



Welcome

We are excited to share with you the sixth annual New York at Work report, produced by Cornell University's New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations (ILR).

Established by the New York State Legislature in 1945 to address the great workplace conflicts of the day and to promote better labor-management relations, the ILR School is guided by a commitment to social and economic justice and to improving the lives of New York's working people. Today, we continue to be the world's leading school focused on labor, management and the economy.

New York at Work is released each year ahead of the Labor Day holiday, and highlights important research conducted, reports published and projects completed by ILR Outreach centers, institutes and programs.

Drawing on ILR's expertise, research-based data and policy analysis of a broad range of key issues affecting the state's workers, employers, unions and communities, this roundup is intended as an informative, accessible and relevant resource for policymakers and the public.

We hope you find it useful, and we look forward to engaging with you as you work to improve the lives of your constituents.

Each report brief in this publication was prepared by the ILR Outreach center, institute or program that conducted the underlying research, and we encourage you to engage with them directly. Whether you want more detail on a specific finding, have a follow-up question or are seeking research support on an emerging issue, our researchers are ready to serve as a resource. Contact information for each center, institute and program is listed at the end of this publication.

Sincerely,

Alexander J.S. Colvin, Ph.D. '99

Kenneth F. Kahn '69 Dean

Martin F. Scheinman '75, M.S. '76, Professor of Conflict Resolution

M. Diane Burton

Joseph R. Rich '80 Professor of Human Resource Studies

Senior Associate Dean for Research, Outreach, and External Relations

Director, Institute for Compensation Studies



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Table of Contents

Buffalo Co-Lab

Federal Cuts Impact on New York State: Interactive Map.....	6
Experiences of Black Women at Work in Erie County.....	8
Responding to Shortfalls in Federal Labor Law and Administration	10

Center for Applied Research on Work

Empire State Poll: A Portrait of Work in New York State from 2003-2024.....	12
---	----

Climate Jobs Institute

Next Generation Clean Energy Program	14
How New York Can Still Achieve Its Climate, Jobs and Equity Mandates	16

Criminal Justice and Employment Initiative

Improving Employment Outcomes for Justice-Impacted New Yorkers with Disabilities.....	18
Criminal Record Online Toolkit Updated	20

Ithaca Co-Lab

Tompkins County Living Wage Study	22
---	----

Worker Institute

Project Labor Agreements and NYC Street Tree Planting Contracts	24
Racial Discrimination, Sexual Harassment and Intimate Partner Violence in the Workplace	26
Unpaid Caregiving and Its Impact on New Yorkers' Paid Employment	28
Building a Mental Health Peer Support Network for Construction Workers	30
Fashion's Data Doubles: How AI Is Reshaping Modeling Work	32
We Are Home: Workers with TPS Belong Here	34
Evaluating the Regulation and Reform Implementation of Street Vending Laws in NYC	36

K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability

Disability Statistics Project Offers Statewide and Local Information	38
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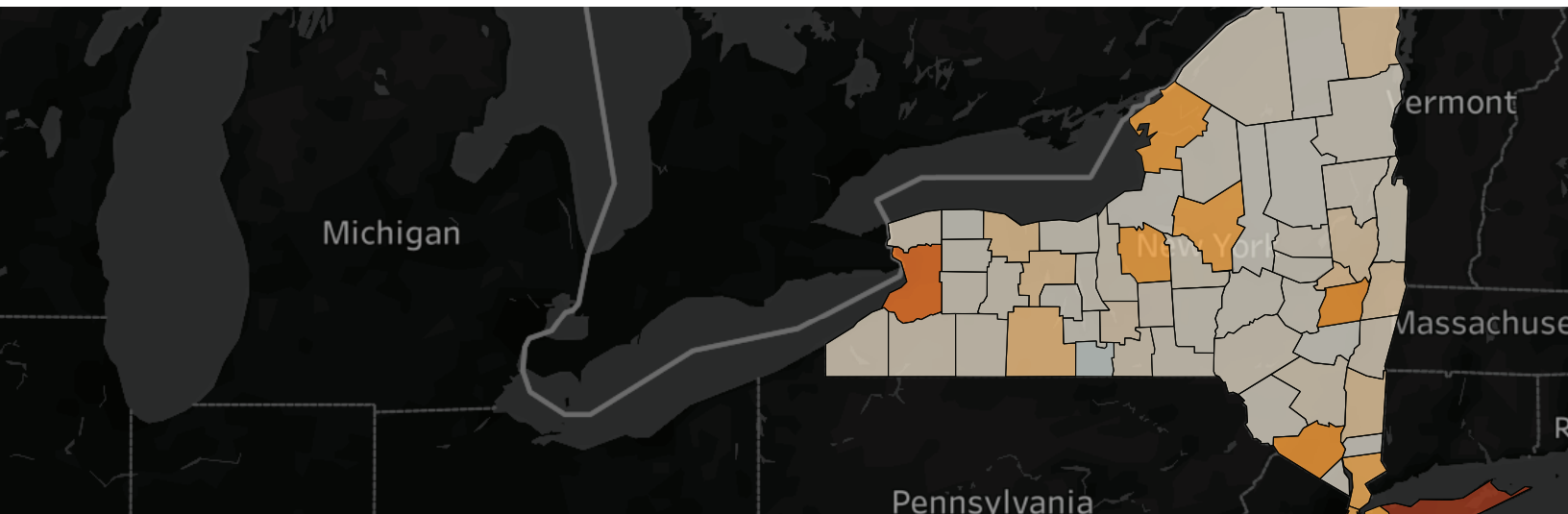
ILR Centers, Institutes and Programs.....

	40
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FEDERAL CUTS IMPACT ON NEW YORK STATE: INTERACTIVE MAP

Russell Weaver, Buffalo Co-Lab director of research; Cathy Creighton, Buffalo Co-Lab director

Federal Impacts



Overview

This project, made possible by generous support from New York state and the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, seeks to provide New York residents, government leaders and staff, businesses, nonprofits and other stakeholders with data-driven insights on how federal actions in pursuit of government efficiency and domestic economic growth are affecting the state and its diverse geographic areas.

The project will grow as new data and indicators become available and are built into the interactive tools, and the current “Phase 1” version establishes a baseline for tracking trends. For the Phase 1 release, the interactive map compiles New York data in two major topical areas: jobs and federal spending.

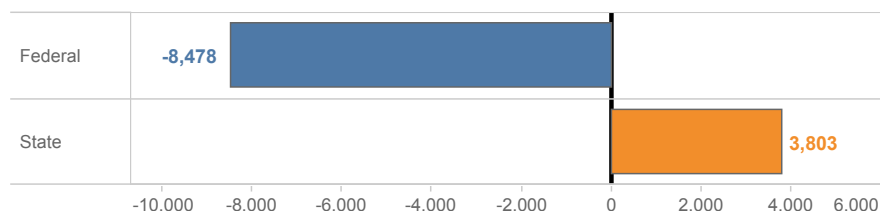
Key Findings

- Between December 2024 and December 2025, New York saw a small net increase in total jobs. However, this net job growth was mostly concentrated in just two industries: healthcare and social assistance, and transportation and warehousing.
- Nearly all other industries have experienced contraction, especially industries with high exposure to newly adopted tariff policies, such as wholesale trade.
- More than 8,000 federal government jobs have been lost on balance.
- Relative to fiscal year 2024, federal grant and assistance spending was down by nearly \$7 billion in fiscal year 2025.

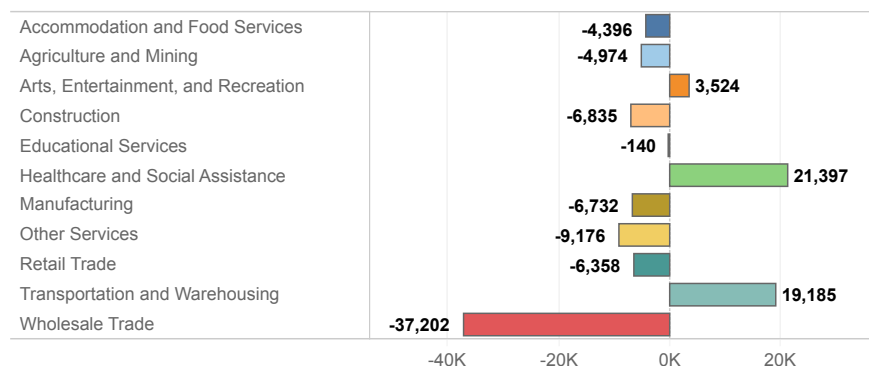
Change in Public and Private Sector Jobs Since December 2024

15,452

Change in Public Sector Jobs Since December 2024, by Level of Government



Change in Private Sector Jobs Since December 2024, by Selected Industry



- Grants and assistance to individuals – especially in the form of direct payments with unrestricted use – accounted for nearly half (\$3.1 billion) of the net decrease.
- During the same year-over-year period, federal contract spending in New York was down by over \$8 billion.
- Reduced federal contract spending in New York is cutting off a key source of revenue for many of the state's minority- and women-owned business enterprises (M/WBEs).

Recommendations

- Revitalize federal data systems and data collection programs that have experienced defunding or disinvestment in recent years.
- Restore crucial federal spending streams.

Research Impact

To date, the NYS Federal Impact Interactive Map has been accessed more than 21,000 times. The Buffalo Co-Lab has demonstrated the map's tools and key findings to elected officials and staff members in the New York State Senate and Assembly, as well as the governor's office and multiple local and regional philanthropic networks. The next major update is scheduled for late October 2026.

ILR Buffalo Co-Lab

Cathy Creighton, Director
cathycreighton@cornell.edu

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EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN AT WORK IN ERIE COUNTY

Kricky Ksiazek, Buffalo Co-Lab civic researcher and High Road program coordinator; Cathy Creighton, Buffalo Co-Lab director; Russell Weaver, Buffalo Co-Lab director of research

County-Level Economy



Overview

In 2025, the Erie County Commission on the Status of Women and the Buffalo Co-Lab at Cornell University's ILR School conducted a study to determine the extent of a gender wage gap in Erie County, New York, and to make recommendations on how such wage inequities can be addressed and eradicated. Focus groups of mixed-race women revealed workplace experiences that varied, primarily based on race. Thus, from October 2025 through January 2026, the ILR research team dug deeper into the historical data and experiences of Black women in workplaces throughout Erie County.

Key Findings

- Black women in Erie County are two to three times more likely to be impoverished than white women and white men, respectively.
- The unemployment rate for women of color in New York state (5.4%) is more than twice the rate experienced by white women (2.5%).
- Black women are concentrated in frontline work in Erie County; while only 5.8% of the workforce, they account for 28.3% of healthcare support workers.
- Black women described their workplaces as benefiting from their labor, expertise and resilience without fully valuing or protecting them.
- Participants reported being overqualified yet underpaid, closely scrutinized and expected to work harder to prove their legitimacy, while navigating racism, sexism, colorism, accent bias and retaliation.



While only **5.8%** of the workforce
in Erie County,
Black women account for
28.3%
of healthcare support workers.



Recommendations

Systemic changes at the national or global level are needed beyond the boundaries of a single county in New York. However, to pursue more immediate progress, our recommendations focus on reform at the organizational level:

- Treat diversity – by race and gender – as a high organizational priority.
- Encourage clear messaging and modeling from leadership.
- Increase pay transparency and pay equity.
- Consistently use clear criteria for evaluation, hiring and promotions.
- Strengthen safe reporting and protections.
- Move beyond performative diversity, equity and inclusion to offer anti-racist training and resources.
- Consider flexible work arrangements.
- Adopt union-friendly policies.
- Invest in retention, not just recruitment.

Research Impact

For the initial launch of the report, researchers were invited to the Black Women's Equal Pay Day event on July 21, 2026, where they presented their findings and recommendations. Additional municipalities throughout New York state have already approached the research team to conduct similar studies in their regions. A presentation of findings and a related panel will take place on Sept. 10, 2026, in Erie County.

ILR Buffalo Co-Lab

Cathy Creighton, Director
cathycreighton@cornell.edu

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RESPONDING TO SHORTFALLS IN FEDERAL LABOR LAW AND ADMINISTRATION

Cathy Creighton, Buffalo Co-Lab director

Federal Impacts



Overview

Changes under the Trump Administration have put federal priorities in conflict with New York's constitutional commitment to protect workers' rights to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing.

In 2025, the Buffalo Co-Lab worked with New York state legislators to develop amendments to the New York State Labor Relations Act. In June of that year, the New York State Legislature passed Senate Bill S8034, and Gov. Hochul signed the legislation into law on Sept. 5. The law allows employees and unions to seek relief before the New York State Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) as an alternative to the federal National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). The New York statute, originally enacted in 1937, also provides substantially greater protections for organizing than federal law allows.

The legislation was challenged almost immediately: The NLRB filed suit against New York, arguing that the law is preempted by the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), and Amazon challenged PERB's jurisdiction after the Teamsters filed an unfair labor practice charge with PERB alleging that the retail giant unlawfully terminated an employee for engaging in union activity. Both cases argue that the New York statute is preempted by federal law. In defending the statute, the ILR School consulted with the New York attorney general's office regarding the legislative intent of the amendments. In July 2026, a federal district court found the New York statute unconstitutional, as the NLRA preempts it. Appeals are under consideration.

Model Labor Legislation Committee

From April to October 2025, the Buffalo Co-Lab co-chaired a committee of labor lawyers and scholars to develop model state legislation for a “trigger law” that would go into effect if the NLRB were eliminated or became nonfunctional. Interest in this approach has grown rapidly. Several states have enacted – or are actively considering – similar legislation that would allow state labor agencies to assume responsibility for matters currently reserved to the NLRB if specified triggering conditions are met.

In September 2025, California enacted AB 288. In March 2026, Washington state enacted HB 2471. Both laws expand state authority over labor relations if the NLRB can no longer effectively perform its statutory responsibilities. Massachusetts is considering similar legislation (H.2086/S.1327), and additional states are exploring comparable approaches.

Impact

With private-sector union density at only 5.9% and meaningful federal labor law reform effectively stalled, federal labor law has increasingly become an impediment to workers’ ability to organize and bargain collectively. As a result, the Buffalo Co-Lab is joining scholars, legislators and worker advocates in developing innovative approaches to protecting collective bargaining rights.

U.S. labor relations have reached an inflection point: Will the federal scheme enacted nine decades ago as part of the New Deal survive, or will labor laws fragment state by state? The Buffalo Co-Lab continues to play a leading role around this topic through research, legislative drafting and policy development.



Cathy Creighton, Director
cathycreighton@cornell.edu

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EMPIRE STATE POLL: A PORTRAIT OF WORK IN NEW YORK STATE FROM 2003-2024

*Anne DeCecco, CAROW senior research & policy development associate; Stella Ma, CAROW research aide;
Russell Weaver, Buffalo Co-Lab director of research; Phumthep Bunnak, former CAROW research aide*

Empire State Poll



Overview

For over 20 years, Cornell University's Empire State Poll (ESP) has taken the pulse of New York state residents' public opinion. Now administered by the Center for Applied Research on Work (CAROW), the poll has continued to ask many of its general-opinion questions while increasing its focus on work. The result is over two decades of rich data on the issues most important to state residents, their views on the state economy and government, and key indicators of New York's labor market, among others.

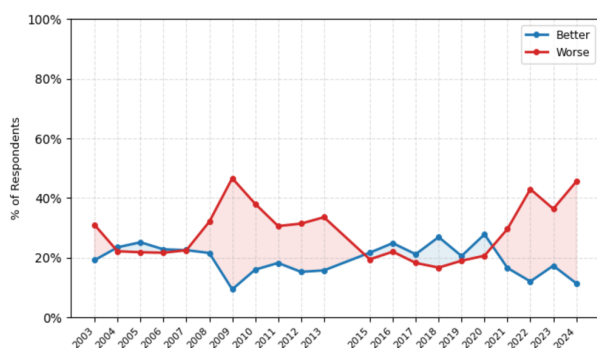
ESP data from 2003 through 2024 illustrates a consistent story: Real household income growth in the state has slowed in recent years, while

inflation has risen. These trends appear to have reshaped residents' priorities toward the cost of living. Meanwhile, respondents' outlooks on personal and statewide finances have grown increasingly pessimistic, and trust in institutions has declined. At the same time, the structure of work has shifted, with the rise of gig workers and a decline in average hours worked after the pandemic.



Financial Outlook Over Time

How are you doing financially compared to the previous year?



Key Findings

- The average household income for New Yorkers has risen by nearly 68% since 2007, but after adjusting for inflation, purchasing power has gone up by just 14%, mirroring national wage stagnation.
- The main public concern has shifted over time, with the cost of living being top of mind for respondents since the pandemic.
- Economic pessimism has grown and coincides with lower trust across all institutions studied. Trust in unions has proved somewhat more resilient than that in other institutions, however.
- Union membership and gig work (23% and about 13% in 2024, respectively) remain notable features of New York's labor market.

Research Impact

Taken together, the findings outlined in this report point to steps policymakers and organizational leaders can take to address the economic anxiety New York residents are experiencing:

- State policymakers can take measures to ensure the minimum wage aligns with living wage estimates, expand and strengthen programs that support basic needs like housing and childcare, and strengthen the unemployment insurance system to ensure that more vulnerable individuals are eligible. It is also crucial to work with local and community leaders to address local-level issues.
- Employers can also take steps to address residents' anxieties by providing cost-of-living adjustments that keep pace with inflation and exploring options to bolster benefits for programs such as childcare, transportation and savings.
- Businesses and local governments should invest in transparency and communication initiatives to rebuild the public's trust.
- The media can highlight the erosion of worker protections and counter the perception that hardship is the individual's fault.



Ariel Avgar, Director

aca27@cornell.edu



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NEXT GENERATION CLEAN ENERGY PROGRAM

*Melissa Shetler, Climate Jobs Institute assistant director of labor outreach and workforce development;
Zach Cunningham, Climate Jobs Institute assistant director of labor education*

Climate



Overview

As New York builds its clean energy economy, it can maximize community benefits and ensure that all workers can access high-quality union careers. To support this goal, the Climate Jobs Institute (CJI) has partnered with organizations in New York's Apprenticeship Readiness Collective (ARC) and with Uprose, a Brooklyn-based, nationally recognized environmental justice organization, to develop and deliver a climate and clean energy apprenticeship readiness curriculum called Next Generation Clean Energy.

The first of its kind in New York, the curriculum introduces climate change's science, disproportionate impacts on frontline communities and intersections with participants' lives. It also explores the role of labor unions in addressing the climate crisis and

highlights career opportunities in the building and construction trades that emerge from the clean energy transition.

In 2025, CJI and Pathways to Apprenticeship (P2A) taught the curriculum to roughly 50 participants. In 2026, the CJI team has built significant instructor capacity through a train-the-trainer model.

Results

- Participants developed a stronger understanding of climate science, environmental justice and the relationship between climate change and their community members' lived experiences.
- Participants connected career opportunities in the construction trades with New York's clean energy transition while learning how unions can help shape equitable climate solutions.

- Participants gained knowledge about the role of organized labor in advancing not only workplace standards and economic security, but also solutions to broader social and environmental issues.
- Feedback from participants and partner organizations indicated that the curriculum was engaging and transformative, with learners describing it as an eye-opening experience that expanded their understanding of climate change and their potential role in addressing it.
- Participants reported gaining new knowledge and confidence to discuss climate issues within their workplaces and communities. One participant, Seagan Soobrian-Aziz, said, “It gave me an opportunity to understand and to see what so many people are talking about, how I can, myself, get the meaningful knowledge and information I need to speak to others about it, and maybe we can make a change.”
- The train-the-trainer model strengthened partner organizations’ capacity to deliver climate education directly within apprenticeship readiness programs, creating opportunities to expand the program’s reach across New York City and beyond.

Recommendations

- Climate and workforce development organizations should integrate climate literacy, environmental justice and labor education into apprenticeship readiness and workforce training programs.
- Union apprenticeship pathways should continue to prioritize outreach to workers from low-income, frontline and historically underserved communities to ensure an equitable clean energy transition.
- Workforce development partners should invest in instructor training and peer-learning models that build organizations’ capacity to deliver high-quality climate education at scale.

- Clean energy workforce programs should emphasize the connection between technical skills, union careers and leadership opportunities within both the labor and environmental movements.
- Policymakers, funders and educational institutions should support partnerships between labor organizations, community groups and training providers to expand access to clean energy career pathways.

Research Impact

The Next Generation Clean Energy Program demonstrates how applied research can inform workforce development strategies. Findings from a 2023 CJI report, “Building an Equitable, Diverse, & Unionized Clean Energy Economy: What We Can Learn from Apprenticeship Readiness,” directly informed the design of the curriculum, helping translate research on apprenticeship readiness into a practical educational tool.

By integrating climate science, environmental justice, labor history and career exploration into apprenticeship readiness training, the program helped participants understand both the opportunities associated with the clean energy transition and the roles they can play in shaping it. The progression from research, to convening, curriculum development, pilot implementation, instructor training and program expansion illustrates a replicable model for translating research into practice.



Lara Skinner, Executive Director
Irs95@cornell.edu



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HOW NEW YORK CAN STILL ACHIEVE ITS CLIMATE, JOBS AND EQUITY MANDATES

Lynda Nguyen, Climate Jobs Institute associate; Iris Packman, Climate Jobs Institute senior research & policy development associate; Nathan Lamm, Climate Jobs Institute senior research support specialist; Tover Feist '26, contributing student author; Eric Plankey '27, contributing student author

Climate



Overview

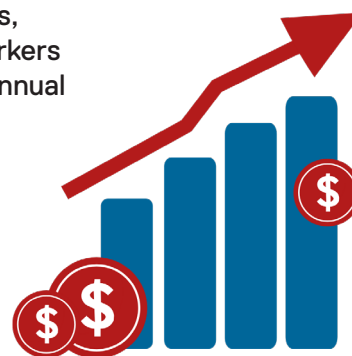
New York's progress toward the commitments established in the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) has been mixed. Much more is needed to meet the law's goals and address the severe affordability crisis the state is facing, even following amendments made to the CLCPA in 2026.

To meet the moment, New York needs to employ new approaches to the clean energy transition. This report, called "Key Interventions: How New York Can Still Achieve Its Climate, Jobs, and Equity Mandates," comes on the heels of federal divestment in renewable energy and identifies 10 immediate interventions New York can take to 1) drive down emissions; 2) expand access to high-quality union

jobs; 3) contribute economic, social and health benefits; and 4) make the state more affordable.

In the absence of renewable energy incentives, by 2035 New Yorkers could see their annual energy bills increase by

**\$170/
YEAR**



Source: 2025 Energy Innovation Report

Key Findings

- The state is behind on its clean energy goals and is expected to miss its 2030 goal of 70% renewable generation, as well as its 2040 goal of a 60% emissions reduction, which was enshrined in the 2019 law.
- As of June 2026, New York has met just 44% of its 2030 renewable generation target and has reduced statewide emissions by 24%.
- New York has entered a new phase of electricity demand growth due to increases in data center load, electric vehicles and building electrification. This has major ramifications for power producers, utilities, workers, ratepayers and policymakers alike.
- In the absence of renewable energy incentives, New Yorkers could see their annual energy bills increase by \$170 by 2035, according to a 2025 Energy Innovation report, adding to the state's already high cost of living.
- By 2030, the state must generate at least 39 GW of energy to meet solar demand.

Recommendations

- Update state renewable energy goals with strong labor standards.
- Renew the public mission of the New York Power Authority (NYPA) to meet New York's energy needs.
- Reimagine utilities to address the affordability crisis and expedite the clean energy transition.
- Address New York's housing affordability crisis.
- Expand transportation options available to New Yorkers.
- Implement cap-and-invest to fund climate action.
- Pass a green public buildings bond.
- Make energy more affordable for hardworking New Yorkers.

- Protect the rights of New York's private-sector workers to a safe and healthy workplace.
- Prepare the next generation of climate workers, and make good climate jobs accessible to frontline communities.

Research Impact

With these targeted interventions, the state can advance its climate and labor commitments to significantly reduce emissions, create and protect high-quality union jobs and ensure projects are implemented equitably.

New York established itself as a leader on climate mitigation through the passage of the 2019 CLCPA, but has pulled back on its most ambitious targets in recent years. The state can do more to ensure its most energy-vulnerable residents and workers are not left behind by the law's implementation. In the absence of federal leadership, the next phase of New York's equitable, worker-centered climate mitigation plan requires focused state-led intervention to support the CLCPA's goals.

The 10 recommendations identified in this report present key legislative and programmatic interventions that can strengthen New York's commitment to climate and labor action.



Lara Skinner, Executive Director
Irs95@cornell.edu

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IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR JUSTICE-IMPACTED NEW YORKERS WITH DISABILITIES

Matt Saleh, Criminal Justice and Employment Initiative senior associate director, Labor and Employment Law Program; Jen Brooks, Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability research associate

Justice-Impacted Employment



Overview

As separate groups, people with disabilities and justice-impacted individuals face significant barriers to work. They are among the most likely to be underemployed or unemployed, or to exit the labor market early. This is true both nationally and in New York, where each group has extremely low employment rates compared to the general population.

These groups are often thought of as separate service populations, but there is substantial overlap. Collaborative research by the Criminal Justice and Employment Initiative and the Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability has explored the need for intersectional approaches to serving New Yorkers with disabilities and justice-system involvement as they pursue employment.

One key consideration is state vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs, which provide people with disabilities support in achieving employment outcomes. Justice-impacted groups are a special service population in the VR program, but our analysis found they are underserved in New York. Additionally, corrections agencies need to increase appropriate referrals and wraparound services during the reentry process.

Key Findings

- Sixty-six percent of people in federal and state prisons report having at least one disability.
- Twenty-six percent of people with disabilities experience some type of justice-system interaction, a rate that far exceeds that of people without disabilities.

- As separate groups, employment rates are low for people with disabilities (about 45%) and people with prior convictions (about 40%).
- Our research provided clearer estimates of the intersectional impact, finding that employment rates for justice-impacted people with disabilities are only 39%, compared to 45% for people with disabilities and no prior justice-system involvement.
- Our analysis of New York VR data found that people with both disabilities and prior justice system involvement exited VR services with lower success in achieving employment (21% vs. 27%) and lower rates of “measurable skills gains” (7% vs. 15%).
- Rates of referral between corrections and VR agencies are also extremely low.

Recommendations

- To improve coordination between systems, New York should remove the “six months from release” criterion from VR policies and implement required frameworks for delivering VR services in carceral settings.
- New York should follow other states’ statutory examples outlining requirements that VR services options be exhausted for incarcerated individuals with disabilities prior to placement in corrections-operated vocational programs.
- New York should ensure that sufficient interagency agreements are in place between corrections and other key agencies serving people with disabilities.
- New York should develop regulatory and other policy frameworks that establish procedures for submitting VR applications, facilitate access to carceral settings for vocational rehabilitation counselors (VRCs) and ensure appropriate referral to VR for individuals under community supervision.

Research Impact

We have delivered training and technical assistance to create impact across stakeholder groups and improve interagency coordination around the state.

These include:

- Training sessions for law enforcement and justice system personnel in collaboration with the New York State Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) Justice Center
- Continuing Legal Education (CLE) training sessions for public defenders, district attorneys, magistrates and probation officers
- Technical assistance and training for state VR and workforce development professionals
- Training and technical assistance delivered to justice-impacted New Yorkers as they navigate employment challenges related to their disability, their criminal record or both



Matt Saleh, Senior Associate Director
mcs378@cornell.edu



Susanne Bruyère, Academic Director
smb23@cornell.edu

Wendy Strobel Gower, Thomas P. Golden Director
ws283@cornell.edu

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CRIMINAL RECORD ONLINE TOOLKIT UPDATED

Esta Bigler, Labor and Employment Law Program director; Caroline Scharf '26, contributing student author; Jason Hoge, Esq.

Justice-Impacted Employment



Overview

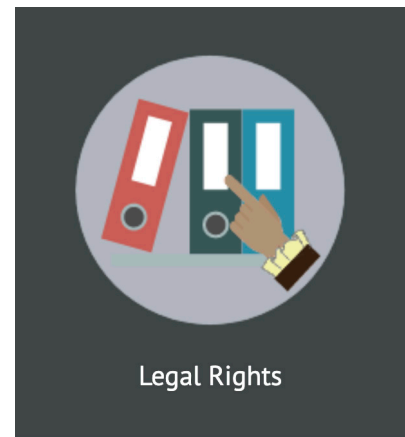
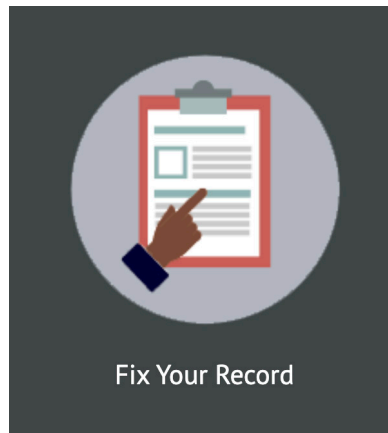
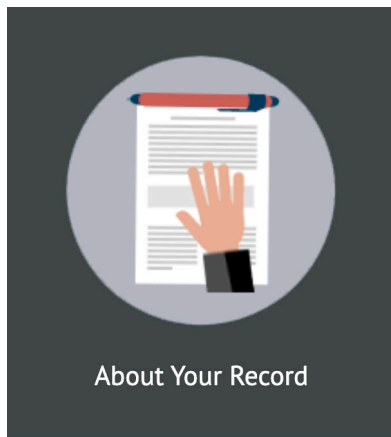
Developed by the Criminal Justice and Employment Initiative (CJEI), the Criminal Record Online Toolkit is designed to help the over two million New Yorkers with a criminal record navigate the overwhelming and complex criminal justice system. The online toolkit provides accessible, easy-to-understand resources that explain how to access and interpret justice-related information.

Part of a larger effort to remove barriers posed by a criminal record, with the goal of increasing employment of justice-impacted people, the revised toolkit includes recent changes in federal, state and local legislation and administrative processes. It provides comprehensive, up-to-date information on New York and neighboring states: Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, recognizing that people may travel to and seek work outside New York. The toolkit now includes expanded resources on civil rights restoration and

sentence commutations. It also includes sample forms that demonstrate how to complete key legal documents.

Key Toolkit Sections

- **About Your Record:** Explains records of arrests and prosecutions (“RAP sheets”) and how to request one from government agencies.
- **Fix Your Record:** Covers each state’s distinct process for correcting an individual’s criminal record. Individuals may also be eligible to petition for a record to be sealed or expunged, which restricts the public and many employers from accessing it.
- **Legal Rights:** Provides primers on rights bestowed by federal laws, such as the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act, and state and local statutes, such as Clean Slate laws and Ban the Box.



Next Steps

- Regularly update the toolkit information to ensure the resources remain up to date.
- Build on the toolkit's reach by continuing to share the resource with organizations that work with justice-impacted individuals.

Research Impact

The toolkit is part of broader CJEI efforts to advance employment opportunities for people with criminal records by working with employers, job seekers, reentry organizations, corrections officials and government officials. So far, the toolkit has had over 21,000 views across the site, providing users with the resources and information they need to navigate their criminal record.

Employment is important to reducing recidivism, but a criminal record – or mistakes in one – can pose a significant barrier for a job seeker. The toolkit will continue to reduce barriers for individuals with a criminal record seeking employment.



Matt Saleh, Senior Associate Director
mcs378@cornell.edu

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TOMPKINS COUNTY LIVING WAGE STUDY

Ian Greer, research professor and Ithaca Co-Lab director; Russell Weaver, Buffalo Co-Lab director of research; Wen Li Thian, Ph.D. student

County-Level Economy



Overview

The situation for low-income earners has become increasingly dire with recent increases in the cost of living, most notably from late 2021 to early 2023. Millions of U.S. workers are trapped in poverty, and the minimum wage is a powerful tool for tackling the problem. Unlike the federal government, which has frozen the minimum wage at \$7.25 since 2009, New York has more than doubled its minimum wage to \$16.00 over this same period.

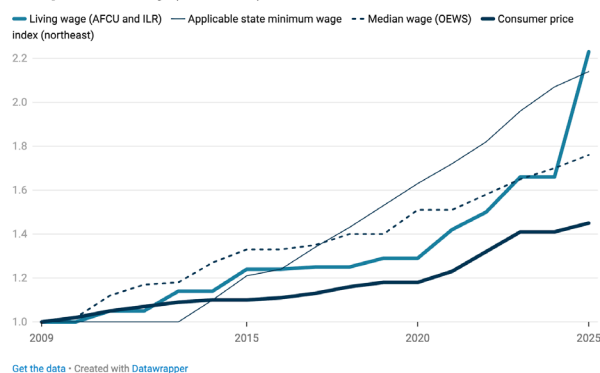
In Tompkins County, the most income-unequal metro area in upstate New York, activists, employers and policymakers have been working since the 1980s to increase the minimum wage to a living-wage level. A living wage covers “basic” expenditures for a single person who lives frugally and does not have to pay for childcare. Starting in the early 1990s, Alternatives Federal Credit Union began calculating a living wage.

Since 2018, ILR School researchers have been supporting local policymakers through research and facilitation. In 2023, the Ithaca and Buffalo Co-Labs wrote a feasibility study to peg the minimum wage to the living wage. Also in 2023, we began calculating the living wage, retaining the Alternatives Federal Credit Union’s basic approach but updating the methodology to use commercial hyperlocal expenditure data available through Cornell’s libraries.

Key Findings

- The 2026 Tompkins County living wage is \$25.08.
- In 2025, the living wage increased by 35%, reflecting the rapid cost-of-living increases over the previous two years.

Table 1. Indices of change in wages and the cost of living, Tompkins County (2009 = 1)



Living wage levels come from reports from Alternatives Federal Credit Union and the Ithaca and Buffalo Co-Lab. Median wages come from Occupational Wage and Employment Statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Inflation comes from the Consumer Price Index also produced by BLS. Minimum wage levels come from New York State Department of Labor's History of the Minimum Wage.

- Wages have not kept up with the cost of living in recent years. While the 2025 living wage was 2.23 times higher than the 2009 figure, the median wage increased by 1.76 times.
- Tens of thousands of workers, just under half of the county's wage earners, are making less than a living wage. The figure is highest for Black workers (67%) and Latinx workers (58%), compared to 48% for white workers.
- The gap between the minimum wage and living wage has widened from \$2.82 in 2021 to \$9.08 in 2026.
- The main drivers of the rapid cost-of-living increases from 2023 to 2025 were housing (\$1,276 to \$1,489 per month) and transportation (\$320.02 to \$519.98 per month).
- The cost of living is higher in Tompkins County than in the surrounding region and is increasing more rapidly. Since 2009, the Consumer Price Index for the Northeast Region has increased by 45.5%, whereas the Tompkins County Living Wage has increased by 73.8%.

Recommendations

- Policymakers should increase the minimum wage in line with cost-of-living increases, and where the cost of living is higher, the minimum wage should be higher.
- Minimum wage levels should be set with the cost of living in mind, using a high-quality living wage methodology.

Research Impact

Since 2025, the ILR School has published an annual living-wage calculation. This figure is used by a local program to certify living-wage employers, and by activists to demand wage increases from employers that do not pay a living wage. It is also used more broadly by journalists, policymakers and others to understand the magnitude of the low-wage problem. It is frequently cited in debates over whether Tompkins County should have a minimum wage higher than the state minimum wage.

The county has commissioned a study by the ILR School to gather input from stakeholders affected by local minimum wage legislation.

ILR Ithaca Co-Lab

Ian Greer, Director
icg2@cornell.edu

ILR Buffalo Co-Lab

Cathy Creighton, Director
cathycreighton@cornell.edu

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PROJECT LABOR AGREEMENTS AND NYC STREET TREE PLANTING CONTRACTS

Russell Weaver, Buffalo Co-Lab director of research; Anne Marie Brady, Worker Institute research director, worker rights and equity

NYC Law



Overview

The Buffalo Co-Lab and the Worker Institute conducted a feasibility study for the use of Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) in street tree planting contracts commissioned by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.

Project Labor Agreements are “job site constitutions” that set terms for an entire project rather than taking a piecemeal, trade-by-trade approach to contracting and negotiation.

As detailed in this report, the PLA design not only appears to be feasible for New York City’s street tree planting contracts, but it also has the potential to be net beneficial for the Department of Parks and Recreation, the public, firms that successfully bid on planting contracts and workers performing the labor on those contracts.



Key Findings

Using the PLA mechanism for street tree planting work in New York City is feasible and would likely yield the following positive benefits:

- Substantive cost savings from standardizing work crew compositions and making use of the relatively new “Green Infrastructure” pay rate.
- Nontrivial cost savings from establishing a joint-trustee group benefit fund for all workers on the PLA project.
- Upward pressure on safety standards, resulting in greater immediate cost savings on insurance premiums and potential long-term savings due to reduced tort claims.
- Upward pressure on quality standards.
- Faster contract execution and quicker tree planting.
- Faster dispute resolution.
- Improved capacity to meet or exceed goals for minority- and/or women-owned business enterprises.

Recommendations

Given the consistency with which PLAs are found to provide broad social and economic benefits to the public and based on this report’s findings, we recommend that the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation adopt a PLA for its street tree planting construction contracts.

Potential Research Impact

The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation is well positioned to generate even greater social and economic benefits for the people, workers and neighborhoods of New York City by using PLAs for its street tree planting and site-work contracts.

Based on the report’s findings, we conclude that efforts to apply prevailing union standards – e.g., for work quality, wages, benefits, worker training and so on – to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation tree planting construction contracts have the potential to save trees, time and money.

Thus, street tree planting with a PLA is feasible, and it appears to be a good deal for the city, its residents and its local construction workforce.

ILR Buffalo Co-Lab

Cathy Creighton, Director
cathycreighton@cornell.edu

ILR Worker Institute

Patricia Campos-Medina, Executive Director
pec1@cornell.edu

Risa Lieberwitz, Academic Director
rl15@cornell.edu

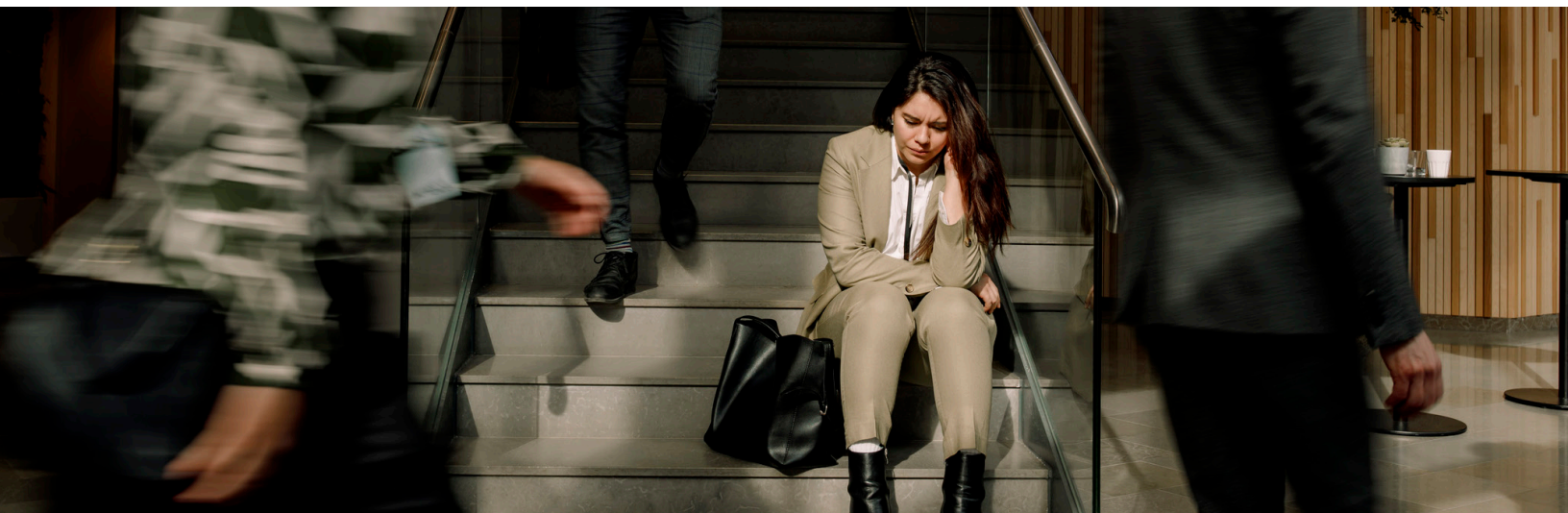
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RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

Michael Lenmark, Worker Institute survey statistician; Patricia Campos-Medina, Worker Institute executive director; Zoë West, Worker Institute senior researcher; KC Wagner, Worker Institute senior extension associate emerita, equity at work

Empire State Poll



Overview

This policy brief shares findings from the 2024 Empire State Poll on racial discrimination, sexual harassment and intimate partner violence in the workplace, as well as how people respond to such issues. Although New York state has strong protections and services available to individuals experiencing these issues, discrimination, harassment and intimate partner violence have the potential to impact workers' economic security, well-being and workplace safety.

Labor unions can play a unique role in addressing these issues by offering their members union-specific means of filing grievances, accessing

resources and receiving training and education on recognizing and reporting these issues. However, numerous workplace initiatives and research endeavors aimed at supporting workers experiencing these issues have faced funding cuts or been shut down altogether. Continuing to support these efforts is essential to ensure that workers can work with dignity, workplaces can attract new employees and researchers can collect data relevant to the study of these issues.

Key Findings

Reported among all Empire State Poll respondents:

23.6%

experienced racial discrimination in the workplace.

22.3%

experienced workplace sexual harassment.

18.3%

experienced intimate partner violence. Of those, 44.2% indicated that intimate partner violence impacted their employment.

9.3%

experienced both workplace sexual harassment and intimate partner violence in their lifetimes.



Research Impact

These results demonstrate that racial discrimination, sexual harassment and intimate partner violence continue to impact workers throughout New York state.

Recommendations

- Support women's committees and similar employee resource groups.
- Increase state, local and philanthropic investment in research.

ILR Worker Institute

Patricia Campos-Medina, Executive Director
pec1@cornell.edu

Risa Lieberwitz, Academic Director
rl15@cornell.edu



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UNPAID CAREGIVING AND ITS IMPACT ON NEW YORKERS' PAID EMPLOYMENT

Zoë West, Worker Institute senior researcher; Michael Lenmark, Worker Institute survey statistician

Empire State Poll



Overview

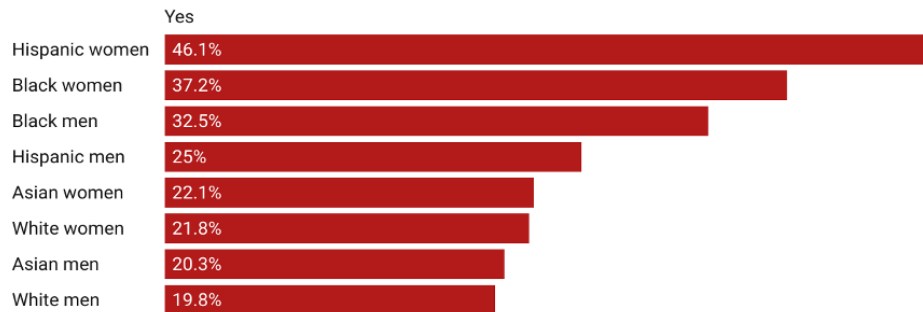
The national care crisis is sharply visible in New York. Those caring for family and loved ones are straining under the weight of unpaid caregiving, while support for care remains unaffordable and difficult to access; at the same time, there is a shortage of paid care workers, who endure devalued, underpaid jobs.

This brief presents an analysis of data on unpaid caregiving and its impact on New Yorkers' paid employment from the 2024 Empire State Poll. The findings affirm that caregiving – both unpaid caregiving and access to paid care support – remains a pressing concern for a substantial number of New Yorkers providing care for children and/or adults. Caregiving respondents widely report the toll caregiving takes on their ability to do paid work, with the highest costs reported by people of color and women. The lack of affordable care support stands out as a significant barrier to employment.

Key Findings

- More than a quarter (26.9%) of all caregiving respondents said their caregiving responsibilities made it difficult to maintain a job, with Hispanic (38.8%) and Black respondents (36.9%) reporting this challenge at significantly higher rates. These findings were even more pronounced for Hispanic women (46.1%) and Black women (39.7%).
- More than one-third of caregiving respondents reduced their paid work due to their unpaid caregiving responsibilities, with women, Hispanic and Black respondents disproportionately affected.
- Among respondents who reduced their paid work due to unpaid caregiving responsibilities, the most common reason reported was that care was unaffordable.

Have your unpaid caregiving responsibilities made it difficult for you to maintain a job?



Universe: Respondents who reported unpaid caregiving responsibilities [n=752 weighted observations]
Subsamples: Hispanic women [n=105], Black women [n=72], Black men [n=47], Hispanic men [n=56], Asian women [n=29], White women [n=224], Asian men [n=39], White men [n=180]
Source: 2024 Cornell University ILR Empire State Poll • Created with Datawrapper

Recommendations

- Ensure universal access to childcare, long-term care and paid family leave policies to bolster people's agency in determining how much time they spend on caregiving and paid work.
- Strengthen worker representation and voice to establish workplace policies for paid leave and caregiving flexibility, as well as higher pay and job security, to enable people to have more agency in their care choices.
- Efforts to expand the care workforce must prioritize securing more dignified pay and working conditions for care workers.

Research Impact

A range of changes recently enacted by the Trump administration threatens to sharply aggravate the crisis of care. Major cuts to Medicaid, the targeting of immigrants and the rollback of important worker protections threaten to reduce access to care and to put the care workforce at risk. On the whole, such changes are likely to increase reliance on unpaid caregiving, intensifying the strain families already bear. Within this context, the findings of this research reinforce the urgency of state- and local-level policy responses that recognize and support unpaid caregiving, make care more affordable and accessible, and provide dignified pay and working conditions for caregiving jobs.



ILR Worker Institute

Patricia Campos-Medina, Executive Director
pec1@cornell.edu

Risa Lieberwitz, Academic Director
r115@cornell.edu

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BUILDING A MENTAL HEALTH PEER SUPPORT NETWORK FOR CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

Arianna Schindle, Worker Institute director of training and curriculum design; Jeff Grabelsky, Worker Institute senior extension associate

Mental Health



Overview

Construction workers face some of the highest rates of suicide and drug overdose in the U.S. Dangerous and physically demanding working conditions, exposure to traumatic incidents and stigma around expressing vulnerability contribute to the crisis, while discouraging workers from discussing mental health or seeking help.

To address the crisis, the Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York (BCTC), representing approximately 100,000 union members in the New York City region, began developing a peer assistance program led by directors of union member assistance programs (MAPs) in 2024.

BCTC subsequently partnered with the Worker Institute to co-create the Building Trades Peer Support Network (BTPSN), launched in March 2026 with funding from the New York Building Foundation. Drawing on MAP directors' frontline experiences, the BTPSN is pioneering a comprehensive training program in peer support and crisis response to destigmatize mental health and reduce suicide in New York City's construction industry.



Key Findings

- Construction workers are six times more likely to die from suicide than from jobsite-related injuries and four times more likely to commit suicide than the average American.
- BTPSN has already trained 20 union-based instructors to deliver peer support education across participating unions.
- During the current pilot phase of the initiative, the BTPSN has placed 20 trained peer supporters on union job sites in New York City.
- BTPSN plans to train 1,000 union members (1% of BCTC membership) to act as on-site peer supporters.

Recommendations

- New York state should continue to provide financial support for the ongoing operation and expansion of the BTPSN program, enabling it to train more workers and instructors while increasing workers' access to peers who can recognize distress and provide appropriate resources.
- The program's efficacy should be evaluated. The New York City initiative could serve as a model for similar multi-union programs to promote the mental wellness of unionized construction workers throughout New York state and potentially the nation.

Program Impact

The BTPSN is an innovative peer support and training program that is creating a system of care and emergency response. The two-hour “It’s Not Weak to Speak” training is open to all union members and addresses industry stressors and cultural norms and helps to reduce mental health stigma. Recruited members may then complete a seven-hour advanced peer supporter course that prepares them to provide confidential jobsite support, assess crisis levels and refer appropriate cases to MAP directors or other resources.

The Worker Institute is conducting an ongoing “train-the-trainer” program that prepares MAP directors to deliver both curricula to union members.

BTPSN offers a potentially scalable model for reducing mental health stigma and strengthening suicide and overdose prevention across the construction industry.

ILR Worker Institute

Patricia Campos-Medina, Executive Director
pec1@cornell.edu

Risa Lieberwitz, Academic Director
rl15@cornell.edu

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FASHION'S DATA DOUBLES: HOW AI IS RESHAPING MODELING WORK

Zoë West, Worker Institute senior researcher; Alexandra Mateescu, Data & Society researcher; Sanjay Pinto, Worker Institute fellow

Artificial Intelligence



Overview

This brief shares key findings from research investigating how artificial intelligence (AI) technologies impact workers in the fashion industry, how they experience and perceive the use of AI in their industry, and what it may mean for the future of modeling as a profession.

In an industry long characterized by major power asymmetries and serious job-quality challenges, the use of AI technologies appears to be amplifying existing inequities and dynamics of exploitation. We found that a variety of actors – including modeling agencies, brands and AI startups – take advantage of existing industry gray areas, often treating models' labor as "data" to be collected in order to bypass contractual protections and increase opportunities to profit. In turn, models struggle with a lack of control over their own "likeness," worsening job precarity and extending dehumanizing practices that have long been entrenched in the industry.

Key Findings

- AI technologies heighten models' vulnerability to nonconsensual uses of their images.
- Generative AI is being used to exploit existing power inequities and gray areas in the fashion industry. By treating models' images and measurements as data to be extracted for profit, brands can use AI tools to generate additional value and profit without compensating models further or rehiring them.
- The increasing use of AI tools contributes to greater job precarity for fashion workers.

Generative AI is being used to take advantage of existing power inequities and gray areas within the fashion industry, enabling fashion brands and others to more intensely exploit models' labor.



Recommendations

- Advance legislative and enforcement efforts that bolster workers' rights generally while also contending with specific forms of AI-enabled labor exploitation. For example, the recently implemented New York State Fashion Workers Act strengthens the rights of models broadly, and requires their consent around the creation and use of digital replicas through AI and other means.
- Support the enforcement of protections through rights training and education that support fashion workers' ability to advocate for their rights on the job.

Research Impact

This research reveals how brands and other fashion industry actors are using a variety of AI technologies to cut labor costs and shorten production timelines, exacerbating the major power asymmetries and job-quality challenges in the modeling industry.

This research has received significant media attention and was featured in a panel discussion during New York Fashion Week in 2025. Stakeholders have also used the research to help advocate for legislative protections for fashion models – who are independent contractors and thus do not have the right to unionize and bargain collectively – and to educate models about this issue so they can more effectively advocate for themselves on the job and collectively for stronger protections.

ILR Worker Institute

Patricia Campos-Medina, Executive Director

pec1@cornell.edu

Risa Lieberwitz, Academic Director

rl15@cornell.edu

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WE ARE HOME: WORKERS WITH TPS BELONG HERE

Patricia Campos-Medina, Worker Institute executive director; Natalia Navas, Labor Leadership Initiative extension associate

Immigration



Overview

This research focuses on the lives of workers with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in New York state. The study's overall findings reveal a community that plays a critical role in New York state's economy, is highly engaged in civic and political organizations, and has an overwhelmingly positive view of their own sense of belonging; community members feel that New York and the U.S. is their home.

This report focuses on Central American workers, who have held TPS status the longest. By examining the impact of this status on Central American TPS holders, many of whom have been in this country for 25 to 30 years, this research seeks to contribute to understanding how temporary immigration status affects precarity in U.S. workplaces.

Key Findings

- TPS workers overwhelmingly identify New York and the U.S. as their home.
- Study participants reported strong integration into their communities and commitment to American values.
- TPS holders have made substantial economic contributions through decades of legal employment and tax payments.
- More than 279,200 American-born citizen children depend on TPS-holder parents for their well-being and stability.
- The threat of deportation and family separation creates lasting social, emotional and economic harm.



Recommendations

- Enact reforms to create a TPS pathway to permanent residency and citizenship.
- Strengthen interagency collaboration on TPS.
- Expand education and understanding on transnational immigration and foreign policy trends that impact migration from the region.
- Expand labor and union leadership education.
- Center TPS holders and their organizations in policy development.

Research Impact

By examining the impact of TPS status on Central Americans, this research seeks to contribute to understanding how temporary immigration status impacts workers' precarity in U.S. workplaces.

Stripping the TPS legal status of countless immigrants of color, including 300,000 Haitians and 600,000 Venezuelans, threatens to further increase the exploitation of low-wage immigrant workers in key industries, such as healthcare, construction and logistics services. It also threatens the stability of the lives of workers who have become embedded in local communities, are parents of American-born citizen children and have invested their human capital in the American economy.



ILR Worker Institute

Patricia Campos-Medina, Executive Director

pec1@cornell.edu

Risa Lieberwitz, Academic Director

rl15@cornell.edu

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EVALUATING THE REGULATION AND REFORM IMPLEMENTATION OF STREET VENDING LAWS IN NYC

Andrew Wolf, Department of Global Labor & Work, assistant professor; Dylan Hatch, ILR M.S. '25

NYC Law



Overview

Street vending has long been an important entry point to the local labor market for immigrants in New York City. Thousands of New Yorkers build their livelihoods by serving the tourism industry and providing fresh food to our communities. Recently, New York City engaged in a series of reform efforts aimed at reducing barriers to obtaining vendor permits and limiting the criminalization of street vending. This report evaluates the regulatory environment faced by street vendors, investigates the implementation of these reform efforts, and examines the disparate impacts and costs of vending enforcement.

Key Findings

- **Heavy and duplicative regulatory environment:** Perhaps no industry in New York City faces regulation from as many agencies and departments as street vending. The result is duplicative efforts to regulate vendors and high exposure to ticketing.
- **Costly and ineffective enforcement:** While many enforcement efforts in New York City that involve issuing citations and fines generate revenue, all available evidence indicates that street vendor enforcement operates at a significant deficit.

- **Extreme racial disparities in the impacts of ticketing vendors:** Comparing where violations occur (mostly in wealthy white neighborhoods) to where those receiving tickets live (mostly in poor immigrant communities) unveils a clear pattern of racialization.
- Reform efforts have failed to meet targets.

NYC's Vendor Fine Return Per Dollar Spent on Enforcers' Wages (2019-2024)

Agency	Year	Violations Issued	Hourly Pay	0.5/hr \$ Return	1/hr \$ Return
DCWP	2021	71	\$31.23	\$2.09	\$1.05
DCWP	2022	1063	\$31.23	\$4.38	\$2.19
DCWP	2023	600	\$31.23	\$3.70	\$1.85
DOHMH	2019	1369	\$31.16	\$3.54	\$1.77
DOHMH	2020	770	\$31.16	\$3.31	\$1.65
DOHMH	2021	233	\$31.16	\$2.84	\$1.42
DOHMH	2022	559	\$31.16	\$2.20	\$1.10
DOHMH	2023	1212	\$31.16	\$2.42	\$1.21
DOHMH	2024	1287	\$31.16	\$1.57	\$0.78
PARKS	2019	722	\$21.97	\$0.14	\$0.07
PARKS	2020	243	\$21.97	\$0.20	\$0.10
PARKS	2021	374	\$21.97	\$0.17	\$0.08
PARKS	2022	423	\$21.97	\$0.22	\$0.11
PARKS	2023	617	\$21.97	\$0.25	\$0.13
PARKS	2024	754	\$21.97	\$0.06	\$0.03
POLICE	2019	1699	\$40.40	\$0.96	\$0.48
POLICE	2020	511	\$40.40	\$1.94	\$0.97
POLICE	2021	254	\$40.40	\$1.06	\$0.53
POLICE	2022	1180	\$40.40	\$1.20	\$0.60
POLICE	2023	1900	\$40.40	\$1.59	\$0.79
POLICE	2024	3297	\$40.40	\$1.16	\$0.58

Report Conclusion

Street vending is a vital source of employment for the most vulnerable populations in New York City. Vending is an essential service that provides fresh food and supports the all-important tourism industry throughout the city. The recent efforts to expand access to vending opportunities through expanding access to licenses, streamlining enforcement by centralizing it under a single agency, and shielding vendors from police enforcement – which can expose them to immigration consequences – all represent important reform steps.

This report found New York City has a long way to go in meeting these goals.

Research Impact

This report was used by the NYC Council and the Street Vendor Project in the push to modernize the city's street vending laws and permitting system. Since the report's release, numerous laws have been passed to fix the deficiencies outlined in the report.

The report was featured in an article by The City Reporter, called "Vending Enforcement Slams Poor Minorities in White Neighborhoods."

ILR Worker Institute

Patricia Campos-Medina, Executive Director
pec1@cornell.edu

Risa Lieberwitz, Academic Director
rl15@cornell.edu

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DISABILITY STATISTICS PROJECT OFFERS STATEWIDE AND LOCAL INFORMATION

Sarah von Schrader, Yang-Tan Institute director of research and program evaluation; William Erickson, Yang-Tan Institute senior research specialist

Disability

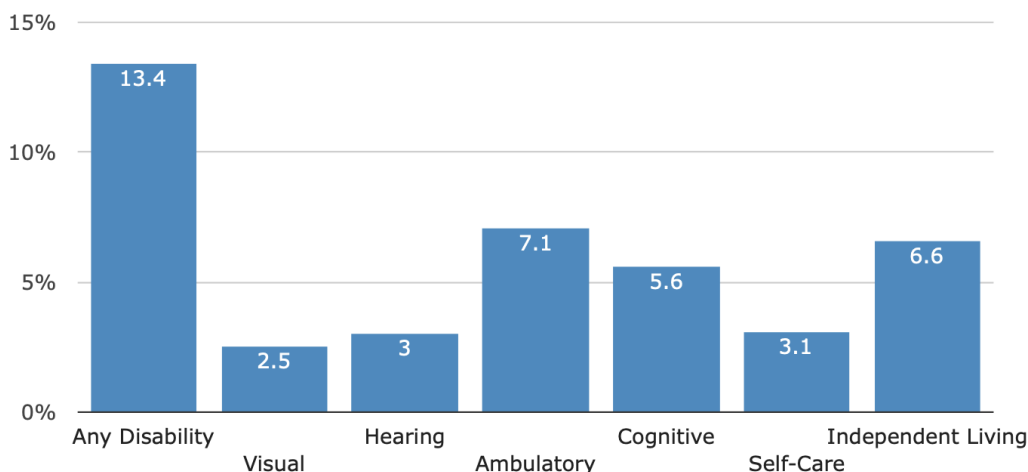


Overview

Researchers at the Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability (YTI) have spent decades examining disability statistics. Working with the institute's web team, they have created an interactive website aimed at policymakers, public administrators and others interested in accurate information about people with disabilities and employment. Based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, this site offers downloadable state-based reports, such as "2024 Disability Status Report New York," and the ability to view and download maps, charts and tabular data at national, state, local and hyperlocal levels.



Prevalence of disability among non-institutionalized people of all ages in New York in 2024*



*Note: Children under the age of five were only asked about vision and hearing disabilities. The independent living disability question was only asked of persons aged 16 years old and older

Disability Statistics for New York State in 2024

- **Employment:** The employment rate of working-age people (ages 21-64) with disabilities was 42.5%.
- **Looking for work:** The percentage of unemployed people with disabilities actively looking for work was 8.4%.
- **Full-time/full-year employment:** The percentage of working-age people with disabilities working full-time/full-year was 27.7%.
- **Annual earnings:** The median annual earnings of working-age people with disabilities working full-time/full-year was \$58,000.
- **Annual household income:** The median annual income of households with working-age people with disabilities was \$65,000.
- **Poverty:** The poverty rate of working-age people with disabilities was 29.9%.

Research Impact

In addition to offering information on the user-friendly Disability Statistics website, researchers at YTI provide technical assistance to a variety of policymakers across New York state. By assisting with access and interpreting large datasets related to New Yorkers with disabilities and employment, YTI experts help policymakers understand the impact of policies and practices and create policies that align with New York's Employment First agenda.

ILR Yang-Tan Institute

Susanne Bruyère, Academic Director
smb23@cornell.edu

Wendy Strobel Gower, Thomas P. Golden Director
ws283@cornell.edu

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Centers, institutes and programs featured in this report:

ILR Buffalo Co-Lab

CONTACT:

Cathy Creighton

Director

cathycreighton@cornell.edu

The [*Cornell ILR Buffalo Co-Lab*](#) for Economic Development continues to play a leading role in Buffalo's resurgence with a more equitable economy. By partnering with Western New York businesses, unions, government, education and community organizations, the Buffalo Co-Lab impacts New Yorkers statewide through workplace health and safety programs, economic development and labor research, immersion experiences for students and many other initiatives.

ILR CAROW

CONTACT:

Ariel Avgar

Director

aca27@cornell.edu

The [*Center for Applied Research on Work*](#) supports research that solves practical problems, improves the lives of workers and informs policymaking. We serve as an incubator for applied research. We provide funding and coordination for innovative projects and initiatives. Our network of affiliated faculty, researchers and practitioners helps guide and facilitate novel approaches to advancing work, labor and employment.

ILR CJI

CONTACT:

Lara Skinner

Executive Director

lrs95@cornell.edu

The [*Climate Jobs Institute*](#) is guiding New York and the nation's transition to a strong, equitable and resilient clean energy economy. CJI's approach tackles the climate crisis, creates high-quality jobs, confronts race and gender inequality, and builds a diverse and inclusive workforce.

ILR CJEI

CONTACT:

Matt Saleh

Senior Associate Director

mcs378@cornell.edu

The [*Criminal Justice and Employment Initiative*](#) improves employment opportunities for people with criminal records by designing and delivering legal employment training to close information gaps, implement best practices and integrate job seekers with criminal records into the workforce.

ILR Ithaca Co-Lab

CONTACT:

Ian Greer

Director

icg2@cornell.edu

The [*Ithaca Co-Lab*](#) officially began its work in early 2020. Researchers and students who serve community partners use resources to tackle the challenges of fighting unemployment, winning a living wage and organizing for worker voice in Ithaca and the surrounding region.

ILR Worker Institute

CONTACTS:

Patricia Campos-Medina
Executive Director
pec1@cornell.edu

Risa Lieberwitz
Academic Director
rl15@cornell.edu

The *Worker Institute* engages in research and education on contemporary labor issues to confront growing economic and social inequalities. A core value of the Worker Institute is that collective representation and workers' rights are vital to a fair economy, robust democracy and just society.

ILR Yang-Tan Institute

CONTACTS:

Susanne Bruyère
Academic Director
smb23@cornell.edu

Wendy Strobel Gower
Thomas P. Golden Executive Director
ws283@cornell.edu

The *K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability* provides a unique combination of research and outreach. With a mission of advancing the inclusion and full participation of people with disabilities in the workplace and community, our research, training and technical resources expand knowledge about disability inclusion, leading to meaningful change.

Other centers, institutes and programs:

ILR CAHRS

CONTACT:

Brad Bell
Director
brad.bell@cornell.edu

The *Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies* is the world's leading human resource partnership between industry and academia, and a unique network of corporate partners from the world's top companies. ILR's top HR faculty work directly with partners and share new research and applications to create excellence in human resources.

ILR GLI

CONTACT:

Jason Judd
Executive Director
jasonj@cornell.edu

Sarosh Kuruvilla
Academic Director
sck4@cornell.edu

The *Global Labor Institute* promotes dialogue between multiple stakeholders in order to find pathways to more sustainable labor practices in global supply chains, particularly in the garment sector.



CONTACT:

M. Diane Burton
Director
burton@cornell.edu

The *Institute for Compensation Studies* is an interdisciplinary center that researches, teaches and communicates about monetary and non-monetary rewards from work, and how these rewards influence outcomes for individuals, companies, industries and economies.



CONTACT:

Lars Vilhuber
Executive Director
lars.vilhuber@cornell.edu

The *Labor Dynamics Institute* creates and makes accessible data on the dynamics of labor markets for research networks and statistical agencies. LDI's work informs policymakers, researchers and educators, and includes partnerships with key organizations, including the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Science Foundation.



CONTACT:

Esta Bigler
Director
erb4@cornell.edu

The *Labor and Employment Law Program* examines the laws and policies that impact the workplace and offers educational programs. We provide labor and employment law education for job seekers, employees, employers, government agencies, community organizations and unions in support of the Cannabis Workforce Initiative.



CONTACT:

Harry Katz
Director
harry.katz@cornell.edu

The *Scheinman Institute* combines the academic depth of faculty in conflict/dispute resolution, employee relations and labor relations with the practical knowledge of leading practitioners in the field to provide intensive skill development for individuals and best practices for organizations.

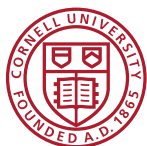
The institute trains more students in mediation and arbitration than any other school in the United States.



CONTACT:

Samuel Bacharach
Director
sb22@cornell.edu

The *Smithers Institute* is dedicated to advancing knowledge of alcohol, drug and health issues in the workplace. The Smithers Institute advocates that the workplace is a critical arena for prevention, intervention and treatment of alcohol-related problems.



ILR School

ilr.cornell.edu

Buffalo

1300 Elmwood Avenue
Buckham Hall B234
Buffalo, NY 14222

Ithaca

121 Tower Road
Ithaca, NY 14853

New York City

570 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10022



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