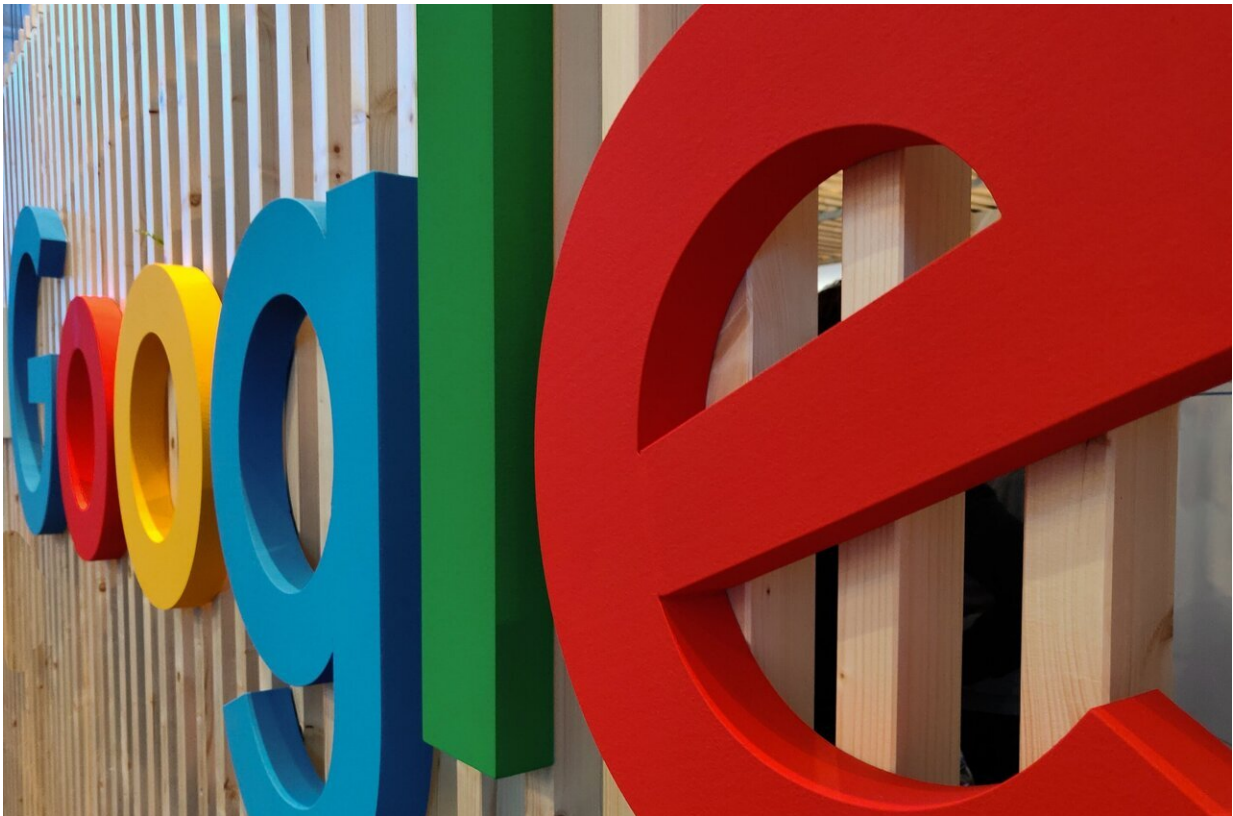


Google excludes thousands of workers from benefits, report says

February 23 2023, by Ethan Baron



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Google's minimum wage and benefits for contractors are withheld from thousands of its U.S. contract workers, a new report from a union alleges.

Google's parent firm Alphabet in 2019 announced that, "All our suppliers and staffing partners working with Google in the U.S. are required to provide a benchmark of [benefits](#) for their workers, including a \$15/hour [minimum wage](#), 12 weeks of paid family leave, eight days of paid [sick leave](#), \$5000/year in tuition reimbursement, and comprehensive healthcare."

But that announcement, made under pressure from direct employees angered about the firm's treatment of contractors, contained a link to a [company](#) document restricting which contract workers are actually eligible for the minimum wage and benefits. And some vendors to Google find ways around complying with Google's wage-and-benefits standards, according to the Alphabet Workers Union, which issued the survey-based report.

"Time and [time](#) again we've heard from workers who are barred from receiving Google's cited \$15 minimum or are told they can't take a sick day—even if they should be able to per Google's own policy," said Parul Koul, a Google software engineer and executive chair of the union. "Our report makes clear that Google is not doing enough to establish and enforce an ethical baseline of working conditions for all workers,"

Alphabet, according to the union, employs an estimated 50,000 U.S.-based contractors. Other reports indicate that about half the company's global workforce as of 2019 were contractors.

The union's report into contracting at Google's parent firm Alphabet was based on responses to a 22,000-worker survey that drew responses from 1,853 workers employed directly by 248 vendor companies.

Nearly half the contractors responding to the survey reported that they didn't have paid sick days or were not aware that they had them, the report said. Almost three-quarters did not report having access to paid

[parental leave](#), and only 10% said they had access to tuition reimbursement, according to the [report](#).

"The umbrella that all these things fall under is exploitation," said David Jones-Krause of Oakland, a contracted content creator for Google customer-service functions from January 2019 to December 2022.

Google called the survey "unrepresentative and misleading," and said it held its U.S. contract companies accountable for meeting its "industry leading benchmark of wages and benefits for their provisioned employees who access our corporate systems and campuses." The company did not immediately respond when asked to explain why the survey was purportedly unrepresentative and misleading.

The restriction of the minimum wage and benefits to "provisioned" employees—those with badge access to Google facilities or access to company systems—is described on Google's "US Wages & Benefits Standards," an online document the company linked to in its announcement about the mandatory wage and benefits for contractors. Those standards include a number of requirements that a contracted [worker](#) must meet to receive the wage and benefits, including having a non-temporary access badge to Google facilities and working 30 or more hours a week for Google.

Jones-Krause, 28, said vendor companies to Google keep many workers' hours below 30 per week to skirt the [wage](#)-and-benefits requirement. When his direct employer in 2019 fell under Google's then-new requirements, he began getting 10 days per year off, which appeared to cover the eight days of sick leave—but workers had to use one of those days for each of the holidays Google recognized, such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, Labor Day, Independence Day, Memorial Day and Presidents' Day, when they were not even allowed to work, Jones-Krause said.

According to the union, the unfair treatment of contract workers includes a racial dimension. About 65% of Google's contractors are non-White, and on average make 10% less than White contractors, with Black and Hispanic contractors making 20% less than White contractors, the union reported, adding that contractors with disabilities make an average of 18% less than able-bodied contractors.

Google's heavy reliance on [contract workers](#) appears driven by attention to the bottom line, but imposes costs on the company as well as workers, Jones-Krause believes. "You'll get better work out of people that are better cared for," he said. "Google needs to ... reverse course on this increasing reliance on this two-tiered system."

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