



I am
a **#YOUNGWORKER**

UCLA Labor Center



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Retail and Restaurant Workers in Los Angeles

About the Young Workers Project

The Young Workers Project uses participatory action research to document and disseminate the experiences of young workers in Los Angeles employed in low-wage industries like restaurant, retail, grocery, health, hotel/hospitality, and customer service. The purpose of this project is to increase the capacity of young workers, students and youth and worker advocates to conduct research and publicly promote findings and recommend best practice strategies based on their experiences in the low-wage service sector economy. Ultimately, our goal is to impact policies that will increase wages and promote equality and mobility among young workers within the current Los Angeles labor market.

About the UCLA Labor Center

For almost fifty years, the UCLA Labor Center has created innovative programs that offer a range of educational, research, and public service activities within the university and in the broader community, especially among low-wage and immigrant workers. The Labor Center is a vital resource for research, education, and policy development to help create jobs that are good for workers and their communities, to improve the quality of existing jobs in the low-wage economy, and to strengthen the process of immigrant integration, especially among students and youth.

UCLA Labor Center

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Executive Summary

Young workers are an essential part of the workforce who contribute substantially to local economies. But in cities like Los Angeles, the soaring cost of living means that making ends meet can be especially difficult for young workers. They earn less than previous generations, face higher education costs, and are concentrated in service sector jobs. Many employers rely on youth to supply cheap and temporary labor, while adults often perceive these early jobs merely as rites of passage in a way that justifies their precarious conditions. Framing these jobs as transitional or solely for young people undermines these forms of labor as real work.

This study aims to highlight the experience of young people who work and to challenge clichés about young workers. We frame young people as *workers* in order to connect the experiences of all workers and to affirm youth work as real work. Our research focuses on workers between the ages of 18 and 29 in retail and food service, the two largest employers of young people in Los Angeles County and an integral part of the region's labor landscape. Our findings are based on multiple methods, including 559 surveys, 30 interviews, government data sources and an extensive literature review. This project utilizes a research justice lens that aims to center the experience, and position, of young workers and student researchers as experts.

Young People Work to Live

Young people work for an array of reasons. Contrary to familiar narratives about youth workers, the vast majority in Los Angeles County work out of economic need rather than spend on clothes, iPhones, or nights on the town. They support their families, pay for school, and cover basic needs like food, rent, and utilities while encountering low wages and high educational costs.

- **Young workers contribute to their families' income and spending.** Less than one percent of young workers use their income solely for recreational and leisure activities. Almost half of our survey participants contribute some of their income to family expenses, and two-thirds of young workers pay rent or a mortgage. Census data show that 32.2% of young workers contribute financially to their households and 16.5% are parents.
- **They work in service sectors that pay extremely low wages.** According to census data, the retail and restaurant sectors are the top employers of young people in Los Angeles and provide young workers with much-needed income. But these industries pay low wages to three-quarters of young workers. Since 2000, wages have decreased by 15.8% in these industries.
- **Young workers struggle to pay for school and to complete their education.** One-third of young workers are in school and apply their income to textbooks and tuition. The cost of higher education has, of late, increased far more rapidly than wages, and more young workers have been forced to take out loans and carry debt. One-quarter of workers report having educational debt, and they owed, on average, \$19,000. Census data indicate that almost one-quarter of young workers started college, but could not complete their degrees.

Young Workers Juggle Out-of-Control Schedules

The retail and restaurant industries now have access to technology that can adjust scheduling week-by-week, or hour-by-hour, to match customer flows. While seemingly efficient, this practice results in erratic schedules and earnings for workers who have little to no say in the timing of their work day. Young workers are often compelled to organize their daily schedules around the needs of their employers, who rarely take into account the worker's family obligations, educational aspirations, or need for a consistent income.

- **Most workers don't have consistent control over their schedules.** Very few workers in the retail and restaurant sectors have predictable schedules. Our research found that 9 out of 10 workers do not have a set schedule. 51.4% of the workers we surveyed have been on-call — also known as “just-in-time” scheduling — where a worker is expected to be on standby to work or cover a shift. The vast majority [74.0%] only sometimes — or never — have a say in their schedule.
- **Many young workers are stuck in part-time or seasonal work arrangements and want more hours.** Nonstandard, irregular work is historically defined as either part-time work, temporary and on-call work, contract work, or self-employment. Almost half of young workers in retail and restaurant industries are part-time employees. Most workers [71.8%] want more hours and one-fifth [19.0%] work multiple jobs to make ends meet. Only one-quarter of young workers, whether or not they are in school, have consistent year-round work.

Young Workers Face Difficult Workplace Conditions

Employers sometimes take advantage of a worker's perceived vulnerabilities — such as age, gender, or immigration status — in order to exploit their labor. This exploitation takes various forms, such as wage theft, harassment, the withholding of benefits, and career immobility. When young workers are exposed to workplace violations in their first jobs, they may come to believe that such behavior is appropriate or normal.

- **Young workers experience overtime and off-the-clock violations.** Wage theft includes being paid below the minimum wage, working off-the-clock without overtime, not receiving meal and rest breaks, and having tips confiscated. Almost half of the workers in our survey were only sometimes — or never — paid for overtime, and almost one-third had worked off-the-clock.
- **Verbal abuse and harassment is commonplace in service work.** More than half of the young workers we surveyed have experienced verbal abuse. Of those, most experience it from customers, and over one-third from employers or supervisors.
- **Young workers lack workplace benefits and advancement opportunities.** Nearly two-thirds [62.2%] of young workers do not receive health benefits, paid sick days, or paid vacation days. Furthermore, young workers in Los Angeles County are concentrated in positions with low wages and little investment in career trajectory, even as many are now gaining tenure in their industries. 21.6% have worked in their industries for six or more years; but many of those that make it to management positions still earn low wages.
- **Young workers lack a collective voice to represent their interest.** Only one in ten workers in retail, restaurant, grocery and fast food is associated with a union or worker center — even though more than half have a positive view of unions and 59.3% would like to join a union or worker center.

What Young Workers Want

Workers have clear ideas about how their workplaces need to change. The participants in our study were asked what would they change at work, and — based on their insights — this is what a *Young Worker Bill of Rights* might include. Young workers demand:



A **wage increase** to a livable wage connected to the cost of living, and a higher minimum wage;



Better treatment of workers in the workplace that addresses abuse by both management and customers and ensures that all workers are treated with respect;



Changes in their **work hours and schedules** that includes more hours, full-time positions, and predictable, stable and adjustable schedules;



Respectful management that abides by federal and state labor law and codes and respects and addresses worker needs;



And **benefits and protections** at work, such as health coverage, child care support, and the freedom to organize with other part-time and full-time workers.

Recommendations

The following is a set of recommendations developed by young workers and intended to contribute to the struggle for the dignity and equity of the next generation's workforce.

1. Build Youth Leadership and Support Youth Movements

- a. **Develop a national "Know Your Rights" organizing campaign for young workers** that invests in organizing young workers and developing educational programs in collaboration with other workers, unions and labor advocates.
- b. **Respect youth movement organizing** and give young workers decision-making power and substantive leadership in institutions like unions and advocacy organizations, and ensure that organizing initiatives represent the needs of the broad population of young workers.
- c. **Develop young worker leadership in government spaces**, such as a Bureau of Young Worker Affairs within the California Labor Commissioner's office, for instance, that could be led by young lawyers and worker advocates and represent the interests of young workers.
- d. **Integrate young worker "ambassadors-leaders-educators"** in a county and statewide campaign to educate high school and college students about their rights as workers.

2. Protect Young Workers from Workplace Exploitation

- a. **Guarantee workplace protections and the enforcement of current laws protecting young workers** and provide materials to young workers about their rights, address barriers specific to young workers to filing claims, educate young workers on the "private right of action" that allows workers to sue their employers directly for unpaid wages and other labor violations, and protect workers from retaliation and intimidation.
- b. **Initiate scheduling and wage regularization legislation** in L.A. County and California akin to ordinances adopted in Vermont and San Francisco that require employers to give workers predictable schedules, stable hours, and guarantee that part-time workers be considered for a greater share of hours before new workers are brought into the workplace.
- c. **Develop no-tolerance policies against workplace harassment and violations** including wage theft, sexual harassment, retaliation, racism, ageism, ableism, classism, and discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, and religious practices.

3. Support High Road Practices and Invest in Young Workers Jobs

- a. **Create a salary system that is equitable across industries** and that obliges employers to recognize and honor transferable skills, previous wage levels, past job training and experience, and seniority.
- b. **Incentivize high road businesses that invest in workers** and offer young workers in Los Angeles greater career training opportunities in service sector businesses that offer benefits, a dynamic salary regime, childcare subsidies, and transferrable retirement options.
- c. **Create a high road youth employer report card or program** through which high road employers are regularly recognized by the California Labor Commissioner and the governor's office.
- d. **Expand county workforce investment funds** in order to focus on advancing career training and job opportunities for young people.



1. Introduction

Young workers are not only the future of the nation's workforce, they are the pulse of the social and economic well-being of every community today.¹ They are young parents, caregivers, students, and are now attempting to establish careers in the wake of nearly a decade of recession. In cities like Los Angeles, the soaring cost of living means that making ends meet can be especially difficult for young workers.² Though they are more educated than past generations, they earn less and are even deeper in debt.³ They are concentrated in service sector jobs that have little room for growth, and with incomes less substantial than they would have been three decades ago.⁴ There is a prevailing cliché of young people as self-indulgent millennials who live with their parents, idly wait for the perfect job, and collect paychecks mostly for shopping and weekend leisure.⁵ In reality, many employers rely on youth to supply “cheap, surplus, temporary and easy-to-discipline labor” that can be recruited or disposed of according to the whims of the business cycle.⁶ Adults often portray these early jobs as brief interludes or rites of passage to justify the precarious conditions of “youth” forms of work.⁷

This study emphasizes the ways in which young people are an essential element of the workforce who demonstrably contribute to local economies. We frame youth as *workers* in order to challenge familiar conceptions of youth as merely consumers, students, and/or young people in a transitional phase.⁸ Because these labels can detach the work experiences of young people from those of older workers, we use the term *young workers* to reconnect these experiences. In this way, we acknowledge and affirm youth work as real work.

The Changing World of Work

Over the last three decades, the world of work in Los Angeles has rapidly transformed, especially for young people. Manufacturing, which was once the leading employer of young people and provided salaries that could support whole families, has been supplanted by service work that is customer-oriented, low-paying and can barely sustain a single person.⁹ This transition to a post-industrial economy has had the most severe consequences for the working class, people of color, and immigrant youth who can no longer “graduate from or drop out of high school and find stable, long-term, relatively well-paying employment in manufacturing, mining, and other resource extraction industries — as well as in what was, for many years, an expanding public sector.”¹⁰

Today, high school graduates find jobs in the low-paying service sector, in which work is typically temporary and marked by wildly erratic scheduling. Even those who work their way through college often compete with high school students for short-term jobs. These workers are vulnerable to precarious work schedules with little advance notice, wild fluctuations in work hours, and little say as to when they work.¹¹ Furthermore, “contingent” work arrangements of contracted, part-time, temporary, and seasonal workers have become an ordinary feature of the labor landscape.¹² Job insecurity, low and stagnant wages, and work expenses — coupled with a severely diminished social safety net — also shape the everyday experiences of service sector employees. Low-wage workers also rarely receive paid time off, health insurance, or retirement benefits.

This work model is the consummation of industry practices that ensure profit and mitigate economic uncertainties by depressing labor costs. These corporate strategies include adjusting wages, increasing and decreasing hours, outsourcing, layoffs, and managing the number of workers through fixed-term contracts.¹³ Young people, especially those lacking work experience and seniority, are increasingly compelled to accept work conditions that embody the corporate ideal of labor market “flexibility” — conditions that present particular challenges for those just entering the labor force and launching careers.

Young Workers in Retail and Restaurants

This study focuses on workers between the ages of 18 and 29 in retail and food service, the two largest employers of young people in Los Angeles. The retail and restaurant industries are a vibrant part of Los Angeles County that comprise 17% of employees in all sectors, operate 47,902 establishments, and have an annual payroll of \$17.2 million.

Table 1: Employment, Establishments and Payroll in Los Angeles County for Retail, Restaurant and All Sectors, 2013

	Number of Employees*	Total Establishments	Annual Payroll
Restaurant	238,783	19,460	\$5,862,392
Retail	385,468	28,442	\$11,370,414
Total for all sectors	3,650,419	253,227	\$194,174,611

Source: U.S. Census Bureau County Business Patterns for Los Angeles County 2013 and *U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimate 2009-2013

In order to examine the experiences of young workers in greater detail, we focus on four distinct industries: *grocery*, *retail* (non-grocery), *fast food*, and *restaurant* (non-fast food). These industries are today the largest employers of young workers, employing a quarter-million young workers — almost half [42.6%] their workforce.

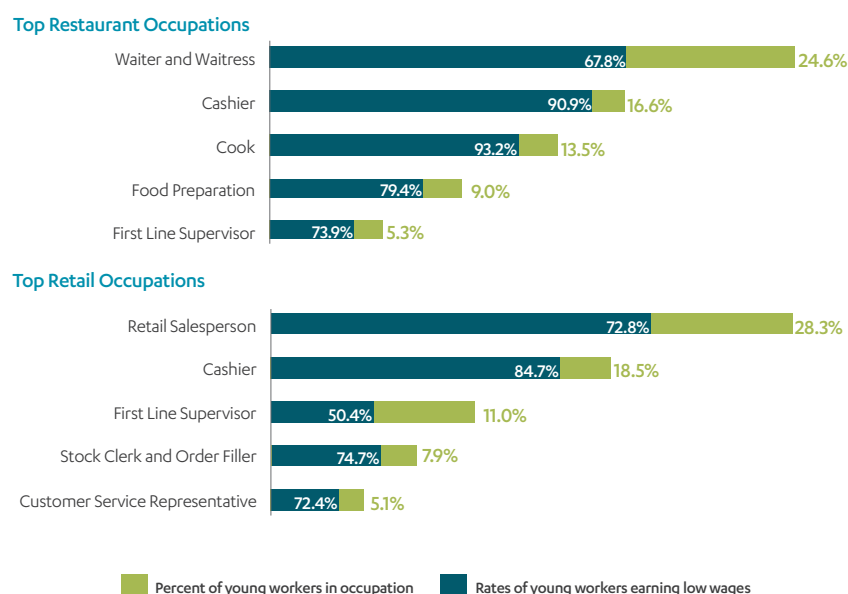
Figure 1: Young Workers in the Four Industries in Los Angeles



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimate 2009-2013

These four major low-wage industries have experienced profound structural shifts over the last forty years. The prevailing view of fast food, grocery, restaurant, and retail work is that these jobs have always been low-paying, insecure, transitory, and with few, if any, benefits. Labor historians, however, have detailed how stable, full-time, and unionized positions in these industries were actually the norm throughout the early and mid-20th century.¹⁴ That workforce, once organized and skilled, has been replaced by young, temporary, and minimum wage employees. As a result, young workers are today concentrated in frontline jobs that pay low wages. We define **low wage** as two-thirds of the median hourly wage for full-time workers. The Los Angeles County median hourly wage for full-time workers was \$20.07 in 2013, and two-thirds of that wage is \$13.38.

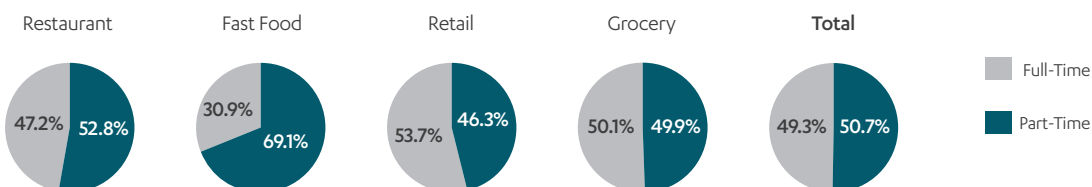
Figure 2: Top Five Occupations in Retail and Restaurant and Rates of Low Wages



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-year Sample 2013

In Los Angeles County, a third of young workers are employed in part-time jobs.¹⁵ That rate is higher for retail and restaurant workers and is even higher for fast food workers.

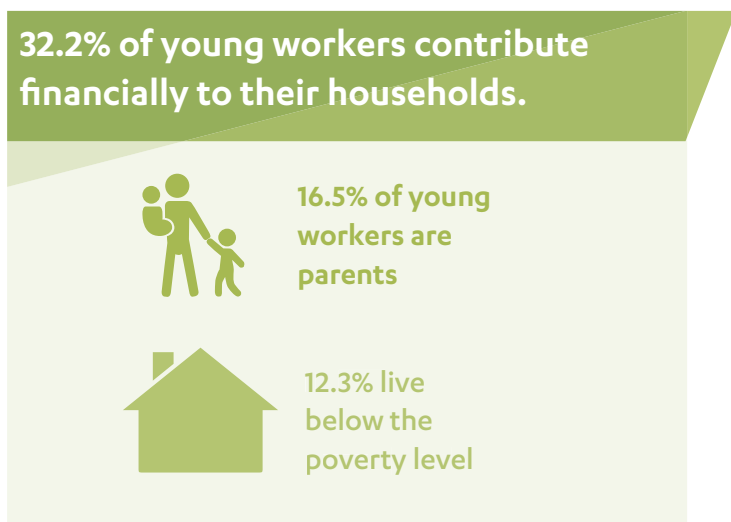
Figure 3: Work Status of Young Workers in Restaurant, Fast Food, Retail and Grocery



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimate 2009 - 2013

Our research shows that young workers play an integral role in supporting their families' livelihood. Census data demonstrate that 32.2% contribute financially to their households and 16.5% are parents. And one out of every ten young workers in Los Angeles is living beneath the poverty line.

Figure 4: Young Workers Support Themselves and Their Families



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimate 2009 - 2013

This report, *I am a #YOUNGWORKER*, critically highlights a situation that should concern policymakers, government officials, educators, employers, and workers alike. It aims to provide a detailed, ground-level view of the work lives of young people in Los Angeles. Early employment experiences have lasting effects on economic security, lifelong earnings, and social well-being, and the state of young workers in Los Angeles County — and nationally — is in need of serious and sustained transformation.¹⁶ If we care about the future of Los Angeles, then we have to care about young workers, and must thoroughly reconsider the conditions in which they work.

This report gathers data from surveys, interviews, government sources, and academic and policy literature. Section 2 illustrates the reasons why young people need to work, as well as the impact of low wages and the rising cost of education on their careers. Section 3 confronts the challenges that arise from erratic scheduling and non-standard work arrangements, and is followed by a section on workplace issues like wage theft, harassment, a lack of benefits, and career immobility. The final section presents recommendations on how to

support young workers in their current work experiences, and how to build a more just future for youth labor.

Study Methodology

This multi-method research project uses census data, surveys, interviews and existing academic and policy research. It is a uniquely participatory research endeavor in which UCLA researchers engaged and integrated young workers and students as collaborative researchers. Using a research justice lens, we aimed to center the experience, and position, of young workers and student researchers as experts.

Surveys and Interviews

We trained, and then guided, a team of students and young workers to collect 559 surveys and 30 interviews between August 2014 and May 2015. The standardized survey consisted of 47 questions and covered topics such as current job conditions, finances, schooling, and scheduling. Our interview guide went in-depth in the areas of family background, reasons for employment, workplace harassment and abuse, training, and future goals. We conducted surveys and interviews in English and Spanish. We employed a mixed-sampling methodology including convenience, random, and stratified approaches, and the student researchers and workers collected surveys through their networks and at malls, public events, and rallies. We also designed an online outreach strategy that included Twitter parties, emails, Facebook posts and ads, and purchased online samples.

Though our sampling and fielding methods were diverse, we still experienced limitations in our data. We oversampled students and fast food and grocery workers, and undersampled white workers. To compensate for this, we used the American Community Survey 2009-2013 sample to weight the data so that it better reflected the population (See Table 2, p.11). We trained the student research team that analyzed the data with SPSS and Dedoose, and developed infographics that they presented to a community forum of workers, students, and organizers in order to receive feedback on our data. Finally, we worked with our student researchers to compile the findings and develop this report.

Census Data and Definitions

We also analyzed government data and conducted an extensive literature review. We used U.S. Census Bureau samples to gather worker characteristics, wages, and industry data. The categories of restaurant, fast food, retail and grocery are defined by the following industry and occupational codes.

- Restaurants: Industry codes 8680 (Restaurants and other food services) and 8690 (Drinking places, alcoholic beverages) excluding Fast Food
- Fast Food: Occupation codes 4050 (Combined Food Preparation and Service Workers), 4060 (Counter Attendants, etc.), and 4720 (Cashiers) working in Industry code 8680 (Restaurants and other food services)¹⁷
- Retail: Industry codes 4670 – 5790 (Retail trade) excluding Grocery
- Grocery: Industry code 4470 (Grocery and related product merchant wholesalers)

For census runs, we defined **workers** as those between 18 and 64 years old, who earned a wage, were not self-employed or unpaid family workers, currently work more than three hours a week for at least 14 weeks, and who work in Los Angeles County. We defined **low wage** as two-thirds of the median hourly wage for full-time workers. The Los Angeles County median hourly wage for full-time workers was \$20.07 in 2013, and two-thirds of that wage is \$13.38. For more information, see our data and methods document for the *Snapshot of Young Workers in Los Angeles* report: <http://www.labor.ucla.edu/young-worker-snapshot/>

Table 2: Demographic Profile of All Workers in Retail and Restaurant, Young Workers in all Industries, Young Workers in Retail and Restaurant, and Our Survey Sample

		Workers any age in retail and restaurant	Young Workers in any industry	Young Workers in retail and restaurant	UCLA Labor Center Survey sample*
Industry	Restaurant	33.3	9.7	33.7	33.9
	Fast Food	4.9	2.3	8.0	7.8
	Retail	50.1	14.0	48.6	49.1
	Grocery	11.6	2.8	9.8	9.1
Gender	Female	46.0	47.0	49.4	51.8
	Male	54.0	53.0	50.6	47.8
	Gender queer/ gender non-conforming / other	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.4
Age Group	18-22	18.1	28.2	42.6	42.6
	23-25	11.7	29.1	27.5	31.5
	26-29	12.8	42.8	30.0	25.9
	Total	42.6			
Nativity	U.S. Born	53.8	71.9	72.8	n/a
	Foreign Born	46.2	28.1	27.2	
Race/ Ethnicity	White	23.3	25.4	22.6	22.4
	Black	5.1	6.2	5.8	5.4
	Latino	56.4	54.1	60.6	61.2
	Asian	13.2	11.8	8.4	8.4
	Native American	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2
	Other	1.8	2.4	2.5	2.5
Educational Level	Less than H.S.	22.3	12.6	14.3	4.9
	H.S.	28.0	23.7	28.9	59.8
	Some College	28.4	31.6	38.5	n/a
	Vocational/Other	n/a	n/a	n/a	3.6
	Associate Degree	6.2	6.2	6.1	15.9
	Bachelor's Degree	12.9	21.5	11.2	14.9
	Advanced Degree	2.3	4.5	1.0	0.9
	Other				
Ability to Speak English	Well	81.9	91.6	91.8	n/a
	Not well/at all	18.1	8.4	8.2	
School Status	Not in School	83.1	71.8	65.4	65.5
	In School	16.9	28.2	34.6	34.5
Housing	Own	40.0	38.2	37.5	n/a
	Rent	60.0	61.8	62.5	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimate 2009-2013 and *UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

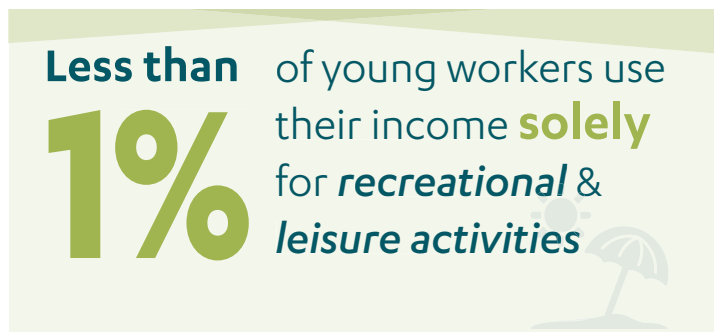


Young people work for a variety of reasons. Contrary to familiar narratives about young workers in Los Angeles County, the vast majority work because of economic need rather than to afford clothes, iPhones, nights on the town, or to advance career prospects.¹⁸ When students find jobs in the service sector, for instance, they consciously forego internships, academic conferences, volunteer or other extracurricular opportunities that could advance their professional or educational careers. They make this decision because they need to support their families, pay for school, and cover basic needs like food, rent, and utilities.

Young Workers and Their Incomes

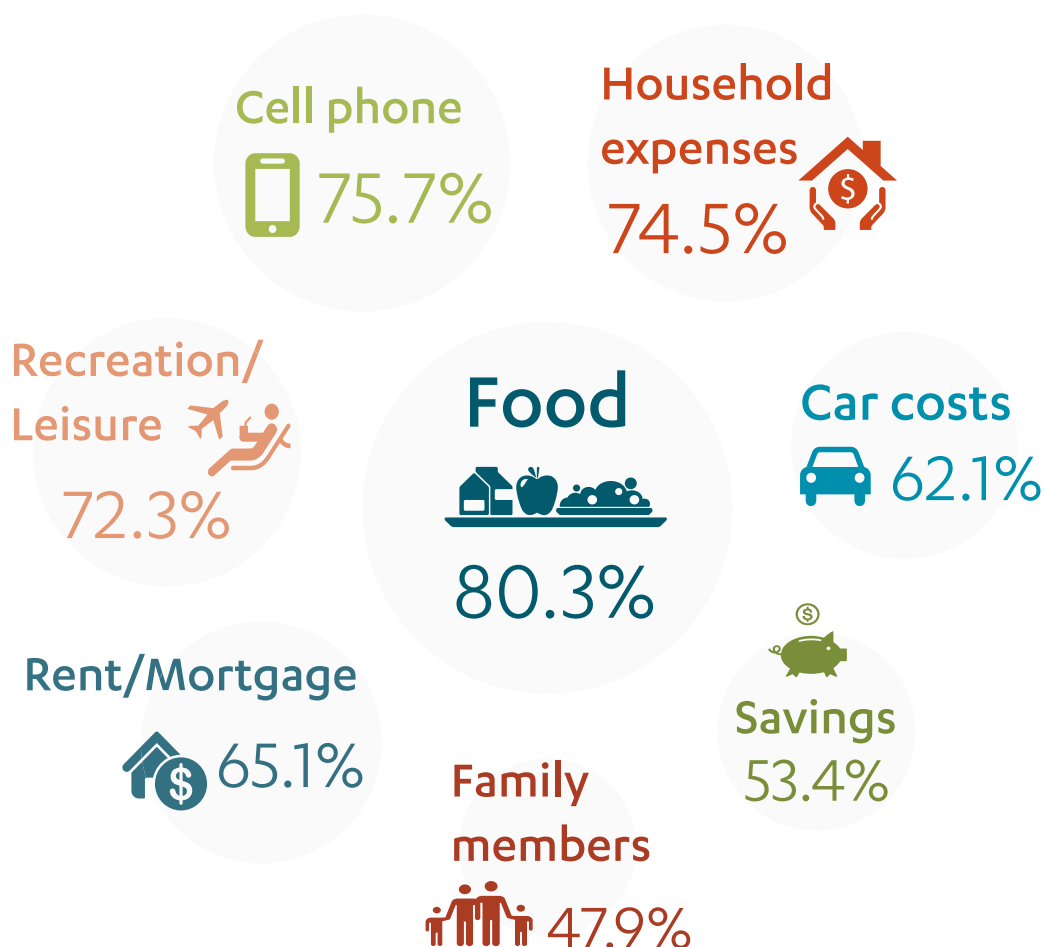
Less than one percent of our respondents spent their income solely on recreational and leisure-related activities. In fact, young workers detailed a web of household, schooling and family-related economic commitments. Almost half of our survey participants contribute some of their income to family expenses and two-thirds of young workers pay rent or mortgage. One fast food worker discussed living paycheck-to-paycheck and struggling with high rent. “We have to pay the rent at a certain time, but sometimes we pay it later, we can’t afford it. So one day [the landlord] could tell us, ‘oh, you’re going to get evicted for not paying your rent.’ Pretty much everything else I pay on time but rent sometimes, we got to wait till we get a paycheck.”¹⁹ Young workers are often behind or late on their bills, which can lead to higher interest rates and late payment fees — not to mention the stress of perennially trying to catch up.

Figure 5: Young Workers and Recreational/Leisure Expenses



Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

Figure 6: How Young Workers Spend their Income



Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

Low and Lost Wages

When the spending habits of young workers are perceived as being centered in leisure activities, employers and policymakers can more easily justify low wages for young workers. According to census data, the retail, grocery, fast food, and restaurant industries generally pay low wages: over half of the workforce in retail and grocery, and almost three-quarters of workers in the restaurant and fast food sectors, earn low wages. For young workers, the rate is even higher — nearly three-quarters of young workers earn low wages.

Table 3: Rates of Young Workers and Low-Wage Workers in the Four Industries and Median Hourly Wages

	Rates of all workers earning low wages in each industry	Rates of young workers earning low wages	Median hourly wage for young workers
Restaurant	67.3	74.6	\$9.64
Fast Food	84.4	87.9	\$8.19
Retail	51.4	67.8	\$10.32
Grocery	55.4	75.1	\$9.59
Average all	58.8	72.4	\$9.78

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimate 2009-2013

Retail and restaurant are the largest employers of young people in Los Angeles. They provide young workers with much-needed income that supports families and educational careers. But these industries suffer from low wages that impact workers across all ages, and make it difficult for workers to earn a living. The median wages of most young workers hover around nine and ten dollars, and fast food workers earn even less — and most of the workers in these four industries are earning less than ten dollars. Experts forecast that low wages have a significant impact on young workers' lifetime earnings and economic stability, and since 2000, the wages of young workers have decreased by 15.8% in these four sectors.²⁰

Figure 7: Young Workers Wages Decline Since 2000



Source: U. S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year sample 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, 2013



School! Work! Life!

I am 23 years old, a part-time grocery store worker, and a full-time college student. I have been working here since I was 20. At school, I also have a part-time job. I have lots of expenses I have to pay, such as rent, electricity, internet, and gas because I don't live at home. I also have to pay my car insurance and gas because I drive all over. Insurance alone can be very expensive because of my age. I also have to think about expenses like food. I try to buy groceries to make food at home to save money, but I am so busy with school and work that I just end up eating out, which ends up being more expensive. I have to think about paying for books and school supplies every quarter. I also help my family out with some of their bills. I usually help my sister who is attending community college with books and for projects she is assigned.

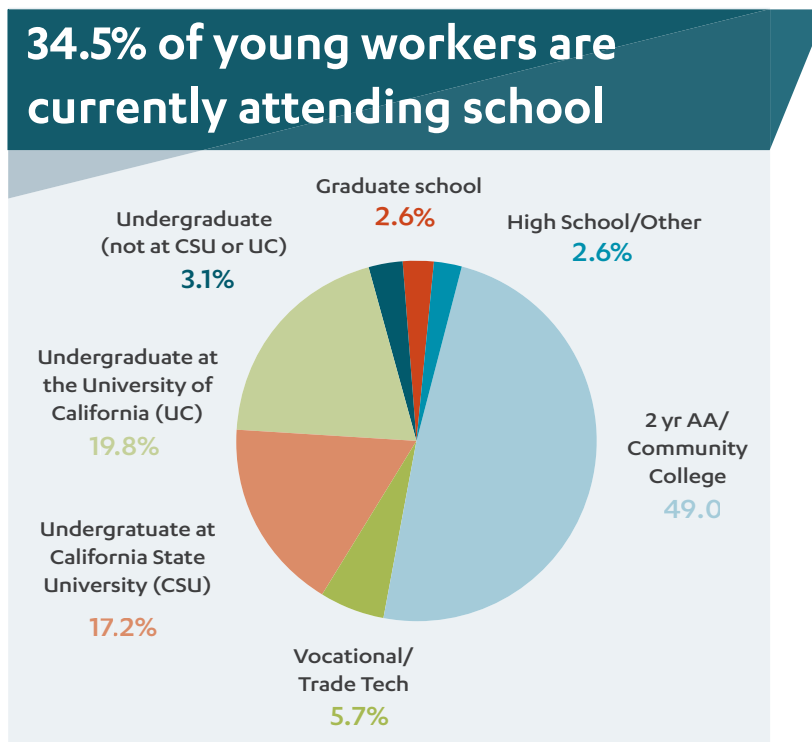
I receive financial aid, have scholarships and grants, which help, but it is not enough to meet all my expenses. I even take out loans to make it easier or use my credit card, which is another bill. It is worse when I have an unexpected expense. Like when my laptop charger stopped working, I had to purchase another one which wasn't cheap, it costs \$100. Or like the time when my mom got sick, I bought her the medicine she needed because she didn't have insurance at the time. I sometimes also go out to have fun, like going out dancing or to the movies, but that is not often nor a big part of my budget.

(Grocery Worker, Cashier, age 23, Female)

Managing School and Work

Many young people struggle to straddle the responsibilities of work and school. While young people are encouraged to continue their education at all costs, they are also aware of how important it is to become trained, employed, and experienced — and how scarce jobs are in this economic climate.²¹ They need to work in order to afford school, and they need to attend school so they can get ahead at work. One-third of the young workers in our survey are currently in school, with almost half attending community college and one-third attending public universities.

Figure 8: Student Workers and Type of School Attendance



Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

The cost of higher education has increased far more rapidly than wages, and more young workers have been forced to take out loans and carry debt.²² A 2015 report found that, due to rising tuition, students who work while in college are not able to cover all their costs.²³ Many working students move back and forth between full-time education and full-time work, or perform both simultaneously to manage the cost of college. One retail worker reflected this balancing act. “When I started college, it was really hard to balance work, school, commuting and being able to pay for everything. So I would work more to pay, but I would take away time from my studies which affected me and my first quarter’s GPA”.²⁴ Over two-thirds of our survey participants who are currently in school reported that they pay for textbooks with their income, and almost half use it for tuition costs.

Figure 9: The Cost of School for Student Workers

71.2% Use income to pay for books 

42.8% Use income to pay for tuition 

Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

The Burden of Student Debt

According to the Economic Policy Institute, there has been a remarkable 92% increase in the number of student loan borrowers, and a 74% increase in average student loan balances over the last decade. Though California school debt is lower than that of other states, half of college freshmen in 2010 took out student loans — up from just one-third a decade earlier.²⁵ The total amount of loans has also increased 36% over a five year period.²⁶ Rising costs and low wages mean that it will take young workers longer to complete their education and move out of these kinds of jobs and up the career ladder. And debt can have a profound impact on the future of a young person. Based on a 2015 national survey, half of young people have college-related debt, and a third have delayed or reduced what they are able to save or invest into retirement.²⁷ Our survey found that one-quarter of these workers reported that they had educational debt such as college or vocational school loans and owed, on average, \$19,000. Almost half of these workers are making loan repayments.

Figure 10: Young Workers and Educational Debt



Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

The Challenges of Work and Graduation

For many young workers, completing higher education is extremely challenging. A recent Georgetown University study concluded that working too much while enrolled in a postsecondary program can impact one’s chances of completion.²⁸ More students take a leave from college in order to work to save for tuition and other basic needs. Of the young workers in the four industry sectors who are not enrolled in school, census data show that almost one-quarter had started but did not finish. Recent national figures show that only 39% of first-time college students who enrolled in a community college in the fall of 2008 earned a credential from a two-or-four-year institution within six years.²⁹ 60% of this cohort, in other words, did not complete their studies. Furthermore, only 13% of students in the lowest income quartile who started at a two-year college in 2003-04 completed their associate degree by 2009.³⁰ The completion rate for students entering a four-year program are higher, with national averages at approximately 59%.³¹

Holding an advanced degree, though, does not necessarily provide young people with employment opportunities outside of service jobs. According to census data, close to 20% of young service sector workers in our study have completed degrees. As a result, researchers are calling on educators, elected officials, and policymakers to rethink strategic connections between work and higher education. Work should not just be a means to pay for school and to subsist — work experiences should be integrated into the college curriculum as a critical and meaningful compliment to the journey of higher education.³² Simultaneously working and learning have been shown to have a significant impact on academic success, especially when students work in jobs related to their studies.³³

Table 4: College Attainment of Workers Currently Not in School

	%
Some college	23.4
Associate Degree	5.0
Bachelor’s Degree or higher	14.9



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimate 2009-2013



3. Young Workers Juggle Out-of-Control Schedules

Young workers in low-wage jobs can be overwhelmed by the difficulties that precarious work schedules impose on nearly every aspect of their lives. A student's chance of graduating often turns on reliable family care arrangements, financial stability, and general well-being, and is diminished by the "unpredictable, unstable, and unwanted" schedules offered to them.³⁴ Young workers are frequently compelled to organize their daily schedules around the needs of their employers, who rarely take into account the worker's family obligations, educational aspirations, or need for a consistent income. The first — and very recent — national study on the precarious work schedules of early-career employees argues that "the immediate and longer-term well-being of families and communities depends on young adults succeeding in the labor market which, in turn, depends on the quality of jobs and the practices of today's firms."³⁵

A Lack of Standard Schedules

Very few workers in the retail and restaurant sectors have set schedules. According to numerous workplace studies, set schedules, advance notice, and control over one's working hours establishes a vital regularity in the lives of workers, which allows them to meet their work requirements and plan their non-work activities.³⁶ Less than 9% of young workers, according to our research, are allowed a predictable schedule. Only 6.9% of women had one, compared to 10.9% of men.

Figure 11: Young workers and Set Schedules

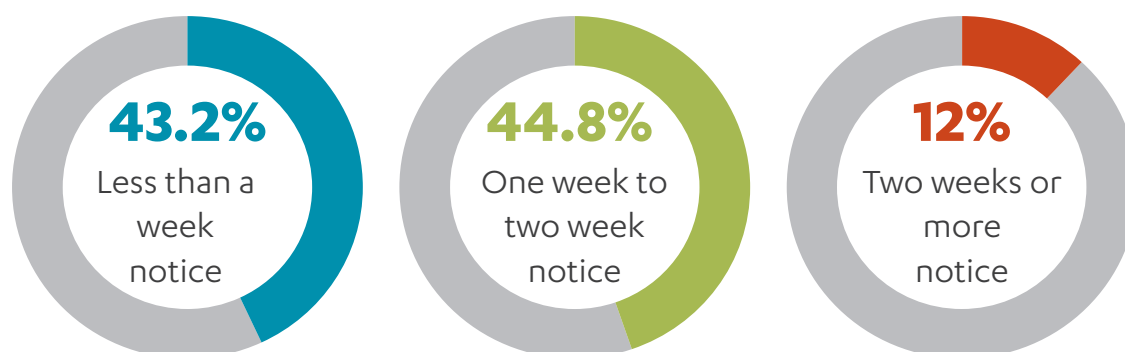


9 out of 10 young workers do not have a set schedule

Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

Schedules for most frontline workers in the service sector are assigned on a weekly basis, often with less than seven days notice. Of those in our survey who do not have set schedules, almost half received less than week's notice, and only a handful of workers get two weeks notice.

Figure 12: Worker Schedule Notification for Those without a Set Schedule



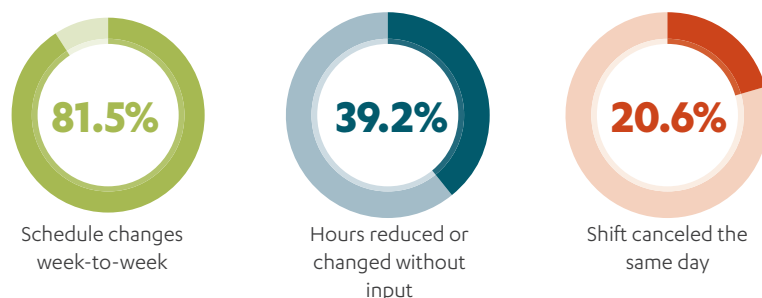
Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

Unpredictable Schedules

Service sector work arrangements depend on schedule assignments that are staggered weekly and build an intricate web of overlapping shifts that ensure that workers are constantly present on the store floor or stockrooms. Management studies strictly control labor costs by lean staffing strategies that match part-time worker schedules to customer flow. Through data analysis, companies can adjust scheduling week-by-week or hour-by-hour to accommodate “large windows of shopping time” by using part-time workers with “very low guaranteed weekly hours but an expectation that workers ‘flex up’ to 40 hours on demand.”³⁷ While seemingly efficient, this practice results in erratic schedules and earnings for workers, both part-time and full-time, leading employees to have little to no say in the timing of their work day.³⁸ The *New York Times* reported in 2014 that “[s]cheduling is now a powerful tool to bolster profits, allowing businesses to cut labor costs with a few keystrokes.”³⁹ In Section 2, we observed that “uncertain and tenuous” scheduling can “wreak havoc with everyday routines like college and child care.”⁴⁰

Most of the workers in our study reported having schedules that were constantly changing. Two in five had their hours changed without their input, and one in five had their shift canceled on the day they were supposed to work.

Figure 13: Work-Hour Fluctuation



Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

This unpredictability seriously complicates the way young workers organize other daily commitments such as school, friends and family, medical appointments, and childcare. One grocery worker explained how her volatile work schedule made attending school and finding babysitters needlessly burdensome.

“ I feel like at this point my situation is unfair, with my whole scheduling and stuff because I have a kid... last semester I was going to school, I had my kid, and going to work, it was hard to balance.... I don’t have a stable babysitter... so it was kinda hard for me to work, school, and care for my kid. ”

(Grocery Worker, Crew Member, age 24, Female)

Likewise, a fast food worker who was also a student found that management insisted she work more hours even after the semester began. “They kept telling me to open more days, open more days, open more days, you know. And so then I did because I was also afraid of losing my job.”⁴¹

On-Call or “Just-in-Time” Scheduling

On-call scheduling is a set of management practices that places workers on standby to work or to cover a shift. They may be asked to work on their day off without notice, and some workers have to call in every morning to find out if they work that day. Others may be asked to wait for a call to work and must be ready to return to work at a moment’s notice. Corporations are rapidly adopting “on-call” work and automated scheduling in order to enhance management flexibility. These practices are also referred to as “just-in-time staffing,” which invokes the “just-in-time manufacturing” practices that aim to cut “excess” inventory and labor.⁴²

“ I don’t have a set schedule, I am open to whatever they need to be filled. I’ve been called on my day off to come help like a host shift. It’s just because they need somebody to greet the customers. ”

(Restaurant Worker, Cook Assistant, age 20, Female)

51.4% of the young workers in our survey said that they have been performed on-call work in the past year.

Figure 14: On-Call Scheduling



Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

Unless there is an arrangement with the employer, though, time spent waiting while on-call is generally not compensated. While a number of employment laws — like the Fair Labor Standards Act — protect the rights of on-call employees to on-call wages, recent investigations have discovered multiple unfair and possibly illegal on-call employment practices in the retail and restaurant industries.

“ I am what they call open availability. I don’t have a set schedule. I am open to whatever they need any days they need to be filled. ”

(Grocery Worker, Crew Member, age 23, Female)

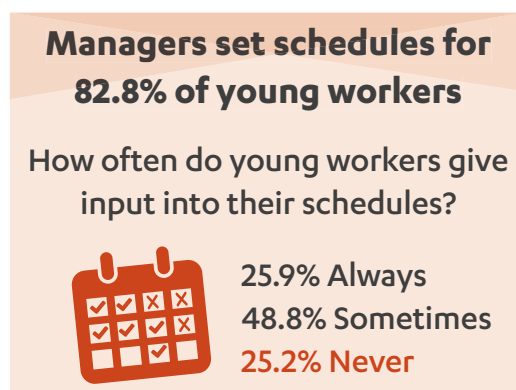
In April 2015, New York’s Attorney General warned thirteen major retail firms that they are potentially violating state law by requiring workers, with little notice, to either show up at the workplace or wait at home for a possible shift.⁴³ New York and California, among other states, have laws that obligate employers to pay four hours, at minimum wage, if a worker shows up to work and their shift is canceled. The Attorney General’s warning has led some major retailers to formally declare that they will discontinue on-call scheduling.

A Lack of Control over Schedules

Originally, “flexible scheduling” was developed so that salaried, full-time, white collar employees could have more influence over their hours and better balance the demands of their work and family lives.⁴⁴ “Flexibility” is often floated as a proactive practice that modifies work hours to cultivate work environments and to accommodate the personal lives of workers.⁴⁵ Low-wage hourly workers, however, have little influence over their schedules, and the model has become one in which “corporations place retail and restaurant managers under strict limits about what their payroll or employee hours can be each week, typically based on a formula tied to sales.”⁴⁶ Managers usually set schedules without input from employees. Only one-quarter of young

workers in our survey felt they regularly had a say in their schedules. One fast food worker explained, “when I requested time off for a school event, the management said, ‘well, a request is a request and that doesn’t mean that we’re going to give you your days off.’”⁴⁷

Figure 15: Young Worker Input in Schedule



Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

Feeling Out of Control with My Crazy Schedule

I’m 29 years old, a parent of 2 children, and I work as a retail manager. I had a direct manager one time who disliked me for some reason and made my work life very difficult. He would especially make scheduling a problem. We all had to give him our preferred time availabilities, but this manager would always schedule me to work outside of those hours. The manager would tell me that the company needs and my work availability didn’t match. There was even a time where I had an event to attend and had worked something out with someone to cover my shift, and the manager told me I could not get the shift covered or the day off. He gave me no reason to why I couldn’t, he just would say “no” to my requests. He even threatened that if I took the day off, he would find a way to make sure I got fired from my job. I told the general manager about this problem, because I really could not work that day. The general manager told me she could not do anything about it. It became really stressful trying to figure out what was going to happen with my job and shift. I ended up getting that day off, but was hesitant to even take it. I kept wondering whether I would still have my job because of the direct manager’s threat. He just wouldn’t take my work availability into consideration. If I told him I was available after 3:30 P.M., he would schedule me for 3:00 P.M., when I was not free. He just made work difficult.

(Retail Worker, Manager, age 29, Male)

Many economists and labor analysts have called for a reconsideration of “flexible” work scheduling to better suit the reality of low-wage jobs and to offer workers agency in setting their schedules.⁴⁸ Research has demonstrated that when workers have some autonomy over their schedules, they are more satisfied with their jobs, more engaged at work, and more able to manage familial and social responsibilities.⁴⁹ These studies have inspired some elected officials and policymakers to insist that their low-wage constituents have a right to reliable work schedules and should not face retaliation when they request it.⁵⁰ The following narrative details how a young worker can be subtly manipulated into an untenable schedule and then be retaliated against for resisting it:

“Most people don’t want to work graveyard shift, [and] because I was new, they could put me on random shifts. Then one day they started putting me in graveyard and they told me at first, ‘oh, it’ll just be this day, I don’t have anybody, just do this day, and then your schedule will be back to normal.’ I agreed to do the favor, and after that, months went by and I still had days working graveyard. When I specifically asked them that I couldn’t do it any more and I asked if I could be taken off graveyard, they docked my hours. They gave me less days, basically like punishment, which I feel wasn’t fair. Eventually I agreed to do one day, and things started to get a little bit better, back to normal.”

(Fast Food Worker, Manager, age 24, Female)

There have been recent legislative gestures that would improve work scheduling for low-wage workers — younger and older alike — in the low-wage service sector, but these efforts are still in their early stages. In San Francisco, for instance, an ordinance called “The San Francisco Retail Workers Bill of Rights” went into effect in June, 2015 and demands that retail employers with twenty or more workers and twenty or more locations internationally give their workers schedules at least two weeks in advance.⁵¹ Nationally, the Fair Workweek Initiative, anchored by the Center for Popular Democracy, addresses some of the most pressing issues for low-wage workers, such as equitable part-time work and predictable and transparent scheduling.⁵²

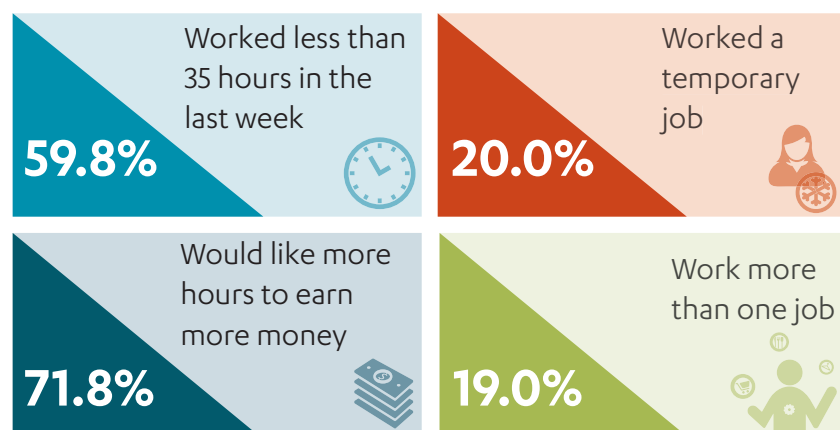
Part-time, Temporary and Seasonal Work

Furthermore, according to the Urban Institute, millions are employed in *nonstandard* work and play an ever larger role in the expanding service economy.⁵³ Nonstandard work is historically defined as either part-time work, temporary and on-call work, contract work, or self-employment. The term has also come to include occasions in which employees work shifts that are not fixed-day schedules.⁵⁴ Studies have estimated that 17-to-24% of American workers have irregular schedules, are on-call, or work split or rotating shifts.⁵⁵ One restaurant worker described his split shifts. “I work four days a week and the economy is [in] recession, and they cut hours and days. So now I work on Monday and Wednesday, I open, and get out like at 1:20 A.M. and 2 A.M. Then on the weekends I get in at 7 P.M. to 3 A.M.”⁵⁶

Part-time work, defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as less than 35 hours per week, has proliferated in today’s labor market. There are an estimated 27 million part-time workers nationally, or 18.4% of the total labor force.⁵⁷ A recent study estimates that part-time workers who are primary wage earners for their families now make up 36% of the part-time labor force.⁵⁸ Nationally, workers between 18 and 29 years old comprise 37% of the part-time workforce, and the majority of part-time workers are women.⁵⁹ Some industries have traditionally employed a part-time work force, but since the so-called Great Recession of 2007, it has grown, especially as big box chains with extended retail hours have expanded.⁶⁰

Almost 60% of workers in our survey worked less than 35 hours in the previous week. Significantly, 71.8% of workers in our survey reported that they want to work more hours in order to earn more money. Our survey found that many young workers are compelled to take second or third jobs, or temporary work.

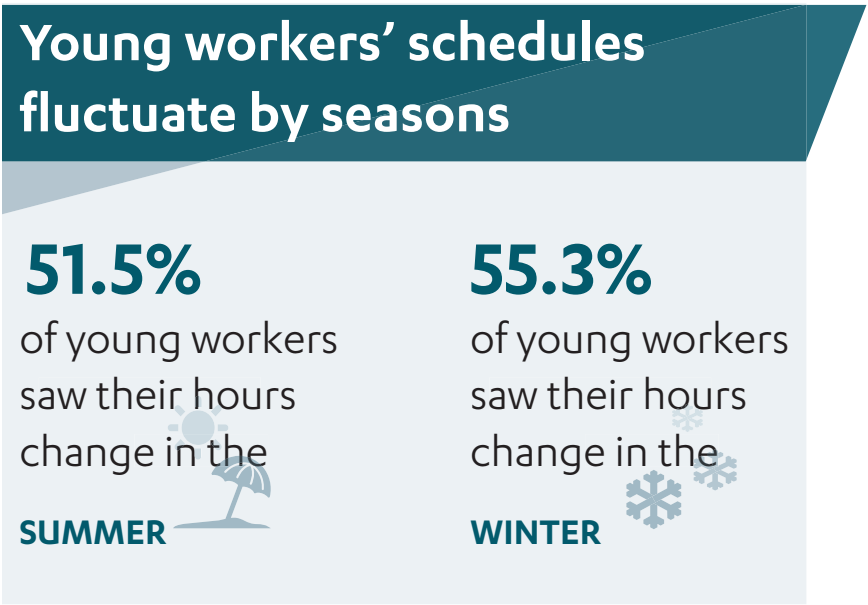
Figure 16: Work Arrangements



Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

The traditional view that part-time workers *voluntarily* choose part-time employment does not reflect present-day economic needs and realities. While many part-time workers work less than 35 hours per week due to school or familial responsibilities, an estimated 7.5 million workers nationally are *involuntarily part-time* workers who cannot find full-time work.⁶¹ Naturally, workers are frustrated when store managers hire new employees instead of increasing hours for existing part-time workers.⁶²

Figure 17: Schedule Fluctuations by Season



Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

Young workers in the retail and restaurant industries experience fluctuating schedules throughout the year, especially during the summer and winter, high seasons for shopping and tourism. Though this is partly due to student schedules, young workers generally experience seasonal changing schedules. Only one-quarter of young workers, student or otherwise, have consistent hours throughout the year. The schedules of a third of non-student workers increase and decrease as seasons change.

Table 5: How Hours Shift by Season

	Students	Non-Students	Total
Hours stayed the same	27.5	25.8	26.4
Hours increased and decreased	42.3	34.8	29.3
Hours increased at least one season	23.3	32.6	29.3
Hours decreased at least one season	6.6	6.8	6.8

Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015





4. Young Workers Face Difficult Workplace Conditions

Employers sometimes take advantage of a worker's perceived vulnerabilities — such as age, gender, or immigration status — in order to exploit their labor. This exploitation takes various forms, such as wage theft, harassment, the withholding of benefits, and career immobility. Sociologists studying the workplace have noted that “[y]oung people learn workplace norms in their early jobs. If harassment is common in their workplaces, they may come to believe that such behaviors are appropriate or normal.”⁶³ In other words, when young workers are exposed to workplace violations in their first jobs, they are more likely to tolerate abusive conditions in their later careers.

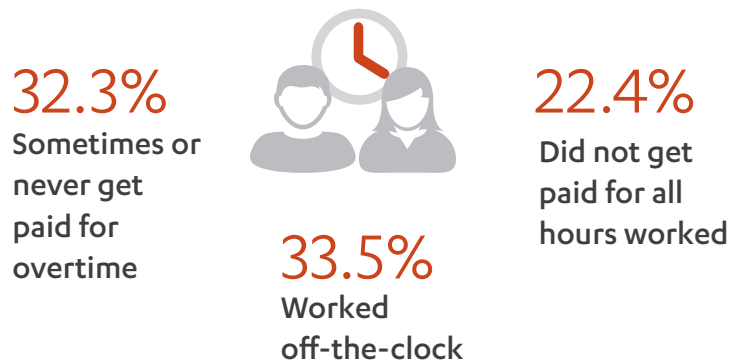
Wage Theft Violations

In low-wage industries, wage theft — which includes being paid below the minimum wage, working off-the-clock without overtime, not receiving meal and rest breaks, and having tips confiscated — is routine. A study of low-wage work in Los Angeles found that workers lose \$26 million each week to wage theft.⁶⁴ One in three young workers between 18 and 25 years of age has experienced a minimum wage violation, and two in three have experienced an off-the clock violation.⁶⁵ Early work experiences play a decisive role in the career trajectories of young workers in low-wage industries, and those who experience wage theft and other labor violations are much more likely to face lifelong economic insecurity and income inequality.⁶⁶

Our survey found that almost half of workers only sometimes — or never — get paid for overtime, almost

one-third had worked off the clock, and two in five workers did not get paid for the whole of the hours they worked.

Figure 18: Young Worker Experiences of Wage Theft



Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

Working outside of one's scheduled work time without compensation is generally known as working "off-the-clock." The United States Department of Labor (DOL) recognizes off-the-clock labor as one of the most common violations of the Fair Labor Standards Act. One retail worker told us that "sometimes I'll clock out for my break and I won't take it, or if I do get to take it, they don't time me obviously, but a lot of times I don't even really get to take it and my lunch is like always late."⁶⁷ One cook likewise noted how he would have to skip lunch when busy. "Especially on the weekends, we are short. There is sometimes only four of us. We have to like double our work. Sometimes we don't even get our 30 minute break, and they just tell us at the end of our shifts and just clock out, or if we don't they will clock out for us. As if they gave us the thirty minute breaks when they didn't."⁶⁸

Other workers in our study spoke about failing to be paid overtime, a violation experienced by 32.3% of the young workers in our sample. One young meat clerk described how wage theft transpired at his workplace.

“About getting overtime, well bosses they'll simply tell you that they forgot or lost the papers. It happens all the time. For whatever reason, I've worked a lot of overtime and they'll just say, 'I don't know what happened,' 'technical problems,' whatever excuse they have, but just not the right one. Now one boss called it 'straight time' which I don't understand because if I'm working more than 40 hours I should get paid overtime not straight time. So that's wage theft, right?”

(Grocery Worker, Meat Clerk, age 23, Male)

Workplace Harassment

Customer service is obviously central to service sector work, and that industry's competitive nature — as well as the ascent of crowdsourcing apps that rank stores and restaurants — have emphasized that fact. An approach that assumes "the customer is always right," however, sometimes contributes to an unequal, and even abusive, relationship between customers and employees. Privileging the customer in every situation can indulge — and in some cases encourage — customer misbehavior while jeopardizing worker well-being.⁶⁹ For instance, more than half of the young workers in our survey have experienced verbal abuse. Of those, the majority experienced it from customers and over one-third from employers or supervisors.

Table 6: Young Worker Experiences of Verbal Abuse

Experienced some type of verbal abuse	57.3%
Experienced abuse from:	
Customer	81.0%
Employer/Supervisor	36.9%
Co-worker	24.2%
Other	.2%



Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

One fast food hostess described how management accommodated the bad behavior of customers. “They let customers get away with a lot of things because you know, they just want the money. They’d rather forgo their employees’ rights and just be on the customer’s side.”⁷⁰ If there was one way she could improve her workplace, she said, she would,

“change the way customers view us in the service industry and the restaurant industry. Sort of give them more of a view of what we go through, and see things from our perspective and make them realize that we are there to help. I don’t know... a lot of customers are really entitled and they don’t see the full picture, and they’re quick to blame everything on you. I would just want to create more of an understanding and more empathy within customers.”

(Fast Food Worker, Hostess, age 22, Female)

One retail worker was frequently demeaned by customers. “I mean, yeah, I’ve been called wetback. I’ve been called all kinds of names by clients or customers because you won’t do something that they want, or you won’t give them a discount that they believe they are entitled to. Then they just start talking about your race and blah, blah, blah. I mean you don’t really pay attention to them or to those kinds of things.”⁷¹

One fast food maintenance worker asserted that management especially targeted immigrant workers. “They try to scream at you. They tell you this stuff because they know you’re not going to tell them anything back. So that’s something they have used to discriminate against us. That a lot of times we can’t defend ourselves. Because we’re scared that we’re going to get deported.”⁷² In California, verbal abuse is illegal if it involves race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, age, and/or disability. One fast food worker relayed explicitly racist abuse from management. “I’ve heard different comments, derogatory comments about black people from employees or even from the boss,” she said. “He will say them jokingly, but it still makes us uncomfortable in that he is a white male and it feels like he doesn’t have the right to say the things he says, but he feels very comfortable saying them. He’s called me ‘Latesha’ before, which is definitely rude.”⁷³

A grocery store worker shared with us a common narrative of verbal harassment that happened simply because he used the restroom.

“I came back from lunch and I was working on some product. And then I was like, okay I gotta use the restroom, so I go to the restroom and I come back out, and [the manager was] like “what are you doing?” I’m like “what are you talking about?” And he’s like “you just went to the bathroom,” and I’m like “yeah, I know I didn’t have to go on my lunch. I just used the restroom and now I’m going back to what I was doing.” He kind of like accused me and got in my face and asked me if I was on something... [I]t was in the middle of the store, so I was like oh man, you know, just making a scene. He could have just taken me to the office or we could have stepped to the back of the store.”

(Grocery Worker, Crew Member, age 23, Female)



Stop! Harassment At Work

I am a 23 years old and a frontline barista worker. There have been two main reasons why I would feel uncomfortable at work and that would be because of sexual harassment and/or because of race. I've been sexually harassed at both jobs, but at this coffee place it was by both customers and employees. There was one guy and he doesn't work for the company anymore but he wasn't fired either. He left by choice which is unfortunate because he definitely should've been fired. He just made a lot of people feel uncomfortable and he has like tried to kiss me or grab me and said just disgusting, disrespectful comments to me... Then also customers have you know, crossed those lines before and I found that managers aren't quite reactive enough. Because they tend to be, well, the way that [the company] is just so corporate.

(Fast Food Worker, Barista, age 23, Female)

Withholding Benefits

An absence of benefits is also endemic among service work. "Full-time and part-time workers receive different wages and benefits. Retail employs a strongly bifurcated labor force, the majority of full-time workers receive benefits and paid time off, while part-time workers are more likely to receive only an hourly wage."⁷⁴ A recent report found that more than half of food service workers work when they are sick.⁷⁵ Almost two-thirds of the young workers in our survey do not have access to health insurance, paid sick leave, or vacation days.⁷⁶ One grocery worker noted that though she often worked 39 hours, she was still considered part-time and thus didn't qualify for benefits.⁷⁷

Figure 19: Young Workers and Workplace Benefits



62.2% of young workers receive **no benefits**.

Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

When young workers cannot accrue time off, they must negotiate with management each time they request it. One retail worker asked for vacation time and was told that there were blackout dates on which "if you didn't show up, you could get fired," though she could not find any such rule in her employee handbook.⁷⁸ Some workers said that their manager wasn't understanding about needing time off, and others were reprimanded or had their hours reduced because of calling in sick or taking time off.

Figure 20: Consequences for Calling in Sick or Taking Time Off



Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

One fast food worker described being sick and attempting to have her shift covered.

“My manager knew I was sick all day and he let me out a little early, but I still had to work early the next morning. I texted him that night and said, ‘I really feel sick, I think I would like to get my shift covered for tomorrow. Can you let me know who’s available?’ He was really hostile and not very responsive. He said, ‘Come on, how are we supposed to get this covered now?’ He was just frustrated and if I didn’t reply within a minute, he would just reply very passive aggressively like, ‘Hello???’ with three question marks. Just very immature and I told him, ‘I’m not calling in sick. I’ll show up tomorrow if I can’t get it covered. I just need help getting coverage.’”

(Fast Food Worker, age 23, Female)

Career Immobility

Many retail stores and restaurants maintain profit margins by continually cutting personnel costs, often through short-term decision making. Research into retail stores, however, has demonstrated that companies actually lose money by failing to invest in employees — which generally boosts sales and profits and allows stores to expand their employee base.⁷⁹ These studies also show that investing in employee training, such as self-study and workshops, may increase productivity, improve morale, reduce turnover, and improve customer relations.⁸⁰

Young workers in Los Angeles County are presently concentrated in positions with high rates of turnover and with very little investment in their training or career trajectories. According to a national study of restaurant human resources, it takes two to three months to train restaurant workers, including fast food employees. “This is contrary,” the Restaurant Opportunity Center observes, “to the general perception that these jobs are low-skilled and workers are easily replaceable.”⁸¹

Most workers in our study received on-site and hands-on training, usually from a manager or supervisor, and some also reported watching videos, learning through online training, or reading pamphlets or a handbook. They were trained in customer service, product knowledge, operating machinery or equipment, and health and safety. A few that had been promoted attended an in-person supervisor or manager training provided by the company. Overall, young workers found their training to be too limited.

For many young workers, retail and restaurant jobs are potential careers. Framing this labor as temporary, transitional, or solely for youth undermines it as real work. In one study of the career paths of young restaurant workers, participants observed that they weren’t just working in temporary jobs, but rather “took their restaurant work seriously.” That study’s authors emphasized the way in which young restaurant workers demonstrated professionalism, responsibility, and maturity. As the age and tenure of restaurant workers increases, so to does the need to make these jobs stable and long-term.⁸² One-third of our respondents have worked in the industry for over four years — only about a quarter are new to the industry.

Figure 21: Time in Industry



Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

Table 7: Years in the Industry for All Industries

Less than one year	25.5%
1-2 years	26.7%
3-5 years	26.2%
6 or more years	21.6%

Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

Restaurant workers have more tenure than in other industries.

Figure 22: Mean and Median Years Within an Industry

Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

Professional opportunities and upward career mobility in low-wage service industries are increasingly limited.⁸³ Those who desire tenure in the service sector need jobs with stability, benefits, and wages on which a family can be supported. Of those young workers we interviewed who wanted to leave the industry, many cited its low wages as the primary issue. For others, opportunity for upward career mobility within the industry was unclear. One line cook noted that he had no space to move up — there was just a head cook.⁸⁴ Very few young workers are in management positions, and of those that are promoted, around half still earn low wages.

Table 8: Young Workers in Managerial or Supervisory Positions

	Percent of young workers in retail	Percent of young workers in restaurants	Percent of young workers in both industries	Percent of managers and supervisors that earn low wages
Managers	1.4%	5.5%	3.2%	47%
Supervisors	10.8%	6.8%	9.1%	55%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimate 2009-2013

Managers and supervisors in retail and restaurant work, according to census data, do not earn significantly more than the lowest-paid employees. One fast food worker never asked for promotion because “you get all [those] extra responsibilities for only 8 to 25 cents of raise.”⁸⁵ A few workers noted that there are no clear career paths within their workplaces and it was generally at the discretion of a manager if a worker is promoted. There were, though, some examples of jobs that had clear paths to raises and promotions. “That’s a good thing about [this grocery store], every six months is a raise and if you want to get a promotion it’s five years. I’m already going on three, so it’s kinda good to have those options. It takes time, I am getting there.”⁸⁶

No Power to Negotiate

I am 21 years old, I work part-time as a retail sales lead, and I am a full-time college student. When I started this job, I was making minimum wage. My manager seemed to like me, and she asked me if I would like to be promoted. At first I thought it would mean more money, but she explained to me this was just temporary and that I wasn't going to be offered a raise, just a higher position. The job offer was temporary because I was stepping in for a manager who was taking a leave of absence. I would just work in the position until she came back. I agreed because I figured I can put this on my resume as experience and I will learn the responsibilities of someone in that position. So I accepted it even though I wasn't going to be paid more.

Once the manager came back, they told me I could stay in the position and they would try to see if I could get a raise. They finally gave me a 10% raise, which is what I should have gotten in the first place but they gave me the raise at the time of the yearly promotion so I wasn't offered the yearly raise. I asked why I didn't get it and the district manager told me "you can't get a double raise." Even when I told them that the raise I got for my position was separate from the yearly promotion raises, they didn't listen and they thought it was perfectly acceptable to not give me a yearly raise. It made me upset. I had done the work and deserved the raise, but they didn't give it to me. They just didn't seem to care what I said to them.

(Retail Worker, Sales Lead, age 21, Male)

Young Workers and Unions

Due to workplace dynamics, changing organizational structures, and shifting legislative priorities, the focus of collective worker negotiations have increasingly turned towards individual worker cases. Industrial restructuring from manufacturing to service sector economies has led to the decline of unions throughout the U.S. since the mid-century, and this decline has especially affected the workplace representation of young workers. "Some people," it has been observed, "interpret the decline of organized labor as if unions belong to the past, and have no role to play in the global economy of the 21st century."⁸⁷ While California is still a stronghold for union density relative to most states, Los Angeles workers are only 15.1% organized. For young workers, the rate declines to 8.7%.⁸⁸

Historically, unions have organized workers around rights such as the minimum wage, a 40-hour work week, health benefits, and safe work environments. These are also some of the very issues around which workers are organizing today, and according to a recent report by the U.S. Department of Labor, the median weekly earnings of union workers are 21% more than earnings for non-union members.⁸⁹ Aside from economic advantages, one union respondent asserted that their employer respects their employees and supports them by providing benefits.

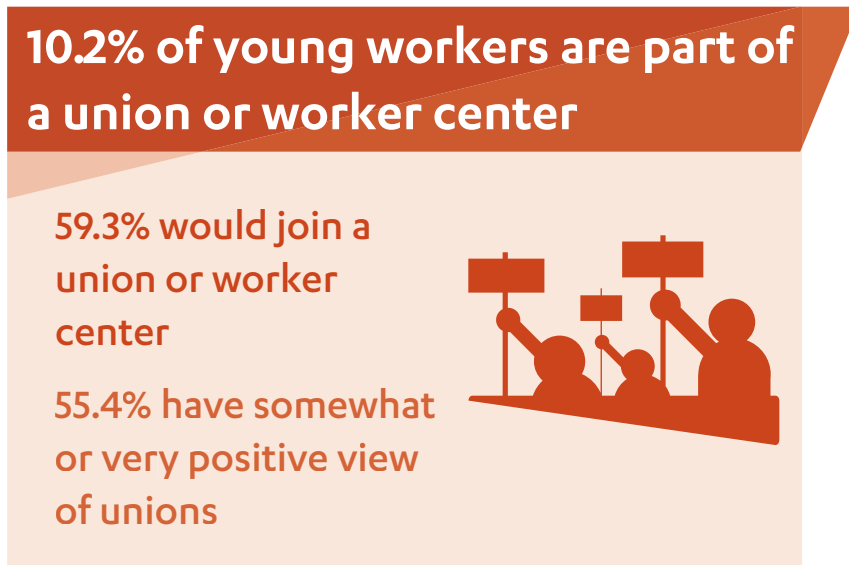
"[My workplace] is a union building so we not only know that it's a good company to work for, but they respect their employees and people tend to stay here for a long time. The pay is good, they take care of their employees with benefits and a 401k. My relationship with other employees is actually really good."

(Retail Worker, Supervisor, age 28, Male)

Few young workers today, however, have any experience — even indirectly — with unions; only 10.2% of young workers in our survey belonged to a union or worker center. The fact of low membership among young workers is both a challenge and an opportunity for labor organizing and educational outreach initiatives. Young people are rarely educated about labor rights or the way in which unions have shaped the American middle class. More frequently, they are exposed to strategic anti-union discourse promoted by corporations

and some media. Young workers are also exposed to regular anti-union meetings that large corporations hold with their employees, which frequently consist of videos advising them to avoid labor organizers while making promises — often empty— about labor protections.⁹⁰

Figure 23: Young Worker Participation and Perceptions of Unions and Worker Centers



Source: UCLA Labor Center Young Worker Survey 2015

Some employers use punitive tactics such as the denial of job promotions or the reduction of worker hours to deter organizing efforts. One young worker reported that “they don’t want us to unionize, so they see me as a threat. So they don’t want me to move up and it’s not even because of my work ethic or because what I do, it’s because they just see me like someone that doesn’t deserve it.”⁹¹ Campaigns of retaliation often successfully keep employees from organizing: over half of our respondents said they would join a union or worker center if they didn’t fear retribution from their employer.

Most young workers in low-wage industries wanted better wages and better work conditions, benefits that can be obtained by joining a union. For young workers to be more engaged in labor organizing, “unions must develop youth-oriented strategic initiatives that embrace young workers, their lifestyles, careers, work styles and values.”⁹² One young worker was hopeful about this possibility:

“ We got to keep on fighting. Corporations are not going to listen. All the workers have to unionize, because the fast food industry has be bad for years, but no one has organized like now. Like with the ‘Fight for 15’ and other campaigns so you know, we got to keep fighting and hopefully we get fifteen dollars and a union. When I move on from fast food and we get a union and we are organized, I hope it will be better for others who come into this job and they have better opportunities. That’s my plan. ”

(Fast Food Worker, Maintenance, age 22, Male)



5. Building a Better Future

What Do Young Workers Want?

Workers have clear ideas about what changes need to take place in their workplace. They believe that workplaces can be transformed and can be supportive, equitable and instructive environments for young people. The participants of our study were asked what would they change at work, and this is what a *Young Worker Bill of Rights* might include based on the insights of young workers:

- Young workers demand a **wage increase** and a higher minimum wage.
 - » Young workers feel they are not being paid a liveable wage. They believe work performance will increase if wages were connected to the cost of living.
- Young workers demand workplace changes so that there is **better treatment of workers**.
 - » They feel employers often have unreasonable expectations. They also feel customers are frequently rude and do not treat them well, and that they would be more effective if they were treated more respectfully.
- Young workers demand changes in how their **work hours and schedules** are arranged.
 - » They want to have schedules that are more predictable, stable and adjustable, especially those workers who are students, parents or have family commitments.
 - » They also want to be given more hours to work when they're available, and to be offered more full-time positions.
- Young workers demand **respectful management that abides by federal and state labor law and codes**.
 - » Young workers believe that management needs more education about current labor laws, and that these laws should be better enforced when management fails to abide by them.

- » They also feel management needs to be more sensitive towards workers and not deliver unrealistic deadlines and fail to consider worker needs.
- Young workers demand **benefits and protections** at work.
 - » Young workers find it unfair that they do not receive benefits from employers. They believe they have the right to benefits such as health coverage, child care support, and the freedom to organize with other part-time and full-time workers.

Recommendations

The following is a set of recommendations developed by young workers and intended to contribute to the struggle for the dignity and equity of the next generation's workforce.

1. Build Youth Leadership and Support Youth Movements

- a. **Develop a national "Know Your Rights" organizing campaign for young workers** that invests in organizing young workers and developing educational programs in collaboration with other workers, unions and labor advocates.
- b. **Respect youth movement organizing** and give young workers decision-making power and substantive leadership in institutions like unions and advocacy organizations, and ensure that organizing initiatives represent the needs of the broad population of young workers.
- c. **Develop young worker leadership in government spaces**, such as a Bureau of Young Worker Affairs within the California Labor Commissioner's office, for instance, that could be led by young lawyers and worker advocates and represent the interests of young workers.
- d. **Integrate young worker "ambassadors-leaders-educators"** in a county and statewide campaign to educate high school and college students about their rights as workers.

2. Protect Young Workers from Workplace Exploitation

- a. **Guarantee workplace protections and the enforcement of current laws protecting young workers** and provide materials to young workers about their rights, address barriers specific to young workers to filing claims, educate young workers on the "private right of action" that allows workers to sue their employers directly for unpaid wages and other labor violations, and protect workers from retaliation and intimidation.
- b. **Initiate scheduling and wage regularization legislation** in L.A. County and California akin to ordinances adopted in Vermont and San Francisco that require employers to give workers predictable schedules, stable hours, and guarantee that part-time workers be considered for a greater share of hours before new workers are brought into the workplace.
- c. **Develop no-tolerance policies against workplace harassment and violations** including wage theft, sexual harassment, retaliation, racism, ageism, ableism, classism, and discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, and religious practices.

3. Support High Road Practices and Invest in Young Workers Jobs

- a. **Create a salary system that is equitable across industries** and that obliges employers to recognize and honor transferable skills, previous wage levels, past job training and experience, and seniority.
- b. **Incentivize high road businesses that invest in workers** and offer young workers in Los Angeles greater career training opportunities in service sector businesses that offer benefits, a dynamic salary regime, childcare subsidies, and transferrable retirement options.
- c. **Create a high road youth employer report card or program** through which high road employers are regularly recognized by the California Labor Commissioner and the governor's office.
- d. **Expand county workforce investment funds** in order to focus on advancing career training and job opportunities for young people.



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A close-up, profile view of a Black man with a short beard and mustache. He is looking slightly downwards and to the right. He is wearing a silver earring in his left ear that is shaped like a raised fist. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a window or a bright outdoor area. The image has a warm, golden-brown color cast.

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