



OCTOBER 2020 | FACT SHEET

The Future of Work Can Be Better Than the Present

What does the future of work look like for women? A quick scan of headlines on any given day in 2020 would paint a bleak picture. The [coronavirus-induced recession has hit women the hardest](#), especially women of color. As of September, [close to 1 in 9 Black women and Latinas are out of work](#), and millions more women—disproportionately Black women and Latinas—are risking their lives every day to go to [jobs that leave them underpaid and inadequately protected](#) from COVID-19.

Even before this year, reports about the future of work would too often posit that all our jobs will soon go to robots, impoverishing even more people while continuing to enrich a very few. And as the pandemic has raged on, [billionaires are in fact raking in unconscionable sums](#)—taking advantage of [technological advances and a global recession](#) to keep people competing for too few jobs that pay too little.

Despite this especially dire moment, a bleak future for working women is far from inevitable—because working people are far from powerless.

Working people across the country are demanding more, including a [recovery that works for all of us](#) and a future of work that is far different than our past. A future that centers the Black and brown women who have been systematically denied workplace protections. A future that ensures everyone has fair pay and safe and dignified workplaces. A future that builds worker power. A future where we transform the systems that have led to poverty and inequality.

Creating the future of work we want will require:

- **EXPANDING WORKERS' RIGHTS TO ORGANIZE AND TAKE COLLECTIVE ACTION:** Women in unions are more likely than their non-union counterparts [to receive higher and more equal pay, more accessible health care](#) and pension benefits, and [more avenues for protection against discrimination on the job, including sexual harassment](#). To build a better future of work, we must not only protect existing rights but modernize and expand the right to organize as we push back against the [consolidation of corporate power](#), and expanded use of workplace technologies that can have a chilling effect on organizing.
- **ELIMINATING HARMFUL EXCLUSIONS FROM OUR LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT LAWS:** The right to organize, protection from discrimination and harassment, wage and hour protections, and the ability to hold an employer responsible for violations of their rights are important for every working person. Yet many do not have access to these rights—because they are [independent contractors](#) (or are misclassified as independent contractors); because they work for small employers who are exempt from laws governing these rights; and/or because of racist, sexist, and ableist legal exclusions,

like those that allow employers to [pay people with disabilities a subminimum wage](#) or deny protections to fields that were and are dominated by women, people of color, and immigrants, like domestic work, [tipped work](#), and agricultural work. We can't create an equitable future without ending these inequities from our past.

- **INCREASING WORKPLACE TRANSPARENCY AND ENSURING THAT TECHNOLOGY IS USED TO COMBAT—RATHER THAN ENTRENCH—DISCRIMINATION:** Keeping information secret from workers and the public allows employer discrimination and abuses to grow undetected in the shadows: employers' tight hold on information about employee pay can [hide pay discrimination](#) and helps perpetuate wage gaps; non-disclosure agreements and secret arbitration proceedings can sweep harassment and discrimination under the rug; and [employers' growing use of algorithmic technology](#) to hire and manage their workforce threatens to [replicate human biases in computerized systems](#), perpetuating—and concealing—discrimination. But [modernizing our anti-discrimination laws](#) and requiring greater transparency about pay setting and other employer practices can build power for working people by shifting control over information from employers to workers.
- **CENTERING CAREGIVING:** Women bear the lion's share of caregiving responsibilities and it is one of the most persistent barriers to women's access to opportunities in our economy—[exacerbated by the pandemic](#). Women also take on the vast majority of paid care work as child care providers, home care workers, and other jobs that are critically important and unlikely to be automated, yet remain [underpaid and undervalued](#). To create an equitable future of work for women, we must value both paid and unpaid care work by enabling people to care for their families while maintaining their jobs and improving the quality of jobs for paid care providers.
- **MAKING EVERY JOB A GOOD JOB:** Everyone should be able to meet their own basic needs, provide for their families, and feel safe at work—but [employers that pay poverty-level wages](#), [provide unpredictable and inadequate hours](#), [deny accommodations to pregnant workers](#) and [allow harassment and discrimination to go unchecked](#) make that impossible. We need to hold employers to a higher standard 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 that they need to balance their jobs with the rest of their lives. We need to strengthen our antidiscrimination and antiretaliation laws to ensure that everyone can work with equality, safety, and dignity. And regardless of where or how much they work, everyone should have access to essential benefits including [health care](#), [child care](#), and [paid family and medical leave](#)—as well as access to [unemployment insurance](#) when they need it.

Making this future our reality is no easy task; achieving each one of these goals requires big, structural change. But thanks to the sustained collective efforts of workers, organizers, advocates, and lawmakers, many of the policies that will get us there are already reflected in federal bills—like the [BE HEARD in the Workplace Act](#), the [Raise the Wage Act](#), the [Paycheck Fairness Act](#), the [Protecting the Right to Organize \(PRO\) Act](#), the [Domestic Worker Bill of Rights Act](#), the [Schedules That Work Act](#), the [Part-Time Worker Bill of Rights Act](#), the [PAID Leave Act](#), the [Pregnant Workers Fairness Act](#), and many more that will help create a better future for women, people of color, and all working people.

The future is what we make it. Let's get to work.

Further Reading

- National Women's Law Center, [letter to the House Committee on Education & Labor re: hearings on the Future of Work](#)
- Washington Center for Equitable Growth, Institute for Women's Policy Research, MomsRising, and National Women's Law Center, [Women and the Future of Work in the United States](#)
- Center for American Progress, [Centering Equity in the Future-of-Work Conversation Is Critical for Women's Progress](#)
- Institute for Women's Policy Research [Women, Automation, and the Future of Work](#)
- [Civil Rights Principles for Hiring Assessment Technologies](#) (coalition document)