

# What will it take to achieve economic gender equality in the US?



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The first International Women's Day, March 8, pushed for women's right to vote, as well as rights to work, vocational training and discrimination-free workplaces.

**Haven't we won these battles? It's the 21st century!**

No. The economic gap between women and men is shockingly large in the U.S. Women's yearly incomes average less than two-thirds of those of men. In other words, the average American man's income is more than half again as much as the income of the average American woman.

American families depend on women's incomes, and would be better off if women earned more. Women are the biggest or only breadwinner in 4 out of 10 households with kids.

**What if we just look at full-time workers? Are you saying that women are still being discriminated against?**

Yes, in fact, the World Economic Forum just reported that 65 other countries do better at paying women equally with men doing similar work, though American women are the most equally educated.

Among year-round, full-time workers, American women are paid four-fifths as much as men, on average. That gap grows with age and with more education.

Big disparities exist between white men and women of color. Of full-time workers, white women are paid 83 cents to white men's \$1, African-American women make 65 cents, and Latinas just 58 cents.

Mothers earn less than similar women without children, docked a "motherhood penalty" for each child. And employers assume that women of color have more children than they do, while believing that white women have fewer than they really do.

Women are also less likely to get overtime, bonuses, good benefits and access to enough hours, particularly in fields like retail.

**What? The Equal Pay Act was passed in 1963, more than 50 years ago! What's it going to take to achieve economic gender equality in this country?**

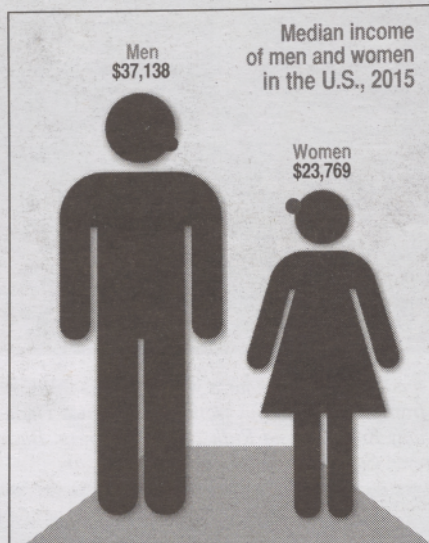
The three most important things to do are:

1. Raise wages in the lower rungs of the extremely unequal U.S. labor market,
2. End the persistent social devaluation of the work of individual women, and the jobs and skills most associated with women, and
3. Provide high-quality, affordable care for children, seniors and adults living with disabilities.

**How can we raise wages in the lower rungs of the extremely unequal U.S. labor market?**

Oregon recently made progress on two effective tactics: raising the minimum wage and mandating paid sick days for all workers.

Other strategies that work elsewhere are reducing barriers to unionization, requiring that part-time work be paid at the same hourly rate as full-time work, mandating more regular schedules, creating more apprenticeships, restoring vocational education and enforcing equal employment laws.



**What do you mean by ending the devaluation of women and women's work?**

Many people don't realize that they subconsciously devalue work done by a woman and the jobs that are most female-dominated.

Famously, the number of women musicians hired increased dramatically after U.S. symphonies started conducting "blind auditions," with the players screened so they couldn't be seen. Resumes with men's names are evaluated more positively than identical resumes with women's names, as are writing samples.

The skills in jobs dominated by women tend to be overlooked or undervalued, as compared with men's jobs.

**Why don't women go into better paying fields?**

Part of the pay gap is due to women being socialized to enter lower-paying occupations and industries. But women earn less than men in all industries, almost all occupations, at every level of education, and after graduating with every college major.

Wages fall when more women go into a field, as seen in pharmacy, journalism and teaching. Harassment pushes women out of some relatively well-paying, male-dominated jobs, in the trades as well as in science, engineering and computer programming.

**Speaking of harassment, does violence against women have an economic impact?**

Yes, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that stalking victims lose 10 paid days of work a year, rape victims eight days, and victims of intimate partner violence seven days a year.

Abusers use economic strategies to maintain their power, including forbidding women to work or attend school; sabotaging women at work; destroying women's property, such as cars and clothes; and undermining women's confidence in their ability to earn a living. Three-quarters of survivors of intimate partner abuse have stayed in a violent relationship for economic reasons.

Even the right wing American Enterprise Institute says a "care chasm" keeps women in the U.S. from working as much as in other countries.

American women's participation in paid

work has fallen since the year 2000, while growing in almost all other affluent nations - many of which provide free, public pre-school.

Men are picking up more of the slack at home, but women are still charged with an outside share of unpaid work. On average, women's days, compared to men's, include an hour and a half a day more of housework and taking care of family members, an hour less in paid work and 45 minutes less for leisure activities.

Although 7 out of 10 women with children at home now work, twice as many women as men work part-time, which means low wages and few benefits. Women are much more likely than men to take time out from work, to care for young children, aging parents and ailing partners.

Unlike other countries, the U.S. barely subsidizes childcare and other forms of care, and it's extremely expensive, despite the very low wages of paid care workers. College-educated pre-school teachers earn the least of any college major, even though high quality, early childhood education is tremendously valuable, markedly improving kids' future earnings.

Paid family leave keeps women connected to their jobs, and their wages up. The U.S., Oman and Papua New Guinea are the only three countries in the world without national paid parental leave in the formal sector. Half of the world's nations pay for 14 weeks or more.

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**But women and men are in families together, so doesn't it all work out in the end?**

Not really. Even straight couples are vulnerable to divorce, desertion, death, disability, unemployment, chronic illness, alcoholism and domestic violence. And plenty of women are single, or partnered with other women. For couples including people of color or immigrants, the gender pay gap is added on top of earnings differences by race, ethnicity and immigrant status.

What's more, pay differences and penalties for caring really add up. Women workers earn more than half a million dollars less over their lifetimes than men do, from annual pay differences over the years of just \$10,000 or so.

Women own a lot less wealth than men do. Women are far less secure in old age, receiving less in pensions and social security, sometimes retiring early to care for parents and spouses, and running down assets to pay for partners' end of life medical care.

Women's poverty rates are much higher than men's, particularly in old age and as single parents. Forty percent of single mothers' households are poor, twice the poverty rate of single fathers and more than five times the rate of married couples with kids.

And in a country where political influence is measured in dollars, women's views count for a lot less.