



MONEY

As clean energy jobs grow, women and Black workers are at risk of being left behind

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Women and Black workers are vastly underrepresented in the clean energy workforce, an industry that pays higher-than-average wages and is the fastest-growing source of jobs in the U.S., according to a new report by a coalition of energy organizations.

Clean energy jobs, which range from creating electric cars to making buildings more energy efficient, are transforming the nation's economy, but they are predominantly filled by white men, with Latino workers mostly stuck in entry-level positions and women and Black workers underrepresented in the industry overall, according to the report by a coalition of organizations including the Alliance to Save Energy and the American Association of Blacks in Energy.

"Congress and state lawmakers need to do more to make sure people of color aren't left behind in what is shaping up as the biggest economic transition in recent history," says Bob Keefe, executive director of E2, a nonpartisan group that supports initiatives benefiting the environment and economy, and one of the report's authors. "So far it's been white workers, particularly white men, who've benefited from this tremendous opportunity."

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In clean energy fields where they are most represented, women have fewer than 30% of the jobs, though they fill almost half of jobs across industries nationwide, the report says.

Meanwhile, Black workers have the biggest gap of any racial group between their representation in clean energy jobs and their numbers in the broader U.S. workforce, the

report says. They make up roughly 8% of clean energy employees, though they are about 13% of U.S. workers overall.

Latino employees make up almost 17% of clean energy workers, just slightly below the 18% of jobs they hold in the broader U.S. workforce. But they tend to be concentrated in entry-level construction positions, "jobs that are some of the first to get cut when things get bad," Keefe says.

That inequity was on vivid display during the COVID-19 pandemic, which also led to Black and Latino workers being disproportionately laid off in sectors like hotels and restaurants when businesses were shuttered to slow the spread of the virus.

Among those who lost clean energy jobs during the pandemic, an estimated 23% were Latino, while 31% of nonwhite workers overall in the industry found themselves out of work, according to the report.

High pay, good benefits

The lack of Black and women workers in the clean energy field resembles a gap also seen in tech, another high-paying field, Keefe says.

"What we're seeing in clean energy is not a lot different from what we saw in the tech industry that is still overwhelmingly run and populated by men," Keefe says.

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More than 3 million people work in the clean energy industry, nearly three times the number of Americans who work in the traditional fossil fuel sector, Keefe says. Access to clean energy jobs could help narrow the nation's gender and racial pay gap.

The energy efficiency sector for instance, which focuses on the reduction of energy waste and costs, typically pays over \$24 an hour, roughly 28% more than the national median wage, according to a separate report from the American Council on Renewable Energy, the Clean Energy Leadership Institute, and E2.

Clean energy jobs are "also more likely to come with retirement and health benefits," Keefe says.

In a case study, the diversity report released Thursday focused on the role of technicians who install and fix wind turbines, the key component to generating energy with wind.

With more than 60,000 turbines in 41 states and two territories, wind power is a surging part of the economy, and senior technicians earn almost \$40 an hour. But Black employees and women each comprise just 5% of that workforce, according to the report. Seven in 10 turbine technicians are white, and 2 in 10 are Latino.

Moving forward with equity

President Joe Biden has made addressing climate change a key component of the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill that has been passed by the Senate and is expected to be voted on by the House this month. And Biden is calling for less advantaged communities to receive 40% of the benefits from federal initiatives on the climate.

But to ensure inclusion, a range of actions are needed, advocates say.

"We need to remember that building back better also means building back more equitably and making sure people of color have (the same) opportunities as any other American," Keefe says.

Initiatives that could help increase diversity include focusing on investing in clean energy businesses owned by people of color and making sure those living near wind farms or electric vehicle factories are given the chance to work for those facilities.

Black workers could also gain access to clean energy jobs if more of those businesses are built beyond states like California and Massachusetts, Keefe says.

"The sun doesn't shine any brighter in Massachusetts than it does in Georgia or South Carolina," he says. "We have the opportunity now to pass policies to expand solar (production), to expand offshore wind in places like the Southeast which have bigger Black populations, and to bring those opportunities of employment to those communities."

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