



# Good Jobs

## An Agenda for Future Study

*Pamela Loprest, Batia Katz, and Jessica Shakesprere*

*February 2021*

**Faced with the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recession, many American workers, employers, and policymakers are now thinking about job quality in ways they had not previously. Lack of access to health care, worker safety concerns, the need for flexible work arrangements and paid sick leave, and disproportionate job losses in certain low-wage job sectors have underscored the ways in which job quality varies for different workers and can connect to health, wealth, and stability. These immediate challenges arrive in the context of changes in the structure of work that have also changed the types of jobs in the economy—such as automation and increases in “gig jobs” and other nonstandard work arrangements—that highlight the importance of considering the impact of job quality on economic mobility.**

This brief is part of a larger project exploring job quality and worker mobility. One project report develops a framework for considering definitions and elements of good jobs and reviewed the evidence on the connections between elements of job quality and worker well-being, with a focus on economic mobility (Congdon et al. 2020). Another brief investigates the job quality elements different workers value in jobs (Scott and Katz 2021), and a third brief provides empirical analysis of how job quality measures may connect to economic mobility measures (Congdon, Katz, Shakesprere 2021).

Our goal in the overall project was to create a common language and framework for a diverse set of stakeholders who share an interest in understanding and improving job quality as well as to more explicitly consider economic mobility (e.g., worker earnings gains or career advancement) as an outcome in the job quality conversation. Building on the various parts of the project, we present here an agenda for filling the research gaps. The first part of this brief presents our framework for defining job

quality. The second lays out several open questions and considerations relevant to carrying out job quality research. The final section of the brief lays out an agenda of research that could advance the identification and definition of good jobs and build the evidence base of how good jobs relate to worker outcomes including economic mobility.

Some stakeholders we consulted as part of this project (box 1) suggested that the job quality discussion should focus first on raising the “floor” to ensure that all jobs are good jobs, rather than focusing on improved mobility. Although recognizing that economic mobility is an important concern, they argued that the first-level priority is a threshold level of job quality. We want to acknowledge this argument. We also believe understanding how features of jobs can promote economic mobility remains a distinct and important goal that can coexist with goals to raise the floor of job quality.

---

#### BOX 1

##### Information Sources

This brief draws on three workshops held by the Urban Institute in summer 2020 that invited expert stakeholders with the diverse perspectives and experience necessary to map the frontiers of research, practice, and measurement on job quality. Stakeholders represented employer, worker advocacy, academia, and nonprofit organizations and were well-versed in the current opportunities and challenges around creating, sustaining, and scaling quality jobs. The goal of the workshops included laying the groundwork for advancing our understanding of “good jobs” and assessing how they might promote economic mobility. This brief synthesizes and incorporates what we learned from the workshops as well as our team’s research. A list of workshop attendees appears at the end of this brief.

---

## Defining Job Quality

Job quality is a multidimensional concept. Any given job is characterized by multiple elements—from the level of pay and benefits to the degree of safety and the task composition—that can each be better, or worse, for worker well-being. Taken together, certain elements may define whether a job is a “good job.” Given the many different job elements and perspectives, it is not surprising that definitions of what makes a good job vary. In a previous report in this series, we developed an organizing framework of job quality based on 11 prominent definitions drawn from diverse literature and public sources. Our goal was to use existing definitions of “good job” to capture a set of job quality elements that experts considered important, recognizing it is not possible (or desirable) to come up with one common definition of “a good job.” We classified the job quality elements from these definitions into five categories: pay, benefits, working conditions, business culture and job design, and on-the-job skills development (table 1).

The main goal of this project is to consider the connection between job quality and worker outcomes, including economic mobility. We explore worker outcomes such as job retention, income stability, and physical and mental well-being. We also consider multiple types of economic mobility

including wage or income growth, occupational or career progression, job promotion, and skill acquisition. Intergenerational improvement in economic well-being is also included in this definition.

All of the job elements in table 1 have the potential to impact worker outcomes, including mobility. To represent the complex ways job elements may affect economic mobility, in table 1 we differentiate between elements of a current job that may indirectly affect economic mobility through impacts on other outcomes (blue column) and elements that may directly affect economic mobility (green column).<sup>1</sup>

**TABLE 1**  
**Organizing Framework for Elements of Job Quality**

	Elements that may indirectly affect economic mobility	Elements that may directly affect economic mobility
Pay	Level of pay Predictability of pay	
Benefits	Health insurance Retirement plans Leave Other benefits (life and disability insurance, housing/commuting allowances, employee assistance plans, wellness/fitness plans, etc.)	Educational benefits (tuition assistance, etc.)
Working conditions	Stable, predictable hours Control over hours/location Job security Health and safety	
Business culture and job design	Culture of belonging Culture of diversity, equity, inclusion Strong organizational mission Meaningfulness of tasks	Focus on personal growth (mentoring, etc.) Autonomy/power to change things Diversity of tasks Clearly defined career paths
On-the-job skills development	Training for specific tasks	Cross-training Advancement training and education

Source: Adapted from Congdon et al (2020).

Job elements that may directly affect economic mobility include clearly defined career pathways or prospects for promotion. Other elements such as training on-the-job that builds workers' skills or education benefits that support external (to the employer) ways for workers to build skills can also lead to economic mobility.

Job elements can indirectly impact economic mobility by affecting other worker outcomes, which in turn affect economic mobility. For example, a job with scheduling flexibility may provide stability to allow workers to save money and develop a plan to return to school or training, leading to higher positions in the future. A job that provides health insurance or paid leave may allow workers to access

care that improves or maintains health, allowing them to more easily focus on advancing at work. Mobility itself may be inextricably entwined with stability, health, and wealth outcomes, making it difficult, or at least more complex, to estimate the impact of job quality on economic mobility. Thus, it is important to understand the connection between job elements and nonmobility worker outcomes as well as those outcomes and economic mobility.

The multiple elements in this framework hint at the complexity involved in studying job quality. For example, most job quality experts and definitions of good jobs emphasize the fundamental importance of pay in job quality. Although no agreement exists on what wage level is needed for a job to be a “good job,” there is general agreement that a higher wage means higher job quality. Existing research on the impact of wages on worker outcomes is more extensive than other job quality elements (Congdon et al. 2020).

Yet many experts agree it is important to consider how additional elements of job quality affect other worker outcomes. For example, employers that believe they have less flexibility on pay for certain jobs might be more flexible on other elements, such as offering tuition benefits, a positive work culture, or scheduling flexibility. Even for jobs that pay the same wage, understanding the impacts on workers of nonwage elements of jobs can point to business and public policy options that could improve overall quality of jobs.

In addition, the importance of different elements of job quality can vary by a worker’s life circumstances. For example, workers who are parents might prioritize scheduling stability or flexibility over other elements. This variation is demonstrated in Gallup’s Good Jobs project, whose survey shows that job satisfaction differs across different job and worker characteristics including firm size and sector, but also workers’ income quintile (Rothwell and Crabtree 2019). Research on job quality, therefore needs to consider that the same set of job quality elements can lead to different outcomes for different workers.

Before laying out an agenda for research that would increase our understanding of the connection between job quality and economic mobility, we discuss a few important open questions and considerations for carrying out job quality research.

## Considerations for Job Quality Research

Our goal is to identify research that would provide evidence about what aspects of job quality improve worker outcomes (including economic mobility) to support solutions that will strengthen those aspects. Experts we consulted for this brief noted that the individual job may not be the only relevant focus. Understanding how the employer, the industry, public policies, and larger economic and social contexts, as well as the individual workers’ circumstances (access to supports, transportation, housing, etc.), contribute to job quality is also critical to measure and analyze how these factors relate to economic mobility and improved job quality.

## Level of Analysis

Some job quality elements are defined or measured at the employer level rather than the job level. Certain management practices such as diversity, equity, and inclusion or harassment policies often apply to the company as a whole, rather than a particular job. In addition, some job quality elements, such as types of benefits and access to formal training, may be more related to the size of the employer than the specific job.

It is also true that job quality elements cannot be thought of as completely independent. On the one hand, employers may “bundle,” or package, elements, meaning they will be positively correlated in analysis. For example, jobs with comprehensive health insurance may often also offer retirement benefits, as a package of benefits offered by employers to attract and retain workers. One study points out that if dimensions of job quality are positively related, this bundling may be used to describe the overall “goodness” or “badness” of a job (Kalleberg 2011), which suggests studies should also bundle groups of job elements when examining impacts on workers’ outcomes.

On the other hand, economists point to circumstances that suggest trade-offs among the dimensions of job elements. The theory of compensating differentials suggests that workers might trade some elements of job quality to obtain other elements, such as higher pay for greater safety risks. The cost to employers of providing different job quality elements may also lead to their trade-offs in other job elements—for example, balancing the cost of health insurance with the amount of paid leave offered. Presumably these trade-offs are influenced by workers’ preferences and business factors, although recent work suggest increases in employers’ monopoly power gives them more control in setting wages and benefits (Benmelech, Bergman, Strong 2018).

## Social, Policy, and Economic Contexts of Job Quality

All jobs and employers exist within a larger social and economic system. The economic context in which an employer operates, including globalization, market competitiveness, and the potential for automating jobs affect firm profitability and play a role in the determination of wages and other aspects of job quality. The policy context also has a direct effect on job quality, through employment law, employer mandates, regulations, and incentives. The broader social and historical context of employment is also important. In the United States, benefits such as health insurance and retirement plans are generally distributed through employment arrangements rather than a broader social contract. Trends in unionization and related regulations continue to influence job quality. Also, the history of occupational segregation by race and gender and the role of laws and policies in intentionally creating these differences need to be considered. Some experts suggest that focusing on job-level quality is asking the wrong question because it assumes certain elements should be provided through employers. It is possible that consideration of the evidence on how job benefits affect worker well-being, coupled with evidence of the gaps in worker coverage, could provide evidence for nonemployment-based solutions for increasing access to these benefits.

The context of the employer-employee relationship is also important for understanding job quality. People in contingent work arrangements (e.g., gig workers and independent contractors) are not classified as employees in the traditional sense. Some job quality elements may be more or less prevalent in these employment relationships. For example, some contingent workers may have more flexibility in terms of how and when they do their work, but less job security, earnings stability, and access to benefits like health insurance than traditional employees (Harris and Krueger 2015). Yet workers considered self-employed, such as those in gig jobs, are not covered by public wage and hour, health, and other policies that were premised mainly on an economy where many benefits were obtained through one's employer (Weil 2014).

Diversity, inclusion, and nondiscrimination workplace practices can also be considered elements of job quality. However, systemic discrimination and society-wide policies and practices beyond individual employer actions have resulted in occupational segregation and other labor market outcomes, meaning certain jobs are more likely to be held by certain gender or race groups, and other jobs may be less accessible to these groups (Brown 2020). Occupations with a higher concentration of women or people of color generally have lower pay (Hegewisch and Tesfaselassie 2019). Currently, for example, workers of color are more likely to hold jobs with greater risk of exposure to COVID (Dubay et al. 2020). In our series, Scott and Katz (2021) show that workers rate the importance of specific job elements differently by race and gender, potentially related to their access to these elements. To improve job quality for these workers, we need solutions that not only strengthen the various elements of job quality, but also consider how historical and societal barriers to participation in different occupations can be removed.

Finally, worker voice, power, and influence on a job are components of job quality that can influence job quality itself. In our framework, aspects of worker autonomy and control are specific job elements, for example in the working conditions category (such as control over schedules and hours) and the job design category (such as autonomy and power to control or change job tasks). Through activities like collective bargaining, worker voice and power can also influence multiple job quality elements. Understanding job quality impacts on worker outcomes requires understanding the context that has led or could lead to changes in worker power and voice at a broader sector or economy-wide level (such as reversing declining unionization) or influencing other models of worker power (such as collective employee ownership or worker councils).

## Research Agenda for New Evidence on Job Quality

Here we put forward an agenda for research to build the evidence base about job quality and worker outcomes, including economic mobility. The goal of this research agenda is to increase interested stakeholders' understanding of what elements of job quality can lead to improvements in worker outcomes and increases in economic mobility. Analysis of the connection between job quality and these outcomes is needed to inform solutions that can lead to improvements in job quality and future economic mobility. Our review of literature and expert workshops, as discussed above, suggest a broad research agenda. We discuss three actions that are important to reaching solutions that will improve job quality in ways that can lead to economic mobility for workers: improve study of specific job elements

and job quality context; create infrastructure to support job quality research; and analyze job quality impacts.

## **Improve Study of Specific Job Elements and Job Quality Context**

### **FOCUS ON MEASURES OF WORKING CONDITIONS, CULTURE, AND JOB DESIGN**

Our review of the literature (Congdon et al. 2020) on the impact of job quality elements (listed above in table 1) uncovered few existing studies that explicitly connect jobs' working conditions, business culture, and job design to economic well-being measures, including job mobility. Further, there is a lack of data that would allow researchers to assess the extent to which jobs currently have these features, either across sectors, occupations, or geographic areas or for the whole country.<sup>2</sup>

More analysis of these key job quality elements is also needed. Predictability of work schedules is an example of a job quality working condition element for which measures have been developed, studied in employer data, and added to larger nationally representative datasets, allowing measure of incidence and connection to worker outcomes (Henly and Lambert 2014; Lambert, Henly, and Kim 2019). Some measures of these job quality elements are included in Gallup's Good Jobs project and SHRM's National Study of the Changing Workforce. But in general, additional research is needed to create measures for job quality elements and analyze the impact on important worker outcomes broadly (e.g., health, well-being), including economic mobility.

### **CONNECT JOB QUALITY AND RACIAL EQUITY**

Increasing job quality means not only increasing the number of jobs that have job elements proven to benefit workers, but it also encompasses increasing access to existing high-quality jobs. As discussed above, evidence exists that people of color have less access to certain high-quality jobs because of systemic discrimination and society-wide policies and practices (Michel and Ben-Ishai 2016). However, we need additional study of the extent to which job quality and specific job elements differ across racial groups, particularly within occupations and sectors. More evidence of these gaps in quality by race can help target solutions for eliminating barriers and increasing access. The data for this type of work is not comprehensive (see below section on needs for improving data infrastructure), but even pulling together data that separately highlight different elements could add to our knowledge. Focused studies of the specific barriers to access for people of color where gaps are identified can lead to solutions. For example, further study is needed to document the extent to which people of color are disproportionately hired as temporary or independent contract workers without benefits or access to workplace protections in certain occupations or sectors (Yang et al. 2020). This is a first step in identifying necessary solutions.

### **STUDY WORKER POWER, VOICE, ENGAGEMENT, AND CONTROL**

Workers' ability to influence elements of job quality (which can be referred to as worker power, voice, engagement, or control) in the workplace differs from other job elements because it can itself be an avenue to improving other elements of job quality. For example, a recent survey of essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic suggested unionization of workers facilitated receiving protective

safety equipment, paid leave, and testing (Hertel-Fernandez et al. 2020). More studies that connect different modes of worker power to other job quality elements could contribute to a better understanding of the impact of worker control on outcomes such as economic mobility. Research should consider a spectrum of models. These models include employer-focused models, such as individual job design initiatives that provide greater frontline worker autonomy and models that encourage employee input into workplace condition policies or practices, as well as models across and outside of employers, such as collective bargaining or employment councils. As discussed above, better understanding of contexts, such as the legal and institutional barriers to participating in formal unions and the conditions needed for alternative models of worker power, need attention and study. One initial step could be a broad scan of the spectrum of models to increase worker power and case studies on different approaches and their outcomes. Such a scan could lead to identifying possibilities for empirical study of impacts.

## **Create Infrastructure to Support Job Quality Research**

### **ADD MORE JOB MEASURES TO LONGITUDINAL DATA**

Economic mobility occurs over time and so requires data that track workers and their situations over time. This information is usually collected through longitudinal surveys or by using administrative data that follow the same person at different points in time. Most longitudinal surveys in the United States that gather economic data from individuals are sponsored by the federal government (e.g., the Survey of Income and Program Participation). Adding more job quality elements, potentially as a one-time special module, would allow analysis of the impact of various job quality elements on economic and occupational mobility. Another option would be the analysis of data that link longitudinal worker data and employer data to study economic mobility as it relates to employer or firm characteristics. The Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics program, for example, links worker earnings data and employer data. These data allow researchers to examine the individual earnings trajectories associated with some limited characteristics of employers, but not individual jobs. Additional links to employer-level job quality measures could expand the understanding of worker mobility. For both of these options, separate smaller studies could focus on developing a set of metrics that capture the important aspects of job elements (e.g., job safety or other working conditions) that could be efficiently implemented in surveys.

### **COLLECT AND CREATE DATA WITH MULTIPLE JOB QUALITY ELEMENTS**

As discussed above, it is important to consider multiple job quality elements together to understand potential trade-offs or complementarities. Some sources, such as the National Compensation Survey (a national survey of employers) collect data on wages as well as benefits (retirement benefits, paid leave, and health insurance) for jobs. Overall, however, our review suggests few existing data sources include information on multiple components of the framework for jobs across employers. This lack of data means it is not possible to determine the extent to which job quality varies by sector, geography, or occupation. Adding measures of other components to existing surveys is one way to expand data on particular job elements.



## **BUILD INFRASTRUCTURE TO USE EMPLOYER PROPRIETARY DATA**

Many employers recognize the importance of the job quality elements, often driven by both ethical and economic considerations, but some struggle with how to incorporate them into their businesses, especially in a challenging economic environment. Businesses across the country are taking steps to expand benefits and other elements, but they are often not well-positioned to learn about the effectiveness of their strategies. An employer collaborative, a group of interested employers with a research partner, could initiate research studies to test strategies to address job quality challenges in ways that are good for workers and good for business. This research could also provide insights for public policy. Such a collaborative would assist employers to use their data to study the impact of different employer practices and benefits, while addressing concerns about proprietary data and confidentiality issues. An example of such a data-sharing employer consortium is the Boston Women's Workforce Council, which addresses the gender and race pay gap.<sup>3</sup>

## **Analyze Job Quality Impacts**

### **EXAMINE JOB QUALITY TRADE-OFFS**

As discussed above, certain job quality elements often appear together. This bundling makes it difficult to identify the impact of any one element and understand how workers value different elements. Stakeholders need information to consider the trade-offs in job quality elements, both those facing employers as well as choices of interest to workers, and how these trade-offs differ across workers by worker characteristics and circumstances. Descriptive studies that examine the real-world incidence of job quality elements by employer and worker characteristics would be a first step. Designing studies to examine trade-offs is not easy because such studies require measuring multiple job quality features along with outcome measures. One option to examine trade-offs would be to identify possible natural experiments in which changes in industry, labor market, or policy circumstances create groups of employers or occupations that differ mainly on one element or a combination of elements (e.g., scheduling flexibility and wage-setting practices). Another option would be adding to the nascent body of work by conducting both real stakes and hypothetical choice experiments with workers in the field to experimentally identify how workers trade-off job elements.<sup>4</sup>

### **EXPLORE RELATIONSHIP OF JOB QUALITY TO ECONOMIC MOBILITY**

Our prior review found little direct empirical research on the connection of job quality to economic mobility. Most existing research literature focuses on how job quality affects worker outcomes such as income, health, or job satisfaction. It is possible that achieving these outcomes allows workers to take advantage of opportunities that may lead to economic mobility, the indirect affect we discuss above. Given various elements in our job quality framework, it is important to develop more nuanced theories about the mechanisms behind why particular elements or groups of elements might potentially improve economic mobility. For some elements of job quality—such as those that affect intermediate outcomes (e.g., health, savings, or job stability)—the pathway for impact is less clear. Such elements could be associated with job retention and advancement or allow workers to be in better circumstances to take

advantage of career advancement opportunities, on or off the job. Better understanding of the pathways toward worker economic mobility is an important goal for future research.

## MEASURE CAREER ADVANCEMENT

As discussed above, multiple measures of economic mobility exist. In addition to earnings gains over time, economic mobility can be measured by studying the steps of a worker's career advancement, moving up the ladder within an occupation or firm or in a different occupation or with a different employer. Although improvement in earnings is the ultimate goal, efforts to improve worker economic mobility through career pathway advancement often focus on attaining additional education, training, or skills, combined with gaining work experience.<sup>5</sup> Analysis of the job elements that promote career advancement is needed, such as how internal promotion policies, employer-sponsored mentoring, educational benefits, formal training, or diversity and inclusion policies promote career advancement. Exploring career advancement opportunities in more depth could also help researchers and policymakers understand economic mobility in the context of occupational segregation, which can restrict certain groups of workers to jobs of lower quality.

One analytic option could be to take a sector focus, especially sectors with high concentrations of frontline workers earning low wages, such as direct care, restaurant, retail, construction, and health care. Some studies use employer data for specific sectors to examine the association between employer practices and outcomes, such as turnover and productivity, as well as worker advancement (Hanleybrown et al. 2020; Hanleybrown, Hawkins, and Medrano 2020). For example, the job quality initiatives undertaken by the National Fund for Workforce Solutions and its regional workforce funder collaboratives<sup>6</sup> suggest specific job elements are important to career advancement. Studying workers' access to these elements more generally, through sector-based employer studies and surveys, potentially linked to employer data, could help identify potential strategies to improve career advancement. Working with employers to identify policies and test their efficacy is an important area for research.

## STUDY "HIGH-ROAD" EMPLOYERS

Research suggests that a job (identified by occupation, sector, or wage) with one employer may have higher quality than a similar job at another employer. These employers are sometimes called "high-road" employers. Analysis of worker mobility using linked employer and worker data has shown firm-level differences, even within the same industries, in workers moving out of jobs that pay low wages (Andersson et al. 2005). Although some existing research suggests firm size is important, less is known about the combinations or "bundles" of job quality measures, especially in addition to pay and benefits, that enable workers in these firms to move out of jobs that pay low wages. Additional study is needed to identify how jobs with high-road employers are linked to mobility outcomes for individual workers, either at that employer or elsewhere in the labor market. An important complement to analyzing the impact of high-road employer jobs on worker outcomes is more study on the conditions that lead to some employers offering jobs with higher quality.<sup>7</sup> This type of analysis could lead to solutions for recreating these conditions or incentivizing employers to take the high road. Research that leverages

international comparisons to study job quality and context can also increase knowledge about creating the context for high-road employment.

Ultimately, policymakers, worker advocates, employer groups, researchers, and others have different but complementary ways that could inform public policy and business practices and also improve job quality and economic mobility. This brief has identified future research and analysis that could be initiated to improve the knowledge about job quality and economic mobility.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> A more detailed description of how different job elements can lead to economic mobility can be found in the companion brief in this series Congdon, Shakesprere, and Katz (2021).
- <sup>2</sup> Gallup's Good Jobs project measures workers' satisfaction with a set of working conditions, culture, and job design features on current jobs. These data provide important information on how satisfaction varies across different types of workers (e.g., income quintile) and jobs (e.g., employer size and sector), but it is different from the measure of whether the job contains a specific element, because different workers have different preferences.
- <sup>3</sup> See "Innovative Actions during COVID-19," Boston Women's Workforce Council, accessed January 15, 2021, <https://thebwvc.org/>, for more information.
- <sup>4</sup> An example of a similar study is an experiment measuring worker trade-offs between pay and flexible work arrangements (Mas and Palais 2017).
- <sup>5</sup> See Fein (2012) for a discussion of the concept of career pathways.
- <sup>6</sup> For more information see 'Designing a "Good Job,"' National Fund for Workforce Solutions, accessed January 15, 2021, <https://nationalfund.org/our-solutions/activate-employers-to-make-jobs-better/job-quality-resource-center/>.
- <sup>7</sup> For research along this line, see Ton (2014).

## References

- Andersson, Fredrik, Harry J. Holzer, Julia I. Lane, Erika McEntarfer. 2003. "Firms that Hire and Advance Low Earners: A Closer Look." In *Worker Advancement in the Low-Wage Labor Market: The Importance of Good Jobs*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Benmelech, Efraim, Nittai Bergman, Hyunseob Kim. 2018. "Strong Employers and Weak Employees: How Does Employer Concentration Affect Wages?" Working Paper No. 24307. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Brown, K. Steven. 2020. "[Racial Inequality in the Labor Market and Employment Opportunities](#)." Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Congdon, William J., Batia Katz, and Jessica Shakesprere. 2021. "[Job Quality and Economic Mobility: Potential Mechanisms, an Empirical Approach, and Directions for Research](#)." Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Congdon, William J., Molly M. Scott, Batia Katz, Pamela J. Loprest, Demetra Smith Nightingale, and Jessica Shakesprere. 2020. *Understanding Good Jobs: A Review of Definitions and Evidence*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Dubay, Lisa, Joshua Adams, Steven Brown, Genevieve M. Kenney. 2020. *How Risk of Exposure to the Coronavirus at Work Varies by Race and Ethnicity and How to Protect the Health and Well-Being of Workers and Their Families*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

- Fein, David J. 2012. *Career Pathways as a Framework for Program Design and Evaluation: A Working Paper from the Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) Project*, OPRE Report 2012-30. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation.
- Hanleybrown, Fay, Elizabeth Hawkins, and Sandra Medrano. 2020. “Advancing Frontline Women.” Boston: FSG.
- Hanleybrown, Fay, Lakshmi Iyer, Josh Kirschenbaum, Sandra Medrano, and Aaron Mihaly. 2020. “Advancing Frontline Employees of Color.” Boston: FSG.
- Harris, Seth D., and Alan B. Krueger. 2015. “A Proposal for Modernizing Labor Laws for Twenty-First-Century Work: The ‘Independent Worker.’” Discussion Paper 2015-10, The Hamilton Project. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Hegewisch, Ariane, and Adiam Tesfaselassie. 2019. “[The Gender Wage Gap by Occupation 2018](#).” Washington, DC: Institute for Women’s Policy Research.
- Henly, Julia R., and Susan J. Lambert. 2014. “Unpredictable Work Timing in Retail Jobs: Implications for Employee Work–Life Conflict.” *ILR Review* 67 (3): 986–1016.
- Hertel-Fernandez, Alexander, Suresh Naidu, Adam Reich, and Patrick Youngblood. 2020. “[Understanding the COVID-19 Workplace: Evidence from a Survey of Essential Workers](#).” New York: Roosevelt Institute.
- Kalleberg, Arne L. 2011. *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs: The Rise of Polarized and Precarious Employment Systems in the United States, 1970s–2000s*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, American Sociological Association Rose Series in Sociology.
- Lambert, Susan J., Julia R. Henly, and Jaeseung Kim. 2019. “Precarious Work Schedules As a Source of Economic Insecurity and Institutional Distrust.” *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 5 (4): 218–57.
- Mas, Alexandre, and Amanda Pallais. 2017. “Valuing Alternative Work Arrangements.” *American Economic Review* 107 (12): 3722–59.
- Michel, Zoe Ziliak, and Liz Ben-Ishai. 2016. “Good Jobs for All: Racial Inequities in Job Quality.” Washington, DC: CLASP.
- Rothwell, Jonathan, and Steve Crabtree. 2019. “Not Just a Job: New Evidence on the Quality of Work in the United States.” Washington, DC: Gallup.
- Scott, Molly, and Batia Katz. 2021. “[What’s Important in a Job? An Analysis of What Matters and for Whom](#).” Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Ton, Zeynep. 2014. *The Good Jobs Strategy: How the Smartest Companies Invest in Employees to Lower Costs and Boost Profits*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Weil, David. 2014. *The Fissured Workplace: Why Work Became So Bad for So Many and What Can Be Done to Improve It*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Yang, Jenny, Molly Weston Williamson, Shelly Steward, Steven Brown, Hilary Greenberg, Jessica Shakesprere. 2020. [Reimagining Workplace Protections: A Policy Agenda to Meet Independent Contractors’ and Temporary Workers’ Needs](#). Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

## About the Authors

**Pamela Loprest** is a senior fellow and labor economist at Urban Institute. Loprest’s research focuses on policies to enhance the economic well-being of disadvantaged persons through work, including providing opportunities for advancement along career pathways, removing barriers to work, improving skills, provision of work support benefits, and improving job quality. She coleads Urban’s Building America’s Workforce initiative, which brings together workforce research from across the Urban Institute. She received her PhD in economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

**Batia Katz** is a research analyst in the Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population, where she researches workforce development and apprenticeship, evidence and evaluation capacity, and job quality and mobility. Katz's previous research experience includes studying the science labor market, the impact of personality traits on employment outcomes, and gender and family in the workforce. Katz graduated with high honors from Haverford College, where she earned a BA in economics.

**Jessica Shakesprere** is a research analyst in the Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population. She applies quantitative and qualitative methods, focusing on workplace equity, place-based economic mobility, and public housing service delivery to support families and youth. Shakesprere holds a BS in biology and a BA in political science from the Ohio State University, where she graduated with honors and research distinction.

## Acknowledgments

This brief was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission.

The authors also thank the many expert participants who joined the three workshops that informed this work:

Kate Bahn, director of labor market policy, Center for Equitable Growth

Amy Blair, research director, Aspen Institute

Steven Brown, research associate, Urban Institute

Susan Fallon Brown, vice president, Monster Government Solutions

Nikki Cole, national policy campaign director, One Fair Wage

Bill Congdon, principal research associate, Urban Institute

Angelina Drake, chief operating officer, PHI

Jessica Fulton, vice president, Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

Jason Green, cofounder, SVP, and general counsel, SkillSmart

Pronita Gupta, director of job quality, CLASP

Heidi Hartmann, president emerita and senior research economist, IWPR

Ariane Hegewisch, program director of employment and earnings, IWPR

Harry Holzer, John LaFarge Jr. SJ professor of public policy, Georgetown University

Elisabeth Jacobs, senior fellow, Urban Institute

Batia Katz, research analyst, Urban Institute

Debby King, senior advisor, National Domestic Workers Alliance

Susan Lambert, professor, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago

Pam Loprest, Senior Fellow, Urban Institute  
Erica McEntarfer, Principal Economist and LEHD Research Team Lead, US Census Bureau  
Demetra Nightingale, Institute fellow, Urban Institute  
Dionne Wallace Oakley, executive vice president of human resources and strategy, Erie Insurance  
Anne Polivka, supervisory research economist, Bureau of Labor Statistics  
Manjari Raman, program director and senior researcher, Harvard Business School  
Martha Ross, metropolitan policy program fellow, Brookings Institution  
Jonathan Rothwell, principal economist, Gallup  
Mary Kate Morley Ryan, head of inclusive future of work, Accenture  
Molly Scott, principal research associate, Urban Institute  
Jessica Shakesprere, research analyst, Urban Institute  
Shayne Spaulding, senior fellow, Urban Institute  
William Spriggs, chief economist, AFL-CIO  
Nicole Trimble, managing director, FSG  
Anne Voller, chair of talent acquisition group, NRF Foundation  
William Wiatrowski, deputy commissioner, Bureau of Labor Statistics

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute's funding principles is available at [urban.org/fundingprinciples](https://urban.org/fundingprinciples).



500 L'Enfant Plaza SW  
Washington, DC 20024  
[www.urban.org](https://www.urban.org)

## ABOUT THE URBAN INSTITUTE

The nonprofit Urban Institute is a leading research organization dedicated to developing evidence-based insights that improve people's lives and strengthen communities. For 50 years, Urban has been the trusted source for rigorous analysis of complex social and economic issues; strategic advice to policymakers, philanthropists, and practitioners; and new, promising ideas that expand opportunities for all. Our work inspires effective decisions that advance fairness and enhance the well-being of people and places.

Copyright © February 2021. Urban Institute. Permission is granted for reproduction of this file, with attribution to the Urban Institute.