



Maine Center for
Economic Policy

State of Working Maine 2026

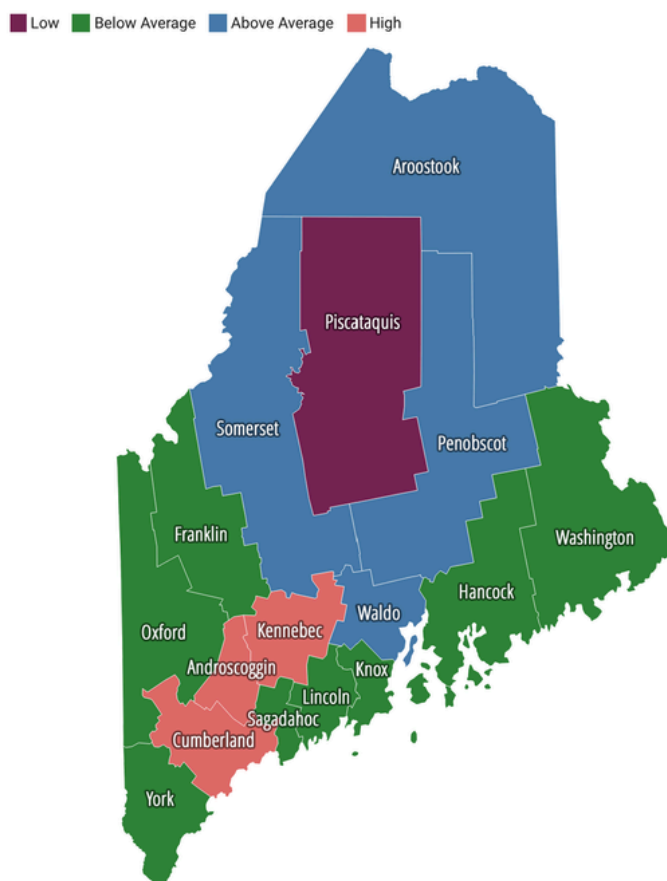
Protecting workers from Artificial Intelligence

Past technologies have often complemented workers before displacing some jobs, and productivity gains have not automatically translated into higher wages. Artificial intelligence may reshape work in Maine, but its pace and effects remain uncertain. The central policy question is who bears the risks and who captures the gains.

Key findings

- **Exposure is broad but uneven.** Maine's overall exposure resembles the nation's, with higher levels in Cumberland, Androscoggin, Kennebec, and Somerset counties. Office support, production, transportation, retail, customer service, and other routine occupations face substantial exposure, while work requiring judgment, physical skill, or sustained human interaction is harder to automate.
- **Current use and impacts are limited.** In mid-2026, one in four employed Mainers used AI at work multiple times a week and 13% used it daily. Only 55% of users reported higher productivity; 41% reported no difference. There is not yet evidence of broad AI-driven unemployment or wage decline, although technology firms, call centers, and early-career workers show warning signs.
- **Exposure does not equal job loss.** AI can complement workers, substitute for tasks or jobs, or increase profits without improving pay. History shows that even modest aggregate change can impose severe, lasting costs on particular workers, communities, and regions.
- **Inequality is the core risk.** Gains may flow to workers, but they may also widen wage gaps, shift income toward owners and investors, and increase insecure platform-based work. Policy choices will determine whether productivity gains are broadly shared.
- **Workplace governance matters.** AI-enabled surveillance, biased employment decisions, algorithmic wage-setting, misuse of worker data, and digital replicas can weaken privacy, accountability, and bargaining power.

Figure 4: AI Exposure by county in Maine



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of AI exposure index by Felten et al. Index level measures exposure compared to average American worker. Regions labeled "high" or "low" had an exposure level at least three quarters of a standard deviation above or below the norm.

Read the full report:
mecep.org/sowm2026



Read *State of Working Maine 2026* to learn more about the experiences of Mainers with AI in the workplace.

Policy recommendations

- **Track and manage displacement:** require AI-related disclosure in mass-layoff notices; restrict full replacement in safety-critical or public-interest roles; and create a durable, rapid adjustment program for affected workers and communities.
- **Modernize the safety net:** expand unemployment insurance eligibility, duration, and wage replacement; cover contractors where appropriate; recognize education and retraining as qualifying activity; remove harmful work-reporting barriers in SNAP and Medicaid; and advance affordable health coverage independent of employment.
- **Invest in education and mobility:** adequately fund Maine's public colleges, protect faculty participation in governance, and expand free public higher education and retraining access to displaced and at-risk workers.
- **Set workplace AI rules:** limit surveillance and inference of protected personal information; prohibit algorithmic wage-setting; require impact assessments, human review, and worker appeals for AI-assisted employment decisions; protect employee data; and require consent before using a worker's voice, likeness, or work to train or create a digital replacement.
- **Protect gig workers:** enforce a strong independent-contractor test and guarantee minimum pay that accounts for expenses, paid leave, and collective-bargaining rights.
- **Share the gains:** maintain progressive taxation; tax investment income and digital services more effectively; consider a practical AI-use levy; remove tax incentives that favor machines over workers; strengthen collective-bargaining rights; and raise and broaden Maine's minimum wage.

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