

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading.
3. Write a 1+ page reflection.

Nearly One-Third of U.S. Workers Make Less than \$15 an Hour

Source: Leslie Albrect, MarketWatch.com, March 23, 2022

At a time when the prices of groceries, gas and other essentials have soared to new heights, nearly one-third of U.S. workers earn “poverty-level wages” of less than \$15 an hour.

That’s according to a new data analysis from the global poverty charity Oxfam, which found that 51.9 million U.S. workers make less than \$15 an hour, or \$31,200 a year.

“It’s shameful that at a time when many U.S. companies are boasting record profits, some of the hardest working people in this country — especially people who keep our economy and society functioning — are struggling to get by and falling behind.” said the report’s author, Kaitlyn Henderson, senior research advisor at Oxfam America. “

Women and people of color are “vastly overrepresented” in these low-wage jobs, the report found, with 47% of Black people making less than \$15 an hour versus 26% of white people. Some 50% of working women of color (14.7 million) make less than \$15 an hour. Some 25% of men of all races make less than \$15 an hour, compared to 40% of women.

Single parents have it particularly tough: More than half (57.5%) make less than \$15 an hour. Despite the stereotype of younger workers earning low wages, most of those earning less than \$15 an hour are not teenagers — 89% are at least 20 years old.

The federal minimum wage is currently \$7.25 an hour and was last increased in 2009. The minimum wage’s “buying power simply hasn’t kept up,” Henderson said in a statement. That’s especially true as white-hot inflation has surged to a 40-year high. Rising prices for housing and food hit lower-income households especially hard because they spend the majority of their incomes on those costs, the Oxfam report noted.

Instituting a universal minimum wage and increasing it to \$15 an hour would “lift millions out of poverty and benefit the U.S. economy,” Oxfam said, urging lawmakers to pass the 2021 Raise the Wage Act, which would raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour over five years.

The legislation, which would have made good on President Biden’s campaign promise to raise the minimum wage to \$15, stalled in Congress. But some major employers including Amazon AMZN, +0.69% and Target TGT, +0.72% have already increased their starting pay to that level and above in a bid to attract employees in a tight labor market.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce opposes raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour, saying it will cost jobs and drive up prices for consumers. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has said a \$15 minimum wage would “really help many of those workers” and have a “very minimal” effect on jobs.

People who earn sub-\$15 hourly wages often do critical work that keeps the economy moving. “These are the workers who care for our loved ones, transport and harvest our food, stock our shelves, and deliver our packages,” Henderson wrote. “Without these workers, our economy grinds to a halt, as does the functioning of our society.”

In the fourth quarter of 2021, U.S. workers earned a median of \$1,010 a week, or \$52,520 a year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Possible Response Questions

- What are your thoughts about the federal minimum wage? Explain.
- The U.S Chamber of Commerce says raising the minimum wage will drive up prices for consumers. What are your thoughts?
- Did something in the article surprise you? Discuss.
- Pick a word/line/passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a “move” made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.