

Work in Progress podcast Episode 318: Gayle Goldin, deputy director, U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

You are listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, Editor-in-Chief of WorkingNation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators, and decision-makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges.

Women are a critical part of the US labor force, and contribute significantly to their family's economic security, and the US economy. But women, especially women of color, experience long-standing disparities in the labor force that exacerbate the problems caused by the pandemic. Joining me to discuss the challenges and efforts to close the gaps is Gayle Goldin, Deputy Director for the Women's Bureau at the US Department of Labor. Gayle, welcome to the podcast.

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

Thanks so much, Ramona. I'm very happy to be here.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

I always like to start by giving people a picture of what the situation is. So tell me about women's participation in today's labor force. How big is it? What part do they make up?

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

Yeah, it's a great place to start. Women currently make up half of the labor force. So we are half the people out there working, and we are doing so now at a much higher rate, in terms of the past couple of years. We saw before, at the beginning of COVID we saw a drop in women's labor force participation, and now women are back to working at the same level that they were before, for the most part.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

And like you said, we're half of the labor market. What is the quality of the jobs? Where is the disparity in the types of jobs, or the kind of pay that women make compared to their male counterparts?

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

There certainly still is a gender wage gap, and one of the things that we look at when we talk about the gender wage gap is what kind of jobs women are in. Economists call this occupational segregation, but essentially it's that women's labor force tends to be gathered around certain jobs, and men's labor force tends to be around other jobs. And women's labor force jobs often tie to care and service jobs are undervalued, so they're not paid as much as those higher paid predominantly men's jobs.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

So talk about some of those jobs. What type of jobs are we talking about?

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

So for women, that might be that you're in the service work, you're a hotel worker, you're a restaurant worker, you are in the care economies, you're providing child care, elder care. Those are very heavily dominated women's jobs. We also see that the jobs are at the lowest end of the pay scale. So around minimum wage are predominantly, majority held by women.

So we see that real disparity. And then when we're talking about men's jobs, that can run the gamut, but certainly when we're talking about something like skilled trades, women only make up 4% of the skilled

Work in Progress podcast Episode 318: Gayle Goldin, deputy director, U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau

trades. And yet for particularly in those unionized jobs, those are pretty high-paying jobs, and good job quality. So we want to make sure we're finding pathways for women to both improve the quality of the jobs that they have, and new paths for women to enter into careers that are traditionally higher paying.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

Let's start with one of those lower end jobs. Women are 93% of childcare workers, and they only make about \$569 a week. But that is a very valuable role, not just for other women working in today's labor market, but also men working in the labor market. You need those childcare workers. So what can we do? Do you have some policy ideas? Do you have some ideas on how we improve that?

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

Absolutely. We need to certainly invest in the way that we have a childcare system right now. Childcare workers are underpaid and undervalued for work they do, they are the backbone of our economy. Anyone who works and has a family, has a child at home knows that even if that child's at school, there's going to be something after school that needs to happen, just because of the [inaudible 00:04:13] system's set up, there's summer, there's a whole lot of different ways that families who work need to be able to have that care.

And we know that that care isn't even always available, and it might not be available because the person in the family that's working, that is working in a non-traditional hour. So, take construction where you might need to be up on the site for 6:00 AM, but who has a childcare center that's open at 6:00 AM? So it's really rethinking how do we provide childcare generally, in order to help women enter the workforce.

And in terms of raising wages, we've seen the president's call on public investment in order to improve the way that we fund childcare. Our colleagues at the Department of Health and Human Services have recently released a rule that would increase access to childcare for about 100,000 families while at the same time improving wages for the childcare workforce. So we are certainly doing everything we can within the Biden-Harris administration to improve those jobs and make sure that they are good jobs for the women that work in them, as well as making childcare more accessible to everybody who needs it.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

And I often think about the fact that a lot of those childcare workers are parents themselves.

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

Right, exactly. The ability to be able to afford that childcare yourself becomes problematic if you're one of the lowest wage workers.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

And one of the other things that I noted in some of the research that I was doing, that women of color in particular experience this inequity in the labor force, and a lot of the childcare workers are also women of color.

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

Yes, that's certainly true. When you look at the data and look at the intersection of race and gender, you see that there are disparities in the way that labor force exists, and also the wages that people are paid.

Work in Progress podcast Episode 318: Gayle Goldin, deputy director, U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau

So for instance, looking at the gender wage gap, which is that difference between what men and women are paid, when you start looking at that data and thinking about race and ethnicity, you can see that women of color are paid even less compared to white men.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

So one of the areas I know that your bureau and the Department of Labor have been looking at is women in apprenticeship in these skilled trade roles. You talked about construction, and there's all other kinds of skilled trades. Tell me about programs that might help women get into some of these non-traditional roles.

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

Yes. We've actually, at the Women's Bureau, I have been working closely with Chicago Women in Trades in order to make sure that there are women who are ready and have a pathway into those jobs. We do that in a few different ways, certainly through our partnership with CWIT and other WANTO grantees. So WANTO is Women Apprenticeship in Non-Traditional Occupations. It is a grant program that the Women's Bureau has had for some years. And while it goes beyond just looking at women in the trades and really looks at getting women into those jobs that are predominantly held by men. The past few years as we have been seeing these federal investments in infrastructure dollars, we want to make sure that women are getting those jobs as well, because we don't want to replicate the system that existed prior to that infrastructure investment. And so instead, we're really supporting those conversations and technical assistance across the entire country.

We're helping find pathways for women to enter into those jobs. And so what that often means is entering into pre-apprenticeship programs and training programs so that they can learn the skills that they need. It also means addressing some of the barriers to that. And it's not just getting the training, we want to make sure that women stay in those jobs.

So first we're getting them ways to be trained, and then we're addressing the barriers to staying in those jobs. Some of that is really basic things like, making sure that your equipment fits you and is not designed for a 6'4 man, but will also fit you, and you can wear that onto the job site. And also helping people get the money that they need in order to buy that first round of equipment in order to start their new jobs.

It's also doing things like making sure that that work site is actually an environment that's safe and people feel welcome at it. That runs a whole bunch of different ways, of which we been doing that along with the trade women's groups, because we want to make sure that women get into those jobs and stay in them.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

And it's very important, as we said at the top, because women do play a significant role in their family's finances. Those jobs are traditionally, especially the union jobs, there are traditionally much better paying than a lot of other jobs.

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

And so much of, previously has been focused on a college education, but now we've as a nation really turned toward understanding how important it's to have a much more diverse educational path, and that apprenticeships are a real path to being able to get into high-quality jobs where the wages are good and you have good benefits. And not everyone even knows about that as they're leaving high school. So

Work in Progress podcast Episode 318: Gayle Goldin, deputy director, U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau

it's really about starting that conversation also with women, and not making sure that they're only targeting towards an education that's a college path, if it's something that they would be more interested in doing.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

Women like to work with their hands as much as men like to work with their hands.

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

Yeah, I think one of the things I have had the pleasure of going to see some of these programs up and running across the country, they're amazing. I visit the Chicago women in Trades, and the welders, in particular, can really talk about how exciting it is, and be able to see other women who are welding. But it's really every trade that they're training for in order to be part of this economy.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

And there's a lot of opportunity too with, as you mentioned, the Infrastructure and Jobs Act. There's a lot of need for women, not just in Chicago, where you might've seen that program. And I actually met one of the program directors there, Lark, sat on a panel with her recently. And there's a lot of opportunities across the country where we need more workers.

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

Absolutely. I mean, this isn't just because we want to get women into jobs. This is also because we need more people to work in those jobs, otherwise we're not going to be able to meet the needs of the investments that we're putting forth.

So if we want to build roads and bridges, which are critically important to our nation, we need to make sure that we have as many people who are interested in entering into those careers available to provide them. So that's really what we're doing, and that runs across roads and bridges, but we're also talking about clean energy. We're talking about anywhere that there are going to be new jobs, we want make sure that women have access to them as well.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

And you also have a grant program, the acronym is FARE, and that assists underserved and marginalized women workers who have been impacted by violence and harassment. Can you explain what that program is? And well, tell me what the problem is first, and then let's talk about how this program might help.

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

Sure. Well, Fostering Access and Rights and Equity, our FARE grant really came out of this idea that we wanted to make sure that women knew what their rights were, and certainly targeting women who might not have the kind of supports in their families or in their work to be able to know what those rights are. So we are really working across the country with different grantees to make sure that that message gets out about what people's rights are.

In the past year, we've had a particular focus on gender-based violence and harassment. And the reason why is that those are issues that come up for women, really in the world of work. And what we mean by the world of work is not just while you're sitting at your desk or you're signed into the job site, but on

Work in Progress podcast Episode 318: Gayle Goldin, deputy director, U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau

your way to work, in the parking lot, as somebody is interviewing. There are a whole lot of different ways you might be on a work trip. All those things are kind of creating an environment in which you might have an experience that's negative, might be targeted by violence or harassment because of your gender. And so we want to make sure people know what their rights are, so that they can address them as problems emerge.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

Can you give me an example of this? Maybe on the work site? I'd just like to get an idea of what the scope of the problem is.

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

Yeah, sure. So we have been talking with women in all different careers, and one of the women that pops to mind to me is a restaurant worker talking about going back into the kitchen and being harassed by a co-worker who was a chef in the kitchen, and wouldn't send out her meals unless she promised sexual favors, or would let him touch her. Things like that, which are really uncomfortable and unlawful. And so it's really, for her to be able to find her voice and know the pathway to be able to address those issues with her employer. And if that doesn't work, how to ask for the federal government's assistance to step in and take care of things. And we've really seen that those kind of issues are leading to whole movement change.

So take for instance, efforts of hotel workers in a few different cities across the country that got together and realized that because their work, and that hotel workers are housekeepers are predominantly women. But they're isolated, because they go into people's rooms and they're in there for 15 minutes, they have no idea what's going to happen when they open a door and see that person in there, what kind of risks they're experiencing.

And so we have seen that those hotel workers have organized themselves and pushed for change, real policy change so that there are cities now that have these panic buttons in all the hotels so that those housekeepers can call on staff immediately to deal with a problem. And it's not just in the moment, but that guest is then not allowed to come back to that hotel, and is really banned from that hotel space, in order to make sure that those hotel workers feel safe in their environment.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

What are the pathways for someone who is, say they've been harassed or been the victim of violence, and maybe their employer is not doing what they should. What are the pathways for women out there?

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

Yeah, well, we at the Women's Bureau have a website which includes information on gender-based violence and harassment. People can take a look at that, and find out if their experience would be helped in certain ways, and what their local resources are, and federal resources. Because certainly the state, it might be a state human rights commission, it might be a Department of Labor, it's kind of different in every single state, but there are certain pathways there as well.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

And we'll have that information on our website too, so people can go to the article and they can go back to your website. So one of the other things I know that you're very passionate about is paid leave. And

Work in Progress podcast Episode 318: Gayle Goldin, deputy director, U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau

you've had your own experience where this is relevant to you. And, tell me about your personal experience, and how that has shaped your thought on paid leave.

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

This is an issue that I care very deeply about, and it's really from my own experience. In 2001, I broke my back and I became a mom. And those two things helped me realize that we have some real gaps in our caregiving laws in the country.

I am Canadian by birth, and so I have a sister who is older than I am, and we both became parents in the same year. And that really helped me see how this was not just an individual problem, it was actually systemic issue with our policies.

So I started organizing to try and change our public policy. At the time I was living in the state of Rhode Island. And it took me a few years, and a lot of different tries, and really trying to figure out the political landscape of that. Eventually worked with a great group of women that together we spoke with unions, and employers, and businesses, and healthcare providers, and a whole range of different folks. And then I ran for office in Rhode Island, became a state senator, and introduced legislation to create paid family leave in Rhode Island, and passed that in my first year. And then after that I worked across the country as a strategist to see that change everywhere, because it's something that eventually everybody is going to need. It's not just about parenting, this is about your own medical care or your care for a loved one.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

So what is the status right now? What rights does someone have to that paid leave?

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

We have 13 states and the District of Columbia have passed laws to create paid family and medical leave. We also have that information up on our website, so we will certainly get that to you so you can post that too, and people can see what those different laws cover. Also, there is a federal Family and Medical Leave Act, and that is a right to unpaid leave. And we have that information, can get that to you too. It covers a portion of the workforce. You have to meet certain criteria, but for eligible workers, you would get 12 weeks of unpaid job, protected leave, which means you can not fear losing your job if you take that time off.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

I think this is definitely a critical issue for any of us, male or female, the idea that because you have a medical event or someone close to you does, and then you lose your economic security. It's devastating.

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

Yeah, and I think what we've seen from the states is that it absolutely works. It gives people the real opportunity to be able to be there for their loved ones when they want to be, and not have to worry about losing the job that they need. It's an important opportunity for everybody to be the person that they really want to be without an additional layer of stress. Because too often, I mean even if you're welcoming a new baby into your home, that's not a, it might be joyful, there's also a lot of stressors going on. So you want to be able to have the opportunity to be really present in the moment. And frankly, that has a lot to do with your economic security.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

Work in Progress podcast Episode 318: Gayle Goldin, deputy director, U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau

Absolutely. And just to wrap up, women and men, everybody lost ground during the pandemic. We all, there was setbacks everywhere. But where do you feel women are right now, since we're talking specifically about women, in that comeback, and where are we going?

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

Absolutely we lost ground because of COVID in terms of the workforce, that women were harder hit in that, there was a real gap in their wages. And we actually have a whole report, be happy to make that available for your website too, called Bearing the Cost, which shows what the impact of COVID was, particularly to women of color, because of the types of jobs that were lost during COVID. We still feel the reverberations of that a little bit, so we have some updated numbers about that too.

But the good news is women are back in the workforce, back up to the pre-pandemic levels, and for some categories of women, it's even a little bit higher. We have seen some growth in the amount of women with children who are young being able to enter the workforce, and that's great too. But we also have research, it's called Cost of Doing Nothing, that shows that if women were engaged in the workforce at the same level as countries that have paid family leave and child care, and really are investing in those family sustaining wages, we'd have 5 million more women in the workforce, and that translates to \$775 billion more into our economy every single year.

It's great news for women in terms of that we are back in the workforce, and that is great. And also we need to keep going with the policy change that we need to see, so that we get the strongest economic growth that we can get.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

It's good for the individual, good for the country.

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

Absolutely.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

Thank you, Gayle. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk to me.

Gayle Goldin, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau:

Thank you. It's my pleasure.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

I've been speaking with Gayle Goldin, Deputy Director for the Women's Bureau at the US Department of Labor. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, Editor-in-Chief of WorkingNation. Thank you for listening.