty Among Women & Families," NWLC, Jan. 2023, https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2023_nwlc_PovertySnapshot-converted-1.pdf. Due to data constraints, NWLC's analysis of poverty among women in low-paid jobs above refers only to the official poverty measure.

30. For example, in the 15 states with the highest poverty rates for women in low-paid jobs in 2021, only four had a minimum wage above the federal level of \$7.25 per hour, none had a minimum wage above \$11 per hour, and all had a minimum cash wage for tipped workers below \$5.50 per hour. In contrast, in the 15 states with the lowest poverty rates for women in low-paid jobs in 2021, all but three had minimum wages above the federal level, half had minimum wages at or above \$11 per hour, and most had tipped minimum wages above \$5.50 per hour, including four that required employers to pay tipped workers the full minimum wage, before tips. See Appendix II, Table 2, and “2021 – Minimum Wages for Tipped Employees,” Wage & Hour Division, U.S. Department of Labor, last modified September 30, 2021, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/state/minimum-wage/tipped/2021>. See also “One Fair Wage: Women Fare Better in States with Equal Treatment for Tipped Workers,” NWLC, last modified February 22, 2021, <https://nwlc.org/resource/one-fair-wage/>.
31. See, e.g., Laura Valle Gutierrez, Julie Kashen & Ellie Kaverman, “Rescuing Child Care: The American Rescue Plan Act’s Positive Impact for Families,” The Century Foundation, January 2023, <https://production-tcf.imgix.net/app/uploads/2023/01/11105332/Rescuing-Child-Care-The-ARP-Acts-Positive-Impact-for-Families.pdf>; “ARP Child Care Stabilization Funding State and Territory Fact Sheets,” Office of Child Care, Administration for Children & Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, accessed June 21, 2023, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/map/arp-act-stabilization-funding-state-territory-fact-sheets>.
32. Julie Kashen, Laura Valle Gutierrez, Lea Woods & Jessica Milli, “Child Care Cliff: 3.2 Million Children Likely to Lose Spots with End of Federal Funds,” The Century Foundation, June 2023, <https://tcf.org/content/report/child-care-cliff/>.
33. See “Monthly Poverty Data,” Center on Poverty & Social Policy, Columbia University, accessed June 21, 2023, <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/forecasting-monthly-poverty-data>.
34. BLS, “Occupations with the Most Job Growth, 2021 and Projected 2031,” Table 1.4 in Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, last modified September 8, 2022, <https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/occupations-most-job-growth.htm>.