HOW TO CREATE DECENT WORK POLICIES FOR ALL

Commonsense policies on wages, paid leave, benefits, and workplace conditions are essential to support workers and their families. Because women, and particularly women of color, are overrepresented in low-wage jobs that lack essential workplace protections such as paid leave, stronger mandates can reduce racial, gender, and economic inequities. Better labor policies correlate not only to higher median household income and GDP per capita, but also to lower rates of poverty, infant mortality, and food insecurity.

Policymakers can reduce inequality by enacting federal policies centered on people, which will create an inclusive economy that works for all.

WAGE POLICIES

Oxfam calls on policymakers to raise the minimum wage to a living wage. Subminimum wages should be abolished, minimum wage exclusions of certain workers must end, and the minimum wage needs to be lifted.

Minimum wage increases should also be indexed to inflation.

CARE POLICIES

Given the extreme costs of care for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities in the U.S., and the burden these costs place on already insufficient wages, there is an urgent need for federal investment in the care economy. Policies for working caregivers and those who are care workers need to be strengthened.

Caregivers need consistent but flexible schedules that enable them to meet their caregiving responsibilities. Last-minute changes in work schedules can interfere with important obligations (such as child care pickup and medical appointments). Policies that guarantee both consistency and flexibility in the workplace allow workers to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities while also making a living.

Congress must also pass legislation to make child care more accessible and affordable, while increasing pay for child care workers and early educators, and ensure the inclusion of care services for the elderly and people with disabilities.

PAID LEAVE POLICIES

Paid family and medical leave and paid sick leave are essential to ensuring workers can care for themselves and their families. Congress should mandate paid sick and paid family and medical leave for all workers. At a minimum, legislation should guarantee:

- 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave for reasons ranging from medical issues to childbirth, or to support care responsibilities.
- 7 paid sick days a year for short-term illness, preventive care, caring for a sick family member, or safe leave, including seeking assistance or tending to needs related to domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

Paid leave policy should be comprehensive, covering private, public, and part-time employees, and should extend “safe leave” coverage for survivors of sexual or domestic violence. Further, the policy’s definition of family should be expansive, recognizing that workers may routinely care for people to whom they aren’t legally or biologically related.

INCLUSIVE POLICIES

To make sure decent work policies cover all workers, federal labor protections should be extended to informal and domestic workers, contractors, and employees of companies with 15 or fewer employees.

Additionally, lawmakers need to include explicit language in any legislation for equivalency in same- and different-sex spousal medical and soft benefits and equivalency in same- and different-sex domestic partner medical and soft benefits, as well as equal health coverage, including gender-affirming care, for transgender individuals without exclusion for all of their needs.

Discrimination and harassment in the workforce are a serious issue for women and LGBTQIA+ individuals, and protections need to be strengthened. Federal legislation needs to prohibit mandatory pre-dispute arbitration and nondisclosure agreements in employment contracts and ensure that businesses have the resources they need to prevent harassment and discrimination.

SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMS AND POLICIES

Social protection programs should ensure that the most underserved communities are able to get by. As pressures like inflation continue to impact low- and middle-income families, funding for programs like school lunches, SNAP, and WIC should be protected and increased, and access should be expanded to include more families. The Child Tax Credit (CTC) expansion that was instituted during the COVID-19 pandemic lifted 2.9 million children out of poverty.
Congress should permanently expand the CTC, including an increase in the amount for each child and making the credit fully refundable.

Oxfam believes we all have a right to adequate healthcare. Rather than leaving whole categories of people uninsured, federal lawmakers must pass a universal healthcare policy so no American goes without the care they need. Untying healthcare from employment will greatly increase access to preventative and live-saving medical care.

**ENFORCEMENT**

Congress must include sufficient funds in annual budgets for government agencies (such as DOL, WHD, OSHA) focused on worker protections, so regulators and officials can set and enforce the laws for issues like workplace health and safety.

**WHY IT MATTERS FOR INEQUALITY**

Companies have been in a race to the bottom for too long when it comes to labor policies, and federal policymakers need to mandate robust protections. The federal government has failed to provide workers with higher wages, universal access to paid leave and benefits, and sufficient workplace protections, leaving many working families stuck in cyclical patterns of poverty. The impact of these policies (or lack thereof) does not fall equally on all communities; in fact, federal inaction is exacerbating inequality in the U.S., especially along the lines of gender, race, and class.

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