



WORKPLACE JUSTICE

LOW-WAGE JOBS HELD PRIMARILY BY WOMEN WILL GROW THE MOST OVER THE NEXT DECADE

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In recent decades, women's work experience and educational attainment have increased dramatically—but for too many women, especially women of color, job and income prospects remain bleak. In 2016, women made up nearly two-thirds of the nearly 24 million workers in low-wage jobs (defined as jobs that typically pay \$11.50 per hour or less), though they make up slightly less than half (47 percent) of the workforce as a whole.¹ Women of color are particularly overrepresented in these jobs. Wages of \$11.50 per hour leave a full-time working mother of two with an annual income uncomfortably close to the poverty line,² and many low-wage jobs pay just the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour.

These jobs leave many women and families struggling to make ends meet—and the situation is unlikely to improve on its own: indeed, three of the top five occupations expected to see the most growth in the next decade are female-dominated and low-wage. If policymakers do not take action to ensure that all of the jobs our economy creates allow working people and their families to be economically secure, the future of work for women threatens to be increasingly characterized by precarious jobs with poverty-level wages.

The five jobs expected to grow the most in the next decade are primarily female-dominated and low-wage.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that personal care aides, combined food preparation and serving workers (including fast food workers), registered nurses, home health aides, and software applications developers will be the five occupations with the most job growth between 2016 and 2026. Each of these jobs will add at

least 250,000 positions in the next ten years; all together they will add nearly 2.5 million jobs, accounting for more than one-fifth of total job growth in the economy over the next decade.³

Among these five occupations:

- The top four (all except software applications developers) are female-dominated, with workforces that are at least 60 percent women.⁴
- Three of the five jobs are both female-dominated and low-wage. These jobs are personal care aides, home health aides, and combined food preparation and serving workers (including fast food workers).⁵
 - In 2017, personal care aides typically made \$11.11 per hour or about \$23,100 a year for full-time work. Home health aides typically made \$11.16 per hour, which translates to about \$23,200 per year. Combined food preparation and serving workers typically made \$9.70 per hour or close to \$20,200 annually.⁶
 - More than one in six women working in the three low-wage, high-growth jobs in 2016 had incomes below the federal poverty line.⁷
- In 2017, only one of the top five jobs, software applications developers, was high-wage, typically paying almost \$50 per hour (\$48.94 per hour or just under \$101,800 annually)—and women made up only 19 percent of that workforce.⁸
- Registered nurses, who typically were paid \$33.65 per hour in 2017 (or almost \$70,000 annually),⁹ hold the only female-dominated job of the top five that is not low-wage.



In many low-wage jobs, pay is not the only problem.

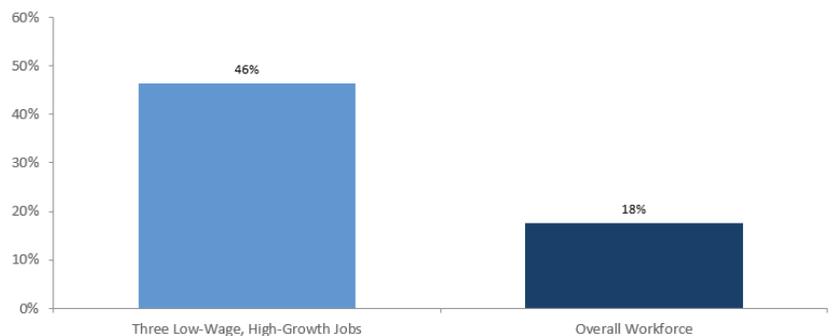
For many people working in low-wage, high-growth jobs, low pay is just one of the challenging conditions they face. Jobs in the food service and home care industries are particularly likely to lack employer- or union-based health insurance; less than half of women working as personal care aides (41 percent) or combined food preparation and serving workers (49 percent), and just 56 percent of women who are home health aides, have health care coverage through their employer or a union.¹⁰ In states that have not expanded Medicaid, people working in low-wage 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.¹¹

These jobs also frequently lack other benefits—like paid sick days and paid family and medical leave—and feature work schedules that are unstable and unpredictable.¹² For example, an analysis of a nationwide survey found that only 19 percent of food preparation and serving workers and 25 percent of personal care and service workers had access to paid sick days,¹³ and in a national survey of early career workers (ages 26-32), about nine in ten workers in food service jobs, and seven in ten home care workers, reported fluctuating work hours.¹⁴ In all of these jobs, at least half of workers reported that they received their schedules one week or less in advance.¹⁵ Unpredictable work schedules and a lack of paid time off can be particularly problematic for parents juggling work and caregiving responsibilities, yet mothers' share of the three low-wage, high-growth jobs was 29 percent in 2016—1.8 times larger than their share of the overall workforce (16 percent).

Women overall are overrepresented in the three low-wage, high-growth jobs, but women of color—especially Black women—are particularly overrepresented.¹⁶

- Women overall accounted for 83 percent of the workforce among the three low-wage, high-growth jobs (personal care aides, food preparation/serving workers, and home health aides) combined in 2016, though they comprised just under half (47 percent) of the entire workforce.
- Women of color accounted for 46 percent of the workforce in the three low-wage, high-growth jobs combined, compared to 18 percent of the total workforce, meaning their share of these low-wage, high-growth jobs was 2.6 times greater than their share of the overall workforce.

Shares of Low-Wage, High Growth Jobs and Overall Workforce Made up of Women of Color



Source: NWLC calculations using the 2016 American Community Survey. Figures are for employed workers.

- For Black women the disparity was particularly pronounced. Their share of the three low-wage, high-growth jobs (25 percent) was roughly 4 times larger than their share of the overall workforce (6 percent).
- In 2016, foreign born women made up 20 percent of workers in the three low-wage, high growth jobs—nearly 3 times their share of the overall workforce (7 percent).
- Women of color—and Black women in particular—in the three low-wage, high growth jobs faced an especially high risk of poverty. In 2016:
 - Among women working as combined food preparation and serving workers, 26 percent of women of color, including 32 percent of Black women and 24 percent of Latinas, had incomes below the poverty line.
 - Among women working as home health aides, 16 percent of women of color, including 17 percent of Black women and 14 percent of Latinas, had incomes below the poverty line.
 - Among women working as personal care aides, 22 percent of women of color, including 26 percent of Black women and 21 percent of Latinas, had incomes below the poverty line.
 - Nineteen percent of all women living in poverty and working in the three low-wage, high growth jobs were foreign born.



| Top Five High-Growth Jobs | Women's Share of Workforce (2016) | | | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| | Median Hourly Wage (2017) | All Women | White, non-Hispanic Women | Latinas | Black Women | Native Women | Asian/Pacific Islander Women | Foreign Born Women | Mothers |
| Personal care aides | \$11.11 | 83.1% | 37.5% | 17.8% | 18.9% | 1.0% | 7.0% | 21.9% | 26.2% |
| Combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food | \$9.70 | 62.6% | 35.9% | 10.4% | 10.8% | 1.1% | 2.9% | 7.8% | 15.6% |
| Registered nurses | \$33.65 | 89.3% | 64.5% | 5.8% | 9.7% | 0.4% | 7.8% | 12.8% | 36.4% |
| Home health aides* | \$11.16 | 87.5% | 36.6% | 13.4% | 31.2% | 0.9% | 4.0% | 20.7% | 33.3% |
| Software developers, applications | \$48.94 | 19.0% | 8.9% | 0.9% | 1.2% | 0.1% | 7.5% | 8.4% | 7.5% |
| Overall Workforce | \$18.12 | 47.3% | 29.9% | 7.3% | 6.2% | 0.3% | 2.9% | 7.3% | 15.8% |

Source: Wages: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics for 2017, Demographics: NWLC calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 ACS using IPUMS. Mothers have related children under 18 living at home.

*Due to data constraints, demographic figures for home health aides includes nursing & psychiatric aides as well.

1. "Low-wage jobs" and the "low-wage workforce" could be defined in many different ways. This analysis defines low-wage jobs as those that paid a median hourly wage of \$11.50 or less in 2017. Median hourly wages for occupations were determined using U.S. Dep't of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), May 2017 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates (OES), https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm (last visited May 25, 2018). Workforce and other occupational data are National Women's Law Center (NWLC) calculations based on 2016 American Community Survey, one-year estimates using Steven Ruggles, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, and Matthew Sobek. *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 7.0* [dataset]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2017. Figures are for employed workers. This entire analysis uses BLS data for 2017 and ACS data for 2016 - the most recent data releases. These datasets were chosen because they provide the most timely and accurate information about the low-wage workforce.
2. NWLC calculations based on 40 hours per week, 52 weeks per year at \$11.50 per hour (\$23,920 annually). The poverty threshold in 2017 for a family with one adult and two children was \$19,749. U.S. Census Bureau, Poverty Thresholds for 2017, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html> (last visited July 13, 2018).
3. NWLC calculations based on U.S. Dep't of Labor, BLS, Employment Projections: 2016-2026, Table 1.4: Occupations with the most job growth, 2016-2026, https://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_104.htm (last visited July 18, 2018).
4. NWLC calculations based on ACS 2016, *supra* note 1. All figures are for employed workers.
5. NWLC calculations, BLS Employment Projections, Table 6, *supra* note 3, and NWLC calculations based on ACS 2016, *supra* note 1.
6. BLS May 2017 OES, *supra* note 1. Wage figures refer to median hourly wage rates; NWLC calculations of full-time earnings are based on 40 hours per week, 52 weeks per year at the specified wage.
7. NWLC calculations based on ACS 2016, *supra* note 1. Nearly one-quarter (23 percent) of women who are combined food preparation and serving workers have incomes below the federal poverty line, as do 14 percent of women who are home health aides and 19 percent of women who are personal care aides. *Id.*
8. BLS May 2017 OES, *supra* note 1, and NWLC calculations based on ACS 2016, *supra* note 1.
9. BLS May 2017 OES, *supra* note 1.
10. NWLC calculations based on ACS 2016, *supra* note 1. In contrast, 89 percent of women who are registered nurses and 93 percent of women who are software applications developers have employer- or union-based health insurance. *Id.*
11. See Rachel Garfield & Anthony Damico, Kaiser Family Found., The Coverage Gap: Uninsured Poor Adults in States That Do Not Expand Medicaid, at 4 (Oct. 2017), <http://files.kff.org/attachment/Issue-Brief-The-Coverage-Gap-Uninsured-Poor-Adults-in-States-that-Do-Not-Expand-Medicaid>.
12. See generally Julie Vogtman & Karen Schulman, NWLC, Set Up to Fail: When Low Wage Work Jeopardizes Parents' and Children's Success (Jan. 2016), <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/FINAL-Set-Up-To-Fail-When-Low-Wage-Work-Jeopardizes-Parents%E2%80%99-and-Children%E2%80%99s-Success.pdf>.
13. See Institute for Women's Policy Research, Paid Sick Days Access and Usage Rates Vary by Race/Ethnicity, Occupation, and Earnings (Feb. 2016), <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/wpallimport/files/iwpr-export/publications/B356.pdf>. Access and utilization of paid sick days and paid family and medical leave policies are also especially important for workers in these occupations because they come into contact with the public and vulnerable populations regularly, making it easy to spread illness.
14. Susan J. Lambert, Peter J. Fugiel, & Julia R. Henly, Precarious Work Schedules among Early-Career Employees in the US: A National Snapshot, at 18 (Aug. 2014), https://sascholars.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/work-scheduling-study/files/lambert.fugiel.henly_precarious_work_schedules.august2014_0.pdf.
15. *Id.*
16. NWLC calculations for all information in this section are based on ACS 2016, *supra* note 1.

