

The economy can't survive without women

Solving the women's labor force participation crisis will advance women's progress and spur economic growth

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New analysis by TIME'S UP finds the caregiving investments proposed in President Biden's American Jobs Plan and American Families Plan would dramatically increase women's economic outlook and improve the economic health of the country. **The proposals would create at least 1.6 million new jobs for women and enable at least 3 million women currently constrained by caregiving responsibilities to join the labor force.**

The addition of 3 million women — including mothers with young children and women providing unpaid care for loved ones with disabilities and older adults — would increase women's labor force participation by approximately 2.2 percentage points. This increase would erase a generation of pre-COVID-19 labor market declines. Coupled with the ongoing labor market recovery from COVID-19, these transformative investments are poised to take women's labor force participation in the U.S. close to an all-time high.*

These investments in paid leave, child care and early education, and home- and community-based services are essential, not only to our recovery from COVID-19, but also to the equitable transformation of the economy.

Increasing women's labor force participation is vital. The COVID-19 pandemic triggered an economic crisis that has been disastrous for women. As of June 2021, there were still **3.4 million women** who had lost jobs since February 2020, and had not found new employment. Despite recent overall growth, women's labor force participation rates remain at their lowest level since 1988.

In our new report, "Women's Work: Key Policies and Paradigms for an Inclusive Post-Pandemic Economy," we address why **the current women's labor force participation crisis must be central to economic recovery and to efforts to build a robust and inclusive economy.**

- ▶ **Women's labor force participation** plays an essential role in women's economic well-being, a robust economic recovery, economic growth, and a stronger economic system. In less than a year, the U.S. erased more than 30 years of women's employment gains — making our entire economy vulnerable.
- ▶ **Care infrastructure** plays a critical role in supporting and enabling women's labor force participation, and must be a foundational policy priority. Unlike the vast majority of wealthy, industrialized nations, the U.S. lacks a public system of comprehensive early care and education, requiring families to privately purchase care for young children. And unlike nearly all other countries in the world, the U.S. does not provide paid leave to parents and other caregivers, or guarantee healthcare, and, until the recent passage of the American Rescue Plan, it did not provide significant tax credits or family allowances to help defray the costs of raising children.

Politically, the reason for the U.S.'s lack of care infrastructure is clear: For the past half-century, a dominant political coalition reflecting the **common bonds** forged between **neoliberal economics and social conservatism** has blocked any form of public investment in the kinds of caregiving supports that enable women's paid work.

The current discourse over care policies isn't policy-driven or based on economics — it's cultural in nature, rooted in beliefs about gender, race, class, and family. Outdated cultural norms have long prevented us from tackling the systematic problems that have manifested in our economy.

It's time to recognize that women's paid work and caregiving play essential roles in building a strong and robust economy.

We are in a moment in which commonsense policies for an inclusive economic future are more politically viable than at any time in the past half-century. Turning the tide, especially for the millions of BIPOC women and caregivers who have borne the brunt of this economic crisis, requires political action.

We urge policymakers to seize this unprecedented opportunity and deliver a historic investment in care infrastructure that will benefit everyone.

*Methodological note: This analysis, calculated by Katherine Gallagher Robbins, is a conservative estimate of the impacts of the Biden-Harris administration's proposals. First, the analysis estimates how many of the 2.1 million jobs created by these policies (see [Palladino and Lala](#)) will be filled by women based on their current share of care occupations and the overall workforce. The analysis then estimates the increase in the number of mothers with young children under six who will join the labor market using data from the Current Population Survey and existing estimates in the literature regarding the impact of child care and preschool on mothers' labor force participation (see [Chaudry and Hamm, Malik](#)). The analysis uses data from the [AARP Caregiving in the U.S. 2020](#) report to estimate approximately how many women have left the labor market, due to caregiving responsibilities for people with disabilities and older adults, and how much less likely women are to leave when supportive policies are in place. Due to a lack of available data, this analysis does not include how many of the women who may receive home- and community-based services under the Biden plan (estimated to be more than 3.2 million women) will be able to join the labor market due to these supports, though [evidence](#) indicates these services provide critical work supports for many.

This paper is a product of Time's Up, Measure Up. Learn more at timesupmeasureup.org.