



COMMENTARY MANUFACTURING

Industrial Policy Requires Care Infrastructure Investments



The combination of the Inflation Reduction Act, the CHIPS and Science Act, and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)—all signed into law by President Biden in the past two years—will create millions of new jobs in the American economy in the months and years ahead. These new industrial policy jobs will be across energy, physical infrastructure, manufacturing, science, and technology. With the Biden administration’s focus on creating “good jobs,” employers will need to ensure that these jobs come with compensation, rights, and benefits that support workers both on the job and at home. And, with the new legislation’s focus on promoting equity, employers in these sectors will need to recruit and retain a diverse pool of candidates.

Diversifying the workforce in these sectors would be essential even if the new legislation had no equity goal, because the practicalities of filling that many forthcoming jobs will require dipping into a more diverse workforce and attracting more women, Black and Hispanic workers, and men and women without college degrees. People in these demographics are likely to have care responsibilities—for children, disabled loved ones, and older family members—that must be met in order for them to train for and fully participate in these new jobs. Building care infrastructure into industrial infrastructure is the best way to ensure that these good jobs that have been created have people to work in them.

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Filling New Jobs Requires Supporting Diverse Care Needs

Without diversifying their workforces, employers in these sectors will see their current worker shortages worsen. For example, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, manufacturing has more unfilled job openings than unemployed people with the experience needed. That means that even if everyone with relevant experience not currently employed was employed, the durable goods manufacturing industry would only fill half of the vacant jobs. And that was before the Biden administration and Congress catalyzed the creation of millions of new jobs.

Today, the manufacturing workforce is 70 percent male, and nearly 65 percent white.¹ Black workers represent 11.9 percent of the entire workforce, but less than 10 percent of manufacturing workers. In addition, Black and Hispanic workers employed in the manufacturing sector are far less likely to be in management or sales than white workers, which are typically higher paying, and also are under-represented in installation and repair jobs, which are frequently the next step up from production jobs. Some jobs are even

more lopsided—for example, nearly nine in ten solar panel installers and broadband technicians are men. It therefore follows that women hold few of these types of jobs. In fact, only 6 percent of welders are women, and less than 11 percent of the semiconductor industry workforce are women.

The National Partnership for Women and Families predicts that, if nothing changes, out of the 800,000 new jobs created each year by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), Black women will account for less than 4 percent of these jobs, Latinas less than 5 percent, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women less than 2 percent, multiracial women less than 1 percent, and Native women just 0.1 percent. In total, women will account for only 29 percent of jobs created by the IIJA.

Something has to change if employers want to fill all of the new jobs.

Lessons from TCF's Industry and Inclusion Cohort

The Century Foundation's (TCF's) Industry and Inclusion cohort, which is a learning community of twelve community colleges focused on centering racial and gender equity in the manufacturing sector through trauma-informed approaches, ecosystem partnerships, and credentialing, has provided important insights into what it will take to recruit more people into manufacturing jobs. TCF colleagues have interviewed nearly ninety community colleges across the country on the functioning of their manufacturing credentialing programs and their work fostering belonging for communities of color and women. A major theme across interviews was the necessity of child care and transportation for women to successfully complete this program, particularly with the sector being unique for workers typically needing to report to their plants prior to 6:00 a.m., and needing accessible and affordable child care to thrive and maintain employment in the sector.

Child care during nontraditional hours, such as at 6:00 a.m., or during unusually timed shifts, can be some of the hardest to find, but this type of child care is essential to support many of these new jobs. Some innovators have made sure these needs are met. For example, Care That Works (CTW) is a coalition of grassroots community groups and labor unions that organize working parents and grandparents, nannies and au pairs, family child care providers, and center-based child care workers in Greater Boston and across Massachusetts. CTW received funding from the American Rescue Plan Act that supported them to increase the number of child care providers who offer nontraditional hours for essential workers, including hospital, construction, and education workers. By securing the funding to support those child care providers, CTW is also supporting the essential work happening in their communities. This type of model could work in communities across the country—in manufacturing as well as elsewhere—but scaling it up requires the resources to do so.

Successful Industrial Policy Requires Care Infrastructure

Child care is not important just for women who want to work in these industrial jobs, but for all workers. Today, 12 percent of workers in the manufacturing industry are parents of young children, and 28 percent of fathers who work in manufacturing have children under age 5. In addition, men are playing a larger role in caring for adult family members as well. AARP's 2020 study on caregiving for adults finds estimates that in 2020 there were 53 million adult caregivers in the United States—that's one out of every five adults over the age of 18. Thirty-nine percent are men. So, recruiting men into these new jobs will also require investing in care.

Many of the new jobs that will need to be filled can be filled by people who have completed less than a college degree. These members of the workforce are the ones least likely to have the resources to privately pay for child care or long-term services and supports for older or disabled loved ones. Yet, these workers will need access to these supportive services in order to train for and fill these new jobs.

Access to needed care services is limited for workers without a college degree. One survey found that parents with only a vocational or technical degree, such as a manufacturing credential, were less likely to use a formal child care arrangement than those with a bachelor's degree—mostly because they could not find or afford options for such care. Because a lack of care impacts these workers' ability to train for new jobs and work without disruption, filling new jobs will require that the United States invest in a care infrastructure to support people's care needs.

Studies have shown that, when care needs are supported, more people can join the manufacturing and construction workforce.

The new industrial policy embodied in recent legislation aims to bring new jobs to new communities, including rural areas. This challenge will also require care investments, because these are the areas that often have the lowest supply of child care options, let alone options that are affordable and meet families' needs. Half of American children live in child care deserts, where fewer than one third of children have access to a slot at a licensed facility. In rural communities, the shortage is even more significant, and many communities have no child care facilities at all.

Studies have shown that, when care needs are supported, more people can join the manufacturing and construction workforce. For example, a 2020 evaluation of the highway construction workforce development program in Oregon found that those receiving child care were 11 percent more likely to complete the apprenticeship program than those that did not. At the same time, apprentices with

household income below \$30,000 were more likely to report the affordability of child care as a problem and that they left their jobs because of it.

A nationwide survey of job training administrators conducted by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research found that insufficient child care, problems with work hours or scheduling, family care responsibilities, and personal or family health issues were all common reasons people did not complete their programs. One administrator from a community college program noted:

Child care is the biggest challenge for students. By providing an on-campus option where students can drop off and pick up their dependent children, the college has alleviated that barrier for several of my students who otherwise couldn’t take their fulltime schedule and graduate on time. This child care opportunity is a huge component to the students’ success.

This is a common story for caregivers participating in education and training—they are more likely to complete their programs if they have support to meet their care needs.

Looking Ahead

Creating millions of new jobs achieves nothing without people to work in those jobs. Some of the biggest barriers to training people and setting them up to succeed are family care responsibilities. The original Biden administration plan for building both physical and care infrastructure together was strategic and prescient. Now that only one of those policies has become law, without further action on care, the consequences will be felt throughout the nation, but particularly in manufacturing. Prioritizing investments in care will not only support the people filling new jobs, but also their children and other family members. Building a care infrastructure into the new U.S. industrial policy is not only the right thing to do, but also the most strategic.

Notes

1. Authors’ analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data retrieved via IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

Julie Kashen, [Director, Women's Economic Justice and Senior Fellow](#)



Julie Kashen is a senior fellow and Director for Women's Economic Justice at The Century Foundation with expertise in working families, economic mobility, labor, and poverty.



Michelle Burris, Fellow

Michelle Burris is a fellow at The Century Foundation, focusing on racial and gender equity in workforce development.



Laura Valle-Gutierrez, Fellow

Laura Valle-Gutierrez is a fellow at The Century Foundation, where she works on economic policy and research to promote economic, disability, racial, and gender justice.
