

# PROTECTED VS. UNPROTECTED WHY STRONG CONSTRUCTION UNIONS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A THRIVING ECONOMY

U.S. construction industry workers often have two career paths with strikingly different working conditions:

**FAMILY-SUSTAINING  
WAGES & BENEFITS**

**HIGH-QUALITY  
TRAINING**

**SAFE WORK SITES  
BACKED BY WORKERS'  
COMPENSATION  
PROTECTION**

**LOW WAGES &  
NO BENEFITS**

**EXPLOITATION &  
FORCED LABOR**

**WAGE THEFT &  
PAYROLL FRAUD**

## PROTECTED LABOR

Offers a viable career path  
to the middle class

## UNPROTECTED LABOR

Career instability with often dishonest labor  
practices in the United States

Unfortunately, the decline in unionization over the years means that thousands of construction workers have no choice but to take the unprotected path. In 1971, 42% of construction workers were union members; by 2019 only 12.6% of construction workers were unionized.

When workers do not earn enough money to meet their basic needs, they often turn to safety net

programs to make up the difference. This, in turn, costs the states, the federal government, and taxpayers almost \$28 billion per year.

**Utilizing union labor is the best way to protect workers against exploitative labor practices, increase tax revenues and decrease human and economic costs imposed by wage theft and forced labor.**

Source: <https://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/the-public-cost-of-low-wage-jobs-in-the-us-construction-industry/>