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## ABOUT THE INDEX AND THE INTERACTIVE MAP

The “Where Hard Work Doesn’t Pay Off” index scores and ranks 38 economic peer countries on 56 labor policies that support working families. This index is meant to demonstrate how the United States compares to its peers and is inspired by Oxfam’s domestically focused Best States to Work Index (BSWI).

Please refer to the interactive map on the Oxfam site, which includes scorecards for all 38 nations.

The interactive map is here: [www.oxfamamerica.org/countrylaborindex](http://www.oxfamamerica.org/countrylaborindex)

## WHICH COUNTRIES ARE INCLUDED?

The index assesses labor policies in each of the 38 countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). These countries are similar to the United States, in that they commit to democracy and free-market economies, and have relatively robust gross domestic products (GDPs).
INTRODUCTION

According to many metrics, the United States is one of the richest countries in the world, if not the outright wealthiest. The United States has the world’s largest economy, the world’s highest net worth and the world’s highest per capita wealth. When calculating national wealth based on gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, or an average of how much revenue citizens generate, the United States still makes the top 10. No matter how you look at the United States, the fact remains that this is a nation of plenty. And yet, the social safety net offered to people, and especially to workers, is far weaker compared with other high-income nations. Despite a powerful economy, one that largely drives the global economy forward, the United States does little to share revenue with workers and does even less to ensure workers are safe and protected while on the job. These are political choices, not inevitabilities.

In the United States, many basic rights—such as healthcare—are directly tied to employment. Others, such as the ability to be housed, fed, and access transportation require individual funds, and that requires a job. In a country where you must work to live, there are shockingly few protections for workers. What’s more, while many labor laws seem gender-, race-, and class-neutral on their face, the implications for communities impacted by their existence, or in many cases their absence, is deeply racialized, gendered, and classed.

The long legacy of slavery and subsequent immigration policies in the US underscore the ways in which the government of this country has written laws and policies meant to create hierarchies of workers in which workers of color, especially women of color, were excluded from protections, stable wages, and the ability to organize. This legal legacy ranges from the exclusion of agricultural workers, domestic workers, and tipped workers from the first tranche of labor protections established by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)—including minimum wages, overtime protections, and protections against child labor—to the exclusion of those same workers from the right to organize as outlined in the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), both policies passed under President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal. The race- and gender-neutral framing of these exclusions, based on only occupation or sector, was a coded way to exclude especially Black workers, who in the late 1930s composed the majority of agricultural and domestic workers in the South, the region of the country where politicians pushed for their exclusion from both bills.

Echoes of these exclusions continue to this day. Tipped wage workers continue to experience higher rates of poverty than non-tipped workers, and the majority of tipped workers (68%) are women. Agricultural workers, domestic workers, and many gig workers continue to receive pay that lags significantly behind other workers’, and as industries where workers of color are the majority, this exclusion from wage protections perpetuates wealth and wage inequality within the US.

The reality is that the United States has a hierarchy wherein the labor of some workers (often white and male) is valued above the labor of others (often women of color). This can be seen in how the federal government continues to deny all workers access to paid sick leave. Due to federal inaction, in the private sector, among the top 10% of earners, 96% have paid sick leave from their employer. Of the bottom 10% of earners in the private sector, only 38% have paid sick leave, and this is largely thanks to paid sick leave policies at the state level. Stagnating wages in the US disproportionately
harm women, specifically women of color, who are often caught in low wage positions and are overwhelmingly breadwinners for their families. Occupational segregation means women, and especially women of color, are stuck in low wage positions lacking paid family or paid sick leave. For breadwinners and single parents, this often means losing pay to care for sick family members, putting the families’ ability to afford basic costs of living at risk, continuing the cycle of poverty even for full-time workers. The inequities created and maintained by the lack of federal mandates for higher wages, paid leave, and rights to organize (among many other policies) for all workers are political choices. But the good news is these realities can change.

For many advocates in the field of workers’ rights and labor policy, it is a foregone conclusion that the United States performs worse than most comparable countries when it comes to supporting workers and working families. In Europe, new parents receive many weeks, even months, of paid leave to care for and bond with their new children, while in the United States new parents are guaranteed zero days off. Similarly, in the US healthcare is tied to employment, and even then it often remains prohibitively expensive, while in other parts of the world healthcare is a guaranteed right for everyone, regardless of their employment status. These anecdotes of difference, especially shocking given the United States’ status as the wealthiest country in the world, continue to echo in the fights for better policies. But the vague notion of replicating the policies of other places is less helpful than it could be, and so this labor index and report is an attempt to put a finer point on where the US can advance.

This index is a comparison of labor policies among countries considered US economic peers. For economic comparison, this index uses the member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as its framework of comparison. Founded in 1961, the OECD is a group of nations with stated commitments to democratic values, free-market economies and economic growth. As a member network with some of the highest gross domestic products (GDP)—or monetary value of national goods, services, and production—and a more recent rhetoric on the need to ‘tackle inequality,’ we chose to use the framework of OECD member nations to create a case study of how economic peer nations approach supporting workers and working families.

Our index tracks 56 policies across the 38 member countries of the OECD and organizes the policies across three dimensions: wages, worker protections, and rights to organize. This index is meant as a tool for policy makers and advocates to help identify where legislation can be improved to help support workers and working families. Our index puts a strong emphasis on policies meant to create a care economy through supporting care work, whether that’s improved wages for paid care workers themselves (such as child care workers or domestic workers) or in support of those individuals who hold care responsibilities (such as paid sick and family leave, right to change working hours, child care support, and healthcare support). As advocate Ai-Jen Poo reminds us, “care is the work that makes all other work possible.” More than the economic argument for care work, or the idea that care workers enable more people to enter the formal economy, the reality is also that care work is what helps sustain life and is inherently valuable. As a result, our index emphasizes care policies not only for their economic contribution but their contribution to the well-being of societies. This index is one tool for policy makers to support and emphasize care policies in creating a more robust labor landscape to support workers and working families.
The United States is well known for being behind its peers in terms of labor policies and support for working families. This reality means many of the policies captured in this index have no US equivalent, because the policies exist in a realm far beyond where the conversation has stagnated in the United States. In most countries, it no longer becomes a question of whether to grant paid leave, but how many weeks are sufficient. It is not a conversation on whether to offer sick leave, but rather how many types of sick leave should be granted to workers and how many days or weeks should be offered. It is no longer a question of workers’ rights to organize, but how many protections exist to maintain the right for workers to organize and collectively bargain.

Removing the United States from its own domestic context and putting its policies into a more global conversation with economic peer nations helps put a finer point on how far the US has to go in the realm of labor policies and workers’ rights.

Not only is this a conversation of advancement, it is also a conversation meant to stop the oft-used reasoning behind why we continue to have such stagnant policies in the United States around things like wages. Often, we hear that raising the minimum wage or providing more social spending on paid leave, healthcare, unemployment supports, or child care would put too big of a dent into local, state, or federal budgets. Our economy, we have heard, relies on low costs and small spending. But that is a false narrative. Studies have shown that higher social spending equates to higher GDP, specifically among OECD countries, and even US history demonstrates how social spending benefits the economy.

Beyond the economic argument, as demonstrated in Oxfam’s Best States to Work Index (BSWI) report, there is a strong tie between labor policies and measures of well-being. Where states score higher in our BSWI index—states with more policies providing higher minimum wages, more workers protections, and stronger rights to organize—there is a strong correlation with lower rates of food insecurity, poverty and infant mortality. As a result, the impetus for this research is not only a wish to help create a blueprint for how the US can improve its labor policies, but also a way to help improve the well-being of people in this country.

**ABOUT THE INDEX**

This index of labor policies across OECD nations was originally inspired by a different Oxfam product focused explicitly on domestic US labor policies. For the last five years, Oxfam America (OUS) has produced an annual interactive labor index and report titled the Best States to Work Index (BSWI), analyzing state labor policies on wages, worker protections, and rights to organize in all 50 states plus Washington, DC and Puerto Rico. The goal of the index is to demonstrate how states are stepping into gaps left by federal inaction on policies impacting workers and working families, with a strong emphasis on working women. Our years-long and robust conversation on how states are creating improved labor landscapes for workers and working families helped us to understand the appetite in the US for conversations around labor. But we wanted to move beyond what is considered possible or reasonable within the context of the United States and instead ask what labor landscapes could or should look like when taken in a more global context. This index demonstrates how many lessons the US federal and state governments can learn from labor standards in other economically advanced countries.
Inspired by our BSWI methodology, the OECD labor index compares federal legal landscapes for workers within our three dimensions: wages, worker protections, and rights to organize. The goal of our methodology, focused on labor law as opposed to broad-based collective bargaining agreements, is to demonstrate legal precedents that can be replicated from other countries. Our index seeks to frame an aspirational legal landscape for workers and working families to help inspire the United States, among other nations, to support and enact policies that can support workers and working families.\(^a\)

Each of the three distinct dimensions provides a ranking of countries from best (1) to worst (38), with the hopes of inspiring nations to take lessons learned from other national legal landscapes and seek new policies to improve the lives of workers and working families. Countries are scored in each dimension on a scale of 0 to 100 (calculated by aggregating policy scores within each dimension), though in the dimensions of wages and worker protection policies, no country scores above 75, demonstrating how all countries, even those performing well, still have much room for improvement.\(^b\)

For this index, labor laws are not considered at a subnational level. The United States is an example of a country where there are sub-federal laws that also mandate worker protections, pay, and ability to organize. However, federal standards in the United States still establish the standard that must apply to all workers and where those are insufficient, millions of workers suffer. This index, therefore, only considers federal standards, so those countries, including the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Australia, among others, which have state or regional governing bodies that create subnational standards, are not considered. The methodological decision to focus explicitly on federal labor laws for this index also does not present a holistic picture of employment at the national level. Spain, for example, performs well in our index due to their strong labor laws, though the country’s high levels of unemployment and insecure employment tracks are not captured. Other countries that do not perform as well on our index, such as Colombia, also experience high levels of unemployment in the formal sector, but high rates of employment through informal sectors. So our index does not reflect employment realities, but rather labor standards in the formal economy. Our purpose of demonstrating the possibilities of strong federal labor standards for a US audience made these methodological tradeoffs necessary.

One limitation of our index is also a limitation of much of the available data: this index and its analysis tends to fall within the gender binary of men and women. As mentioned above, though many labor policies are written to be race- and gender-neutral, their impacts have been highly gendered and racialized—especially in the context of the United States. The history of many welfare states, including the social spending policies in the United States, were designed with a male head of household and breadwinner in mind, with the further notion that women stayed home and cared for families. This very binary and heterosexual framework persists in welfare and labor policies, where the historical exclusions of roles largely occupied by communities of color and women of color still impacts wage and protection policies for certain sectors. Throughout this report, mention is made of how policies have different impacts on men vs women in the workforce. This narrative

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\(^a\) Several other indexes compare global countries’ labor policies. An explanation of how this Oxfam index compares to those can be found in Appendix A.

\(^b\) The scores are calculated by averaging the scores of each policy within each of the three dimensions. A full explanation of how each policy is scored can be found in Appendix B.
does not capture the experiences of non-binary, gender non-conforming, or transgender workers, which is an important gap in our analysis as well as in federal labor statistics and data captured by the Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics or the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey data. This gap offers an opportunity for further study.

THE THREE DIMENSIONS

WAGE POLICIES

This dimension of the index focuses on legal frameworks for minimum wages and unemployment support. The goal of the wage dimension is to move beyond a conversation of base minimum wages to include frameworks of inclusivity and seeks to understand how policymakers can proactively work to ensure minimum wages more closely reflect the cost of living. This dimension also emphasizes the importance of unemployment supports. Programs meant to help workers who are between jobs are a form of income protection, allowing workers to keep their families fed and housed. In the US, workers themselves pay into unemployment systems and should therefore benefit from them if between jobs. Our index measures the robust nature of these unemployment supports as well as their duration in supporting workers and replacing incomes as a means of measuring the legal safeguards in place for workers and working families among OECD nations.

This dimension includes the following policies:

- Minimum wages
  - Existence of a national minimum wage
  - Statutory mandate to update the minimum wage annually
  - Ability for localities to set higher minimum wages than federal standards
  - Inclusion of workers with disabilities in the minimum wage standard
  - Inclusion of young workers in the minimum wage standard
  - Inclusion of domestic workers in minimum wage standard
  - Inclusion of agricultural workers in minimum wage standard
  - Purchase-price-parity minimum wage (or minimum wages standardized to national costs of living)
  - Ratio of hourly minimum wage to national median income

- Unemployment support
  - Compulsory unemployment insurance (UI)
  - Minimum contribution length for UI eligibility
  - Strictness of criteria to receive and maintain unemployment assistance
  - Unemployment insurance (UI) maximum length
  - Unemployment benefits maximum length
  - Unemployment benefit share of previous income at one month
  - Unemployment benefit share of previous income at one year
  - Minimum benefit share of median family disposable income at one month
The approach of our index to minimum wages is an emphasis on national wage floors and how workers are supported when between jobs, especially since the framework of unemployment support is providing a safety net for people seeking employment.

Pursuant to our methodology, this dimension focuses on legal standards at the national or federal level within each OECD member state. As a result, several countries do not receive credit for minimum wage policies simply because they do not have federal legal standards around minimum wages, and instead rely on collective bargaining agreements to set wage floors. The lack of legal precedent makes a collective bargaining system difficult to replicate in other countries, including the United States. As such, those nations without a legal federal policy mandating minimum wages, such as Denmark and Sweden, score lower on our index than in other indexes focused on workers or labor. This methodological decision was made because we wanted to find legal models other countries could use and emulate within their own national contexts. This decision should not be interpreted as a value judgement on collective bargaining agreements for wages.

Unlike the United States, where the federal minimum wage has stagnated for the last 14 years, losing nearly one-third of its real value, many countries in our index have a legal mandate to update their minimum wage every year. This is but one legal framework that allows wages to more closely keep pace with rising costs of living. As the COVID-19 pandemic and the interconnected nature of the global economy demonstrated in 2022, when parts of the global supply chain break or lag the cost is borne by everyone the world over, leading to higher costs for gas, grain, or housing. This legal mandate, therefore, does not solve for inflation in a global economy, but does allow for more consistent impact on workers’ ability to afford the cost of living. Though the United States ranks third worst in this dimension, it should be noted that of the two nations ranked below the US, Denmark’s rank reflects a methodological distinction, as discussion previously, and though the minimum wage lags behind the United States, Mexico’s federal government has successfully raised its federal minimum wage each year since 2019. The United States is distinguished in this category for many reasons, not least of which is its recent continued inaction on national wages. As will be discussed more in the right to organize dimension, there is a strong correlation between higher wages and high density of unionization and collective bargaining agreements. Though the wages section of our index does not include collective bargaining agreement policies, they are included in our right to organize dimension, and the two are intrinsically linked. Among the most notable reasons the United States experiences such high rates of economic inequality are federal inaction on raising minimum wages and the weak coverage of collective bargaining agreements for US workers.

The United States also holds the distinction as the member nation of the OECD with the highest average wage, nearly $75,000. The next closest national average income among OECD nations is Luxembourg, a country with a population of around 640,000 people (a smaller population than the District of Columbia), where the national average income is nearly $74,000. But unlike Luxembourg, where the minimum wage covers nearly 60% of the average wage of full-time workers (indicating a lower level of income inequality among workers), in the United States, the federal minimum wage only covers 29% of the average wage, trapping low wage working people in cyclical poverty (indicating a much higher level of income inequality among workers). While the national average wage can be an indication of national wealth, in the case of the United States, it is also an
indication of inequality due to US governing bodies’ decision to keep the minimum wage stagnant and ignore the needs of working people and working families.

As previous Oxfam research has indicated, nearly one-third of all workers in the US (around 52 million people) earn $15 an hour or less (equal to $31,200 or less annually), a direct result of federal inaction on minimum wages. In the United States, the people who are disproportionately represented among these low wage workers are women, especially women of color, BIPOC communities, and single parents. As a result of this reality, the decision by the federal government, specifically by Congress, not to raise the minimum wage disproportionately traps women—disproportionately women of color—BIPOC communities, and single parents in cyclical poverty, unable to afford child care or even the basic costs of living. The composition of the underpaid workforce in the United States is especially stark, with nearly 6 in 10 low-wage workers being women, despite women representing only 47% of the workforce. The wage gap between men and women in the United States, a gap that grows wider when gender race are taken into consideration, means women, and especially women of color, continue to make only a fraction of each dollar men earn.

The wage gap and the prevalence of women, and disproportionately women of color, in low wage jobs both reflect the undervaluing of what has traditionally been considered “women’s work,” like cooking, cleaning, serving, and providing care. Whether caring for children, the elderly, people with disabilities, or even the home, the labor needed to provide care has historically been relegated to the realm of women and undervalued monetarily. As scholars Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein have demonstrated, the history of care workers in the United States reflects a series of policy decisions meant to keep especially Black women trapped in specific sectors with depressed wages due largely to low government reimbursement rates and little opportunity for career advancement. We can see this reality echo even in today’s industries where jobs with similar tasks are paid at remarkably different rates: janitors vs housekeepers are but one example. The sectors where women are overrepresented, like child care where women represent nearly 95 percent of providers and 40 percent are women of color, are consistently underpaid despite their vital role in our society. This occupational segregation, and persistent wage gap, is costing women in the United States a staggering amount of money. As demonstrated in a recent report by National Partnership for Women & Families, if women earned and were employed at the same rate as non-Hispanic white men, women would have earned an additional $96 billion in one year. As such, the approach countries take to questions of minimum wages and compensation, policies that are in theory gender neutral, often have an outsized impact on working women and especially women of color, whose labor is consistently undervalued and underpaid.

**WAGE POLICIES SCORES**

Each dimension is scored on a 100-point scale, higher scores indicating a more robust policy landscape with, in this case, stronger minimum wage laws. The top-ranking nation in this dimension is Belgium, with an overall score of 74.75, followed by France (68.97), Netherlands (67.47), South Korea (66.9), and Spain (65.58). On the bottom end of the dimension, ranking last is Mexico (23.25), followed by Denmark (33.47), United States (37.28), Czech Republic (40.45), and Italy (40.62).
*As mentioned above, Denmark and Sweden rank much lower in our index on wages than on other measures of worker pay solely because our methodology focuses on federal law and not broad collective bargaining agreements. While other Nordic nations also rely on collective bargaining agreements to set the wage floor, Denmark has the lowest purchase price parity wage per existing data. For more information, please reference the full data set.

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What’s Happening in France?

There have been several notable developments in France since the end of the data collection for our index. In December 2022, the French government pushed through an overhaul of their unemployment system, cutting the duration of support by 25 percent (a policy that passed after our September 1 cutoff date). The government framed this decision as an attempt to get people back into the labor force, as the French government claimed high unemployment numbers, despite rates remaining similar to those of neighboring countries. Then, since late January 2023, French workers have been staging regular general strikes protesting President Macron’s proposal to lift the retirement age from 62 to 64. France has one of the most generous pension systems in Europe, though the President claims the funds cannot be maintained. Despite widespread protests and opposition from the lower house of Parliament, President Macron pushed the change through unilaterally on 16 March 2023. The events in France are crucial for many reasons, not least of which is the fact that even in countries with robust labor landscapes, there is movement against supporting workers and working families. This is further proof that social safety nets and strong labor protections require vigilance. All governments, even those with strong protections, must be held accountable.

Worker Protections

This dimension focuses on how countries’ legal landscapes seek to proactively support and protect workers and working families. Our policies center the care economy and policies that either disproportionately or directly benefit working women to highlight the ways all countries can do more to invest in a caring economy. Though many labor policies that create the fabric for a social safety net, such as paid leave or unemployment support, were established to support society’s male breadwinners, the evolution of the workforce to include more women as laborers and primary caregivers (with an important caveat that Black women have long been in the workforce and acted as family breadwinners) have substantially shifted the beneficiaries of these policies. The COVID-19 pandemic helped shine a light on the vital nature of unpaid and underpaid care work, and these worker protection policies are but one way countries can step up to support those who hold the largest share of care responsibilities within and outside their homes. In the spirit of considering and centering the care economy, our worker protection dimension includes both child care and healthcare support, two vital services for workers and working families.

Our index does not emphasize health and safety policies since in the US context, it is increasingly a conversation around enforcement. The US does have policies at the federal level, for example, preventing child labor and yet enforcement is lax and repercussions for companies that break those laws are small. The nature of these issues fell outside the methodology of our index, which focuses most on federal law.

As this index was also built with the US policy landscape in mind, equal pay is a policy included in our worker protection dimension since the wages dimension centers on minimum wage (and unemployment), but equal pay is a legal framework mandating equal pay for equal work regardless of pay rate.
This dimension includes the following policies:

- **Equal pay**
  - Basic equal pay
  - Mandatory private sector employer pay reporting
  - Private sector equal pay audits
  - Public sector equal pay audits

- **Historically excluded occupation protections**
  - Domestic worker protections
  - Gig economy worker protections

- **Protection from sexual harassment**
  - Legal protection against sexual harassment in the workplace
  - Criminal penalties for sexual harassment in the workplace
  - Civil penalties for sexual harassment in the workplace

- **Identity protections**
  - Sexual orientation protections
    - Protection against workplace discrimination
    - Protection against hiring discrimination
  - Disability protections
    - Protection against workplace discrimination
    - Protection against unfair dismissal

- **Healthcare availability**
  - Link between healthcare and employment

- **Paid parental leave**
  - Maternity or birthing parent leave
  - Paternity or non-birthing parent leave
  - Parental leave for adopting parents
  - Leave for care of child under 3

- **Other paid leave**
  - Statutory minimum days of annual leave
  - Paid sick leave
  - Menstrual leave

- **Child care support**
  - Child care cost vs average household income for two-parent household
  - Child care cost vs average household income for one-parent household

- **Working schedule protections**
  - Right to change working hours
  - Overtime protections

- **Pregnancy accommodations**
  - Pregnant worker accommodations
  - Private sector right to pump
  - Protection from dismissal for pregnant workers and/or workers on maternity leave

In the worker protection dimension, the United States falls in last place, and holds the distinction as the only country in our index without any mandated paid family or sick leave. In addition, as of
September 2022, the US was the only country in our index to score zero points around protections for pregnant and lactating workers. However, recent updates are important to mention. In late 2022, after our data collection ended, two major bills passed to improve the rights of and protections for pregnant and breastfeeding workers: the PUMP Act and the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA). Only now are private sector employees in the United States (with the exception of airline flight crew) federally guaranteed the right to take breaks to pump/express breastmilk at work in a designated pumping space. And as of 27 June 2023, federal protections for pregnant workers go into effect, where accommodations for their health and safety must be implemented, and discrimination against workers for being pregnant is deemed unlawful.

While the United States inches its way toward a legal landscape that’s been in place for decades in other economic peer nations, several countries continue to set the bar higher and higher in terms of how workers are valued, protected, and prioritized. Spain, for example, is the only OECD member nation to provide equivalent paid maternity and paternity leave. The importance of this equivalency is the creation of a policy landscape that encourages parents – regardless of gender – to invest in the care of their children and promotes a model of shared responsibility for caregiving. This equal paid parental leave is especially important if birth parents need to physically recuperate from giving birth, and thus need their partner and co-parent to help with caring for both the child and the person who gave birth. Furthermore, when both parents have access to 16 weeks of paid leave, this benefit can decrease the likelihood of gender discrimination in the workplace where employers are less likely to hire women of birthing age for fear they will take extended absences from the workplace while on maternity leave.

Another notable example is paid menstrual leave, which is now mandated in three countries: Japan (since 1947), South Korea, and, recently, Spain. In Spain, the new paid menstrual leave program allows three days of leave a month for workers who experience painful periods and need time off. While this bill passed the legislature only in February (after the cut off for our index), Spain must still be celebrated as the first European nation to create this new standard for workers who menstruate. The same legislative session that saw the implementation of menstrual leave in Spain also included expanded rights to abortion and protections for transgender teens, a new precedent the country’s Minister of Equality advanced.

The slow expansion of policies such as menstrual leave help bring a stronger gender lens to the landscape of labor policies where the lived reality of menstruating people at work is acknowledged and accommodated. This movement toward expanding the notion of who workers are and what type of medical reality they experience is important for building a more inclusive economy. Beyond menstrual leave, this dimension’s emphasis on inclusivity includes policies targeting equal pay across genders, protecting workers from workplace and hiring discrimination, and expanding protections to workers often excluded from traditional labor law – specifically gig and domestic workers. Our index seeks to imagine a more intentionally inclusive labor landscape, where notions of workers’ identities—both inside and outside the workplace—are respected.

Beyond inclusivity, this dimension also emphasizes the needs of a care economy. In this theme, the policies we track focus on the ability for caregivers to take paid protected leave, workers’ ability to afford care for children to be able to access the paid workforce, whether domestic workers – historically excluded from labor laws – are protected at the federal level, and access to healthcare.
While the majority of the policies in this dimension follow the overarching methodology of the index, tracking specifically whether or not a policy exists at the federal level and, in some cases, to what extent, there are a few policies in the worker protection dimension that move beyond the near binary question of existence. Specifically, in the question of child care support, our worker protection dimension seeks to track the average cost of providing child care for a single parent and multiparent household. This policy is measured by giving countries more credit where child care costs are lowest, so for those countries where child care is either free or a net negative cost for families, the country receives a one. Where costs are highest, the country score moves closer to zero. For our index, we measure this for both one-parent and two parent households, to try and capture how robust social safety nets are for different types of families, with the implicit understanding that only with affordable child care can people—disproportionately women—access the paid labor force. Affordable child care, in this sense, is a protection for workers.

Similarly, while healthcare does not fall within traditional labor law, healthcare as a component of worker protections is an important one in the context of the United States where employment and access to healthcare have historically been linked. Though there has been movement toward disassociating healthcare access from employment status in the US (with the passage of policies such as the Affordable Care Act and the expansion of Medicaid at the state level), in many cases, healthcare remains cost prohibitive. This is especially true in states overwhelmingly concentrated in the South that have chosen not to expand Medicaid. As a result, the inclusion of healthcare support in our index is a question of how countries seek to keep workers and working families safe, healthy, and free from crippling debt.

While every other country in our index offers robust paid leave options—including weeks to months of parental leave—the United States mandates not even one day of paid leave for workers. The lack of paid sick and paid family leave helped spotlight the care crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic. Women disproportionately hold care responsibilities in their homes and families. So when a dependent person falls ill or needs support, women are asked to step into the gap. However, in the United States, if a family member falls ill and needs care, there is no guarantee someone can take time off their job without losing wages. This phenomenon is especially prevalent in the Black community where Black women are disproportionately heads of household or family breadwinners and as a result cannot afford to lose work or income.

The care responsibilities overwhelmingly held by women saw the exodus of millions of women from the paid workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic, as care responsibilities skyrocketed at home with the closure of schools and child care centers. While unemployment has decreased in the United States compared to pandemic highs, the unemployment rate of women of color continues to outpace the rates of all other demographics, including white women. And while unemployment for most demographic groups has gone down, rates for Black women and Latina women increased at the end of 2022. Much of this difference is the result of occupational segregation. Those sectors still struggling to recover their full workforce, often jobs that disproportionately employ women of color, such as retail, leisure and hospitality, and child care, are the same jobs that pay low wages, offer few benefits, and often have unpredictable hours.

New policies have the opportunity to address the gaps created by long histories of federal oversight, intentional exclusions, and perpetual occupational segregation. The lack of affordable
child care and elder care, as well as the lack of paid leave for people needing to give birth or care for loved ones, means many workers face the choice between employment or providing care. This index captures policies that would reflect a greater investment in a care economy: policies that put the well-being of people at their core and center the experience of women. Our worker protection dimension focuses on policies that either directly or disproportionately benefit women at work. Policies like paid sick leave disproportionately benefit women as the primary holders of care responsibilities for family members. Yet other policies, such as paid menstrual leave, breastfeeding accommodations, or pregnancy accommodations directly benefit women workers by centering and respecting their bodily needs.

While the list of policies in our worker protection dimension is by no means exhaustive, it offers the beginning of a roadmap for US policy makers to apply lessons learned from other economic peer nations on how women at work can and should be supported. What’s more, our emphasis on support for workers who adopt children, who are non-birthing parents, and protections from harassment or discrimination work to engage the realities of workers across the gender binary, whose experience must also be reflected and respected in policy landscapes. Where countries pay stronger wages, where wages are more routinely updated, where equal pay mandates are strong and their implementation audited, are places where fewer working women are trapped in cyclical poverty.
WORKER PROTECTIONS SCORES

Each dimension is scored on a 100-point scale. Higher scores indicate a more robust policy landscape with, in this case, stronger worker protection laws. The top-ranking nation in this dimension is Germany, with an overall score of 72.91, followed by Finland (72.53), Norway (71.73), Austria (71.21), and France (70.49). At the bottom of the dimension, the United States (25.23) ranks last, followed by Estonia (44.41), Japan (44.7), New Zealand (44.8), and the Netherlands (48.77).

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 RIGHTS TO ORGANIZE

This dimension focuses on workers’ ability to collectively bargain and organize across public and private sectors. Research has consistently shown considerable benefits around belonging to a union and collective bargaining. In the United States, unions are shown to raise wages for all workers, help promote equal pay, improve job benefits and retirement security, help with scheduling fairness and consistency, and improve onsite health and safety, among other benefits. However, in the US, the right to organize is consistently attacked by some branches of government and by private corporations. While popular support for unions continues to grow, union membership remains low, leading to eroding worker power. This dimension is an opportunity to see policy solutions from other countries.

This dimension includes:

- Right to organize
  - Right to organize in the private sector
  - Right to organize in the public sector
- Collective bargaining
  - Right to collectively bargain in the private sector
  - Right to collectively bargain in the public sector
- Right to strike
  - Right to strike in private sector
  - Right to strike in public sector
- Sectoral bargaining
- Protection from retaliation
  - Protection for union representative
  - Protection for whistleblowers
  - Notice required for dismissal
  - Pay in lieu of notice of dismissal

Compared to the wages and worker protections dimensions, the United States performs better in the question of rights to organize, largely because government workers have a protected right to organize and collectively bargain. While the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), passed after the Great Depression, helped enshrine workers’ freedom of association in the United States, rates of unionization in the US remain very low. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), in 2022 the number of unionized workers in the US overall dropped to a historic low of 10.1%. By comparison, according to OECD data tracking trade union density, as of 2019 in Iceland 90.7% of workers were unionized, 67% of workers were unionized in Denmark, 65.2 percent in Sweden, 58.8 percent in Finland, 50.4% in Norway, and 49.1% in Belgium. While these countries stand out as nations with notably high union participation, OECD member nation averages for unionized workers are 15.8%, putting the United States well behind its peers. The only countries reporting lower union participation rates than the United States are: Lithuania (7.4%), Estonia (6%), Hungary (8.3%), Colombia (9.5%), and Turkey (9.9%).

Beyond the question of what proportion of workers are members of unions, the OECD also tracks what proportion of workers are eligible for collective bargaining agreements among its member...
countries. Much like its rate of union participation, the United States also lags behind nearly all other OECD nations on collective bargaining coverage. Based on the most recent data collected by the OECD (from May 2021), while 12% of the total US workforce is covered by collective bargaining, in other countries the number is drastically higher. In the most stark contrast to the US, in Italy 100% of workers are covered by collective bargaining, while in Austria and France this number sits at 98%, followed by Belgium (96%), Iceland (90%), and Sweden (88%). This is largely the result of other countries’ standards wherein workers can be covered by collective bargaining agreements without being members of a union or signatories of a specific contract. In the United States, on the other hand, collective bargaining coverage is specific to certain classes of workers and their employers. The continued exclusion of certain classes of workers from the NLRA, as well as the absence of sectoral bargaining, leads to more limited collective bargaining coverage in the US.

In the United States, collective bargaining and protected rights to organize are more strongly protected for government employees than those working in the private sector, though even in the public sector, as mentioned above, the coverage is not extensive. To this day, certain classifications of workers are still excluded from the protected right to organize, as defined by the NLRA, including agricultural workers, domestic workers and independent contractors. These excluded workers are historically workers of color. When the NLRA was passed in the 1930s, this exclusion targeted Black workers, especially in the South. Today, these same workers are not only people of color, but in many cases they are also immigrants, which can add another level of vulnerability or exclusion from legal protections.

There are many solutions for the patchwork protection for collective bargaining as framed in the United States. One policy included in our rights to organize dimension, which is not widely utilized in the US but could significantly benefit workers and working families, is sectoral bargaining. In the United States, labor organizing tends to follow what scholar David Madland and others refer to as an “enterprise-based model” where a union is negotiated between a specific employer and their employees. While this model does work, and as mentioned above provides very important benefits for workers, there is another model that is less utilized in the US but hugely beneficial: sectoral bargaining. This system of bargaining, where an entire industry, sector, or region is covered by contracts, is less prevalent in the US, but could offer a way for workers to gain access to unions – something nearly half of all non-unionized US workers have indicated they are interested in joining, and which have an overall approval rating of over 70 percent. Unlike the enterprise model of the US, sectoral bargaining would allow for broader and more inclusive representation of workers within collective bargaining models, and would allow an avenue for workers excluded from the NLRA to benefit from collective bargaining. According to research conducted by the OECD, member countries where collective bargaining coverage is highest for workers are those “where multi-employer agreements (i.e., at sector or national level) are negotiated.” If the US were to adopt a sectoral bargaining model, this would expand coverage of collective bargaining agreements among larger swaths of workers, helping reduce gender and race based wage gaps and help strengthen workers protections.

Unions are unquestionably beneficial for working women. Women who belong to unions make higher wages than non-unionized working women and tend to experience a smaller gender pay gap than non-unionized workers. As mentioned above, unions ensure better benefits, greater safety measures, and protections from unfair dismissal. While unions benefit all working women, raising
the wage and ensuring better benefits for members, the impact on women of color is especially notable. While all women on average experience a wage increase of 24% when in a union, Latina women, for example, experience a 40% increase.\textsuperscript{52} Union membership expands healthcare coverage by 25% for all women workers; for Black women, healthcare coverage increases by 23%, for Latina women healthcare coverage expands by 29%.\textsuperscript{53} In the context of women at work, these benefits make it easier for women to navigate the care responsibilities they disproportionately carry. With higher wages, women are more easily able to afford supports for caring for children, the elderly or people with disabilities. With benefits, such as healthcare and paid leave, women are better able to navigate their own and their families’ health issues without undue financial burden. And with protection from unfair dismissal, more women feel empowered to speak up against unfair, discriminatory, harassing, or unsafe work environments.\textsuperscript{54}

When union rights are hollowed out or even dismantled, women workers experience a disproportionate impact. In Wisconsin, for example, when public teachers’ right to bargain collectively was weakened in 2011, it was women whose incomes suffered most.\textsuperscript{55} The rights to organize and to bargain collectively are a gender issue. Similarly, workers’ ability to access sectoral bargaining often helps women in industries that historically undervalued and therefore underpaid them. It also helps workers in more informal economic spaces access rights usually reserved for the formal economy. A recent case study of agricultural workers in Morocco demonstrated how a collective bargaining agreement for agricultural workers allowed women working in the agricultural industry to receive more equal wages, higher pay, and even maternity leave.\textsuperscript{56} This is only one example. Sectoral bargaining can also benefit women, such as domestic workers, who work in industries historically excluded from federal labor law. In the context of the United States, in Seattle and Philadelphia the creation of a sectoral workers’ board of domestic workers has helped create a new standard for all domestic workers, providing greater pay, fair schedules, and paid leave.\textsuperscript{57} As of now, 14 countries from the OECD have ratified the ILO convention on domestic workers rights (only 13 have enforced it, Spain will observe the convention starting in February 2024). The convention establishes domestic workers’ right to minimum wages, stable work hours, protections from child labor, and maternity benefits, among other rights.\textsuperscript{58} Though this convention does not establish sectoral bargaining for domestic workers, it does create new standards for all employers to enforce.

**RIGHTS TO ORGANIZE SCORES**

Each dimension is scored on a 100-point scale, with higher scores indicating a more robust policy landscape with, in this case, stronger rights to organize laws. The top spot in this dimension is held by Slovenia, with a score of 97.5. This is followed by Sweden (95), France (92.5) and a five-way tie for fourth place held by Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, and Portugal which each scored 90 points. At the bottom, Colombia and Costa Rica tie for last place with a score of 25; followed by Mexico (30), South Korea (32.5), Chile (35) and the United States and Turkey tied for 32 with a score of 37.5. The United States ranks higher in the rights to organize dimension than either wages or worker protections, but still lands in the bottom six.
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CONCLUSION

This index shows us how far the US lags behind its economic peer nations. The reality is the differences are enormous. This is not simply a question of scale. The US fundamentally undervalues its workers and working families and refuses to provide the basic benefits that all workers should be entitled to receive. The asks are not shocking and are not going beyond what is considered standard in other robust economies. Rather, this is further proof that US workers deserve paid leave, deserve robust protections at work—especially for working women—and would deeply benefit from more robust rights to organize and bargain collectively.

Beyond the issue of what US workers and working families deserve, this is also a question of well-being. In Oxfam’s 2022 (BSWI) report, our data demonstrated the strong correlation that exists between robust labor policy landscapes and measures of well-being. We tracked how those states that scored higher on our BSWI—which is to say those states with higher wages, stronger protections, and greater rights to organize—had lower rates of poverty, infant mortality, and food insecurity. In a country like the United States where one must work to survive, since even the basic right of healthcare is tied to employment, how the country treats its workers is paramount to the nation’s overall wellbeing. This index of labor policies across economic peer nations provides a pathway for the United States to not only improve the labor landscape that already exists in the domestic context, but also to envision a different reality. This is the time to learn lessons from countries that seem light-years ahead of the US in labor policies, and to envision a radical new world where workers are celebrated, protected, and respected. The fact that this is the wealthiest country in the world tells us the ability to do more for workers and working families exists. It is simply a question of political will. The US can do more, and it must.
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The US can and must do more to support workers and working families. We should take inspiration from our economic peer nations and move toward a labor policy landscape that prioritizes care: policies that care for and protect our workers, that enable them to care for their families and themselves, and that provide the vital social supports they need. Each policy tracked in this index presents a model for the US government to consider. While the US has a long way to go in enhancing federal policies on wages, worker protections, and rights to organize, below is a selection of recommendations for federal policymakers to help us build a more caring and just economy.

WAGE POLICIES

The US ranks third-to-last on wages among OECD nations. Paying workers enough to support themselves and their families is fundamental to a labor policy landscape that values and cares for workers. We can learn important lessons from our peers. Belgium’s wage policies, for example, provide a useful model: wages are adjusted annually for inflation, so that workers can keep up with the cost of living. And domestic workers, agricultural workers, and workers with disabilities are covered by minimum wage laws. In the US, on the other hand, Congress’ failure to raise the minimum wage, and ensure that it keeps up with the cost of living, has trapped low-wage workers—especially women, BIPOC communities, women of color, and single parents—in poverty. Federal policymakers must:

- Raise the federal minimum wage
- Eliminate all exclusions from federal minimum wage standards, including tipped workers, youth, agricultural workers, domestic workers, and workers with disabilities
- Require annual updates to the minimum wage, indexed to inflation

WORKER PROTECTIONS

The US ranks dead-last among OECD nations when it comes to protecting workers and supporting them both on and off the job. We are the only OECD member that does not guarantee a single day of paid family or sick leave, which disproportionately harms low-wage workers, women, and workers of color. Meanwhile, the US can learn so much from a peer nation like Spain, which guarantees 16 weeks of paid parental leave to both parents helping encourage a more equitable approach to care responsibilities. In the US, policymakers must ensure that workers don’t have to choose between their health or caring for their loved ones, and a paycheck. They can start by:

- Providing paid family and sick leave to all workers
- Investing in childcare and home- and community-based care, including expanding the Child Tax Credit
- Providing universal healthcare that is not contingent upon employment
- Strengthening equal pay laws to ensure equal pay for equal work
- Strengthening discrimination protections
• Requiring stable, predictable, flexible scheduling practices that enable workers to handle caregiving responsibilities

**RIGHTS TO ORGANIZE**

The US ranks 32 out of 38 OECD countries in protecting rights to organize and collectively bargain. 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. Many of our peer nations—15 in fact—allow sectoral bargaining, which can help reduce gender- and race-based wage gaps while strengthening worker protections across entire industries. US policy makers should:

• Eliminate all exclusions from the right to organize, including for agricultural workers, domestic workers, and independent contractors
• Support sectoral bargaining alongside workplace-level bargaining

There are bills Congress should pass that will help us build an economy that cares for workers, supports them in caring for their loved ones, and enables workers and families to thrive, including the Raise the Wage Act, the FAMILY Act, the Building an Economy for Families Act, and the PRO Act. While none of these bills would encompass all of the above policy recommendations, they’re a start. When we raise the floor on wages, worker protections, and rights to organize, we improve well-being, and we reduce inequality. Our economic peer nations show us that strong economies and strong support for workers go hand-in-hand.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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APPENDIX A

HOW DOES OUR INDEX COMPARE TO OTHERS?

By design, this index sits at the intersection of several related indices in the labor rights policy space. These include the ITUC Global Rights Index, the CFR Women’s Workplace Equality Index and the OECD Better Life Index. Each uses a distinct methodology scoped to define particular areas of policy relevance for practitioners, which differ substantially with our approach.

The ITUC Global Rights Index is designed in large part to assess the quality of implementation for national human and worker rights at a more basic level than our Index’s approach. Countries are scored based on the presence of certain overlapping pillars such as the right to strike and collectively bargain, but also a series of more basic protections such as the right to civil liberties and free speech. Beyond the scope of legal protections tracked, the ITUC Index also varies methodologically, focusing on the implementation success of certain base civil and trade liberties and tracking metrics, such as the number of violent attacks on workers. The ITUC’s efforts provide a basis from which the Oxfam Where Hard Work Doesn’t Pay Off Index methodology can expand to represent more advanced legal frameworks around worker rights and protections.

The CFR Women’s Workplace Equality Index provides a similar basis for documenting policies focused on working women, which we expand on. In particular, the CFR Index focuses on empowerment of women through work and entrepreneurship, scoring countries by their inclusionary practices for women across the labor market, financial institutions and property ownership. Similar to the ITUC Index, the policies highlighted by CFR focus on more basic rights and freedoms for women, such as the ability to build credit and protections from violence in the workplace and across society. These are scored across both legal frameworks and empirical implementation success, again occupying a space adjacent to our Index from which we may explore more progressive policies across the OECD.

The OECD Better Life Index is intended to present a holistic assessment of quality of life, with an expansive scope outside the articulated goals of the Oxfam Best States framework. The OECD Index draws from the same extensive body of OECD research that is used for several pillars of the Oxfam Index, but focuses on empirical measures across each dimension included, rather than centering on a legal framework of protections.

Lastly, this Index is also uniquely situated in comparison to another Oxfam publication: the Commitment to Reducing Inequality (CRI) Index. While the CRI Index spans public services spending and tax progressivity across more than 150 countries, its labor right and wages pillar draws the closest comparison to this Index. However, even in this particular dimension, substantive differences emerge. Because the Oxfam Where Hard Work Doesn’t Pay Off Index focuses only on labor across 38 countries, we are able to include a higher volume of government policies emphasizing working women and families.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Oxfam CRI Index</th>
<th>Oxfam Where Hard Work Doesn’t Pay Off Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wage policies</td>
<td>Scores based on minimum wage vs GDP per capita.</td>
<td>Scores based on the existence and maintenance of a minimum wage, the inclusivity of this wage across vulnerable populations, and the value of this wage in the local economy by purchase-price parity and comparison to national median income. Also includes the existence and maintenance of unemployment supports, spanning availability and access, the length of coverage, and the income replacement rate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker protections</td>
<td>Scores based on equal pay, discrimination in the workplace, and sexual harassment legislation, as well as policies promoting parental leave.</td>
<td>Scores based on policies accommodating pregnant workers, base equal pay provisions and expanded provisions ensuring access and compliance, the existence of paid parental leave at various stages of childhood, paid well-being care including sick days, working schedule protections, sexual harassment protections [criminal and civil], identity-based protections, historically excluded occupation protections, healthcare availability, and childcare supports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights to organize</td>
<td>Scores based on base support of labor rights legislation, as well as percent coverage of labor rights.</td>
<td>Scores based on rights to organize, collectively bargain and strike, as well as the existence of sectoral bargaining permissions, and the span of protections from retaliation for union representatives and others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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APPENDIX B

WHERE HARD WORK DOESN’T PAY OFF LABOR INDEX

SCORING LEGEND

All scores in the index reflect policies in effect as of 1 September 2022. Country scores are an aggregate of the policy scores within each dimension.

I. WAGE POLICIES

1. Minimum wage metrics

1.1 Existence and maintenance

- **Statutory minimum wage**: Countries receive a 1 if they have one or more statutory minimum wage(s) which in aggregate apply to their entire region and all occupations. Countries with no statutory minimum wage receive a 0.

- **Statutory mandate to update minimum wage**: Countries receive a 1 if they have a legal mandate to update the minimum wage on a regular basis (every six months to two years). Countries with no mandate to update their minimum wage receive a 0.

- **Subnational ability to set higher minimum wage**: Countries receive a 1 if the central government delegates agency to subnational governments to set a higher minimum wage for particular regions. Countries with no subnational delegation of authority receive a 0.

1.2 Inclusivity

- **Workers with disabilities included in minimum wage**: Countries receive a 1 if workers with disabilities are entitled to the same minimum wage as all other workers. Countries with mandated lower or no minimum wage for workers with disabilities receive a 0.

- **Young workers included in minimum wage**: Countries receive a 1 if workers under 18 or 21 years old are entitled to the same minimum wage as all other workers. Countries with mandated lower or no minimum wage for young workers receive a 0.

- **Domestic workers included in minimum wage**: Countries receive a 1 if domestic workers are entitled to the same minimum wage as all other workers. Countries with mandated lower or no minimum wage for domestic workers receive a 0.

- **Agricultural workers included in minimum wage**: Countries receive a 1 if agricultural workers are entitled to the same minimum wage as all other workers. Countries with mandated lower or no minimum wage for agricultural workers receive a 0.
1.3 Living wage comparison

- **Purchase-price-parity minimum wage:** Countries receive a standardized score from 0 to 1 based on how their minimum wage compares to the local cost of living. This is calculated by deflating wages by national Consumer Price Indices (CPI), then converting values into a common currency using USD Purchase Price Parities (PPP). The country with the highest minimum wage relative to local cost of living receives a 1, with the lowest relative minimum wage receiving a 0.

- **Minimum wage vs national median income:** Countries receive a standardized score from 0 to 1 based on how the standard minimum wage compares to national median income. The country with a minimum wage set closest to national median income receives a 1, with the lowest relative minimum wage vs national median income receiving a 0.

2. Unemployment supports

2.1 Availability and access

- **Compulsory unemployment insurance:** Countries receive a 1 if there exists a national compulsory unemployment insurance plan available to any worker meeting certain eligibility criteria requirements. Countries receive a 0 if no national government plan is in effect.

- **Minimum contribution length for unemployment insurance eligibility:** Countries receive a standardized score from 0 to 1 based on the minimum number of months of required employment before being able to access unemployment insurance. Countries that do not utilize unemployment insurance but provide robust alternatives (Australia, Columbia and New Zealand) are given scores based on the OECD mean number of months required, whereas countries with no meaningful alternative are given the minimum score. Therefore, the country with the shortest required contribution period receives a 1. Countries with no unemployment insurance, or with the longest required contribution period receive a 0.

- **Strictness of criteria to receive and maintain unemployment assistance:** Countries receive a standardized score from 0 to 1 based on how strenuous requirements are to receive and maintain unemployment assistance, as calculated by an OECD standard metric. Countries that do not have unemployment assistance (Costa Rica and Mexico) receive the OECD mean score. The country with the least strict criteria receives a 1. The country with the strictest criteria for receiving and maintenance receives a 0.

2.2 Length of Coverage

- **Unemployment insurance maximum length:** Countries receive a standardized score from 0 to 1 based on the maximum allowable length of their unemployment insurance, capped at 60 months. The country with the longest maximum length receives a 1. Countries without an unemployment insurance plan (inclusive of Australia, Colombia, and New Zealand) receive a 0.

- **Uninsurance benefits maximum length:** Countries receive a standardized score from 0 to 1 based on the maximum allowable length of their non-insurance unemployment benefit,
capped at 60 months. The country with the longest maximum length receives a 1. Countries without an unemployment benefit receive a 0.

2.3 Income replacement rate

- **Unemployment benefit share of previous income at 1 month:** Countries receive a standardized score from 0 to 1 based on the percentage of previous income for a single person making 67% of the average national wage that is covered by unemployment benefits in the first month. The country with the highest coverage rate receives a 1. Countries without an unemployment benefit receive a 0.

- **Unemployment benefit share of previous income at 1 year:** Countries receive a standardized score from 0 to 1 based on the percentage of previous income for a single person making 67% of the average national wage that is covered by unemployment benefits after the first year. The country with the highest coverage rate receives a 1. Countries without an unemployment benefit receive a 0.

- **Minimum benefit share of median family disposable income at 1 month:** Countries receive a standardized score from 0 to 1 based on what percentage of median family disposable income is covered by the minimum unemployment benefit. Where OECD data are not available (Chile), the OECD average is used. The country with the highest rate of income coverage by the minimum benefit receives a 1. Countries without an unemployment benefit receive a 0.

II. WORKER PROTECTIONS

1. Equal pay indicator

- **Basic equal pay:** Countries receive a 1 if they have mandated equal pay for equal work across private and public sectors.

- **Mandatory private sector employer pay reporting:** Countries receive a 1 if employers have legal obligations or other measures in place that require them to regularly report statistics such as the average or median remuneration of men and women at company level in companies, enterprises, or organizations.

- **Private sector equal pay audits:** Countries receive a 1 if employers have legal obligations or other measures in place that require them to incentivize organizations to undertake gender pay audits, either internally or carried out by an external actor. Audits may entail gender pay gaps, gender jobs composition, and job classification systems. In contrast with pay reports, gender audits seek to discern gender pay gaps and propose strategies to address them.

- **Public sector equal pay audits:** Countries receive a 1 if government agencies have legal obligations or other measures that require them to incentivize organizations to undertake gender pay audits, either internally or carried out by an external actor. Audits may entail gender pay gaps, gender jobs composition, and job classification systems. In contrast with pay reports gender audits seek to discern gender pay gaps and propose strategies to address them.
2. Historically excluded occupation protections

- **Domestic worker protections**: Countries receive a 1 if they have ratified and adopted the ILO Domestic Worker Convention (C189). Countries that have not ratified and implemented the convention receive a 0.

- **Gig economy worker protections**: Countries receive a 1 if they have a law that provides rights and protections to all gig workers. Countries receive a 0.5 if they have a law that extends to a class of gig workers. Countries receive a 0 if they have no legislation extending rights and protections to gig workers.

3. Protection from sexual harassment

- **Legal protection against workplace sexual harassment**: Countries receive a 1 if they have laws explicitly regarding sexual harassment and its restrictions in the workplace. If there is no such law, countries receive a 0.

- **Criminal penalties for workplace sexual harassment**: Countries receive a 1 if they have penalties for sexual harassment in the workplace that are of criminal nature. If there is no such law, countries receive a 0.

- **Civil Remedies for Workplace Sexual Harassment**: Countries receive a 1 if there are civil remedies in instances of workplace sexual harassment. If there is no such law, countries receive a 0.

4. Identity protections

- **Sexual orientation protections**
  - **Protection against workplace discrimination**: Countries receive a 1 if they have laws that explicitly protect employees against sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace. If there is no such law, countries receive a 0.
  - **Protection against hiring discrimination**: Countries receive a 1 if they have laws that explicitly protect employees against hiring discrimination based on gender identity and sex characteristics. If there is no such law, countries receive a 0.

- **Disability protections**
  - **Protection against workplace discrimination**: Countries receive a 1 if there is a law mandating protection from discrimination for employees based on their abilities. If there is no such law, countries receive a 0.
  - **Special protection against dismissal**: Countries receive a 1 if there are laws protecting persons with disabilities from unfair dismissal. If there is no such law, countries receive a 0.
5. Healthcare availability

- **Link between healthcare and employment**: Countries receive a 1 if they have a universal healthcare system provided by the government not tied to employment or employers. Countries where most healthcare coverage is provided through employment receive a 0.5, and countries where the majority of healthcare coverage is achieved through non-employer privatized plans receive a 0.

6. Paid parental leave indicator

- **Maternity leave/birthing parent leave**: The country’s mandated weeks of paid maternity (or paid birthing parent leave) is listed, and the component score is a normalization of the number of weeks on a scale of 0 to 1, 1 being the highest, based on the number of weeks provided. Countries with no mandated paid maternity leave are given a 0.

- **Paternity leave/non-birthing parent leave**: The country’s length of paid paternity leave is listed, and the component score is then a normalization of the number of weeks on a scale of 0 to 1, 1 being the highest number of weeks provided. Countries with no paid paternity leave are given a 0.

- **Parental leave for adopting parents**: The country’s length of paid adoption leave is listed in the number of weeks, and the component score is then a normalization of the number of weeks on a scale of 0 to 1, with 1 being the highest number of weeks provided. Countries with no mandated paid adoption leave are given a 0.

- **Leave for care of child under 3**: Countries receive a 1 if they have paid child care and home care leave for new parents that allows at least one parent to remain at home to provide care until the child is three years of age. This component is split into two parts: paid time available for mothers and paid time available for fathers. Countries with no paid home care leave are given a 0.

7. Other paid leave

- **Statutory minimum**: Number of annual leave days which are entitlements generally reflect those for full-time, full-year private sector employees, working a five-day week, who have been working for their current employer for one year. In some countries (e.g., Finland, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Poland and Turkey) the statutory minimum annual leave entitlement varies with tenure. The number of days is then scored on a scale of 0 to 1, the more days the closer to 1. Countries with no mandated days or paid leave are given a 0.

- **Sick Leave**: Countries receive a 1 if they have a mandated paid sick leave. Countries with no mandated paid sick leave are given a 0.

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*Employment-protected leave of absence for employed women directly around the time of childbirth (or, in some countries, adoption). The ILO convention on maternity leave stipulates the period of leave should be at least 14 weeks. In most countries, beneficiaries may combine pre- with post-birth leave; in some countries, a short period of pre-birth leave is compulsory, as is a period following birth.*
• **Menstrual Leave**: Countries receive a 1 if they have a mandated menstrual leave – paid leave that allows workers that are menstruating and in pain to take a leave. Countries with no mandated menstrual leave are given a 0.

8. **Child care supports**

• **Child care costs vs average household income for a two-parent household**: Countries receive a standardized score from 0 to 1 based on the proportion of average two-parent national household income required for expected child care costs. Countries with free or net negative child care costs receive a 1. The country with the highest relative proportion of child care costs as compared to household income receives a 0.

• **Child care costs vs average household income for a one-parent household**: Countries receive a standardized score from 0 to 1 based on the proportion of average one-parent national household income required for expected child care costs. Countries with free or net negative child care costs receive a 1. The country with the highest relative proportion of child care costs as compared to household income receives a 0.

9. **Working schedule protections**

• **Right to change working hours**: Countries receive a 1 if workers are able to change their working hours, especially to accommodate care responsibilities, and work outside of standard working hours or work fewer hours. Countries receive a 0.5 if only certain workers have access to this ability (largely countries with 0.5 have this right restricted to pregnant women or birthing mothers). And countries where workers do not have the right to change their hours, including countries where this right is not a mandate but an ability to request a change that can be easily rejected by their employers, receive a 0.

• **Overtime protections**: This policy measures whether there are protections in place against extended workdays or weeks. Countries receive a 1 if there are limits on working hours AND mandates for extra pay or rest for any hours worked over established working hours. Countries receive a 0.5 if there are no limits on how many overtime hours a worker can work; if overtime is or can be compulsory; or if compensatory rest or pay is very low (not equivalent hours of rest, less than 50% increase in pay). Countries receive a 0 if there are no legal limits on working hours or no mandates for overtime compensation.

10. **Pregnancy accommodations**

• **State mandated pregnant worker accommodations**: Countries receive a 1 if they have mandated private employers provide some accommodation, either by request or by default, to pregnant workers. Countries with recommendation, opt-in programs, or no accommodations are given a 0.

• **Private sector right to pump**: Countries receive a 1 if they have a mandated accommodation for private workers to express breastmilk, or other language implying a right to pump, within their workplace.
• Special protection against dismissal for pregnant workers and/or workers on maternity leave: Countries receive a 1 if they have a law that protects against dismissal of pregnant workers and/or workers on maternity leave.

III. RIGHTS TO ORGANIZE

1. Right to organize

• Right of association in private sector: Countries receive a 1 if they have a law that fully protects worker and employers’ freedom to organize, and 0.5 if it is protected but with minor restrictions. Countries with majorly restricted right of association receive a 0.25 and those that do not ensure a right to organize receive a 0.

• Right of association in public sector: Countries receive a 1 if they have a law that fully protects government workers and employers’ freedom to organize, and 0.5 if it is protected but with minor restrictions. Countries with majorly restricted right of association receive a 0.25 and those that do not ensure a right to organize receive a 0.

2. Collective bargaining

• Right to bargain collectively in private sector: Countries receive a 1 if they have a law that protects workers right to bargain collectively, and 0.5 if it is protected but with minor restrictions. Countries with majorly restricted right to bargain collectively receive a 0.25 and those that do not ensure it receive a 0.

• Right to bargain collectively in public sector: Countries receive a 1 if they have a law that protects public sector workers right to bargain collectively, and 0.5 if it is protected but with minor restrictions. Countries that majorly restricted the right to bargaining collectively for government employees receive a 0.25 and those that do not ensure it receive a 0.

3. Right to strike

• Right to strike in private sector: Countries receive a 1 if they have a law that protects workers’ right to strike, and 0.5 if it is protected but with minor restrictions. Countries with majorly restricted right to strike receive a 0.25 and those that do not ensure it receive a 0.

• Right to strike in public sector: Countries receive a 1 if they have a law that protects public sector workers’ right to strike, and 0.5 if it is protected but with minor restrictions. Countries with majorly restricted right to strike for government employees receive a 0.25 and those that do not ensure it receive a 0.

4. Sectoral bargaining

• Sectoral bargaining normalized: Countries receive a 1 if they have enabled workers to sectorally or nationally bargain with companies. Countries receive a 0.5 if they have enabled some sectoral bargaining but continue to have prominent instances of company-based bargaining relations. Countries where collective bargaining is predominantly practiced via decentralized company-based bargaining receive a 0.
5. Protections from retaliation

- **Protection for union representative**: Countries receive a 1 if they extend special protections to union representatives to protect them against retaliation or discrimination based on a threshold defined by the International Labour Organization.

- **Private sector whistleblower protections**: Countries receive a 1 if workers who have reported illegal or illicit activity by their employer are protected through a national legal framework. Countries receive a 0.5 if certain private sector workers receive protection, and countries with no legal framework to protect private sector whistleblowers are given a 0.

- **Notice required for dismissal**: Countries receive a 1 if workers whose employment is to be terminated are entitled to a reasonable period of notice for dismissal. Countries with no mandated dismissal notice are given a 0.

- **Pay in lieu of notice**: Countries receive a 1 if workers whose employment is to be terminated are entitled to compensation in lieu of a reasonable period of notice. Countries with no mandated pay in lieu of notice are given a 0.
NOTES


5 Justin Schweitzer, “Ending the Tipped Minimum Wage Will Reduce Poverty and Inequality,” n.d.


10 The United States, for example, has ratified only 2 of the 10 fundamental conventions put forward by the International Labour Organization (ILO), only 1 of 4 governance conventions, and only 11 of 176 technical conventions. Fundamental conventions from the ILO which the US has not ratified include provisions around rights to organize, free association, equal pay, discrimination protections, occupational safety, and protections against forced labor, to say nothing of more technical labor conventions. For more, see https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/?p=NORMLEXPUB:11200:0::NO::p11200_country_id:102871.

11 https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=1110_1110970-gia5g3aj&title=MCM-oct-2021-Trust-in-global-co-operation-Mathias-Cormann


The US federal minimum wage has been stuck at $7.25 an hour since 2009; the tipped minimum wage has been stuck at $2.13 an hour since 1991. Federal standards permit subminimum wages for some workers as well. For more information, please refer to Oxfam’s report, “The Crisis of Low Wages.”

Another example is indexing wages to inflation, much like Social Security payments are indexed to inflation in the United States. There are also 13 states that currently raise their minimum wages annually to reflect inflation. For more, see: https://www.epi.org/blog/tying-minimum-wage-increases-to-inflation-as-12-states-do-will-lift-up-low-wage-workers-and-their-families-across-the-country/.


Henderson, "The Crisis of Low Wages in the US."

Henderson, "The Crisis of Low Wages in the US."

Tucker and Patrick, “Low-wage jobs are women’s jobs: the overrepresentation of women in low-wage work.”


29 Mason and Robbins, “Women’s Work Is Undervalued, and It’s Costing Us Billions.”


38 Claire Ewing-Nelson, “All of the Jobs Lost in December Were Women’s Jobs,” Fact Sheet [National Women’s Law Center, January 2021].

39 Jasmine Tucker and Brooke Lepage, “While Overall Unemployment Rate Edges Down, Rates Increase for Black Women and Latinas” [National Women’s Law Center (NWLC), January 2023].

40 U.S. Department of Labor, “The Union Advantage.”


The most notable exception to this rule is Project Labor Agreements, or PLAs, which are collective bargaining agreements often used for construction projects. PLAs help establish wage rates, and typically create a contract with unionized workers. For more, see [https://www.dol.gov/general/good-jobs/project-labor-agreement-resource-guide](https://www.dol.gov/general/good-jobs/project-labor-agreement-resource-guide).


Policies that support and protect working families vary greatly by country. How is the US doing compared to its peers? According to our research: not well. The US is falling drastically behind similar countries in mandating adequate wages, protections, and rights for millions of workers and their families. The wealthiest country in the world is near the bottom of every dimension of this index.