

# Part-Time Workers Are Paid Less, Have Less Access to Benefits— and Most Are Women

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## INTRODUCTION

**Over 35.6 million working people in the United States—more than one in five—work part time.<sup>1</sup>** Some people work part time to support their families while caring for loved ones, going to school, or attending to other obligations—but find themselves penalized relative to their full-time counterparts in terms of pay, benefits, stability, and opportunities to advance on the job. Others work part time because their employers, particularly in low-paying service industries, rarely offer full-time positions, while some employees—especially women—find that caregiving or other responsibilities preclude full-time work.

## WHO ARE PART-TIME WORKERS?

### **MOST PART-TIME WORKERS ARE WOMEN.**

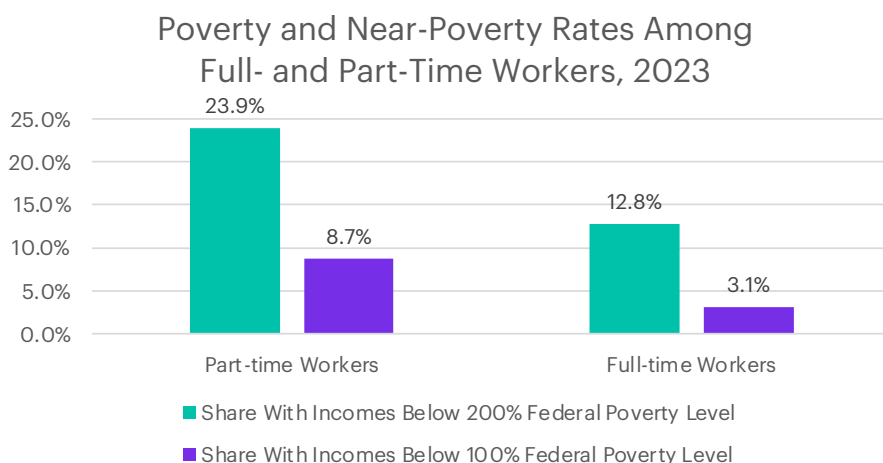
- More than 35.6 million people work part time—23.2% of all workers.<sup>2</sup>
- Nearly six in 10 part-time workers (58.6%) are women.<sup>3</sup>
- A larger share of women report working part time than men—about 1.6 times more: 28.9% of all working women work part time, compared to 18.2% of all working men.<sup>4</sup>

### **MOST PART-TIME WORKERS ARE AGE 25 AND OLDER.**

- Three in four part-time workers (75.4%) are 25 and older; only 11.0% are teens 16 to 19 years old.<sup>5</sup>
- Nearly half of part-time workers (48.9%) are 25 to 54—that is, prime working age. Over six in 10 prime-age part-time workers (61.2%) are women.<sup>6</sup>
- More than one in four part-time workers (26.5%) are 55 and older. Over half of older part-time workers (56.7%) are women.<sup>7</sup>

## A DISPROPORTIONATE SHARE OF PART-TIME WORKERS WORK IN LOW-PAID JOBS AND STRUGGLE TO MAKE ENDS MEET.

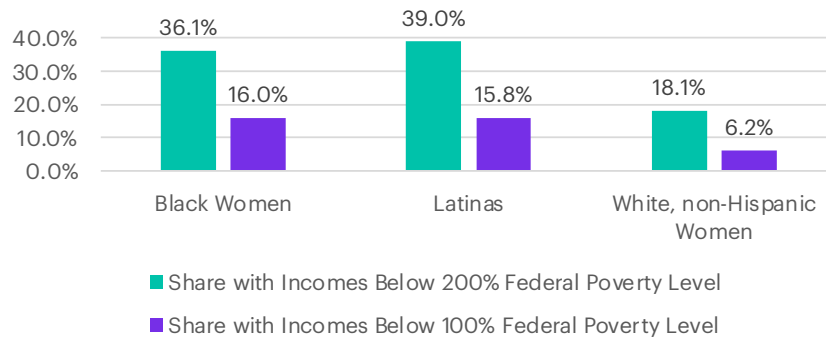
- In 2023 (the most recent year for which this data is available), more than one in four part-time workers held low-paid jobs—almost triple the share of full-time workers in low-paid jobs (defined as the 40 lowest-paying occupations in the United States).<sup>8</sup> More than two in three part-time workers in low-paid jobs (68.6%) were women.<sup>9</sup>
- One in 12 part-time workers (8.7%) lived in poverty in 2023—nearly three times the rate of poverty experienced by full-time workers (3.1%).<sup>10</sup> And the federal poverty line—which was just \$24,549 in 2023 for a single parent with two children—barely begins to capture what families need to make ends meet.<sup>11</sup>
  - » Amid the rising costs of goods and housing, even those with incomes of up to twice the poverty line (i.e., \$49,098 for a single parent with two children) are living “near poverty,” where a medical emergency, a few cut shifts, or another unexpected expense can mean that families won’t have enough to pay for basics, like food, rent, utilities, or child care.
  - » In 2023, almost one in four part-time workers (23.9%) lived in or near poverty, with family incomes below 200% of the poverty line, compared to 12.8% of full-time workers.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, among women working part time, 24.4% had family incomes below 200% of the poverty line, including 9.2% who lived in poverty.<sup>13</sup>



Source: NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 Current Population Survey. Figures are for 2023.

- In 2023, a disproportionate share of Black women and Latinas working in part-time jobs lived paycheck to paycheck. More than one in three Black women (36.1%) and Latinas (39.0%) working part time had incomes below 200% of the poverty line. Nearly one in six Black women (16.0%) and Latinas (15.8%) working part time were living in poverty.<sup>14</sup>

## Poverty and Near-Poverty Rates Among Women Working Part Time, by Race/Ethnicity, 2023



Source: NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 Current Population Survey. Breakdowns for Native American women and AAPI women are not included due to sample size. Figures are for 2023.

### MANY PART-TIME WORKERS ARE SUPPORTING FAMILIES.

- Nearly one in four part-time workers (24.8%) had children under 18 in 2023. The vast majority (70.8%) of these parents working part time were women.<sup>15</sup>
- More than three in 10 mothers working part time (31.0%) were supporting children on their own.<sup>16</sup>

### PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WORK PART TIME AT HIGHER RATES THAN PEOPLE WITHOUT DISABILITIES.

- More than two in five workers with a disability (40.6%) worked part time in 2023, compared to 22.8% of workers without a disability.<sup>17</sup>
- In 2023, 43.4% of working women with a disability worked part time, compared to 28.5% of working women without a disability.<sup>18</sup>

## WHY DO PEOPLE WORK PART TIME?

### MILLIONS OF PART-TIME EMPLOYEES WORK PART TIME BECAUSE FULL-TIME WORK IS NOT AVAILABLE.

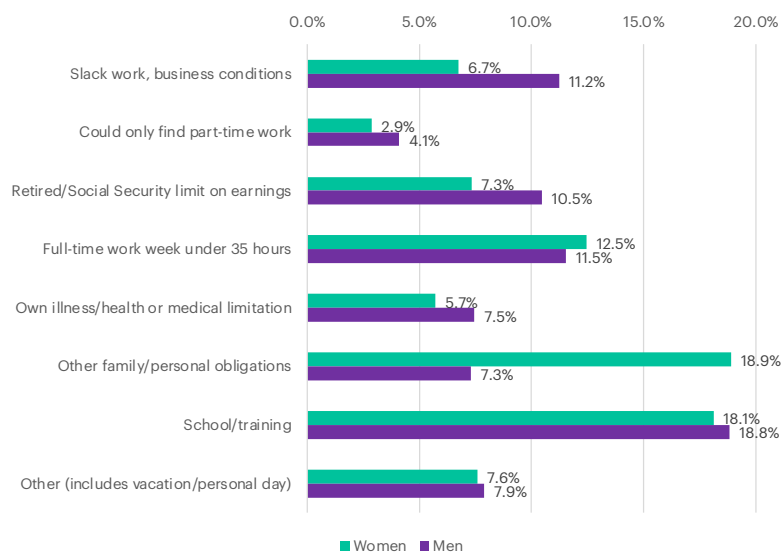
Nearly one in eight part-time workers—4.4 million people—work part time “involuntarily” as defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), which considers part-time work to be involuntary when it is for “economic reasons,” including because of slack work, unfavorable business conditions, the inability to find full-time work, or seasonal declines in demand. Close to half of employees who work part time involuntarily (46.4%) are women.<sup>19</sup>

The BLS estimates of the prevalence of involuntary part-time work do not include people who want to work part time but receive fewer hours than they are seeking from their employer—a scenario that is common in many low-paid service sector jobs.<sup>20</sup> Research from the Center for Law and 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.<sup>21</sup>

## EIGHT IN 10 WORKERS WHO WORK PART TIME DO SO FOR OTHER REASONS, INCLUDING SCHOOL OR FAMILY OBLIGATIONS.

- More than eight in 10 people who worked part time (87.7%) did so for reasons other than the unavailability of full-time work—reasons that the Bureau of Labor Statistics terms “noneconomic reasons.” Women are six in 10 of these workers (60.3%).<sup>22</sup>
- People who work part time for noneconomic reasons may not seek full-time work for a variety of reasons—many of which are not truly “voluntary,” including caregiving responsibilities that disproportionately fall to women.<sup>23</sup>
  - » Nearly 6.1 million workers who are part time for noneconomic reasons (17.1% of all part-time workers) report working part time because of child care problems or other family or personal obligations.<sup>24</sup>
    - > In 2023 (the most recent year for which this data is available), women cited “child care problems” or “other family/personal obligations” as reasons for working part time during a given week at a rate three times higher than men.<sup>25</sup>
    - > While some of these workers prefer to work part time, for others the “choice” of part-time work may be forced by, for example, unaffordable (or unavailable) child care and/or inflexible and unpredictable work schedules. Yet research finds that mothers who work in part-time jobs typically have less flexibility and access to family-friendly benefits than their counterparts who work full time.<sup>26</sup>
  - » Just under 6.0 million workers who are part time for noneconomic reasons (16.8% of all part-time workers) report working part time because they are in school or training.<sup>27</sup>
  - » 2.9 million workers who are part time for noneconomic reasons (8.1% of all part-time workers) report working part time because they are retired or are subject to Social Security income limits and would lose benefits if they worked more.<sup>28</sup>
  - » Nearly 1.2 million workers who are part time for noneconomic reasons (3.3% of all part-time workers) report working part time due to health or medical limitations.<sup>29</sup>
  - » Over 600,000 workers who are part time for noneconomic reasons (1.7% of all part-time workers) report working part time due to weather-related curtailment—a number likely to grow with increasing weather disruptions from climate change.<sup>30</sup>

Women's and Men's Reasons for Working Part Time Last Week, 2023 (Economic and Noneconomic)



Source: NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 Community Population Survey.<sup>31</sup> Breakdowns for those who cited child care, seasonal work, weather affected job, job started/ended during the week, and holiday are not included due to insufficient sample size. Figures are for 2023.

## WHAT ARE KEY CONCERNS FOR PART-TIME WORKERS?

### PAY AND ACCESS TO BENEFITS ARE A MAJOR CONCERN FOR THOSE WHO WORK PART TIME.

- **Part-time workers are paid less than full-time workers in the same industry and occupation.** For example, in 2023, an entry-level part-time retail salesperson made three dollars less per hour, on average, than their full-time counterpart (\$14.51 per hour for part-time workers, compared to \$17.86 per hour for full-time workers). Similarly, part-time office and administrative support workers made \$5.40 less per hour than their full-time counterparts (\$18.29 per hour for part-time workers, compared to \$23.69 per hour for full-time workers).<sup>32</sup> Overall, the Economic Policy Institute estimates part-time workers are paid 19.8% less per hour than their full-time counterparts in the same industry and occupation, and this part-time wage penalty is greatest (at 29.5%) for workers who work part time because they cannot secure the full-time work they are seeking.<sup>33</sup>
- **Part-time workers often are not eligible for employer-provided benefits.** Just 27% of part-time workers have access to medical insurance benefits, compared to 89% of full-time workers.<sup>34</sup> Full-time workers can access retirement benefits at nearly twice the rate of part-time workers (83% of full-time workers, compared to 47% of part-time workers).<sup>35</sup> Just over half (55%) of part-time workers report having access to paid sick days, compared to nearly nine in 10 full-time workers (89%).<sup>36</sup> And 59% of full-time workers report having access to paid personal leave—more than twice the share of part-time workers (22%) who have access to this benefit.<sup>37</sup> Part-time workers are often ineligible even for unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act due to their varying schedules and hours.<sup>38</sup>
- **Women who work full time are more likely than those who work part time to be promoted.** A 2014 study found women working full time are more likely to be promoted than part-time workers, though the trend did not hold for men.<sup>39</sup> And in a 2018 analysis, the Federal Reserve found that more than half (56%) of full-time workers had received a raise in the prior year, while only 29% of part-time workers who cited economic reasons and 37% of part-time workers who cited other reasons could say the same.<sup>40</sup>
- **Part-time workers face varying schedules and hours.** In 2022, the Federal Reserve found that 58% of part-time workers reported some form of unstable scheduling practices, and that 48% of part-time workers received less than a week's notice of their work schedule. The same report found that 83% of part-time workers reported that their hours varied from week to week,<sup>41</sup> making it difficult for part-time workers to have a consistent income. Volatile hours and income are associated with material hardship, including difficulties paying bills and securing adequate food and housing—and unpredictable schedules make it even more challenging for working parents to arrange child care.<sup>42</sup>
- **Part-time workers are ineligible for unemployment insurance in many states.** Part-time workers who lose their jobs may be unable to access unemployment insurance (UI) due to state policies that, for example, require workers to earn a certain level of wages over a short period or to seek full-time employment to qualify for UI benefits.<sup>43</sup>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ENDNOTES

1. NWLC calculations using Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), “Persons at work in nonagricultural industries by age, sex, race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, marital status, and usual full- or part-time status,” Annual Averages, Table 22 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey* (Washington, DC: Jan. 29, 2025), <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat22.htm>. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) defines part-time work as less than 35 hours per week. See BLS, Handbook of Methods: Current Population Survey, at 4-5, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/hom/cps/pdf/cps.pdf>. Figures from this table are for 2024 and for workers 16 and older unless otherwise specified. They include only those not in agricultural industries.
2. NWLC calculations using BLS, Annual Averages, Table 22 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*. Figures are for 2024 and for workers in nonagricultural industries who are 16 and older.
3. *Id.*
4. *Id.*
5. NWLC calculations using BLS, Annual Averages, Table 22 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*. Figures are for 2024 and include only those in nonagricultural industries who are 16 and older.
6. *Id.*
7. *Id.*
8. 26% of part-time workers held low-paid jobs in 2023, compared to 9.0% of full-time workers. NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 Current Population Survey (CPS), accessed through Sarah Flood, Miriam King, Renae Rodgers, Steven Ruggles, J. Robert Warren, Daniel Backman, Annie Chen, Grace Cooper, Stephanie Richards, Megan Schouweiler, and Michael Westberry. IPUMS CPS: Version 12.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D030.V12.0>. Figures are for 2023. Definitions of low-paid occupations vary; 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 2024 [National Occupational Employment & Wage Estimates](#). See Jasmine Tucker and Julie Vogtman, “When Hard Work Is Not Enough: Women in Low-Paid Jobs” (NWLC, July 2023), <https://nwlc.org/resource/when-hard-work-is-not-enough-women-in-low-paid-jobs/>.
9. NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 CPS, accessed through Flood et al., *IPUMS CPS*. Figures are for 2023.
10. *Id.*
11. See U.S. Census Bureau, Poverty Thresholds for 2023, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html> (last accessed July 9, 2025).
12. NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, CPS Annual Social and Economic Supplements (ASEC) microdata <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/time-series/demo/cps/cps-asec.html>. Figures are for 2023.
13. *Id.*
14. *Id.* Respondents self-identified their race in the 2024 CPS. “Black women” includes women who self-identified their race in the CPS as Black or African American; “Latinas” includes women of any race who self-identified as Hispanic, Spanish, or Latino.
15. NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 CPS, accessed through Flood et al., *IPUMS CPS*. Figures are for 2023. Parents have at least one related child under 18 in the home.
16. *Id.* “Women supporting children on their own” are those who have at least one related child under 18 in the home and whose marital status is married, spouse absent; separated; divorced; widowed; or never married/single.
17. *Id.* This figure includes CPS respondents who self-identified as having any physical or cognitive difficulty including hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, difficulty remembering, physical difficulty, a disability limiting mobility, or a personal care limitation.
18. *Id.*
19. NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, BLS, Annual Averages, Table 22 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*. Figures are for 2024 and for workers in nonagricultural industries who are 16 and older. Per BLS Handbook of Methods, involuntary part-time work includes part-time work due to slack work or business conditions; could only find part-time work; seasonal work; and jobs started or ended during the week.
20. See, e.g., Elaine Zundl, Daniel Schneider, Kristen Harknett, and Evelyn Bellow, “Still Unstable: The Persistence of Schedule Uncertainty During the Pandemic” (Shift Project, Jan. 2022), <https://shift.hks.harvard.edu/still-unstable/>; Elizabeth Ananat, Anna Gassman-Pines & Olivia Howard, Work Requirements Penalize Workers in Volatile Occupations (Brookings Institution, May 2025), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/work-requirements-penalize-workers-in-volatile-occupations/> (finding in an analysis of 2023 survey data from the Federal Reserve that 57% of service sector workers in low-income households—and 66% of low-income service sector workers with at least one child at home—wanted to work more hours); Susan J. Lambert, Anna Haley-Lock, and Julia R. Henly, “Schedule Flexibility in Hourly Jobs: Unanticipated Consequences and Promising Directions,” *Community, Work & Family* 15, no. 3 (Aug. 2012): 293, 301, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2012.662803> (in study examining scheduling practices at a national women’s apparel retailer, 46% of white, 57% of Black and 71% of Hispanic part-time sales associates—all of whom were women—wanted more hours).
21. Lonnie Golden and Jaeseung Kim, “The Involuntary Part-Time Work and Underemployment Problem in the U.S.” (Center for Law and Social Policy, Aug. 2020), [https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2020/08/GWC2029\\_Center%20For%20Law.pdf](https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2020/08/GWC2029_Center%20For%20Law.pdf).
22. NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, BLS, Annual Averages, Table 22 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*. Figures are for 2024 and for workers in nonagricultural industries who are 16 and older. Per BLS Handbook of methods, voluntary part-time work includes child care problems, other family or personal obligations, health or medical limitations, in school or training, retired or Social Security limit on earnings, vacation or personal day, holiday, legal or religious, weather-related curtailment and all other noneconomic reasons.



23. Katherine Gallagher Robbins, “Women’s Unpaid Caregiving is Worth More Than \$625 Billion – and It Could Cost More,” (National Partnerships for Women & Families, Aug. 2023), <https://nationalpartnership.org/womens-unpaid-caregiving-worth-more-than-625-billion/>.
24. NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, BLS, “Persons at work 1 to 34 hours in all and in nonagricultural industries by reason for working less than 35 hours and usual full- or part-time status,” Annual Averages, Table 20 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat20.htm>. Figures are for 2024 and workers in nonagricultural industries.
25. NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, CPS 2024 accessed through Flood, et al. Figures are for 2023. Calculations are based on the week prior to the survey, not the whole year. Those deemed “not in universe,” who are likely those who did not work part time during the reference week, were excluded from calculations.
26. Liana Christin Landivar, Rose A. Woods & Gretchen M. Livingston, “Does Part-Time Work Offer Flexibility to Employed Mothers?” BLS Monthly Labor Review (Feb. 2022), <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2022/article/does-part-time-work-offer-flexibility-to-employed-mothers.htm>.
27. NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, BLS, Annual Averages 20 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*. Figures are for 2024 and for those in nonagricultural industries.
28. *Id.*
29. *Id.*
30. *Id.*
31. NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, CPS 2024 accessed through Flood, et al., *IPUMS CPS*. Figures are for 2023. Calculations are based on the week prior to the survey, not the whole year. Those deemed “not in universe,” who are likely those who did not work part-time during the reference week, were excluded from calculations.
32. NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, BLS Modeled Wage Estimates, 2024, <https://www.bls.gov/mwe/data.htm>. Figures are for 2023.
33. Lonnie Golden, “Part-Time Workers Pay a Big-Time Penalty: Hourly Pay-and-Benefits Penalties for Part-Time Work Are Largest for Those Seeking Full-Time Jobs and for Men, but Affect More Women” (Economic Policy Institute, Feb. 2020), <https://www.epi.org/publication/part-time-pay-penalty/>.
34. NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, BLS, “National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2024,” (U.S. Department of Labor, Sept. 2024), <https://www.bls.gov/ebs/publications/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2024.htm>. Figures are for civilian workers.
35. *Id.* Figures are for civilian workers.
36. *Id.* Figures are for civilian workers.
37. *Id.* Figures are for civilian workers.
38. The Family and Medical Leave Act requires an individual to work at least 1,250 hours for an employer during a 12-month period, preventing many part-time workers from accessing unpaid leave.
39. John T. Addison, Orgul Demet Ozturk, and Si Wang, “Job Promotion in Midcareer: Gender, Recession, and ‘Crowding,’” *BLS Monthly Labor Review* (Jan. 2014), <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2014/article/job-promotion-in-midcareer.htm> (Table 3). See also Landivar, Woods & Livingston, “Does Part-Time Work Offer Flexibility to Employed Mothers?”
40. “Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2017” (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve, May 2018).
41. Lina Stepick, “Shifting Hours, Unstable Work Scheduling Practices” (Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco), <https://www.frbsf.org/community-development/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/shifting-hours-unstable-work-scheduling-practices-cdrb-07.pdf>. See also Julie Ray, “Work Schedules Fail Millions of U.S. Employees” (Gallup, June 10, 2025), <https://news.gallup.com/poll/690881/work-schedules-fail-millions-employees.aspx> (finding 34% of part-time workers have a “low-quality” schedule—i.e., the employee has no control over their schedule and it lacks predictability or stability—compared to 25% of full-time workers).
42. See generally, e.g., “Collateral Damage: Scheduling Challenges for Workers in Low-Paid Jobs and Their Consequences” (NWLC, 2025), [https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/CollateralDamage\\_December2025.pdf](https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/CollateralDamage_December2025.pdf); Lauren Bauer, Olivia East & Olivia Howard, “Low-Income Workers Experience—By Far—the Most Earnings and Work Hours Instability” (Brookings Institution, Jan. 9, 2025), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/low-income-workers-experience-by-far-the-most-earnings-and-work-hours-instability/>; Daniel Schneider and Kristen Harknett, “It’s About Time: How Work Schedule Instability Matters for Workers, Families, and Racial Inequality” (Shift Project, Oct. 2019), <https://shift.hks.harvard.edu/its-about-time-how-work-schedule-instability-matters-for-workers-families-and-racial-inequality/>.
43. See, e.g., “Reforming Unemployment Insurance: Stabilizing a System in Crisis and Laying the Foundation for Equity” (Economic Policy Institute et al., July 2021), <https://files.epi.org/uploads/Reforming-Unemployment-Insurance.pdf>. See also “Comparison of State Unemployment Insurance Laws” (U.S. Department of Labor, 2023), 5-28, <https://oui.doleta.gov/unemploy/pdf/uilawcompar/2023/complete.pdf>.