

Provide Jobs for Those Who Need Them

By [Algernon Austin](#)

In 2023, the United States had a second year of the lowest annual unemployment rate since the 1960s. The national unemployment rate averaged 3.6 percent, tying the rate for 2022. But while the national average showed record low unemployment, many communities in every state continued to suffer from high unemployment. For example, the unemployment rate averaged 8.1 percent in Magoffin County, Kentucky; 8.6 percent in Coachella, California; 10.7 percent in Flint, Michigan; and 14.7 percent in Kusilvak, Alaska. Access to jobs is not spread evenly across the country.

Even during the best labor market conditions nationally, there are still millions who need work:

- Although the country had a very strong labor market in 2023 on average, there were still 6.1 million people officially counted as unemployed, 5.3 million who wanted to work but were not officially counted as unemployed, and 4.1 million who wanted to work full-time but could only find part-time work.
- In 2023, the teen unemployment rate averaged 11.2 percent.
- In the late 1960s, almost 95 percent of prime-age males were employed. In recent years only around 85 percent are employed. This translates to about 6 million fewer men working today. (The employment rate for prime-age women increased substantially over this time period.)
- The increased use of artificial intelligence may lead to a short-term spike in joblessness for some workers.

Solution: The Government Should Subsidize Employment

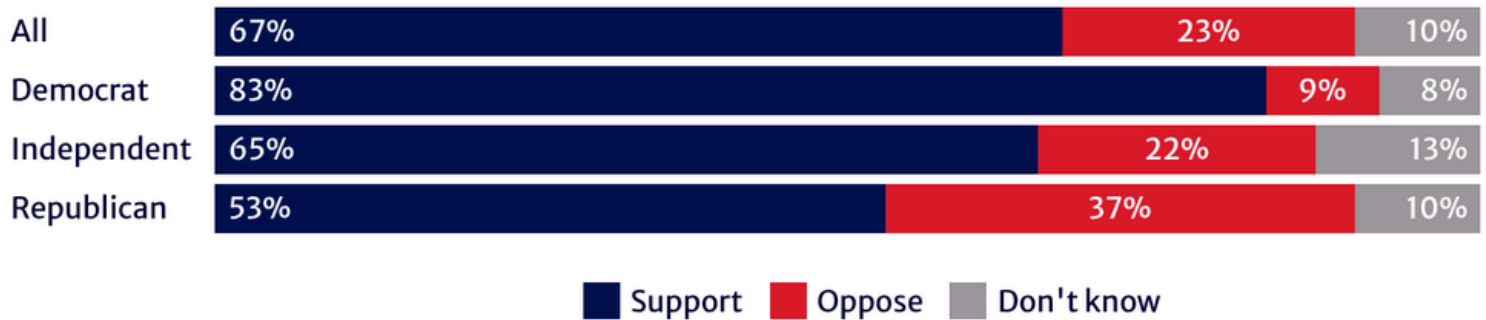
A targeted, large-scale subsidized employment program or a universal federal jobs guarantee would significantly increase the number of people working. A wide variety of subsidized employment programs have been shown to increase employment and reduce social welfare and criminal-legal system costs. Bills such as the Workforce Promotion and Access Act and the Federal Jobs Guarantee Development Act are good starting points.

The Public Supports a Jobs Guarantee

Several polls in recent years have shown majority support for a federal jobs guarantee. A 2024 survey from Data for Progress found majority support for the policy across party lines. Slightly more than half (53 percent) of Republicans expressed support, as did 83 percent of Democrats.

Support for Federal Jobs Guarantee Transcends Political Party

Share of likely voters who support or oppose creating a federal job guarantee program



Source: Data for Progress, May 3–4, 2024 survey of likely voters. Independent includes unaffiliated and third party voters.



Resources:

- [More Lessons Learned From 50 Years of Subsidized Employment Programs: An Updated Review of Models](#), Kali Grant and Natalia Cooper, **Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality**, August 1, 2023.
- [Working to Reduce Poverty: A National Subsidized Employment Proposal](#), **RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences**, February 2018.
- [What Works for Active Labor Policies?](#), **CID Working Paper Series 2019.358**, **Harvard University**, July 2019.
- [Memo: The Case for a Federal Job Guarantee Program](#), William Darity, Jr. and Dawn Milam, **Data for Progress**, September 10, 2020.