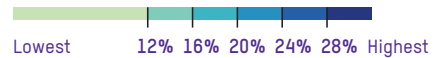


**CHILDREN OF LOW-WAGE WORKING FAMILIES**  
 Highest concentrations of children in low-wage households, by Congressional district



Nationwide, more than 15 million children live in households that depend on the earnings of low-wage workers.

In some Congressional districts, as many as 75,000 children—more than two out of five children in these districts—live in low-wage families.

# WORKING POOR FAMILIES IN AMERICA

OVER 60 MILLION AMERICANS LIVE IN WORKING FAMILIES THAT STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE ON LOW WAGES

Every day, millions of Americans in working families feel the impact of a federal minimum wage that hasn't been increased since 2007. The wage, set at \$7.25 an hour by Congress seven years ago, has a ripple effect on the incomes of millions of low-wage workers throughout the economy, and takes a serious toll on the economic security of workers and the people who depend on them: children, partners, siblings, and aging parents. While the cost of living increases steadily, the minimum wage remains stuck at a level that is well below the poverty line for a family of three (annual full-time income at minimum wage is \$15,080; the poverty line is \$19,790).

To find out more about working families, Oxfam America and the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) examined Census Bureau data about low-wage households in all 435 Congressional districts (and the District of Columbia) and the 50 states. We found that 25 million workers would benefit from an increase in the minimum wage, and that more than 60 million people live in families that are struggling to survive on low wages, including more than 15 million children. An increase in the

federal minimum wage (and indexing it to the cost of living) would help prevent more hardworking families and children from falling into poverty.

The new evidence further debunks a common stereotype of the typical low-wage worker: a teenager with no skills, working an entry-level job before moving up, likely living at home with parents. In fact, the real picture of most low-wage workers is drastically different. They are often

the primary breadwinners in their families, with an average age of 35; they live in households with an average of three family members (counting the worker), who all depend on that low-wage income; and they are often stuck in these jobs, as they can't afford to invest in the means to move up the ladder. Many of these workers are supporting young children, and face enormous challenges in maintaining the family and investing in their futures.



# WORKING POOR FAMILIES IN AMERICA: THE STATS

Unfortunately, low- and minimum wage jobs have become the fastest-growing sector of the US labor force; the economic recovery has meant growth in these sectors and a contraction in decent-wage jobs. Not only are these jobs difficult to survive on, they also block access to the ladders out of poverty. When families are struggling to survive—turning to food banks and food stamps, relying on loans and pawn shops—they don't have the means to invest in traditional routes to economic mobility like training and education.

The new data illustrate the harsh realities for working families at national, state, and Congressional district levels.

- Many American households depend on low-wage workers as the primary source of family income; **these workers contribute well over half of the family budget (56.4 percent)**. As a consequence, most of these families are living in, or at the edge of, poverty.
- **If you count the number of low-wage workers in America, the figure is 25 million; however, if you add up the number of people living in their households, the figure balloons to 60.6 million Americans.** This is more than one-quarter (25.9 percent) of all people in working families in the US. More than one in four Americans in working households are trying to get by on low wages; these wages are held down by a low federal minimum wage, which is not keeping pace with costs for the things necessary to a family: rent, heat, clothes, medicine, food, and transportation.
- The average household of a low-wage worker includes nearly three family members. This may include partners, children, aging parents, or siblings.
- **More than one third (35.4 percent) of low-wage workers are caring for children** (under 18 years old). In total, 8.9 million parents are working for low wages. This number includes more than 5.9 million working mothers and almost 3 million working fathers.
- **More than a quarter of all American children in working families live in households supported by low-wage workers:** 15.4 million children.
- In some Congressional districts, as many as 75,000 children—more than two out of five children in these districts—live in low-wage families.
- The districts with the highest percentage of children in low-wage families include a mix of urban and rural districts spanning the country. At the top is East Los Angeles (CA-40 at 43.5 percent) followed by a rural coastal district in Texas (TX-34 at 40.4 percent).
- The states with the highest percentage of children who would benefit are Arkansas (31.3 percent) and Mississippi (31.3 percent).
- In two districts, the number of children who would benefit from a minimum wage increase is so high, it outnumbers low-wage workers themselves (TX-15 and TX-28).
- Congressional districts represented by Democrats and Republicans in the 113th Congress have similar dynamics:
  - The average Republican-held district has 139,936 people in low-wage working families including 35,833 children.
  - The average Democratic-held district has 137,653 people, in low-wage working families including 35,270 children.

## HOW TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF WORKING POOR FAMILIES?

Despite the economic recovery, low-wage jobs are becoming ever more common in the US. It is important for everyone to share in the returns of work; workers who receive sufficient wages are better able to provide for their families, and they are consumers of goods and services that fuel economic growth.

If Congress voted to increase the minimum wage to \$10.10, it would benefit at least 25 million workers and their families, lift five to six million people out of poverty, strengthen our economy, and save taxpayers billions of dollars.

### FOUR REASONS TO RAISE THE MINIMUM WAGE

1. It will reduce poverty.
2. It will fuel economic growth.
3. It will save taxpayers money and reduce use of government programs.
4. It is long overdue.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper is linked to an interactive map project on the Oxfam America web site: [oxfamamerica.org/workinkingpoormap](http://oxfamamerica.org/workinkingpoormap).

We define workers as “likely to be affected by an increase in the minimum wage” to \$10.10 as those who currently earn \$7.00–\$11.50 per hour.

Our research is based on the American Community Survey (ACS) of the Census Bureau, for the years 2010 to 2012. For more information about the maps and the methodology, please refer to the report *Working Poor in America*, available on the Oxfam America web site.



Oxfam America is a global organization working to right the wrongs of poverty, hunger, and injustice. As one of the 17 members of the international Oxfam confederation, we work with people in more than 90 countries to create lasting solutions. Oxfam saves lives, develops long-term solutions to poverty, and campaigns for social change. To join our efforts or learn more, go to [oxfamamerica.org](http://oxfamamerica.org).

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