LABOR RELATIONS POLICIES THAT WORK FOR WORKERS

Policies protecting collective bargaining, including for workers employed under non-standard work arrangements (NSWAs) such as temporary, contract, seasonal, and gig positions, 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, enforceable 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.

Multiple Oxfam research projects [Inequality, Made in America; Best States to Work Index; Where Hard Work Doesn’t Pay Off; U.S. Care Policy Scorecard] show that policymakers can reduce inequality by enacting strong labor policies centered on people, which will create an inclusive economy that will work for all.

RIGHTS TO ORGANIZE

The federal government must enshrine the rights of workers to build power collectively. At the state level, the prevalence of “right-to-work” laws demonstrates the systematic approach to undermining worker power and the clear need for the federal government to protect workers’ rights to organize.

Corporations are raking in record profits, while workers and their families struggle to make ends meet. The opportunity to join a union and collectively bargain for better working conditions helps to rebalance the power toward workers. Union workers have higher wages, better benefits, more equal pay, and stronger protections at work.

But not everyone has access to a union, and historical exclusions targeting Black workers and other workers of color remain today. Self-employed workers and contractors are most likely to be Black and Hispanic/Latinx and slightly more likely to be women¹, and the U.S.’s current labor laws are not designed to meet the needs of the most underserved communities.

Congress must amend the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) to cover all workers, including independent contractors, gig workers, and others currently excluded from NLRA protections. Importantly, Congress has increased funding for the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) only once since 2014, and the number of staffers in the agency has dropped by 39 percent since 2002.² This lack of financial and human resourcing threatens the NLRB’s ability to enforce the NLRA.

Federal policymakers must:

- Eliminate all exclusions from the rights to organize and collectively bargain, including for agricultural workers, domestic workers, and independent contractors, covering vulnerable sections of the workforce employed under NSWAs.
- Support sectoral bargaining alongside workplace-level bargaining.
- Prevent employers from setting different standards for part-time or non-standard employees around benefits, pay, pensions, promotions, access to family and medical leave, and other rights.
- Fully fund and resource the NLRB.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR INEQUALITY

While our thriving economy delivers prosperity and enormous wealth to some of us—from billionaires to the middle class—millions of people are denied these rights; and they are disproportionately BIPOC, immigrants and refugees, and women. The lack of sufficient congressional action on labor relation policies exacerbates economic, gender, and racial inequality for workers.


FIGHTING INEQUALITY TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD

Oxfam believes that poverty is a policy choice, and that the ultrawealthy and giant corporations have hijacked our systems to benefit a select few. We are working to redress the balance of power, putting it back in the hands of working families in the U.S. and around the world.

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