AMERICA'S RECOVERY FROM THE 2020 "SHECESSION":

Building a Female Future of Childcare and Work

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FOREWORD

Global pandemics have been regarded as great equalizers. Viruses do not discriminate based on who you are, where you live, how much you earn, and certainly not by how you vote. The COVID-19 crisis, however, has upended the "egalitarianism" of pandemics, unearthing social and economic inequities that are jeopardizing half a century of women's hard-fought gains in the American workforce.

We are living through our nation's first female-driven recession. Fueled by disappearing service-sector jobs and a lack of childcare options, the COVID-19 public health and economic crisis has triggered a nationwide *"shecession."*

This "shecession" is a bipartisan concern, the ripple effects of which are already threatening the current workforce and could imperil the female future of work. Women, especially women of color, are being ousted from the workforce, largely due to disappearing jobs in industries that may never recover. Absent pipelines to a female future of work—e.g., college preparation that promotes science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs; dual-generation approaches that provide educational opportunities for children and parents; and apprenticeships in technical fields—this female exodus from the workforce is at risk of becoming permanent.

When the first wave of women joined the workforce during World War II, the need for childcare was a reality, not a policy or line item to be debated. Working moms had become the backbone of the economy. Comprehensive and affordable childcare solutions popped up across the country to meet their needs. The circumstances were unique, but the benefits were not. The social and economic benefits of comprehensive childcare and pre-K programs, both for working mothers and their children, are well documented. Yet, over the past 75 years, America has failed to replicate the success of the childcare programs established during World War II. Our own history is proof that an investment in comprehensive childcare is both necessary and achievable.

America's Recovery from the 2020 "Shecession" does not decry the politicians or policies that created our current reality. Rather, this paper provides an honest look at our shortcomings and successes—both past and present—so that our political leaders may learn from mistakes, not condemn the nation to repeat them. The fact is that without mitigations and a substantial investment in childcare, this "shecession" was inevitable.

Women feared economic insecurity long before they feared COVID-19. YWCA USA's YWomenVote 2020 survey—conducted and released prior to the pandemic—identified and measured women's issue priorities in this pivotal election year. To produce a snapshot that captures our nation's truest hues, we oversampled traditionally under-sampled populations: younger women and women of color. What did we find out? Women. Are. Worried.

Across age, income levels, and racial identities, women expressed deep concerns about access to high-quality and affordable childcare, well-paying jobs with benefits, pay equity, and fair workplaces. Even before COVID-19, women of color and young women felt these concerns with the greatest intensity. And now, they are the ones feeling the deepest economic pain.

If women were merely "worried" prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the current economic situation is downright terrifying. In the months since YWCA conducted the YWomenVote2020 survey, the majority of women of color have lost their hours, experienced a pay cut, or faced unemployment. Even women on the frontlines, those who arguably have the best job security, are being pushed out of their jobs due to the lack of available childcare.

The pandemic is the breaking point of a system that has failed American women for generations. Women, especially women of color, need a path to economic security. The current system is untenable for American families and the American economy as a whole.

We now know, in no uncertain terms, what women need to achieve economic security: well-paying, stable jobs and comprehensive childcare solutions. The political system had more than 50 years to prepare for the inevitability of the "*shecession.*" The time to act is now.

This paper provides practical recommendations for tackling childcare and the female future of work. I hope these recommendations lay the groundwork upon which our legislative leaders will develop and enact a comprehensive policy response. The economic security of American women rests in their hands.

Sincerely,

Alejandra Y. Castillo
CEO, YWCA USA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COVID-19 is a public health and economic crisis, and women are bearing the brunt of the resulting economic devastation. Americans are living through the country's first "*shecession*". Over the last 50 years, women and mothers have become an inextricable part of the American labor force. Social and economic policies, however, have not kept pace with the advancement of women. And women of color are shouldering the heaviest burden of the nation's systemic failures and inequities. Women in America have endured a decades-long childcare and workforce support crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has simply brought the role of women in the US workforce into stark relief.

In recent months, due to job loss and/or lack of childcare, women have been forced out of the workforce in droves. If left unmitigated, this "*shecession*" could jeopardize hard-fought advances in the labor force.

America's Recovery from the 2020 "Shecession" identifies three challenges and systemic inequities that engendered this inevitable "shecession":

1. **Failure to identify women's economic security needs.**
2. **Inadequate childcare options and an underpaid childcare workforce.**
3. **A future of work that will automate women out of the labor force.**

The systems that undergird women's economic security, and by extension the American economy, are irretrievably broken. To fix this fractured system, a substantial investment and policy reform are needed.

The opportunity to act is now.

America's Recovery from the 2020 "Shecession" provides a roadmap to address the nation's systemic challenges and inequities. The following solutions will help the US emerge from the COVID-19 crisis with a robust economy that catalyzes future growth and stability, and supports women in the workforce now and in the future.

Challenge 1: The root obstacle to equity is the failure to identify women's economic security needs.

- Women worry about getting or keeping a well-paying job with benefits, affording rent or a mortgage, and earning a household income that is sufficient to meet the family's expenses.
- Although workplace safety is a top legislative priority for all women, women of color, in particular, are especially concerned about their safety in the workplace.
- A clear majority of women indicate support for expanded childcare, but it is a concern most deeply shared among women of color and Gen Z and Millennial women.

Solution: Listen! Across the board, women cite childcare, jobs, equal pay, and fair workplaces among their chief concerns. The failures to address these concerns at a national and local level, despite overwhelming support, indicate that women simply are not being heard.

Challenge 2: Today's childcare system is failing everyone—parents, children, childcare workers, and the American economy. The system relies on a low-earning, predominantly female workforce to provide childcare that is insufficient to meet the needs of working parents across income levels.

- The American childcare system has not kept pace with labor force changes. Single and low-income mothers face the greatest inequities.
- Childcare workers are among the lowest paid wage earners in the American workforce. This low-wage sector is 96 percent female, and women of color are disproportionately represented.
- Insufficient availability of childcare is a problem regardless of income. Families with incomes over $100,000 and less than $40,000 are equally likely to report inadequate childcare options.
- When surveyed in 2019, half of working families reported having difficulty finding suitable childcare. They cited cost, availability, and quality as the primary obstacles.
- The childcare crisis hurts the American economy. The cost of lost earnings, revenue, and productivity resulting from inadequate childcare totals about $57 billion per year.[1]

Solution: Establish and invest in a high-quality childcare system that addresses availability, cost, quality, and equity to aid the nation's COVID-19 recovery and support long-term economic resiliency. This robust, comprehensive childcare system must also compensate childcare workers fairly, as they are the workers on which the rest of the economy relies.

Challenge 3: Gendered education norms and occupational segregation cemented an inequitable system that has harmed women's labor force participation and put them at highest risk of being replaced in the workforce by automated technology.

- The future of work relies on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Women, especially women of color, remain vastly outnumbered in the field.
- Technological advances and automation will trigger widespread economic pain and acute economic pain for women in particular.
- College pipelines and apprenticeship programs are critical to reducing wage gaps, especially for women of color, yet few of these programs are in operation.
- A lack of job training programs with a dual-generation approach, yet such programs are proven to bolster economic security and educational opportunities for parents and their children.
- Sexual violence, harassment, and discrimination contribute to the continued lack of physical and emotional safety for women in the workplace, despite established legal protections.

Solution: A comprehensive female future of work recognizes the reality that the majority of primary caregivers are women; it provides a safe and supportive environment for all workers. This will require a shift in workplace culture from one rooted in hostility and uncertainty to one in which women are physically and intellectually respected, and are acknowledged for their dual role as workforce participant and caretaker. A strategic investment in the future of work demands that women, like their male counterparts, are given a strong base for post-secondary STEM pursuits and professional development programs in fields or industries that offer longevity and security, where workers are not at risk of being replaced by automation. Not only will this prevent a scenario of job loss, but it serves to create one of widespread economic growth for women, men, their families, and the American economy.

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INTRODUCTION

The economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has been aptly termed a "shecession."[2] Since March, the unemployment rate for women across all racial and ethnic groups has risen higher than that of men. The rates of unemployment have been especially steep among women of color. Compared to 13 percent unemployment for white women, Latina unemployment is nearing 20 percent, followed by 16 percent unemployment among Black and Asian American women.[3] Over 60 percent of women of color have lost their hours, faced a pay cut, or been laid off or furloughed.[4]

Women are in the midst of a perfect storm. Women are overrepresented in the service sector—hotel housekeepers, food servers, retail attendants, casino workers, etc. This sector was the first to shut down and will be the slowest to recover. Service-based industries are also the ones forecast to shed the greatest number of jobs in the next decade as a result of automation. The reality is that close to 40 percent of these lost jobs simply will not come back.[5]

At the same time, women—who are the majority of essential workers—have been pushed to the frontlines of the pandemic without sufficient access to childcare. Nearly half of childcare centers have closed or reduced capacity. Working mothers have been left without care and 1 out of 5 childcare workers—96 percent of them women—have been left without a job.

Many moms who work outside of the home have been effectively pushed out of the workforce.

At this moment, women are bearing the brunt of the COVID-19 economic devastation. If left unmitigated, this "shecession" could jeopardize hard fought advances in the labor force in both the near and distant future. COVID-19 has forced women to exit the workforce either because of job loss or lack of childcare, and the clock is very much in danger of being turned back.

The role of women over the last 50 years has flipped from one where the majority of women did not work outside of the home to one where they do. Today, the labor force participation of women is 58 percent, an increase of 35 percent since 1970. But the most transformational change in the last several decades has been the growth of women in the workforce with a young child.[6] As more women began starting families at a later age, women were also more likely to be established in their jobs and not leave the workforce when they had children.

Women and mothers have become an inextricable part of the American labor force. The problem is that social and economic policies have not kept pace with the advancement of women. Since entering the workforce in large numbers, women have had to make do with an anemic childcare system and inadequate structural workforce support.

COVID-19 is a public health and economic crisis, but it is also an opportunity to create future growth and stability. This pandemic provides a window to restructure key policy that supports women, and by extension, the entirety of the American economy. Women's economic advancement in the 21st Century is supported by two central pillars that the pandemic has brought to the fore: comprehensive childcare and job security.

Women have had to make do with an anemic childcare system and inadequate structural workforce support.

Rebuilding from the pandemic's perfect storm means constructing an infrastructure that can specifically support the female labor force. And the timing could not be more urgent. As the American economy enters the Fourth Industrial Revolution, digitally driven advances will bring about unprecedented changes in jobs, occupations, and the overall structure of the workforce.

The following paper sketches out a blueprint for American economic recovery based on the intentional buildout of high quality, affordable, and accessible childcare together with a concrete future-of-work plan for the female workforce. In the current climate of hyper-partisanship, support for quality and affordable childcare, as well as the future of work, are standouts of bi-partisan agreement. The key now is to seize the moment.

This *"shecession"* did not develop in a vacuum. *America's Recovery from the 2020 "Shecession"* lays out a roadmap for identifying the systemic inequities that contributed to this inevitable crisis, and the solutions for recovery. This paper begins by listening to the voices of women and identifying their needs for economic security. Next, the discussion transitions into a key issue jeopardizing women's security: childcare. This section takes a critical look at the disconnect between workforce realities and childcare provisions, and what can be done to remedy this disparity. The latter half of the paper shifts the focus to the other primary issue facing working moms: a female future of work. The analysis focuses on how women, who have experienced the brunt of job loss and career elimination as a result of COVID-19, can chart a path of recovery through a comprehensive female future of work.

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WOMEN IN THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

The 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment and the 55th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act reignited conversations around gender equality, creating a space to celebrate and reflect on these critical milestones and how to continue to chart a path forward. Although women have consistently outvoted their male counterparts in the last 40 years, economic, societal, and representational inequities persist. And the fight to ensure universal suffrage and participation at the ballot box—particularly for women of color—endures.

Nevertheless, women across the country remain highly motivated to raise their voices to advance shared personal and economic security interests as well as to call on legislators to enact policy solutions that will foster, rather than inhibit, economic security for all women in America.

The only way to chart a path for COVID-19 recovery that leads to systemic equity is by listening to women and understanding their economic needs.

What Women Need

American women are keenly aware of what they need for their families, communities, and the nation to succeed. The particular needs of young women and women of color further help delineate the road to economic enfranchisement for the whole of American women.

Shortly before the COVID-19 outbreak, YWCA USA released their results from the "YWomenVote 2020" survey, one of the most comprehensive examinations of women's concerns, experiences, and priorities. This survey is unique in that it oversampled traditionally underrepresented sample groups: young women and women of color. The rich diversity that characterizes American women—race, ethnicity, political party, age, region—is intentionally integrated into the YWomenVote survey.[7]

In developing a blueprint for the short-term economic recovery and long-term advancement of women, the starting place is none other than listening to what women say.

In looking to the 2020 election and the next president and Congress, women are a powerful voting bloc. Women of every age, background, and political party have clearly staked out their economic security, health, caregiving, and safety priorities.

The "YWomenVote" data reveal that American women, in the aggregate, demonstrate strong agreement on issue priorities; childcare, jobs, equal pay, and fair workplaces are among women's chief concerns.[8]

Over half of American women are worried about their economic security, namely their ability to afford living expenses. These apprehensions are particularly acute among Latinas and Black women, as well as Gen Z women (age 18-22).[9] These Gen Zers, who are not yet established in their jobs or careers, single out economic security as their most pressing issue of concern.[10] The high degree of prioritization of economic security for women points to an underlying landscape of economic insecurity among all women, but especially women of color and Gen Z women.

This pandemic was merely the breaking point of a system that has eternally failed to provide for the needs of American women.

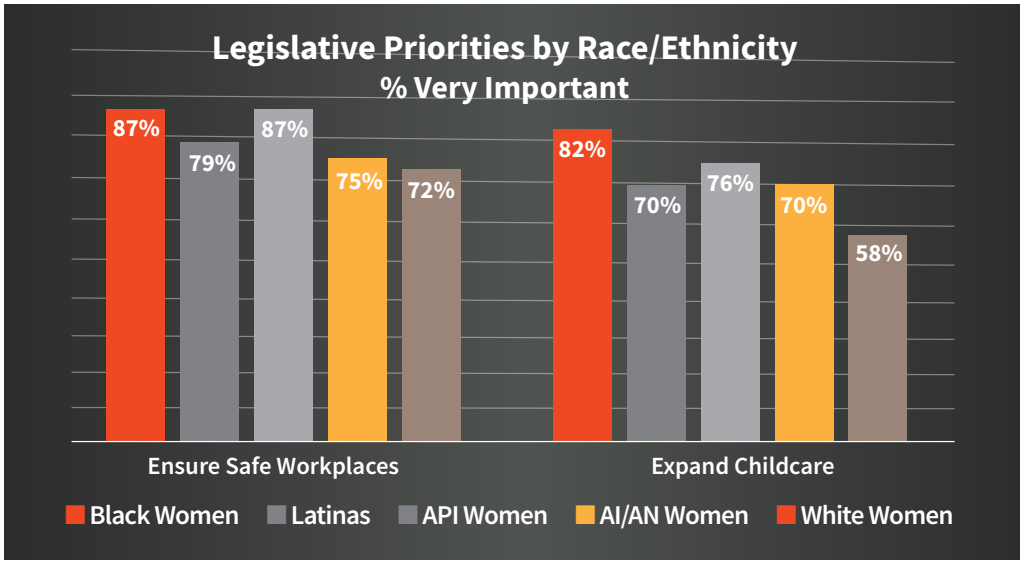
Key Indicators of Women's Economic Concerns	% Very Worried		
Housing and Jobs By Race / Ethnicity	**All Women**	**Black Women**	**Latinas**
Being able to afford your rent or mortgage*	34%	52%	55%
Getting or keeping a good paying job with benefits*	30%	42%	51%

College Costs and Jobs By Generation	**All Women**	**Gen Z Women**
Paying for college or repaying student loans*	32%	65%
Getting a good paying job*	24%	50%

Source: YWomenVote 2020

The particular concerns that undergird women's economic security include: getting or keeping a well-paying job with benefits, being able to afford rent or a mortgage, and earning a household income that is sufficient to meet family's expenses and to pay bills.

Women are also concerned about their general security in the workplace. Ensuring safe workplaces is a top legislative priority for all women. However, women of color indicate a greater intensity of support, with Latinas and Black women indicating the highest levels of support at 87 percent.[11]



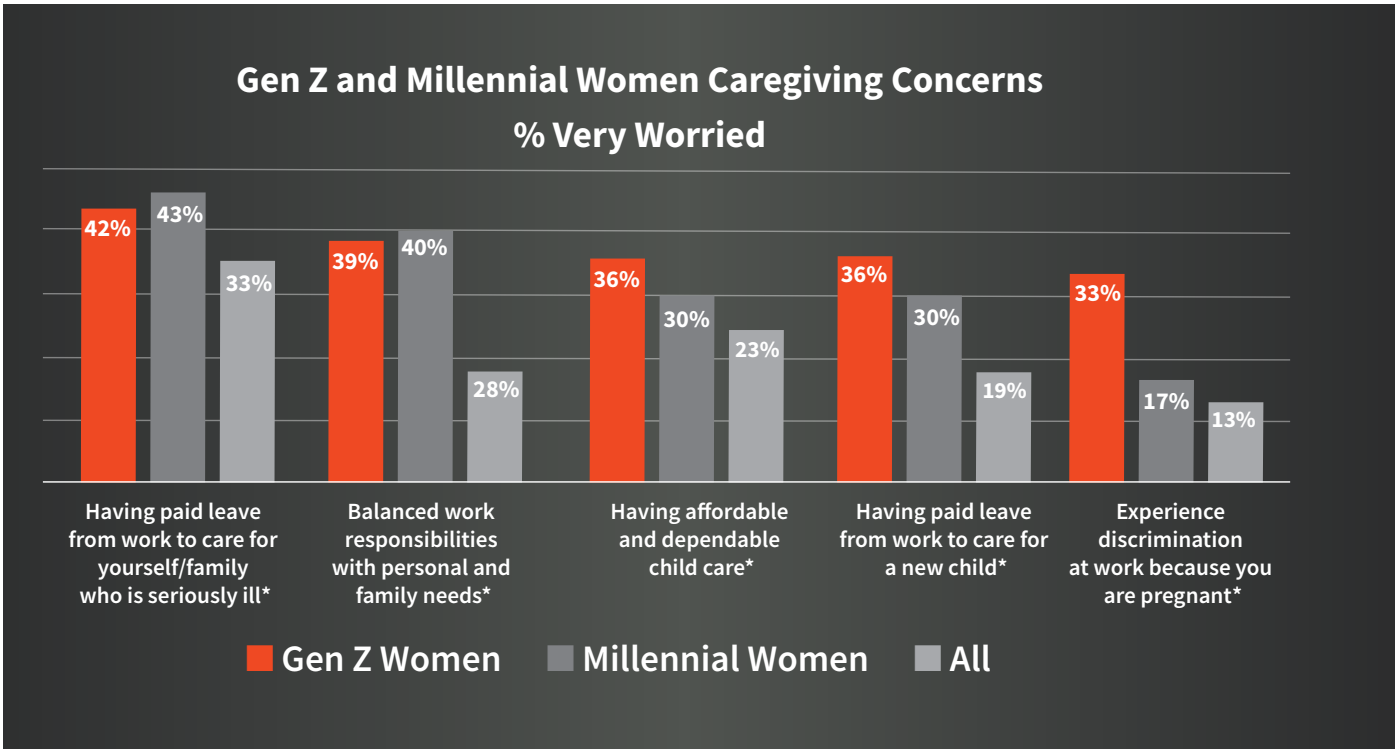
Source: YWomenVote 2020

For women, a peer concern to economic security and workplace safety is childcare. A clear majority of women indicate support for expanded childcare. Among women of color, this support ranges from 70-82 percent.[12] By generation, Gen Z and Millennial women are the most worried about having affordable and dependable childcare.[13]

Women are worried. And as revealed by the "YWomenVote" survey, this heightened economic concern

predates the onset of COVID-19. Over the last several months, women, especially women of color and young women, have been put under extreme economic duress. The pandemic was merely the breaking point of a system that has eternally failed to provide for the needs of American women.

The pandemic has highlighted the deficient policy support for the economic well-being of women. By amplifying structural policy weaknesses, the COVID-19 crisis provides a critical window of opportunity to fix what all can now plainly see is broken. Now is the time to build a comprehensive policy response that goes far beyond the immediate needs of women in the midst of the "shecession." The social and economic turmoil has engendered a watershed moment, an opportunity to build a policy foundation for women to thrive well beyond the COVID-19 era.



Source: YWomenVote 2020

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CHARTING A FUTURE OF CHILDCARE POST COVID-19 AND BEYOND

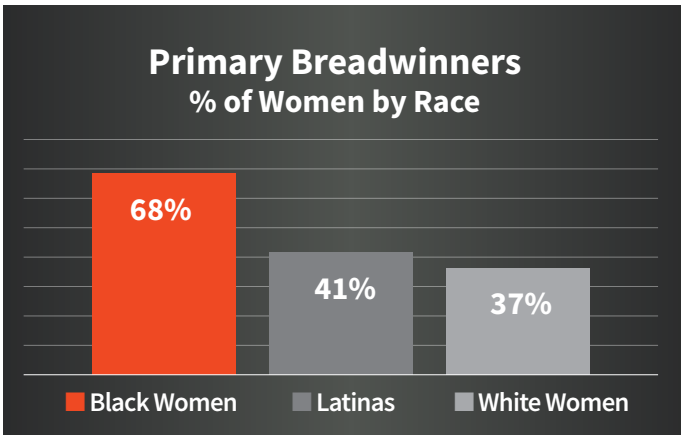
COVID-19 has forced the closure of schools, camps, and childcare centers; it has rendered babysitters and grandparents—once reliable backup childcare alternatives—as unsafe options. For women whose job requires them to continue to work outside of the home, the situation is bleak—all the more so for women who are the core of frontline essential workers. Women comprise three-quarters of both the healthcare and public administration sectors, two-thirds of grocery store clerks, and nearly half of mail carriers.[14]

Roughly four in five essential workers have not been able to continue to use previous care arrangements.[15] Others have had to rely on informal care, work fewer hours, or take leave to provide childcare. For women who have been fortunate to keep their job, there is no easy choice. And for those mothers whose work has gone remote, the options are not much better.

Many moms have been effectively pushed out of the workforce as childcare options disappear, with devastating impacts on the economic security of their family. Eleven percent of working parents, almost entirely mothers, have been forced to rreduce their hours or quit their jobs and leave the workforce altogether.

As with other dimensions of the COVID-19 crisis, layoffs, furloughs, and cuts in hours are disproportionately impacting women of color. High percentages of Black and Latina mothers are the primary or sole source of income for their family.[16] And with women of color falling into the lowest income quintiles, options available to higher income families such as nannies, nanny shares, or private schools are not an option. Moreover, this exit from the labor force imperils the hard-fought progress of women over the last 50 years.

The impact of women exiting the workforce in this current moment goes well beyond these women, their families, and even the economy. Hospitals are short-staffed, grocery stores are struggling to find workers, and communities' ability to care for their residents is compromised when female essential workers must stay home. At a time when resources and supply chains are already stretched thin, the nation is put further at risk when essential workers must exit the workforce.



Source: Sarah Jane Glynn, "Breadwinning Mothers Continue To Be the U.S. Norm." Center for American Progress, (May 2019).

There is an acute need for childcare to support the nation's effort to fight COVID-19. However, the lack of childcare is not a reality that suddenly appeared with the onset of the novel coronavirus. The pandemic exacerbated an existing problem. What has been laid bare is the vital linkage among childcare, the American labor force, and economic resiliency. A holistic solution is called for to connect the realities of the American workforce to the needs of parents.

High-quality childcare, at its most abstract level, is an investment with high returns—not just for children, parents, and employers, but for communities and the larger American Economy. A system of childcare that addresses availability, cost, quality, and equity is needed both for the nation's COVID-19 recovery and its long-term economic resiliency.

The remainder of this section documents the growth of the US female labor force in the last 50 years. This review establishes the growing disconnect between American workforce needs and the current childcare system, and discusses the three most pressing childcare system problems the nation faces:

1. **Exorbitant childcare costs.**
2. **Limited availability to childcare.**
3. **Inequitable wages for childcare workers.**

In laying out a path forward, this section concludes with a call to harness bi-partisan support for a childcare system that is inclusive and supports children and their parents, as well as childcare workers.

Societal Change and a New American Workforce

By the late 1960s, women were increasingly entering the labor force. Together with advances in family planning, the second women's movement allowed women greater access and ability to pursue opportunities that were previ-ouslylimited to men.

Accompanying the increased entry of women into the labor force was a call for childcare provisions to support women in the workforce. However, this call had to contend with the view of daycares as programs for the needy. In the 1960s, the publication of research promoting the developmental benefits of early childhood education prompted a shift in the public perception of childcare programs.

Center-based care grew in popularity among middle- and high-income families as they joined the labor market. Social policy advocates further promoted early education centers as an important tool in ameliorating the effects of poverty on child development. Both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations saw public centers as an investment. And as part of the Great Society, President Johnson created the Head Start program in 1965, which provided educational childcare for low-income families.[17]

By the late 1960s, there was a growing bipartisan consensus for supporting the role of women in the workforce through subsidized childcare provisions. This consensus culminated in the Comprehensive Childhood Development Act of 1971, which sought to increase women's workforce opportunities through the provision of childcare.[18] This Act provided for a universal childcare system of nationally funded, locally administered centers that were to provide education, mid-day meals and snacks, and medical services. The program was open to all and parents would pay on a sliding scale.[19]

The Comprehensive Childhood Development Act passed both the House and Senate, with allocated funding nearly five times the current Head Start budget. But President Nixon vetoed the bill due to fears that universal childcare would create more bureaucracy and damage the integrity of the family.[20]

A Growing Disconnect

Over the following decades, the government prioritized personal responsibility and reduced public spending, stalling any federal pursuit of expanding access to childcare. During this same time, other industrialized countries invested in universal or nearly universal childcare systems to accommodate the changing roles of mothers at home and work.

The American childcare system has not kept pace with labor force changes. Nowhere is the disconnect more apparent than among single and low-income mothers. The 1996

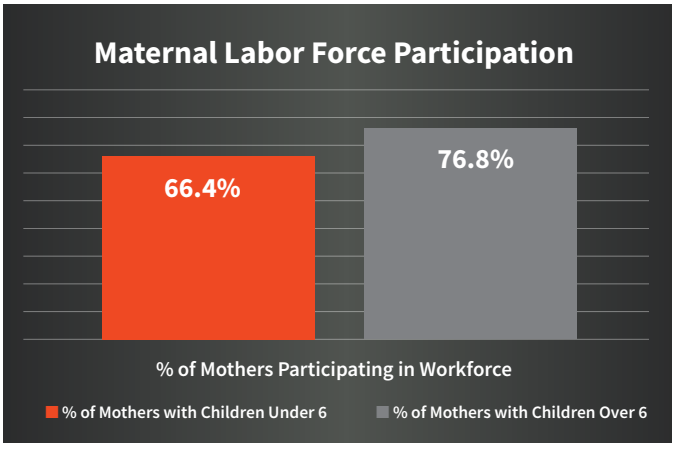
Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, a bipartisan welfare reform act, replaced multiple welfare programs with a singular block grant intended to foster self-sufficiency. The block grant increased work participation rate requirements, imposed stricter penalties for violations, created a five-year lifetime limit on the amount of time a family can receive federal assistance, and gave states discretion to design programs to fit their constituents.[21] However, this policy had no provisions to facilitate parents' increased work hours and pushed households led by single mothers into deep poverty.[22]

Not Reaching Full Potential

The disconnect became more noticeable as women increased their labor force participation. In the 1990s, the female employment rate in the US peaked at 66 percent, ranking among the highest in the world.[23] Since then, female employment has dropped closer to the global median of 59 percent.[24]

Mothers that work are penalized for it. Women without children are far more likely to reach gender parity than mothers.[25] Unencumbered by the demands of raising children, these women are more likely to meet the workplace expectations designed for men and are paid accordingly.

Increasingly, inaccessible childcare is pushing mothers out of the workforce; when there are not enough slots, mothers' labor force participation drops by 12 percent.[26] In 2019, mothers with children under age 6 participated in the workforce at lower rates than mothers whose children were between the ages of 6 and 17.[27]



Source: "Employment Characteristics of Families News Release." U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, April 21, 2020.

Staying home can yield lasting economic consequences as well. Women who take a year off of work after birth earn less than women who do not.[28] Beyond lost wages, the cost of leaving for even a limited time extends out to lost retirement savings, benefits, and the lower likelihood of reentering the workforce.

Unpaid care for children, usually assigned to women, is time consuming and inflexible, thereby shrinking options for when and where women can find paid work. Without childcare, women who were once full-time employees are relegated to part-time positions that offer less economic stability. Women's workforce participation is not just cut by the involuntary exit of mothers from the workforce, it is also impacted when mothers engage in involuntary part-time work.

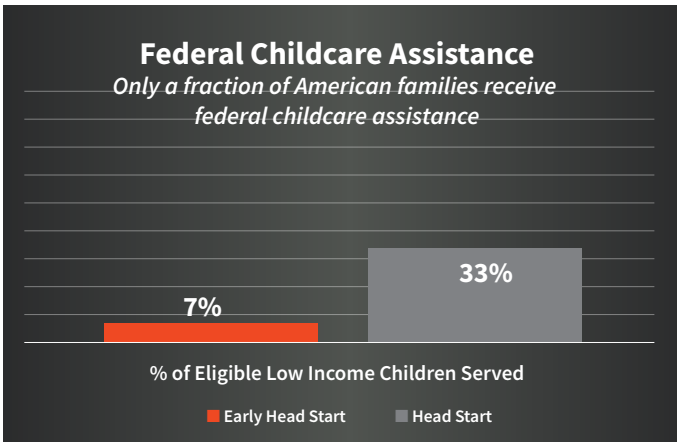
More than 20 percent of low-wage working women must work part time due to family care responsibilities and cannot control their schedule.[29] Part-time work exempts employers from providing fringe benefits such as healthcare and family and medical leave, further straining women.

The broken childcare system is disconnected from the realities of American women, especially for the 70 percent of mothers in low-income families who are the primary or sole provider.[30] Women of color are especially hurt by the scarcity of childcare options because they are more likely to be breadwinners than white mothers. This is most true for Black mothers who, at 68 percent, are more than twice as likely as white mothers to be primary providers.[31]

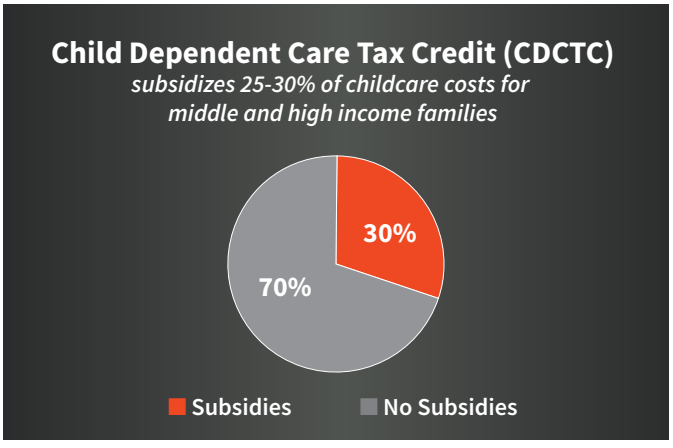
The current childcare system has become increasingly disconnected from women and the realities of a modern economy. In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, this disconnect is not only hindering women from reaching their full economic potential, it is impeding a path to recovery.

The State of Childcare Today

Decades of impasse have resulted in the current patchwork system that provides childcare support to a fraction of low-income families. Head Start, founded in 1965 to foster the development of children from low-income homes, provides subsidized early childhood education to families living in poverty or receiving social assistance. Early Head Start, established during the Clinton administration, serves children from pregnancy to age three.[32] These programs are administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, which gives grants to local public and private organizations. More than 1,400 Early Head Start and 1,600 Head Start programs exist throughout the country, providing care for children in center-based, home-based, and other locally designed care models.[33] The Head Start program served a record low of 848,000 children 2017, only a third of eligible 3-5-year-olds. The Early Head Start program had over 150,000 participants, just 7 percent of those eligible.[34]



Source: Maya Pendleton. "A Closer Look at Universal Child Care." Policy Perspectives, May 20, 2019.



Source: "Work and the Cost of Child Care," The White House, The United States Government, (February 2019).

The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) was established in 1976; it subsidizes childcare for middle- and high-income families via a nonrefundable tax credit equal to about 25–30 percent of childcare costs up to a maximum of $3,000 per child and $6,000 per family.[35]

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), created in 1990, is the nation's largest federal childcare program.[36] The program subsidizes childcare for low-income families, but is so underfunded that only 15 percent of eligible families receive aid.[37]

Established in 2018, Family Savings Accounts (FSAs) assist low-income families who could not access other programs. FSAs allow families to set aside up to $5,000 pre-taxed income to put toward childcare. Use of the CDCTC and an FSA Dependent Care account is allowed but cannot exceed $6,000 total.[38] While both of these programs have seen modest success, coverage does not meet real demand. In the absence of subsidized childcare, women have had to principally rely on the private sector, presenting the added challenge of finding adequate childcare that is affordable and has availability.

The inequity extends beyond working mothers: workers in the sector, predominantly women, are among the lowest paid workers.[39] This in turn exacerbates the issue of cost for childcare workers who are also mothers. Today's childcare system is failing all families, even those of the childcare workers on which the rest of the economy relies.

Cost

The US childcare system has fallen far behind its peers to the detriment of families and the economy alike. The US spent less than 0.5 percent of its GDP on early childhood education and care, far out of step with other countries within the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2015.[40] Similarly, childcare enrollment rates of 3- and 4-year-olds are far behind OECD countries like Japan, the United Kingdom, Mexico, and France, which each enroll nearly 100 percent of their 4-year-olds in preschool.[41] Moreover, family childcare costs in the US[42] far exceed what

Health and Human Services deems appropriate—7 percent, a figure that represents the amount that should not burden families such that it affects their financial health or ability to contribute to the economy[43] — as well as average family childcare expenditures in OECD countries.[44]

How the U.S. stacks up to other OECD countries in childcare

Spending on early childhood education and care:	37th out of 39
Preschool enrollment for 4-year-olds:	26th out of 39
Preschool enrollment for 3-year-olds:	24th out of 39

Source: "Public Spending on Childcare and Early Education," OECD Family Database, OECD, (February 2019).

Childcare costs in the U.S.

Up to 25% of two-parent family income
Over 50% of single parent family income

Source: Education at a Glance 2019: Putting U.S. Data in a Global Context." NCES Blog. IES, (September 2019).

Childcare costs in OECD countries

15% of family income, on average

Source: "Public Spending on Childcare and Early Education," OECD Family Database, OECD (February 2019).

While childcare overall is increasingly unaffordable, infant care has become almost cost prohibitive. One year of infant care costs more than one year of in-state tuition in 33 states and D.C.[45] For full-time minimum-wage workers, this means that an increasingly higher share of their paycheck goes to center-based infant care. At the low end, a mother in North Dakota working full time and earning minimum wage can see close to a third of her paycheck go to infant care, while in D.C. the entirety of a mom's paycheck would go to care.[46]

The issue of infant care cost is particularly worrisome given the lack of standardized paid parental leave in the US. Many new moms cannot afford to continue working and will stay home until children enroll in pre-K or kindergarten.[47]

A little less than half of American workers—53 million people—make around $18,000 a year.[48] About half of these low-wage workers are primary or significant earners, 37 percent of who have children; a quarter of low-wage workers with children live below the poverty line.[49]

This crisis is exacerbated by race, ethnicity, gender, and education level. Putting all the pieces together, women of color, who are more likely to be primary or co-primary breadwinners and in low-wage jobs, are feeling the greatest weight from the high costs of childcare and insufficient wages to cover them.

Availability

Insufficient availability of childcare is a problem regardless of income. Families with incomes over $100,000 and those that earn less than $40,000 are equally likely to report that very few programs are nearby, affordable, and high quality.[50] When surveyed in 2019, half of working families reported having difficulty finding suitable childcare. They cited cost, availability, and quality as the primary obstacles.[51]

High-income families struggle to find available slots, but only spend 10 percent of their income.[52] Low-income families face similar challenges in finding childcare, but this difficulty is compounded by their particular care needs. Low-income families are far less likely to work traditional hours and frequently need overnight or short-notice childcare because of employer scheduling practices, which leave workers with inconsistent schedules from week to week.

Nearly half of single mothers with children under six work in retail or food service, jobs where standard 7a.m.–6p.m. daycare is insufficient.[53] And as with childcare expenses, women of color are especially burdened by the lack of expanded care options given that they are more likely to be breadwinners. This is especially the case for Black mothers who are almost twice as likely as white mothers to be primary providers.[54] Oftentimes, parents cannot find any quality care, let alone affordable 24-hour options.

The challenges low-income families face is exacerbated by the prevalence of childcare deserts, areas that have an insufficient supply of licensed childcare. When parents cannot afford to leave the workforce, they must spend an unsustainable amount on transportation to get their children to an expensive center or leave their children in the care of grandparents, family friends, or neighborhood teenagers. Without social resources, some mothers

must concede their child's safety by sending them to an unlicensed daycare in someone's home or leaving them home alone in order to work and earn the income needed to provide for them.

Childcare Workforce

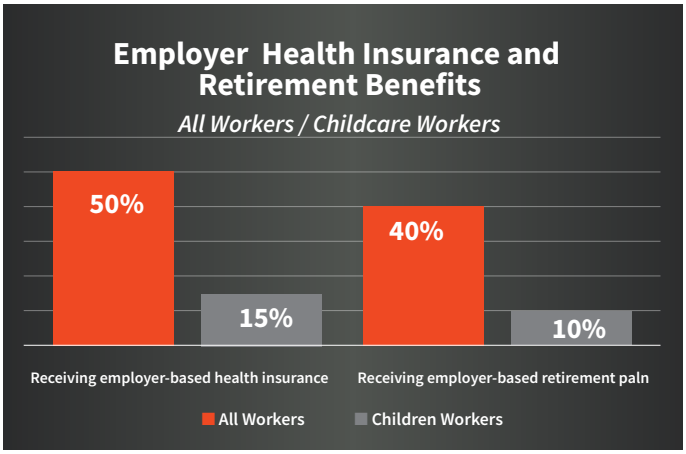
Parallel to the issues of childcare cost and availability is equity. Childcare workers are among the lowest paid in the American workforce. This low-wage sector is almost all female (96 percent), and women of color are disproportionately represented; women of color make up 20 percent of the population and they represent 40 percent of childcare workers.[55]

Women, especially women of color, are integral to supporting other women in the workforce. Yet these childcare workers have historically been underappreciated and underpaid. Despite working full time, childcare workers report concerns of food and housing insecurity and postponement of medical services and continued education. Many are forced to rely on government programs just to get by.

Childcare workers are deemed low-wage workers in every state.[56] The median pay for childcare workers of all positions was $11.65 an hour in 2019, compared to the national median in other occupations of $19.14 an hour.[57] Save for a few rural areas, childcare workers cannot meet their local cost of living anywhere in the country. Over one-third live below 200 percent of the poverty line, which is equivalent to supporting a family of 4 on $52,400 a year.[58] More childcare workers (15 percent) live in poverty than similar workers in other occupations (7 percent).[59]

What childcare workers lack in pay is not made up for in employer-based health insurance and retirement benefits.[60] Childcare workers seldom earn enough to afford care for their own children, costing over a third of their annual earnings in most states. They must rely on reduced cost of care through their employer, thus becoming entrenched in their position for fear of losing childcare.

Although the childcare workforce is predominantly female, wage disparities that are particularly harmful to women of color persist within the childcare sector. Wages are lower



Source: Economic Policy Institute

Childcare workers cannot meet their local cost of living anywhere in the country.

for childcare workers who care for infants and toddlers as opposed to those who care for older children, yet women of color disproportionately care for the former. Fifty-two percent of Black women work with infants compared to 43 percent of all center-based staff.[61]

Half of early childcare workers participate in public assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); pre-K and kindergarten teachers participate at 43 percent.[62] While childcare workers who care for older children are slightly less likely to need public assistance than those who care for toddlers, still nearly half must rely on public assistance to make ends meet.

Unlivable wages in the childcare industry perpetuates and exacerbates racial and gender-based inequality. Black and brown women working in childcare are falling deeper into economic uncertainty to allow parents to fight their own families out of poverty. Bottom line: childcare workers are not receiving the support they need. A comprehensive childcare system will require living wages for these workers who are critical to the provision of high-quality childcare.

From Really Bad to a Whole Lot Worse

In the years leading up to the outbreak of COVID-19, the childcare system was at a breaking point. Parents have been forced to engage with a childcare system that is expensive and not readily accessible. At the same time, childcare workers are not able to earn a livable wage. The American childcare system was already in crisis; the pandemic simply exacerbated it.

Eleven percent of workers, including those from the childcare sector, are now at home with their children fulltime and cannot return to work until schools and childcare centers are reopened, halting an estimated 10 percent of economic activity.[63]

The economic impacts of COVID-19 have hit the childcare sector particularly hard. Classroom capacity has been slashed and protocols to reduce the risk of exposure are costly. A quarter of a million childcare workers have lost their jobs as centers can no longer afford to operate. This has hit some areas particularly hard. Prince George's County, Maryland (which borders the nation's capital) has lost almost half of its licensed providers, representing 11,000 slots for children of working mothers.[64]

In Texas, essential workers can access childcare but are faced with a different dilemma. Some centers (14 percent of licensed facilities) have closed while others remain open absent requirements to impose up-to-date safety precautions.[65] While masks, social distancing, and lowered capacity are all recommended, the onus to implement safety is on the center. Childcare centers must figure out how to retrain staff and fund new protocols with fewer slots or waive safety in the name of survival.

In L.A. County, the childcare centers that have stayed open for essential workers have to adhere to strict protocols (unlike those in Texas), yet there was still a COVID-19 outbreak. In early August, officials linked over 300 cases to childcare facilities.[66]

Individual providers must determine how to reconcile the childcare needs of essential workers, the financial needs of childcare workers, public safety, and the cost of operations without federal guidance. To meet COVID-19 safety measures, childcare providers incur an average of a 47 percent increase in operating costs, and higher for pre-K programs.[67] With social distancing measures and the number of children staying home, providers cannot afford to stay open much longer.

A Path Forward

There is a unifying momentum to fix the current childcare system, a system so fundamentally flawed that it does not work for anyone. A 2018 poll from the First Five Years Fund shows that 8 out of 10 voters support funding childcare and early education programs, and more than a quarter say that early childhood education is a key determinant in supporting elected officials.[68]

Policy makers agree on the need to fix childcare, they simply disagree on the best tactics. On the one hand, Republicans tend to favor education savings accounts and tax credits while Democrats typically prefer increased spending on childcare programming. While policy proposals vary based on values and priorities of the parties, both agree that providing nearly universal coverage is necessary and that the investment will be offset by additional growth.

Although the federal government provides the bulk of funding for various public childcare programs, states and cities have created innovative programs that provide models of best practices. These models provide high quality and affordable childcare, filling urgent local needs. But at

the same time, these programs underscore the success and benefit of investments in early childhood education.

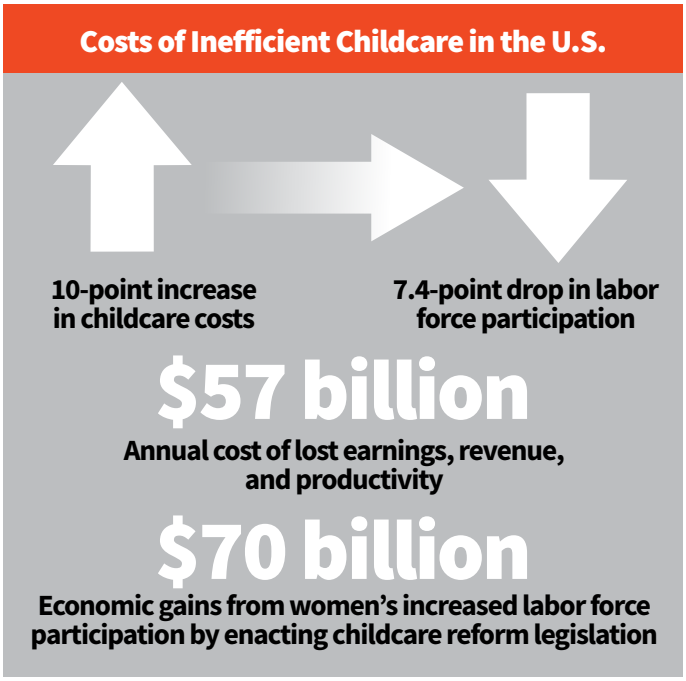
Washington, D.C., and San Antonio, TX, provide two of the most innovative and robust pre-K models in the nation. Since 2009, the nation's capital has offered two years of universal preschool for children aged three–four. By 2016, women's employment rate in D.C. climbed from 65 percent in 2008 to 76.4 percent. As a result, D.C. now has the highest maternal labor force participation rate among the 50 largest cities in the country.[69]

Under former mayor Julian Castro, San Antonio developed a program that provides grants to local schools' existing pre-K programs in addition to four Pre-K 4 SA centers that serve over 2,000 predominantly low-income four-year-olds. Educators are provided professional development, quality pay, and support (such as paid planning time and access to specialists). The program spends nearly thrice the amount as the state of Texas per child and has expanded out the access to high-quality childcare for half of the households that qualify for assistance. While the San Antonio program is not universal, it has focused on building a quality base of instruction that serves a population nearly 10 times as it would without the pre-K program.[70]

Investing in American Families

Seen from the most abstract level, providing a robust and effective childcare system is an investment in the nation's human capital. Expanding the availability of safe, accessible, and affordable childcare options is a direct and immediate investment in the American worker, both current and future, as well as the broader economy. Establishing a childcare system that works for all families will pay dividends not just to children and parents, but to society and the nation as a whole.

For mothers, the return on investment on quality and affordable childcare is readily seen. Investment in quality childcare generates positive effects in maternal education, labor force participation, and parental income. Public investment in early childhood care and education is significantly and positively correlated with female employment and negatively correlated with the gender-based pay gap.[71] Parents are able to work more hours, miss fewer days and pursue further education and training.



Source: Economic Policy Institute

Both spending on early childhood care and the index of workplace flexibility have a positive relationship with female workforce participation and a negative one with the employment gap.

In contrast, research finds that states with expensive childcare typically also have shorter school days, and thus fewer moms in full time jobs.[72] State and local governments that structure public schools often shorten school days to redress state budgetary deficit, unintentionally restricting maternal employment.[73] While this may be a short-term budgetary solution, it is a long-term fiscal weight on cities, states, and ultimately the broader national economy.

The effects of an inefficient childcare system negatively impacts both parents and employers, causing lower labor force participation and other economic impacts.[74] Working families lose upwards of $8 billion in wages annually.[75] Businesses squandered roughly $2 billion due to employee absences, turnover, and lost productivity in 2016.[76] The cost of lost earnings, revenue, and productivity resulting from the childcare crisis totals about $57 billion per year.[77] However, the costs in lost earnings, revenue, and productivity could disappear by enacting childcare reform legislation, and by one estimation, boost GDP by 1.2 points.[78]

The benefit to children in high-quality childcare is the most immediate, providing for enhanced cognitive and socioemotional development.[79] And as decades of research has established, the most vulnerable children (those from the households with the lowest incomes) receive the greatest benefits.[80]

In the landmark Carolina Abecedarian Project, researchers followed the path of children who attended early childhood education and tracked them into adulthood. Participants in the treatment group had far better life outcomes than those in the non-treatment group. The study found that children from this program had improved academic and economic prospects as compared to those who did not attend.[81] Participants earned up to 23 percent more than had they stayed home until kindergarten.[82] Women in the program had superior high school graduation and adult employment rates. Men saw lower rates of drug use and hypertension.[83]

The immediate benefits to parents and the later benefits to the children who attend high-quality early childcare are a return on investment, by themselves, in terms of support for a robust labor force. The Abecedarian Project and similarly comprehensive, high-quality, birth-to-five childhood development programs have a return on investment of 13 percent for disadvantaged children; high-quality early childhood education programs that serve 3- and 4-year-olds see a return of 7–10 percent.[84]

At the societal level, the effects are equally transformative. Early childhood education is an investment in public safety and the local community. The benefits of comprehensive programming extend beyond the children who participate. Adults who attended high-quality pre-K have lower rates of arrest (33 percent drop) and incarceration (46 percent reduction), and are less reliant on government aid (26 percent decline).[85] Early childhood education promotes public safety and self-sufficiency. And at the community level, the availability of these programs attracts homebuyers, increasing property values by 13 percent, and reduces grade retention, which curtails spending on K-12 education.[86] These impacts improve local communities in both the short and long term.

The cost of quality, accessible, affordable, and equitable childcare will require a sizable investment. There are myriad approaches to fund this initial investment, yet all plans highlight the short-, medium-, and long-term benefits for communities and the larger American GDP.

Building a Childcare System that Works for Women and the Economy

Providing for a high-quality system of childcare that is affordable, accessible, and equitable requires an investment, but it is an investment that will allow for both short- and long-term returns. In the short-term, recovery from the COVID-19 recession will depend on the re-incorporation of women into the workforce. Women, especially women of color, were hardest hit. To support an inclusive economic recovery, women need ready access to childcare. At the same time the majority of women in the childcare sector need support in the form of livable wages.[87]

Beyond the established return on investment, the nation has experience in implementing highly effective and large-scale childcare programs. During World War II over six million women went to work for the first time, including 1.5 million mothers of children under age four. And to support this large-scale mobilization of women on the home front, 635 communities established over 3,000 childcare centers; they were open to working mothers of any socioeconomic status and many stayed open 24 hours, 6 days a week. It cost 50 cents per day, about $9 today.

Solutions for a Comprehensive Childcare System

The recommendations below are not new. However, the urgency is. At no other time since World War II, has it been so critical to re-imagine the American system of childcare. By doing so the nation will have the ability to recover and grow in the aftermath of the pandemic. In the absence of substantive and large-scale change, women are at risk of not only not recovering from the COVID-19 recession but being permanently set back.

1. Building an Affordable Childcare System

Building an affordable childcare system facilitates a path out of poverty for American families, especially for women. At the same time, an affordable childcare system protects middle-income women and families from falling into poverty. A childcare system that works is one that serves both as a step stool and as a cushion to working American families.

- **Increase funding for CCDBG, Head Start, and Early Head Start** to make childcare assistance available to all eligible low- and moderate-income families, with more financial support provided to families with the most need. Consider innovative partnerships and funding streams.
- **Establish universal pre-K3 and pre-K4** by providing incentives and funding for states to create high-quality preschool programs for low- and moderate-income 3- and 4-year-olds during the school day, including providing a higher matching rate for programs for infants and toddlers, for whom it is often harder and more expensive to find care.
- **Increase the utilization of the CDCTC** by making it refundable, increasing the sliding scale, and raising the expense limits so that it covers a greater proportion of a family's childcare costs.
- **Enact a refundable payroll tax credit** for the purchase of safety equipment, qualified workplace reconfiguration expenses, and qualified workplace technology expenses during and immediately following health emergencies and natural disasters.
- **Base the cost of childcare on a sliding scale and cap the cost of childcare to 7 percent of a household's income**, the amount at which the US Department of Health and Human Services considers childcare to be affordable.

2. Building a High-Quality, Accessible Childcare System

Building an accessible childcare system will enable American families to better engage in the workforce. Childcare must meet the needs of the families—care options for children must be available at night, over the weekends, and during the summer. A childcare system that works is one that meets working mothers and families where they are.

- **Ensure underserved populations have sufficient quality childcare choices to meet their needs.** These are populations for whom challenges are particularly acute, including communities of color and rural communities, immigrant families, families with infants and toddlers, families needing care during nontraditional hours, and families with children who have special needs.
- **Increase the supply of licensed childcare providers,** specifically targeting childcare deserts and communities in rural areas.
- **Ensure families are able to access quality early-learning and childcare settings that best meet their needs** within their communities, including licensed and regulated childcare centers and family childcare homes, as well as informal providers.
- **Increase access to care offered at non-traditional hours and in a variety of settings**. Care options must accommodate those who work flexible schedules to help meet the needs of working families.
- **Build more inclusive, high-quality childcare facilities for infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities**, including by increasing funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- **Establish programs and procedures that increase the accessibility of childcare assistance**, including permitting families to apply for childcare assistance online or in person. Ensure all forms and criteria are clear, and encourage support from community-based organizations that provide language access for parents.
- **Increase funding for payments and other supports to childcare providers to cover the costs of providing high-quality childcare**—including the ability to hire and retain well-qualified staff who can foster children's early learning, to purchase classroom materials, and to maintain facilities.
- **Strengthen resources to improve and sustain increased levels of quality**, as measured against a set of agreed upon quality criteria.
- **Target resources that are specifically designed to expand the availability of and improve the quality of childcare** for infants and toddlers.
- **Ensure the availability of high-quality and culturally-appropriate inclusive services for all children**, including those with disabilities and social, emotional, and behavioral needs, by making available resources and supports to all childcare programs and providers.
- **Improve access to resources and supports to increase providers' capacity to recognize and respond to trauma**, including intervention strategies that could potentially protect children from the adverse consequences of traumatic experiences.
- **Assess eligibility policies and practices to ensure they do not have a disparate impact on families of color** (e.g., workplace documentation requirements and implementation of 12-month eligibility periods).
- **Ensure that data collection on the availability, accessibility, and quality of childcare and early education programs adequately documents the experience of underserved families and communities**, particularly children of color.

3. Building an Equitable Childcare System

Building an equitable childcare system ensures that childcare workers are better able to provide for their families. Childcare is essential to the support of the American labor force, especially the female labor force. To be successful, a childcare system needs to work both for parents and for the women who care for their children.

- **Increase funding levels and payment rates to ensure increases in benefits and compensation**, so that childcare workers are paid at least a living wage. They should enjoy pay parity with K-12 educators, tied to standards and credentials and based on knowledge, skills, and competencies.
- **Commit to retaining and attracting a diverse workforce**, including race, gender, and gender identity (among other criteria), and ensure that diversity is well distributed across staffing levels and all types of care.
- **Ensure that early childhood professionals are able to access high-quality professional development and training**, including higher education programs for associate's and bachelor's degrees in early childhood education and other relevant credentials. Provide for scholarship funding and other monetary and non-monetary supports.
- **Invest in employees' well-being and healthy workplaces by providing job-protected safe leave, paid sick leave, and paid family leave** to ensure personnel can take time to tend to their own health conditions without risking their jobs or economic security.

eliminating racism
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CHARTING A FUTURE OF WORK POST COVID-19 AND BEYOND

Prior to the pandemic, economists estimated that over 26 million American jobs would be automated by 2030. And up to a quarter of women were projected to face transitions across occupations or skill sets in order to remain employed.[88] A recent study from the Institute for Women's Policy Research finds that while both men and women in low-skilled/low-wage jobs are at high-risk of automation, women are also at a high risk of losing higher paying jobs.

Women account for 47 percent of the workforce but 58 percent of positions at high risk of automation, including cashiers, receptionists, and clerks.[89]

Prior to the recession, women outnumbered men in occupations with the highest risk of disappearing in the face of technological advances. Economists at the University of Chicago's Becker Friedman Institute estimate that anywhere from 32-42 percent of COVID-induced layoffs will be permanent.[90]

Changes in the labor market as a result of technology advances had been on the horizon before COVID-19. Today, they are in front of us. With this reality comes the need for the intentional development and implementation of a future or work. With the dawn of the Fourth Industrial Revolution there will be no "going back to normal" as the COVID-19 health crisis subsides.

This is a moment of intersecting disruption for all American workers and especially for the female workforce. This is also a moment of opportunity. This is a moment to chart a concrete and actionable future-of-work plan, a *female* future of work.

In charting a female future of work, this section takes stock of what the Fourth Industrial Revolution is and what the future of work looks like for women within this paradigm. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is the first industrial transformation to take place where a majority of American women work outside of the home. This is the first time there is the ability to design a future of work where women are a central component. This is the first time that the needs of women, a majority of whom are in the labor force, can be intentionally integrated into an inclusive future of work.

There are needs that are specific to women in the workforce and that traditionally male-centered workforce models have not addressed.

Primary among these distinct needs are:

1. **Targeted pipelines to counteract entrenched occupational segregation**
2. **Workforce training that incorporates childcare and**
3. **Workplace safety that ensures a space where women will have the right fitting equipment, be free from sexual harm and harassment, and be respected.**

This is the first industrial revolution where there is the opportunity to explicitly design a future of work where women are a core part of the labor force.

This section ends by looking at how an inclusive future of work is within reach. Policy solutions from both sides of the aisle complement rather than contradict each other. Core pieces that together can form a comprehensive Future of Work plan are already in place. The next step is making the investment in the future and putting together a comprehensive plan for a future of work that, well, works.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution

Every industrial revolution has been accompanied by questions of technology-induced job loss. The last industrial revolution of the mid-20th century spurred by computing advances saw the Kennedy administration creating an Office of Automation and Manpower in the Department of Labor in response to widespread fears of large-scale unemployment because of the substitution of men with machines.[91]

The fears of the Kennedy administration and similar concerns accompanying previous industrial revolutions have not borne out. What has happened instead is that the nature of jobs has changed. The current industrial revolution is no exception. The Fourth Industrial Revolution will see an expansion of certain jobs and a contraction of others. Easily automated tasks will become obsolete, while jobs that are harder to automate or that support the digital age will expand.

At the aggregate, there is no cause for concern. But at the micro level, where the focus turns to the lives and livelihoods of millions of Americans, the aggregate net neutral becomes problematic.

Today's most vulnerable workers—the low-skilled and low-wage workers—will suffer the greatest growing pains as the economy transitions from one industrial era to the next. Women of color, communities of color, and youth will be disproportionately affected. Projections shortly before the outbreak of COVID-19 indicated that the jobs of women in low-skill and low-wage jobs were already the most likely to be on the chopping block. Today, a quarter to a third of jobs lost because of the pandemic have in effect been chopped off.

Disruption of the magnitude of an industrial revolution impacts all. But the most vulnerable, those with the least economic cushion, are historically the most impacted. However, the current moment of digital transformation could follow a different trajectory. Our future of work is characterized by machine learning, nanotechnology, quantum computing, the Internet of Things, etc. The onset of the Fourth Industrial Revolution is an opportunity to learn from, rather than to repeat, mistakes of the past.

The Difference this Time

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is markedly different in the speed and intensity of change. Arguably, in the last decade there has been greater technological change than in the last 50 years. In his *Foreign Affairs* article where he coined the term *Fourth Industrial Revolution*, Klaus Schwab, the founder and President of the World Economic Forum, pointed to the exponential, rather than linear, advancement of technology in the current era.

Beyond the accelerated speed of today's technological change is a transformation of how things, how *work* is done. The machines of this revolution are not so much adding muscle to routine tasks but doing wholly different things. At its essence, Schwab sees the Fourth Industrial Revolution "blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres."[92] Day-to-day lives will forever be changed as a result of driverless cars, 3-D printer liver transplants, or robots becoming part of an organization's staff.

Accelerated technological innovation is happening alongside globalization. Trade-driven firm segmentation has largely done away with the traditional company structures of the post-war era.[93] At the same time, global integration has permanently altered the landscape of traditionally American jobs.

Structural changes in the labor force will only increase within an era of rapid technological advances.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is of a different scale in relation to the change in types of jobs, employment structures, and skills training that will be needed for the future of work. Different does not connote either good or bad. The outcome will depend on whether change can be harnessed through a well-defined future of work plan. The

disruption of the Fourth Industrial Revolution can have a substantively positive effect on the American workforce if planned with an intentional structure of inclusivity and gender equity. Failure to enact a strategic future of work plan, especially a female future of work plan, will not only entrench existing pay gaps and labor market disadvantages for women but widen them as well.

A Female Future of Work

A female future of work is not a zero-sum paradigm where women gain at the expense of men.

The creation of a female future of work addresses the inequities that have harmed women's labor force participation, whether as a result of gendered educational norms or occupational segregation. A female future of work is one that recognizes the reality that the majority of primary caregivers are women. And finally, a female future of work is one that is safe and supportive of *all* workers.

A female future of work is necessary for an equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a pressing short-term need. But the intentional conceptualization of a female future of work is one that will pave the way for sustained growth and equity for both women, men, and the families they support.

A Common Point of Departure and Multiple Pathways

The educational foundation of children is critical to the occupational and career paths of adults. However, young girls face a unique challenge in building their base—they track away from science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) throughout their education.

As early as third grade, girls lose confidence in their math skills. Gendered math gaps are fueled by stereotype threat, male-dominated STEM cultures, and fewer female STEM role models, all of which contribute to STEM pathways being less accessible to young women.

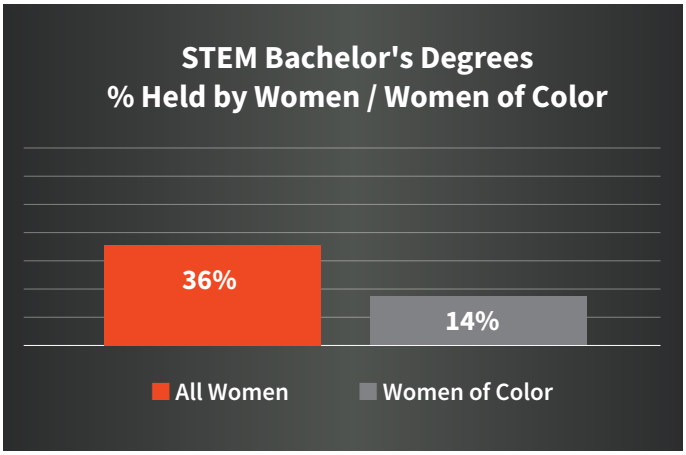
In cultivating a female future of work, a full set of occupational and career options must be ensured for women. This means that girls need to be provided with the necessary STEM foundations as early as elementary school. Doing so will establish a common digital literacy and further allow a full set of options to be available for young women.

STEM education is needed to ensure that women are equipped with the technological tools required of a changing landscape. Programs within schools and communities will need to be built and expanded. Knowledge and familiarity with STEM is part and parcel of the Fourth Industrial Revolution—it is not a luxury or an add on, it is a core skill along with reading, writing, and math that both boys *and* girls need.

In less than two decades, jobs requiring computer programming could increase by 60 percent.[94] Although more women than ever are entering STEM fields, women hold roughly one third of STEM bachelor's degrees,[95] and women of color hold far fewer.[96] Women, especially women of color, remain vastly outnumbered. With the future of work relying on STEM, women need a strong base for post-secondary STEM pursuits.

Even jobs that are non-technical in nature (such as retail sales workers, stock clerks and administrative assistants) will increasingly integrate automation, machine learning, robotics, and artificial intelligence as part of work.[97] A female future of work must ensure a common base of technological knowledge and at the same time cultivate a wide range of options for women of all walks of life.

A strong K-12 STEM base provides a common base for young women to pursue a post-secondary route. The



Source: "Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM): Quick Take." Research, Catalyst, last modified April 4, 2020.

absence of a post-secondary degree or credential is not an option in the future of work. Without it, economic security is out of reach. This is why readily accessible post-secondary on-ramps for young women are imperative.

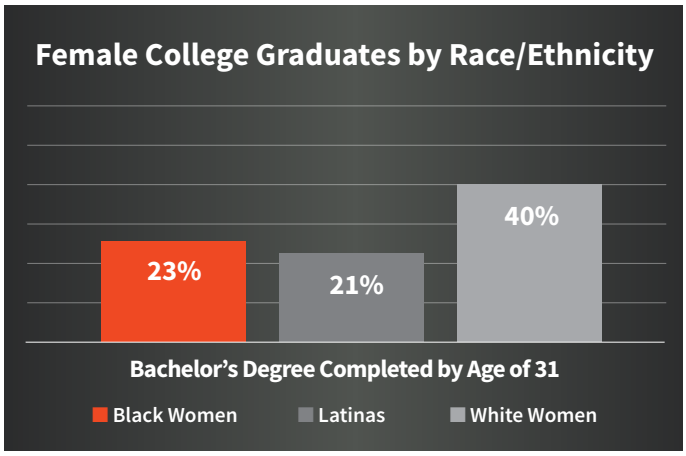
College Pipelines

Women now make up the majority of college students, with 57 percent of women earning bachelor's degrees.[98] However, in looking at the racial and ethnic backgrounds of female college graduates, a significant disparity is evident.[99]

College enrollment has gone up for women of color, but completion rates are not commensurate.[100] While minority communities as a whole have seen educational improvements, including lower drop-out rates and increased college enrollment, the overall number of minority students remains well below that of their white peers. Even more worrisome, a significant completion gap persists.

A college education not only opens more doors, it ultimately provides greater job security. The workers least at risk of being displaced by automation are those with college degrees.[101] Moreover, a Pew Research Center study from earlier this year finds that the gender wage gap narrows as women move into high-skill jobs and acquire more education.

The economic security of women, in large part depends on narrowing the pay gap. And the most direct way to close that gap, especially for women of color with the widest gaps, is through college. However, for young women whose families are not college graduates, do not have the financial resources or knowledge to navigate the application process, college can seem a far-removed reality.



Source: "Women more likely than men to have earned a bachelor's degree by age 31," Bureau of Labor Statistics (December 2018).

To make college readily attainable, intentional on-ramps in the form of pipelines must be built. The college pipeline is not a new idea. But college pipelines centered around women of color, such as the Ann Richards School for Young Woman Leaders in Texas (ARS), are far less common. ARS goes from grades 6–12 and enrolls a majority of low-income young women of color.[102] Throughout the six years, girls are provided with targeted college preparatory material as well as college counseling. For the 2018-19 academic year, their graduation rate and college acceptance rate were 100 percent, and 55 percent of the girls were pursuing STEM majors in college.[103]

As ARS shows, pipelines work. The key is replicating them beyond secondary education to ensure women can also thrive in a future of work.

Pre-Apprenticeship Pipelines

A college education provides a strong base for workforce preparation. However, college is not the right fit for everyone. Good paying and rewarding jobs can be secured through non-college credentials, such as an apprenticeship. Middle-skill jobs, such as welding and construction, have experienced strong growth and do not require a college degree. Additionally, these jobs are not at high risk of displacement and see earnings starting at an average of $47,000 for apprentices and increasing upwards of $70,000 with experience. These are good jobs, but jobs where women are few and far between. In the US, women make up fewer than one in ten apprentices.

Although apprenticeships are proven to be some of the most effective programs to raise salary without a college degree, women are woefully underrepresented in these nontraditional jobs. With baby boomers heading into retirement, the middle-skill workforce is in need of young trained people to join the ranks. With an average apprentice salary of $60,000[104], research shows that people who participate in an apprenticeship make $240,000 more in their lifetime than similar workers who did not participate in an apprenticeship or a similar program.[105] Women make up only 7.3 percent of apprentices, leaving them outside this significant economic benefit.[106]

The gender line in traditionally male-dominated occupations is deep-seated. However, there are successful models of female-targeted programs. Organizations such as Chicago Women in Trades, New York's Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW), and Oregon Trades Women address unique challenges women face going into nontraditional careers. From 2016-2017, the National Ironworkers Pre-apprenticeship Program for Women placed 95 percent of participants into apprenticeships.[107]

Pre-apprenticeship programs provide young women an on-ramp to jobs that have been subject to extreme occupational segregation. These programs introduce young women to trades, provide them with the confidence and knowledge needed to decide if going into a trade is right for them and then equip them with the tools necessary to complete an apprenticeship.

Targeted female pre-apprenticeship programs require re-fashioning long entrenched, occupationally segregated culture. But as targeted pre-apprenticeship programs have shown, let alone the history of the female-fueled World War II manufacturing effort, when made available women will readily step up to the opportunities made available to them.

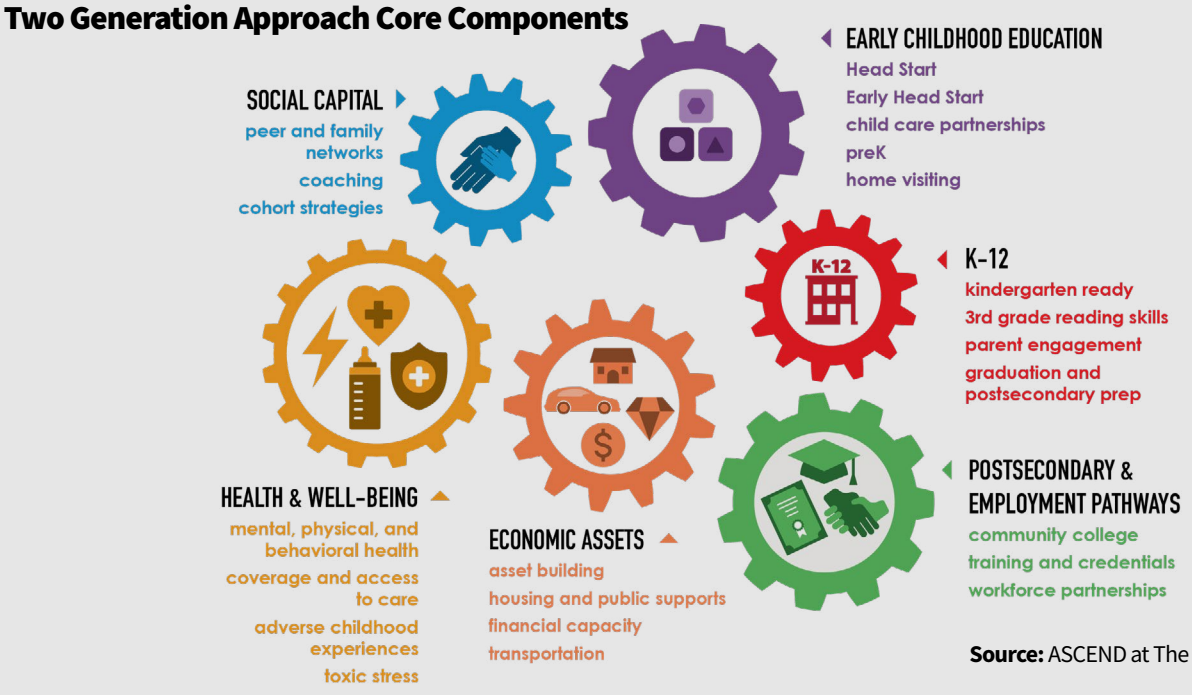
Dual-Generation Approach

Adult learning workforce training is about adults, but also the children they care for. This recognition requires a design of a future of work that explicitly incorporates a structure that supports women in their dual roles: **caretakers and labor force participants**.

Childcare support is integral to the success of training programs. No matter how robust a workforce credentialing program is, if the mother cannot complete it because of lack of childcare then the training material is in effect useless.

Childcare issues will only become more pressing in light of the need for iterative lifelong learning in an era of rapid technological advances. For a mother it will not be about just cobbling together childcare while she attains a post-secondary credential. As women return to upskill and engage in booster shot trainings, they will again have to find how to fit in their learning together with childcare.

This recognition—that a future of work depends on supporting the childcare responsibilities of those who are training for the workforce—has spurred the development of dual-generation programs that pair, and even co-locate, early childhood learning programs with workforce training



Source: ASCEND at The Aspen Institute

opportunities, along with other services and interventions to address the economic, health and well-being, and social capital aspects of women's full workforce participation.

Dual-generation programs take a multipronged approach by centering the family unit and creating learning opportunities for both the parents and the children. Spearheaded by the Aspen Institute, dual-generation programs have gained national attention and have gained national attention. Over the last decade, dual-generation programs have been implemented across various cities such as Atlanta, Baltimore, New Haven, Minneapolis, and Austin.

One of the first and most successful dual-generation models is in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The Community Action Project of Tulsa County developed a program where it recruited the parents of children enrolled in Head Start centers to take part in the Career*Advance* program that provides career ladders through certification programs in health care.[108] And while the program is open to both men and women, at least 9 out of 10 program participants have been mothers.[109]

After one year in the program 61 percent of parent participants attained a career certificate compared to 3 percent of parents in the matched comparison group. The program was also highly successful in promoting healthcare employment within one year, where almost half of program parents gained employment in the healthcare sector by year end compared to less than a third of the matched comparison group. The children of the program participants also saw statistically significant improvement in attendance and a reduction in chronic absenteeism.[110]

Programs such as those in Tulsa are providing support for the future of work by investing in human capital development—both in the short-term human (the parents) and the long-term (the children). Dual generation programs provide for a female future of work where the investment is widely felt beyond the women themselves.

Workplace Safety

A safe and welcoming workplace is critical to a productive workforce. For women, working in an environment that is free from sexual violence, harassment, and discrimination is one of the top concerns for American women.[111] Without protections from physical and emotional violence, the female workforce is held back from its full potential.

In 2018, workers filed over 7,500 cases of sexual harassment with the US Equal Employment and Opportunity Commission, with many more going unreported.[112] Women experience gender-based violence from their superiors, coworkers, and even clients. Furthermore, women in nontraditional jobs report pervasive harassment in their trades, with one study finding that 83 percent of women affirmed that they experienced unwelcome sexual remarks.[113] The AFL-CIO found that while women make up only less than 3 percent of the construction and extraction workforce, 88 percent of them have reported experiencing sexual harassment at work.[114]

Workplace safety is an issue of concern in occupations where women are highly represented and where they are not. In one of the most comprehensive reports on gender-based workplace violence, the AFL-CIO finds serious and far reaching consequences of gender-based violence across occupations.[115] Legal protections have been put in place, but in addition to legal and regulatory guidelines is the need

for a shift in workplace culture where women are physically and intellectually respected.

For women, workplace safety also represents basic on-the-job safety considerations. Personal protective equipment that fits correctly such as gloves, work boots and hard hats are often not provided. This puts women at risk. For example, women may have to wear larger gloves which can get caught in machinery and larger boots which do not provide the grip necessary to prevent falls.[116]

Workplace safety for women also encompasses practices as simple as maintaining clean bathrooms, but which for male-only worksites are not a consideration. A prime example is the use of temporary sanitary facilities on construction sites, which often result in unclean bathrooms and a lack of sink or any sort of hand-washing station. This can force women to avoid using the restroom, which can lead to kidney issues, or abstaining from drinking water, which in turn can lead to a heat stroke on the job.[117]

At its most basic level, workplace safety means ensuring the physical and emotional safety of women. A culture that facilitates harassment and discrimination can be just as damaging as one that fails to prevent on-the-job accidents and sexual violence. The future of work depends on employers' willingness to implement and foster a climate that is intolerant of physical endangerment and emotional abuse. A woman who feels safe and secure will more effectively engage in the labor force, seek out new opportunities, and better harness the technological advances of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

A Path Forward

The American public is well aware that a future of robots, automation, and rapid technological advances is fast approaching. In December 2018, a Pew Research Center survey found that 82 percent of respondents agreed that in the future robots/computers will do much of the work done by humans.[118] And while many Americans view the effect of automation on the future as positive (40 percent) the rest of Americans are evenly split in having a negative or neutral view.[119]

Americans are clear-eyed in what the future holds. They see the potential positive outcomes, yet there are concerns about stemming further economic inequality.

Envisioning a new future of work, requires a multi-pronged and bi-partisan approach. Both sides of the aisle want to harness the power of technological advances and ensure that it improves the lives of workers. Encapsulating this vision is the Congressional Future of Work Caucus, which launched in January of this year.

While a comprehensive strategic future of work plan does not exist, the work of the Caucus builds on policies advanced and enacted by both the Obama and Trump administrations. In 2014, President Obama signed into a law a sweeping revamp and expansion of workforce training through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. And several years prior, the Obama administration, in the wake of the Great Recession, created the Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant that awarded close to $2 billion between 2011 and 2018.[120]

The TAACCCT grants enrolled over half a million students who earned 350,000 credentials. At the same time, over 2,500 programs were designed or updated over the four phases of the grant. The scope of the program was massive and follow-up studies have established the positive and substantive impact for program and credential completion.[121]

While the Democratic agenda emphasizes educational and safety net components of a future of work plan, Republicans and the Trump administration have focused on apprenticeship programs and strengthening the on-ramps to these opportunities. For example, the Trump administration has proposed an industry led apprenticeship program for educational institutions to develop and expand apprenticeships by partnering with companies that provide matching funds.

While there has been some forward movement toward a future of work agenda, Congress lacks a national strategic plan for how it will respond to automation. Before the pandemic, the lack of such a strategy was concerning. In the wake of COVID-19, this concern must be transformed into action to support the recovery of American workers, especially women, many of whose jobs have been cut and are not likely to return.

Investing in America's Workforce

Charting an inclusive future of work is one that requires the integration of both Democratic and Republican solutions. And within a bi-partisan approach, a female future of work requires that the specific needs of women be incorporated from the outset and seen as inseparable from an American Future of Work agenda. With a majority of women in the workforce the strength of the national economy depends on the strength of the female workforce.

It is a well-established fact that women are most at risk of losing their jobs as a result of automation. And women of color are the most vulnerable among all groups. The effect of job loss for women is especially dire in that Black women and Latinas are more likely to be their families' breadwinner or co-breadwinner.

In the absence of a comprehensive female future-of-work plan, technological advances and automation will trigger widespread economic pain and acute economic pain for women in particular. However, a strategic investment in the future of work can not only prevent a scenario of job loss but create one of economic growth for women, men, and their families.

Like with any smart investment, the key is to diversify this investment. Investing in a female future of work, is no exception. Women and especially women of color need to have STEM- based education integrated early on into their educational experiences. To counteract the drift away from STEM as they get older, young girls need the educational support and access to post-secondary pipelines to equip them with the skills needed for the workforce of tomorrow.

The role of women as mothers must also be supported in a future of work. The voluntary stay-at-home mom is no longer the norm. American mothers, including those with small children, are integral to the workforce.

An investment in creating safe work environments is at both the most concrete and diffuse. As women increasingly enter male-dominated occupations—welding, truck-driving, construction—they must be provided with the right-fitting equipment to maximize their on-the-job safety. This will require an investment in tools, equipment, work clothing and facilities that accommodate the physical differences of women. This will entail a cost, but it is one that is readily identifiable and can be met.

However, ensuring workplace safety in the form of an environment free of sexual harassment or intimidation is not as directly addressed. This requires a cultivation of an inclusive space for women that is enforced from the top-down as well as peer-to-peer such as the "Be That One Guy" initiative from the ironworkers fostering a climate of respect and not tolerating disrespectful behavior from other men.[122]

Building a Female Future of Work

A female future of work is one that actively supports the safety of women and makes concrete investments in education and childcare. These investments, in turn, set the foundation for an effective future of work plan for all.

Solutions for Building a Female Future of Work

The COVID-19 economic crisis has come to be known as a "shecession." The job losses resulting from the quarantine shutdowns most severely impacted women and, in particular, women of color. However, the idea of an eventual recovery once the pandemic has subsided is not accurate. Many of the jobs lost, especially those by low-wage/low-skill women, will never come back. Economists already projected these jobs would disappear in light of automation and the onset of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. There is no longer a buffer of time. The COVID-19 crisis has hastened the workforce transitions, nullifying the gradual shift that was anticipated over the next two decades.

This new and present reality demands the building of a comprehensive future of work plan today. The following policy recommendations will help build a future of work that not only allows women to recover from the immediate economic crisis, but to chart a path of economic security into the future.

1. Strengthening Educational Pipelines

Access to high-wage, high-skilled positions particularly for women and women of color begins with strong STEM education for girls at a young age. Although we have seen increases in the number of women and girls in STEM, significant "leaks" in the STEM pipeline remain such that women's participation at the most senior work levels is but a trickle.[123] In building a female future of work, a STEM foundation in the early years should be followed by post-secondary pipelines through high school toward a college degree or trade. Moreover, transformation of the male-dominated culture and antagonism toward women must be addressed in education and employment settings.

All educational institutions must implement the following recommendations at all levels to ensure equitable access and opportunities:

- Increase funding, grants, and additional resources to access quality STEM programming focused on girls and girls of color.
- Establish and enforce policies and teaching practices that build awareness toward implicit and systemic biases and also breakdown barriers towards STEM participation including gender-based bullying, harassment and discrimination.
- Examine and strengthen data collection, tracking, and reporting methods on program participation and retention; call for disaggregated data cross-tabulated by race and gender.
- Foster STEM education by having teachers and educators incorporate female as well as male mentors or role models into the curriculum to further enhance and encourage participation in these fields.
- Strengthen diverse public-private partnerships specifically for girls and girls of color in STEM, computer science, and other fields nontraditional t o their gender, to develop pathways to economic opportunities and advancement.

Specifically for **P-12 institutions,** we recommend implementing the following recommendations to strengthen and expand opportunities and exposure to STEM for girls and girls of color:

- Increase support and access to STEM-focused out-of-school learning opportunities and summer programs specifically for girls and girls of color.
- Incorporate equity best practices that build on students' interests and backgrounds to include meaningful engagement and support sustained learning.
- Enforce Title IX, including guidelines for Title IX Coordinators to break down barriers and ensure equitable access to STEM education.
- Include STEM, computer science, and career and technical education assessments and accountability tactics in state plans under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to ensure measurable growth in participation by girls and girls of color.

Post-secondary institutions including trade and career and technical education must implement the following recommendations to ensure inclusive opportunities that work to retain women, specifically women of color, in STEM:

- Attract, recruit, and retain women into STEM majors with a focused attention on recruitment into engineering, computer sciences, cyber security, and other high-skill opportunities in colleges and universities. This can be achieved by prioritizing diverse, inclusive, and respectful environments.
- Examine admission policies and scholarship opportunities to ensure they do not foster discrimination.
- Enforce Title IX including guidelines for Title IX Coordinators to break down barriers and ensure equitable access to STEM education.

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- Expand the number of pre-apprenticeship programs as well as opportunities for women to enroll in pre-apprenticeship programs to prepare them for high-wage careers.
- Dramatically increase the federal investment in the Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations (WANTO) Grant Program that is administered by the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor.
- Call for the inclusion of robust accountability measures and improvement plans and the reinstatement of sanctions to hold states and municipalities accountable for increasing women's completion of career and technical education programs.

2. Building Childcare into STEM Education and Workforce Training

In building a workforce education and training system that works, the childcare needs of women must be built in from the start. Without support for their childcare and other caretaking responsibilities from educational institutions and workplaces, women not only decide against pursuing STEM careers but also vacate STEM positions at higher rates than men, particularly following the birth of a child, leaving fewer women at top positions in STEM fields.[124] A female future of work is one that is grounded in the realities of the children and families they care for.

Support women's caretaking responsibilities in workplaces, workforce training programs, and educational settings through:

- Expansion of on-site, high-quality, and affordable childcare for employees, apprentices, female graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, faculty members, and professionals.[125]
- Robust paid maternity leave, paid family leave, and medical benefits.
- Holding faculty tenure clocks in abeyance during periods of maternity leave.

Federal, state, and local policymakers should **incentivize and expand dual-generation workforce training programs** to support women in accessing pathways to post-secondary education and career opportunities in STEM through:

State Programs:

- Embed two-generation approaches in state and local programs supported through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).[126]
- Develop state job training strategies that intentionally incorporate a two-generation approach.
- Increase the number and capacity of two-generation workforce and training opportunities for young women who are parenting and young women of color who are parenting, who face greater barriers to employment.

Financial Aid for STEM Training and Education:

- Expand and increase Pell grants, work study, and other federal and state financial aid policies to better respond to the needs of students raising children and their families by allowing 12-month, year-round financial aid plans for certificate and other programs.
- Enable student parents to maintain full-time status and use summer terms to complete required coursework by using a 12-month funding calendar for Pell Grants and state financial aid.
- Incorporate expenses for childcare during class *and* study time into financial need calculations; and ensure financial aid is available for part-time adult students, many of whom are parents.

3. Building Safe and Inclusive Work Environments

Building safe and inclusive work environments where women are able to thrive without undue concern for their well-being requires intentional and targeted resources and support. Whether it is in wearing the properly fitting tool belt or being free of verbal or physical harassment, a safe and inclusive work environment is needed for the full integration of women into the American labor force.

Federal and state governments should **ensure women's physical safety** in non-traditional occupations as well as other professions that may employ higher numbers of women, through the following:

- Improve enforcement of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) safety standards, which specifically require employers to provide accessible sanitary facilities for *all* personnel and to ensure that these facilities are maintained in an appropriately, clean and sanitary condition (29 CFR 1926.51).
- Incentivize employer implementation of OSHA best practices, which specifically identify providing separate bathrooms for male and female workers, supplying a container of hand sanitizer, and maintaining bathroom facilities in an open area that is well illuminated.[127]
- Incentivize employers to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) and personal protective clothing (PPC) based upon female anthropometric (body measurement) data.

- Hold employers accountable for failure to provide the necessary equipment that protects women employees because it is uncomfortable, unsuitable, improperly fitting, or damaged from wear and defect.

Government agencies and employers must take affirmative steps to **protect women employees from sex discrimination, sexual harassment, bullying, and other forms of gender-based violence**, including:

- Establishing strong employer anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies that include a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment and gender-based violence.
- Robust enforcement of federal and state anti-discrimination and anti-harassment laws and policies by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and other appropriate agencies.

Employers should promote **welcoming and intentionally inclusive work environments** through employment practices, such as:

- Recruiting female employees and working to retain and promote women throughout their careers with professional development, leadership training, formal mentorship programs, and other initiatives to support women's retention and advancement.
- Providing pay equity across the organization, including articulatinging salary ranges for every job posted and hired, eliminating the use of prior salary history as a factor in negotiating hiring salaries, and prohibiting retaliation/discrimination for discussing or disclosing wages.
- Developing formal diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives that include implicit bias and anti-bias training, ensuring all employees are aware of anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, and management training based on gender and racial equity principles.
- Creating mentorship, networking and ally-ship opportunities.

eliminating racism
empowering women
ywca

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 crisis has inflicted widespread economic pain. However, in America's first female recession, women—and especially women of color—have been at a particular disadvantage. Women have been disproportionately laid off and at the same time pushed to the frontlines of the pandemic with insufficient childcare support. The current economic crisis is especially severe because it is layered on policy that has institutionalized gender inequity. Childcare policy choices of the 1970s, welfare reform from the 1990s, and dozens upon dozens of policies coupled with occupational segregation and biased societal norms have built a system that perpetuates gender inequities.

Over the last 40 years, women, notably mothers, have expanded their footprint in the labor force. However, this growth has occurred within a context that was not designed for women. For the last several decades, women have had to make do with an inadequate childcare system and insufficient structural workforce support.

American women have been experiencing a decades long childcare and workforce support crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has simply brought the role of women in the American workforce into stark relief.

The current patchwork system of childcare policy does not work—for parents, for children, for childcare workers, or for the economy as a whole. To fix this broken system a substantial investment is needed. However, this investment has been proven to reap across-the-board returns. The greater provision of affordable, accessible, high-quality, and equitable childcare allows women to participate in the labor force at higher rates, better provide for their families, and not be forced to turn to public assistance. At the same time, early childhood development has been decisively shown to improve the short-and long-term outcomes of children. The numerous benefits reaped from the ready accessibility and affordability of a high-quality childcare system together represent a potential GDP boost.

Investment in long-term economic solutions, like a comprehensive childcare system, is paramount to the recovery from a crisis of the magnitude of this novel coronavirus. Historically, the nation has fueled American resiliency by supporting the structures that underpin the American workforce—this includes a robust childcare system. When circumstances called women to the frontlines during World War II, the US designed and implemented a successful large-scale childcare system. Replicating the system's success requires nothing short of the innovation and ingenuity seen during the nation's wartime effort nearly 80 years ago. In the case of comprehensive and effective childcare policy, history should most definitely be looked to as a predictor of the future.

In looking to the future, both in the short-to-long term, technological advancements will unfold at a speed never before seen. Automation will lead to drastic changes in the workforce—in particular for sectors that are overrepresented by women. The potential for economic pain for low-skilled/low-wage workers is high. But at the same time, there is incredible potential for charting a female future of work that supports and cultivates women in the workforce and, in turn, the larger American economy.

The COVID-19 crisis has coincided with the onset of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This is the first industrial revolution where a majority of women are in the workforce and there is the opportunity to design a future of work that directly integrates the unique workforce needs of women.

The global pandemic has hastened a workforce transformation that will demand direct support of women through educational programs and pipelines, as well as ensuring childcare support is part of the future of workforce training. And finally, ensuring workplace safety is foundational to building a female future of work where women will not only survive the COVID-19 crisis but thrive into the future.

Charting a path of COVID-19 economic recovery and future economic resilience begins with women. This starting point, however, does not represent a zero-sum proposition for men. Building out the policy infrastructure to allow women to effectively engage in the workforce has wide-ranging benefits. When women thrive, American families and communities thrive as well.

Historically, moments of great crisis bring with them windows of opportunity to enact transformational policy change. The COVID-19 pandemic presents this opportunity. Right now is the moment to remedy the disconnect between the needs of the American workforce and public policy realities. With the rapid onset of technological advances and the broader onset of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, immediate action is critical.

Republicans and Democrats may not agree on much. But overhauling the childcare system and creating a future of work stand out as unifying issues. Approaches differ, but ultimately both sides of the aisle know that to ensure that the nation emerges from the pandemic stronger than it entered, important substantive reforms must be put into place. As this paper has established, to support a COVID-19 recovery and chart a path of economic resilience, the place to start is at the intersection of childcare and a female future of work.

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