



THE COUNCIL ON WOMEN AND GIRLS: ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS



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The Council on Women and Girls: Economic Empowerment Accomplishments

The White House Council on Women and Girls

Since the day he took office, President Obama has fought for policies that are important for women and will expand opportunity for all Americans. He's signed major legislation like the Affordable Care Act and Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. He's dramatically expanded fair pay and paid leave protections. And his administration has systematically encouraged cities and states to embrace policies like higher minimum wage and paid leave.

Underpinning these actions, President Obama and Vice President Biden have spoken out and driven a conversation about treating women fairly in America. They have pushed for cultural change that gives women the respect they deserve in schools and in workplaces, and joined advocates in dramatically changing our country's approach to sexual assault on campus and elsewhere. That conversation has spurred changes in cities and states, businesses big and small, schools from pre-K to college.

Across the Obama-Biden Administration, this work has been driven by the White House Council on Women and Girls (CWG), which the President created in March of 2009 to help develop and implement these policy priorities. The CWG is comprised of representatives from each Federal agency, as well as the White House offices, and coordinates efforts across Federal agencies and departments to ensure that the needs of women and girls are taken into account in all programs, policies, and legislation.

Below, we will explore some of the ways the Obama Administration has worked to expand economic opportunity for women and girls.

Expanding Economic Opportunity

President Obama believes that when women succeed, America succeeds. From the first bill he signed as President – the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, making it easier for workers to fight discriminatory pay practices – to the United State of Women Summit and beyond, women's equality has been a priority. He understands, however, that we can't have equality without economic success. It was this understanding that led to the founding of the White House Council on Women and Girls. This understanding is woven into all of the Administration's economic policy because we know America is stronger when we are fielding a full team. We know that when women have access to the health care they need, the paid leave they deserve, and equal pay for equal work, our Nation is stronger. The Obama Administration recognizes that there is still work to be done to achieve full economic equality for women, but has taken significant steps over the last seven years to form that more perfect Union.

The Obama Administration has taken the following actions to boost economic empowerment both domestically and globally:

1. **Fighting for equal pay and the policies that help get there;**
2. **Increasing women's labor force participation** through modern workplace practices, including access to affordable child care, paid sick and family leave, and flexible scheduling;
3. **Raising income levels and retirement savings;**
4. **Stopping the cycle of poverty;**
5. **Taking care of caregivers;**
6. **Fighting against human trafficking; and**
7. **Promoting women's economic empowerment around the globe.**

Fighting for Equal Pay and the Policies that Help Get There

“Making our economy work means making sure it works for everyone. That there are no second class citizens in our workplaces, and that it’s not just unfair and illegal – but bad for business – to pay someone less because of their gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion or disability. And that justice isn’t about some abstract legal theory, or footnote in a casebook – it’s about how our laws affect the daily realities of people’s lives: their ability to make a living and care for their families and achieve their goals.”

President Barack Obama, January 29, 2009

More than seven years ago, President Obama signed into law his first piece of legislation as President, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. Policies that ensure fair pay for all Americans and that help businesses attract the strongest talent can not only narrow the pay gap, but also boost productivity and benefit our economy. Yet today, the median wage of a woman working full-time year-round in the United States is [about \\$39,600](#)—only 79 percent of a man’s median earnings of \$50,400. President Obama has taken a number of steps to fight for equal pay and put forth policies that help target discriminatory pay practices. While the gap has narrowed slightly, there is much more work to be done to ensure fair pay for all.

In January 2010, President Obama created the [National Equal Pay Task Force](#) to implement his pledge to crack down on violations of equal pay laws, bringing together the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the Department of Justice, the Department of Labor, and the Office of Personnel Management. Since the creation of the Equal Pay Task Force in 2010, the EEOC has received tens of thousands of charges of pay discrimination, and through enforcement efforts, the EEOC has obtained over \$85 million in monetary relief for victims of sex-based wage discrimination. And pay discrimination enforcement by the Department of Labor has gotten more effective: After rescinding enforcement guidance on pay discrimination that had imposed artificial barriers to finding and resolving systemic, wage-based discrimination by Federal contractors, the proportion of pay discrimination violations that the department found that addressed systemic issues skyrocketed—from 28 percent in 2012 to 100 percent in 2015. The Task Force has issued reports on its progress, including [Fighting for Equal Pay in the Workforce](#), [Keeping America’s Women Moving Forward](#), and [Fifty Years After the Equal Pay Act](#).

In May 2013, the President signed a Presidential Memorandum directing the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to [develop a government-wide strategy](#) to address the gender pay gap in the Federal workforce, leading to a [report](#) in April 2014. OPM found the gender pay gap for civilian white-collar employees in the Federal government has decreased significantly over the last 30 years. In 2015, the average salary for women in the Federal white-collar workforce was 88.5 percent of the average salary of men—a pay gap of about 11 cents on the dollar. New [guidance](#) issued in July 2015 cautions against required reliance on a candidate’s existing salary to set pay, as it can potentially adversely affect women who may have taken time off from their careers or for whom an existing rate of pay is not reflective of the candidate’s current qualifications or existing labor market conditions.

In February 2014, President Obama issued an Executive Order requiring Federal contractors to raise their [minimum wage](#) to \$10.10 an hour and to lift the tipped minimum wage ([which disproportionately impacts women](#))—and urging Congress, states, cities, and businesses to do the same. And in April 2014, President Obama issued an Executive Order, which was followed

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by a Department of Labor rule in September 2015, prohibiting Federal contractors from discriminating against employees who [discuss or inquire about their compensation](#). Additionally, so that women have the tools they need to fight for equal pay where they live, the Department of Labor's Women's Bureau has created resources to share information on equal pay, including a map of Federal and state-level equal pay and pay transparency protections for workers and an issue brief outlining state-level pay transparency laws.

In January 2016, on the seventh anniversary of the signing of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, President Obama announced a new proposal from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission requiring businesses with 100 or more employees to submit summary pay data [by gender, race, and ethnicity](#). This proposal would cover more than 63 million employees and would help focus public enforcement of our equal pay laws and provide better insight into discriminatory pay practices across industries and occupations.

And lastly, on numerous occasions, President Obama has called on Congress to pass the [Paycheck Fairness Act](#), commonsense legislation that would strengthen the Equal Pay Act of 1963 by closing loopholes in the defenses for equal pay violations, providing stronger remedies, and expanding protections against discrimination for employees who share or inquire about information about their compensation at work.

Increasing Women's Labor Force Participation

"We've got to harness the momentum that we're seeing in the broader economy and make sure the economy is working for every single American. We've got to keep making smart choices. And today, here at RIC, I want to focus on some common-sense steps we can take to help working families right now. In particular, I want to zero in on the choices we need to make to ensure that women are full and equal participants in the economy."

President Barack Obama, October 31, 2014

Education

To make sure that all young women have the opportunity to reach higher, President Obama [invested in college affordability](#) for millions of low-income and middle class families across the country by raising the maximum Pell Grant award by \$1,000, increasing the amount of Pell Grant funding by 70 percent, and expanding the number of Pell Grant recipients by 50 percent. He also established the [American Opportunity Tax Credit](#) to assist families with the costs of college, providing up to \$10,000 of college tuition over four years and [reforming Federal campus-based aid](#) to promote affordability and value.

The White House convened a meeting between senior Administration officials and a group of business school deans in April 2014 to identify strategies and best practices to better prepare students, particularly women, to lead the 21st - century workforce. Recognizing that schools can play a critical role in helping workers, companies, and leaders adapt to meet the needs of the changing American workforce, business schools around the country took a [pledge](#) and committed to following a set of best practices including investing and addressing the gender gap in faculty hiring, promotion, and pay, working with companies to develop programs that will help women trying to get back on the fast track, and helping to facilitate the reentry of those who have taken time out of the labor force.

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The President also expanded [income-based student loan repayment](#) to enable 1.6 million students to take advantage of a new option to cap repayment of student loans at 10 percent of monthly income and to keep student loan interest rates low.

Pregnancy, Paid Leave, and Flexible Workplaces

In June 2014, the President signed a Presidential Memorandum to enhance [workplace flexibility](#) for Federal employees to the maximum extent practicable, including enshrining a right to request flexible work arrangements.

In 2014, the President called on Congress to pass the [Pregnant Workers Fairness Act](#), which would require employers to make reasonable accommodations to workers who have limitations from pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions (unless it would impose an undue hardship on the employer). The legislation would also prohibit employers from forcing pregnant employees to take paid or unpaid leave if a reasonable accommodation would allow them to work.

In January 2015, the President signed a Presidential Memorandum directing Federal agencies to advance six weeks of [paid sick leave to Federal employees](#) with new children and directing Federal agencies to ensure that, to the extent permitted by law, their policies offer 240 hours of advanced sick leave, at the request of an employee and in appropriate circumstances, in connection with the birth or adoption of a child or for other eligible sick leave. As part of his [FY 2016 Budget](#), the President called on Congress to grant another six weeks of paid leave for Federal employees.

In September 2015, the President issued an Executive Order requiring Federal contractors to provide employees working on Federal contracts up to seven [paid sick days](#) each year—and urging Congress, states, cities, and other businesses to do the same.

Child Care

President Obama increased investments to expand access to high-quality early care and education, including efforts under the [Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge program](#), [Preschool Development Grants](#), Head Start and Early Head Start, and a [landmark proposal](#) that helps all eligible working families with young children afford high-quality child care. In 2014, the President signed the [Child Care and Development Block Grant Act](#) into law, reauthorizing the Federal Child Care and Development Fund and making significant advancements by defining health and safety requirements for child care providers, requiring more caregiver trainings, outlining family-friendly eligibility policies, and ensuring parents and the general public have transparent information about the child care choices available to them.

The President promoted [innovation in the child care subsidy system](#) through a \$100 million investment in competitive grants for pilot programs that will develop, implement, and evaluate models of providing child care to address the unmet needs for families who face unique challenges to securing child care. He also proposed tripling the maximum [Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit](#) to \$3,000 per young child and expanding eligibility to middle-class families with incomes up to \$120,000.

To make sure we have our best workforce possible taking care of young children, the Department of Labor is promoting access to [child care for workers in job training programs](#) through a \$25 million investment in addressing barriers faced by those with childcare responsibilities.

In 2015, the Administration issued a [report on the Economics of Early Childhood Investments](#), which indicates that investments in high-quality early education generate economic returns of

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over \$8 for every \$1 spent. That same year, the President called on Congress to fund initiatives that help the nearly 1 in 3 American families who [struggle to afford diapers](#) for their babies, while working with the private sector to tackle the diaper gap to provide more affordable and more accessible diapers to low-income families.

Diversity

In July 2010, the President issued an Executive Order to increase Federal employment opportunities for the [54 million Americans living with a disability](#), the majority of whom are women. And in September 2013, the Department of Labor updated its rules prohibiting Federal contractors from discriminating in employment on the basis of disability, for the first time establishing a nationwide [7 percent utilization goal](#) for qualified individuals with disabilities. The Department of Labor's Women's Bureau, in collaboration with the Office of Disability Employment Policy, published [A Guide to Hiring Women with Disabilities](#), documenting the statistics and providing promising practices in recruitment and retention of women with disabilities.

The President believes in promoting diversity and inclusion, especially in non-traditional occupations – fields in which women have been historically underrepresented – such as law enforcement, science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), and the military. That's why the Department of Homeland Security created the "Women in Law Enforcement Leadership Training Program" to support the [professional development of women in law enforcement](#) at home and across 46 countries around the world. That's why the Administration has worked to expand [women's participation in STEM fields](#) by encouraging mentoring to support women throughout their academic and professional experiences and supporting efforts to retain women in the STEM workforce. That's why the Department of Defense opened military [combat roles to women](#), allowing women to serve in all military positions and creating more opportunities for military promotion and career advancement, because our military is strongest when we open it up to our very best talent. And for those who serve our country, they shouldn't have to face unemployment when they leave the military. That's why the Department of Veterans Affairs has worked to increase [employment opportunities for female veterans](#) in the Federal government through the Women Veterans Initiative. And that's why the Department of Homeland Security has taken steps to successfully [recruit, hire, and retain women staffers](#), and prepare women for senior positions within the department and across other government agencies.

The Administration published a resource guide on women and minorities in apprenticeships, launched a public-private effort to recruit and train women for STEM fields and apprenticeships, created a [clearinghouse for women](#) accessing non-traditional occupations and apprenticeships, and [invested \\$90 million](#) in the Department of Labor's *ApprenticeshipUSA* program. The Department of Labor also published a proposed rule to [update the Equal Employment Opportunity regulations](#) to diversify participation in Registered Apprenticeship programs. The Department of Labor also announced the availability of [approximately \\$1,988,000 in grant funds](#) to solicit applications for "The Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations Technical Assistance Grants" program. These competitive grants to community-based organizations will be awarded to assist Registered Apprenticeship employers and labor unions in the recruitment, training, placement, and retention of women, including women of color and women with disabilities, in apprenticeships and nontraditional occupations.

Despite their driving growth in the workforce, women of color face persistent challenges to full participation in the economy. Although women in general face a continuing pay gap compared to their male counterparts, the gap is even larger for women of color. Increasing the economic opportunity of women of color will also give more opportunity to their children

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and continue to increase opportunity for generations to come. The Administration has been working to increase opportunities for economic prosperity for women and girls of color. The President continues to push to make permanent key provisions to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC) and has also announced independent commitments which, include a \$100 million, 5-year-funding initiative by [Prosperity Together](#) to improve economic prosperity for low-income women.

And lastly, because no one should be fired due to who they are or who they love, in July 2014, the President issued an Executive Order, followed by a Department of Labor rule in December 2014, [prohibiting federal contractors from discriminating](#) in employment on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Additionally, the Department of Labor is finalizing updated [sex discrimination regulations for Federal contractors](#) for the first time since 1978 to align with current law and address barriers to equal opportunity and pay, such as pay discrimination, sexual harassment, hostile work environments, a lack of workplace accommodations for pregnant women, and family caregiving discrimination.

Strengthening Working Families Initiative

Our businesses, communities, and families thrive when all Americans have the opportunity to master new skills and to access training that enables them to attain gainful employment and contribute fully to our economy. A growing policy concern is that certain barriers, such as balancing family obligations and access to reliable child care, can make it difficult for low-income and working parents to participate and succeed in education and training that support employment and career advancement. Together, with the Department of Labor (DOL) and the Center for American Progress (CAP), the White House hosted the [Summit on Working Families](#) to set an agenda for a 21st century workplace. The Summit convened businesses, economists, labor leaders, legislators, advocates and the media for a discussion on issues facing the entire spectrum of working families – from low-wage workers to corporate executives, from young parents to baby boomers caring for their aging parents.

As part of the Administration's efforts to support working families, the Department of Labor will make approximately \$25 million in grant funds available for the [Strengthening Working Families Initiative \(SWFI\)](#) grant program to address education and training barriers for low- to middle-skilled parents by prioritizing the needs of this targeted population; addressing child care needs for parents seeking education and training; increasing access to child care resources; and bridging the gap between the workforce development and child care systems. SWFI grants will provide low- to middle-skilled parents opportunities to advance in their careers in high-growth or in-demand H-1B industries, addressing barriers to accessing training and employment faced by those with child care responsibilities. These grants will give more working parents a career pathway to secure higher-wage jobs by addressing the significant barriers to participating in and completing training, and in trying to find and acquire affordable, high-quality child care – including emergency child care – while attending skills training programs.

Immigration and Citizenship

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) increased economic empowerment and educational opportunity for millions of immigrant women through a variety of new policies that seek to make our immigration system more fair and humane. In June 2012, the Department of Homeland Security announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy, which allows certain people who came to the United States as children and meet other requirements to request relief from deportation, on a case-by-case basis, and employment authorization. Over the past four years, close to 730,000 people, including many young women, received DACA enabling them greater access to educational and economic opportunities.

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In May 2015, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services also began [extending eligibility for employment authorization](#) to spouses of H-1B nonimmigrants seeking employment-based lawful permanent residence. Allowing these spouses to work decreases economic stress on their families and facilitates their integration into the United States. Since then, over 30,000 spouses, including many women, have obtained employment authorization and are now able to contribute to their families and our economy.

In March 2016, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services launched the [Citizenship Public Awareness and Education Campaign](#). This initiative raises awareness concerning the rights, responsibilities, and importance of United States citizenship, and provides referrals and access to quality direct service providers to assist with citizenship preparation. This campaign complements the President's "Stand Stronger" citizenship awareness campaign that seeks to reach out to the 8.8 million lawful permanent residents who are eligible for citizenship. Every year, [between 600,000 and 800,000 persons become naturalized](#); over half are women.

Workforce Development and Training

In June 2016, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will roll out three workforce development and training initiatives to help prepare the next generation of transportation workers. This will include the announcement of:

- A new workforce development coalition with states, industry, and workforce development groups;
- The creation of a new Center for Workforce Development within FHWA's Office of Innovative Program Delivery; and
- Release of \$3 million in On-the-Job Training/Supportive Service grants in eight states.

International Community

Through a number of international agreements and partnerships, President Obama and his Administration have not only promoted women's empowerment at home, but also around the globe, making the United States a clear ally in the fight for women's equality. Highlights include:

- [Advancing women's economic participation in 21 countries](#) through the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation's commitment to five key pillars impacting women's economic empowerment, access to markets, skills building, leadership, and more;
- Supporting the G-20 Summit's [goal of boosting female labor force participation](#) by 25 percent by 2025, which would bring an estimated 100 million women into the formal workforce worldwide; Working within the G-7 to advance women's economic empowerment, including through increased technical and vocational training, and support for the UN Women's Empowerment Principles; and
- Promoting [women's economic participation globally](#) through ongoing Department of State and Millennium Challenge Corporation initiatives and investments, as well as [U.S. Agency for International Development programs](#) to encourage and promote women's economic opportunity.

Raising Income Levels and Retirement Savings

"Today, the federal minimum wage is worth about twenty percent less than it was when Ronald Reagan first stood here. [...] Give America a raise."

President Barack Obama, January 28, 2014

The Minimum Wage

No one who works a full-time job should have to live in poverty. President Obama reminded us of that idea in his 2013 State of the Union address, calling on Congress to act to raise the Federal minimum wage for the first time since 2007. By keeping constant at its current value of \$7.25 per hour, it has lost about 20 percent of its value since the early 1980s. A fair minimum wage has historically enjoyed bipartisan support; in fact, since it was first established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, every president but two has enacted an increase in the minimum wage.

On February 12, 2014, President Obama signed [Executive Order 13658](#), “Establishing a Minimum Wage for Contractors.” This action raised the minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour for workers employed through Federal contracts, and provided for annual cost of living increases going forward. Today, the minimum wage for Federal contractors is currently [\\$10.15 per hour](#). The Executive Order and the implementing regulations from the Department of Labor are expected to benefit nearly 200,000 workers directly by increasing their pay. Also, it improves taxpayers’ return on their investment, as higher wages can make for a more productive workforce, thus improving the quality and efficiency of services provided to the government. Additionally, the Administration has shown great support for state and local increases in minimum wage, and as such many localities across the country have taken steps themselves.

Overtime Protections

In recent decades, the erosion of overtime standards – a critical feature of the Fair Labor Standards Act – has undermined the economic stability of many white-collar workers. Because of the failure to update the overtime regulations, an exception to overtime protections originally meant for highly-paid executive, administrative, and professional employees was applied to workers earning as little as \$23,660 a year. [For example](#), a convenience store manager, fast food assistant manager, or some office workers were expected to work 50 or 60 hours a week or more, making less than the poverty level for a family of four, and not receiving a dime of overtime pay.

In response, at the direction of the President, the Department of Labor took action to restore the promise of the Fair Labor Standards Act by updating the salary threshold at which white-collar workers can be exempt from overtime protections. The final rule, which will take effect in December 2016, expands [overtime pay protection to millions of American workers](#) by raising the salary threshold for exemption from overtime protections from \$455 per week to \$913 per week (or from \$23,660 to \$47,476 for a full-year worker). The rule will also automatically update this new level every three years to prevent a future erosion of these protections. This rule will go a long way toward ensuring that workers continue to earn the pay they deserve. More than half (56 percent) of those benefiting from the rule will be women.

Protecting Retirement

The President has called for making Social Security more generous, increasing its benefits so that today’s retirees and future generations get the dignified retirement that they’ve earned. But too many women still have insufficient savings to supplement their Social Security and enjoy a secure retirement. In fact, the median value in women’s retirement savings accounts is one-third less than men’s, in part because women on average earn less over their lifetimes.¹

Fortunately, we know how to increase retirement savings. Workers are most likely to save for retirement if they have access to a workplace savings plan and are automatically enrolled in that plan. That’s why the President launched [myRA](#), a simple, no-cost, risk-free retirement savings

¹ “Shortchanged in Retirement: Continuing Challenges to Women’s Financial Future,” Brown, Rhee, Saad-Lessler, and Oakley, *UC Berkeley Labor Center*, 2016 (<http://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/shortchanged-in-retirement-continuing-challenges-to-womens-financial-future>).

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account intended for Americans without access to a workplace plan that could [ultimately help millions of Americans begin to prepare for retirement](#). With myRA, there are [no costs to open an account, no fees to maintain an account, and no minimum balance](#). myRA safely earns interest and is completely portable should the saver switch jobs. It's why, in every budget since taking office, he has proposed to automatically enroll in an IRA approximately 30 million employees who don't have access to workplace savings plans. And it's why the Department of Labor proposed new rules enabling states to create their own retirement savings plans. Eight states (California, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Washington) have already passed laws, and we expect more to follow suit.

Finally, the President has taken steps to ensure that Americans who do the hard work of saving for retirement are able to protect and grow their nest egg. Existing rules of the road allowed some firms to incentivize retirement advisers to steer clients into products that may have higher fees and lower returns, [costing America's families an estimated \\$17 billion a year](#). The Department of Labor's conflict of interest rule cracks down on these conflicts of interest and ensures that families get advice that's truly in their best interest, better enabling them to protect and grow their savings.

Stopping the Cycle of Poverty

"I think it's important when it comes to dealing with issues of poverty for us to guard against cynicism, and not buy the idea that the poor will always be with us and there's nothing we can do -- because there's a lot we can do. The question is do we have the political will, the communal will to do something about it."

President Barack Obama, May 12, 2015

Under this Administration, we have made important gains in reducing poverty. [Unemployment has been cut by more than half to 4.7 percent](#) during a [record streak of private sector job creation](#), and [child poverty fell](#) further in the last two years than it has in any two-year-period since 2001. The high school graduation rate is at [an all-time high](#). And [the Affordable Care Act \(ACA\)](#) has tackled head-on the tragedy of health crises leading American families to financial ruin; thanks to the ACA, 20 million Americans have gained health insurance, and for the first time ever, more than 90 percent of Americans are covered.

Over the past seven years, President Obama has worked to [strengthen high-poverty communities through better Federal partnerships with local leaders](#). The Administration is now partnering with communities and local officials to achieve goals that benefit women, girls, and families including creating jobs; increasing economic activity; improving educational outcomes; increasing access to affordable housing; reducing serious and violent crime; and other locally-defined priorities. Through the cornerstone initiative in this model, the Administration has [designated a total of 22 rural, tribal, and urban communities as Promise Zones](#), pairing Federal government partners with local leaders to streamline resources across agencies and deliver comprehensive support. These communities receive 10 years of significant Federal support for local leaders in high-poverty communities. The first 13 Zones have already garnered over \$550 million in Federal investments to advance these goals.

The President has used evidence and brought local and federal leadership to advance the fight to end homelessness nationwide. In 2010, [the President released Opening Doors](#), the first ever national plan to prevent and end homelessness. The Administration has led the [Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness](#), with success nationwide: over 20 cities including New

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Orleans, Las Vegas, and San Antonio, as well as entire states of Connecticut and Virginia, have ended veteran homelessness. Over the past seven years, the President's leadership has also resulted in decreases to family homelessness, and the President's FY 2017 budget includes an \$11 billion [plan to end homelessness among all America's families](#) by 2020.

The President has engaged the tech sector, open data, and technology to leverage every possible tool to expand ladders to opportunity, including empowering women and girls, through [the Opportunity Project](#), a platform for using Federal and local data and digital tools to expand access to opportunity for all Americans. To date, 14 private and non-profit tech teams including Redfin, PolicyMap, and GreatSchools have launched new digital tools through the Opportunity Project that help people to find affordable housing, identify schools that will best serve their children, advocate for neighborhood resources, and more.

Additionally, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act took important steps to help the hardest-hit Americans. Without the Recovery Act's boost to household incomes, the poverty rate would have risen an additional 1.7 percentage points—which translates into about 5.3 million additional people that would have slipped into poverty in 2010.

Lastly, the President also enacted improvements to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC). The EITC and CTC improvements lift about [16 million people](#) – including about 8 million children – out of poverty or closer to the poverty line each year.

Taking Care of Caregivers

“But here’s what makes caregivers like you all so inspiring for me. No matter what you’re going through, you always find a way to dig just a little deeper. You always find more to give. You always keep moving forward and rebuilding for your families. And we are here today because we want to show you that you’re not alone in this journey.”

First Lady Michelle Obama, May 20, 2015

In October 2013, the Department of Labor published the Home Care Final Rule, which extends minimum wage and overtime protections under the Fair Labor Standards Act to home health care workers. The Final Rule [gives nearly 2 million workers](#) the same basic protections already provided to most U.S. workers—including those who perform the same jobs in nursing homes. This step also helped ensure that home care consumers have access to high-quality care from a stable and increasingly professionalized workforce.

The President also made a commitment to caregivers of our veterans. VA has supported 30,000 family caregivers of Veterans through the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers since the program began in 2011. More than 95% of those participants have been women. The program provides financial assistance in the form of a stipend, health insurance if the family caregiver is not already covered under another plan, mental health services, training and education, and other services to support family caregivers as they care for our nation's Veterans.

Fighting Against Human Trafficking

“Our fight against human trafficking is one of the great human rights causes of our time, and the United States will continue to lead it -- in partnership with you. The change we seek will not come easy, but we can draw strength from the movements of the past. For we know that every life saved -- in the words of that great Proclamation -- is ‘an act of justice,’ worthy of ‘the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.’”

President Barack Obama, September 25, 2012

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The Administration has demonstrated a strong commitment to ending human trafficking across the United States and around the world, and in March 2012, President Obama [directed his cabinet](#) to double down on efforts to combat human trafficking. Building on the efforts of the [President's Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons](#), the Administration has pursued an ambitious agenda focused on four priority areas: rule of law, victim services, procurement and supply chains, and public awareness and outreach.

In an effort to stem the supply of trafficked individuals, in 2012 the President signed an [executive order](#) to strengthen the U.S. Government's zero-tolerance policy on human trafficking in government contracting. Furthermore, in January 2015, the White House hosted a [forum dedicated to combating human trafficking supply chains](#). The event brought together leaders from the private sector, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the federal government to talk about what we can do together to prevent and eliminate any instances of trafficking-related activities in federal contracts and in private-sector supply chains.

In February 2016, President Obama signed the Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act, which eliminated an exception that allowed imports into the United States of goods produced with forced labor in circumstances when U.S. consumer demand was not met by U.S. domestic production. Federal agencies are also seeking public comment on a proposed new rule to define recruitment fees in the context of Executive Order 13627 on "Strengthening Protections Against Trafficking in Persons in Federal Contracts," and its implementing regulations. These include a provision prohibiting contractors and those in their supply chains from charging employees recruitment fees.

The Department of Labor (DOL) has an important role to play in combating trafficking in persons through its civil enforcement of Federal labor laws, its research and funding for grants overseas, and employment and training expertise. DOL's Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) funds projects that support efforts to provide assistance to children in or at risk of the worst forms of child labor, including those who could potentially be victims of trafficking. In 2015, ILAB also launched an \$11.5 million initiative with the International Labor Organization (ILO) to support efforts to combat forced labor under the 2014 ILO Protocol and Recommendation on forced labor. Through the Wage and Hour Division's civil enforcement, DOL partners with Federal law enforcement agencies around the identification and referral of potential instances of trafficking in persons and the calculation of restitution amounts for victims. The Wage and Hour Division also strategically approaches enforcement efforts by focusing on industries where labor law violation rates are high and vulnerable low wage workers are often reluctant to assert their rights and raise their voices.

The Anti-Trafficking Coordination Team (ACTeam) Initiative, an interagency effort launched in 2011 to streamline Federal criminal investigations and prosecutions of human trafficking offenses, brings the Wage and Hour Division together in partnership with the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security. The ACTeam Initiative established six Phase I ACTeams in Atlanta, Georgia; El Paso, Texas; Kansas City, Missouri; Los Angeles, California; Memphis, Tennessee; and Miami, Florida. In these ACTeam districts, thanks to the intergovernmental collaborations at work, prosecutions of forced labor, international sex trafficking, and adult sex trafficking rose even more markedly than they did nationally. For instance, [the number of defendants convicted rose 86 percent in ACTeam districts, compared to 14 percent in non-ACTeam districts, and 26 percent nationwide](#). Phase II of the initiative was launched in December 2015 in six new cities.

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In October 2012, the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration published a Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 09-12: "Human Trafficking: The Role of the Public Workforce System in the Delivery of Services and Referrals to Victims of Trafficking." This guidance provides further information to the public workforce system about the importance of providing employment and training services to victims of human trafficking and to give updated guidance on how to deliver these services.

In 2015, the Department of Labor, International Labor Organization, Humanity United, and University of California, Los Angeles Burke Center for International Relations convened multi-stakeholder dialogues with experts from across sectors to discuss the issues of forced labor and other forms of exploitative labor practices. The conferences were organized around three important goals: 1) highlight emerging and innovative strategies used toward the effective eradication of forced labor and other forms of exploitative labor practices; 2) promote knowledge-sharing among stakeholders on existing international and domestic experiences and best practices to combat forced and exploitative labor, with a focus on Brazil and the United States; and 3) explore the relationship between exploitative labor practices and forced labor.

Additionally, the Department of Defense, in April 2015, held its largest ever Operational Contract Support Exercise that evaluated current policies aimed at combating human trafficking via the supply chain in U.S. Pacific Command's area of responsibility. The Department is planning a similar exercise in April 2016 for U.S. Southern Command.

Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment Around the Globe

"Any nation that fails to educate its girls or employ its women and allowing them to maximize their potential is doomed to fall behind in a global economy."

President Barack Obama, July 26, 2015

Beginning in 2009, the Department of State led efforts to create the Women and the Economy forum within the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) to address women's economic participation across APEC economies, and to mainstream and integrate discussion of women and economics into other APEC fora. In 2011, the 21 leaders of the APEC economies adopted the [San Francisco Declaration on Women and the Economy](#). The Declaration detailed concrete actions to promote women's economic participation in four areas: access to capital; access to markets; skills training and capacity building; and business leadership. Since that time, U.S.-led initiatives within APEC have focused on empowering women entrepreneurs, promoting women's health to improve their economic participation, increasing women's access to transportation, and advancing women's participation in STEM-related fields. Additionally, to elevate the importance and productivity of artisan enterprises and help connect artisan entrepreneurs to global markets, the Department of State helped launch the Alliance for Artisan Enterprise, an international public and private sector initiative housed at the Aspen Institute. This is because the artisan sector generates about [\\$34 billion a year](#) and employs hundreds of thousands of people, the majority of whom are women.

In 2011, USAID launched the Women's Leadership in Small and Medium Enterprise Program in cooperation with the World Bank. This initiative aims to promote a better understanding of the

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key determinants of successful women-led small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in developing countries—in terms of both entry and profitability. The trust fund co-finances rigorous evaluations of interventions in 12 pilot countries. More generally, at the urging of the United States, the World Bank has taken a much more proactive approach to addressing gender-based violence in developing countries. This is reflected in its newly approved Gender Strategy for 2016-2023, which includes a specific focus on gender equality in fragile and conflict-affected situations, as well as the elevation of the status of the Gender Office within the World Bank organization. Similarly, the African Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank have, in recent years, adopted plans to integrate gender considerations into programs in fragile and conflict-affected situations.

Also in 2012, the U.S. government launched the [Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index \(WEAI\)](#), developed for the Feed the Future Presidential Initiative, a first-of-its-kind tool to measure the empowerment, agency, and inclusion of women in the agricultural sector in an effort to identify ways women can overcome persistent obstacles and economic constraints. The WEAI was developed by USAID, the International Food Policy Research Institute, and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. Data gathered through the WEAI illustrates linkages across empowerment, agricultural productivity, and well-being for households, women, and children across different countries and contexts. Gender parity within the household is also measured by the WEAI, grounded in evidence showing that equalizing access to assets and opportunities for women and men helps achieve better development outcomes—such as better health and nutrition for women and their families, greater investments in education for children, and greater poverty reduction. In addition to building this evidence base through the WEAI, USAID is also investing in rigorous, gender-sensitive impact evaluations of programs that seek to empower women (and men) by securing a key asset: land.

In September 2012, President Obama launched the [Equal Futures Partnership](#), a U.S.-led multilateral initiative designed to encourage and support a growing number of member countries to empower women economically and politically through sharing information and best practices. In its first three years, the partnership has grown to 29 members. These members commit to new actions to ensure women's full participation in public life as well as to enable them to lead and benefit from inclusive economic growth. Those actions include legal, regulatory, and policy reforms and involvement of all relevant stakeholders. EFP advisory subcommittee members, including UN Women, the World Bank, the Thunderbird School of Global Management, and the Asia Foundation, collaborate with EFP members to support implementation of country commitments through technical assistance, advisory services, and financing.

In October 2013, USAID launched Leveraging Economic Opportunities (LEO), which works to build inclusive market systems by building women's access to markets and their agency to make financial decisions and participate in economic systems. The program addresses gender inequalities throughout the market system, opening up new opportunities for women to access additional resources and enhance their agency. This dynamic cycle ultimately enables women and men to compete for and reap the benefits of market systems on a level playing field. Additionally, in 2015, USAID launched the [SPRING Accelerator](#), in partnership with the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and the Nike Foundation. SPRING is a five-year program designed to accelerate economic empowerment for girls in parts of Africa and Asia by delivering technical and financial support to early stage enterprises developing life-enhancing products and services that enable girls to safely learn, earn, and save. The program was launched in Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda in 2015, and is expanding to Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh. By 2019, SPRING aims to reach 200,000 girls in eight countries.

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On June 14, 2016, the Department of State will release the “U.S. Department of State Strategy for Women’s Economic Empowerment.” In the strategy, the Department of State will outline its policy objectives, guiding principles, action framework, and implementation tools to support women’s economic empowerment globally. State’s overseas missions and domestic offices and bureaus will use the strategy to guide their efforts to support women’s economic participation and pursue gender integration across their portfolios. The strategy will outline four broad policy objectives: promoting women’s equal access to resources and services; promoting women’s equal access to decent work; promoting women’s entrepreneurship; and addressing overarching issues that impede women’s economic participation, such as gender-based violence. Beyond strategic guidance, the document outlines a wide range of programs and diplomatic initiatives as examples of department efforts.

Lastly, in September 2016, USAID will release its Women’s Economic Empowerment Framework. USAID has supported a new era of women’s empowerment since the launch of its Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy in 2012. A multi-sectoral Women’s Economic Empowerment (WE3) Framework will help USAID programs create a blueprint for ensuring that women’s economic empowerment is central to each part of an economic-related project cycle. The Framework will include a working definition and set of principles as to what constitutes WE3, identification of needed technical assistance and resources, and a clear set of planning, implementation, and evaluation guidelines.