



The Future of American Jobs

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Better jobs and more productive workers are the key to a brighter future for the U.S. economy. In a series of compelling briefs, reports, and media contributions, SSN scholars detail ways to improve job quality and labor market flexibility, help humans compete with computers, support women and men who combine wage-earning with family care, and improve conditions for low-wage workers.

> [Making American Jobs Better for Everyone](#)

[Paul Osterman](#), Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Economic revival alone will not ensure that the U.S. economy offers more jobs with good wages and benefits – and taking steps to increase the supply of such good jobs will improve overall economic performance. Policymakers can raise the minimum wage, reward firms that upgrade employee skills and provide career ladders, and strengthen unions and other forms of organized employee voice.

> [How Computers are Transforming American Jobs](#)

[Frank Levy](#), Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and [Richard J. Murnane](#), Harvard University

Robots and other computerized technologies are eliminating many rote jobs, but human workers are holding their own in posts at all wage levels that require judgment and the synthesis of situational information. In a pathbreaking study, [Dancing with Robots](#), Levy and Murnane untangle the job market trends and explain how America can educate young people to do jobs that computers cannot handle, now or in the future.

> [Paid Family Leave in California and the Future of U.S. Family Policy](#)

[Ruth Milkman](#), City University of New York, and [Eileen Appelbaum](#), Center for Economic and Policy Research

American workers, especially women, must often combine wage-earning with family care work. For employees of large firms, U.S. law guarantees the right to take leave for family needs, but it does not currently require wage replacement, so leave is a realistic option only for the best-paid employees. Now California and New Jersey have taken the next step: to make leave possible for low-wage workers by requiring that employers and employees collect small payroll contributions to fund wage replacement. Costs to business are low and researchers have found clear benefits for economic efficiency. If the United States wants to boost productivity and help families raise the workers of the future, paid leave laws should be enacted by all states or legislated by Congress.

> [How Innovative Worker Centers Help America's Most Vulnerable Wage Earners](#)

[Janice Fine](#), Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations

With unions in sharp decline, more than 200 worker centers across the country are stepping into the breach. Centers provide legal services, English classes, and information to low-wage workers; and they advocate for worker rights in disputes about wages and hours and workplace safety. Increasingly, worker centers are banding together in federations such as the National Day Laborer Organizing Network and the National Domestic Worker Alliance.

> [“ObamaCare Cures ‘Job Lock,’”](#) *USA Today*, February 5, 2014
[Theda Skocpol](#), Harvard University, and [Katherine Swartz](#), Harvard School of Public Health

The United States currently has proportionately fewer small businesses than many other advanced nations, in part because so many American workers have been chained to suboptimal jobs in order to get access to affordable health insurance from large employers. More than a quarter of U.S. employees say they are stuck for this reason. With Affordable Care reforms now taking effect, experts estimate that U.S. self-employment will grow by more than ten percent. Millions of working men and women can now quit jobs or reduce work hours to start small businesses, care for family members, or pursue valued volunteer pursuits. Overall, the U.S. economy will become more flexible, efficient, and innovative – as further documented in Skocpol and Swartz’s [brief on job lock](#) and a related [brief on health reform and the economy](#) by MIT’s [Jon Gruber](#). These efficiency gains are above and beyond gains to employment in health care businesses fueled by new public expenditures authorized in the Affordable Care Act.