DOMESTIC WORKERS’ JOBLESSNESS TICKED UP IN JULY, WITH 29% OF RESPONDENTS OUT OF WORK

Of domestic workers who could not pay their July rent, 58% owe two or more months of rent

Domestic Workers Economic Situation Report · July 2021

Source: La Alianza surveys, NDWA Labs
Released: August 6, 2021

Today’s Bureau of Labor Statistics Jobs Report shows a decrease in the unemployment rates for Black and Latinx adults in July 2021. However, the rates remain higher than before the pandemic and higher than for other demographic groups. NDWA Labs’ July Report shows an increase in the percentage of jobless respondents in July compared to June 2021. Unemployment is still very high for Spanish-speaking domestic workers. In July 2021, 29% of domestic worker respondents were still out of work, much higher than the 9% who reported having no jobs before COVID-19.

Domestic workers are the nannies, homecare workers, and house cleaners whose work is essential to our economy, and yet they are one of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups of workers. Even before COVID-19, domestic workers earned less than the average US worker and were three times as likely to be living in poverty.¹

La Alianza survey data from Spanish-speaking domestic workers shows how the pandemic has amplified the vulnerability of this workforce. Domestic workers continue to face low wages and high levels of unemployment and underemployment. A contextual note regarding our findings: domestic workers, and particularly house cleaners, often have multiple employers. This means they may have to schedule several jobs in a given week in order to make ends meet.

Each month, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) releases an Economic Situation Summary with employment and other labor market data. This is an important report to keep track of how the economy is doing. However, domestic workers, along with other vulnerable workers, are often underrepresented in official data. Here we present an overview of the BLS Jobs report, along with NDWA Labs’ data which shows the employment and economic situation of thousands of Spanish-speaking domestic workers.

On August 6, the BLS released new employment data for July 2021.

- The unemployment rates for Black and Latina women decreased in July 2021.
- The unemployment rates for Black and Latinx adults continue to be higher compared to the rates for White and Asian adults.
- People who have been unemployed long-term (27 weeks or more) represented 39.3% of the total unemployed in July.

The economic crisis that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly harsh for Latina and Black women. In April 2020, the unemployment rate for Latina women reached 20%, the highest compared to other demographic groups. The unemployment rate for Latina women decreased in July 2021 with respect to June 2021, but it remains among the highest compared to other demographic groups.²

NDWA Labs’ July Report shows an increase in the percentage of jobless respondents in July compared to June 2021. Unemployment is still very high for Spanish-speaking domestic workers. In July 2021, 29% of domestic worker respondents were still out of work, much higher than the 9% who reported having no jobs before COVID-19.

July Domestic Worker Jobs and Wages

July unemployment and underemployment for domestic workers continue to be very high, with 29% of respondents reporting having zero weekly work hours.

- On average during July, 29% of domestic worker respondents reported a week with ZERO work hours, compared to 25% in June and May.
More than 8 in 10 respondents who had work in July were underemployed. 86% of domestic worker respondents who had at least one hour of work per week said they wanted to work more hours.

![Domestic worker joblessness ticked up in July, with 29% of respondents out of work.](chart)

Source: NDWA Labs Weekly Survey, Jul 2 - 31, 2020; May 7 - Jul 30, 2021

During July 2021, 88% of domestic worker respondents earned $15 or less per hour.

![In July 2021, 88% of surveyed domestic workers earned $15 or less per hour.](chart)

Source: NDWA Labs Weekly Survey, July 2 - July 30, 2021

Note: Percentages shown are monthly averages.

Job search

Most domestic worker respondents, whether or not they had current work, looked for additional work in July.
● Nearly 9 in 10 (87%) domestic worker respondents, whether or not they had current work, told us they had looked for new work in the past 30 days.
● More than 8 in 10 (83%) respondents, whether or not they had current work, told us they had asked at least one of their regular employers to go back to work in the past 30 days.

Housing and Food Security

Nearly half of domestic worker respondents faced housing insecurity, and 6 in 10 of those workers owe 2 or more months of rent. Nearly 8 in 10 experienced food insecurity. While some domestic workers are starting to recover some of the work they had lost, this is not enough to ensure their economic security. Their ongoing economic precarity is reflected in the high number of workers who are unsure if they can afford, or who cannot afford, food in the next two weeks, as well as the high number who are unable to pay rent and who have significant rent debt.

*Nearly 8 in 10 domestic workers experienced some level of food insecurity in July.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Can afford food in the next two weeks</th>
<th>Jul 2021</th>
<th>Jul 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don't know</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NDWA Labs Weekly Survey, July 2, 2020; July 3, 2021

● In early July, 11% of respondents said they would not be able to afford food in the following two weeks and 67% were unsure if they would be able to.
  ○ In comparison, during July 2020 17% of respondents said they would not be able to afford food in the following two weeks and 60% were unsure if they would be able to.

● At the beginning of July, nearly half of domestic worker respondents said they were unable to pay their monthly rent or mortgage.
  ○ In comparison, the same time last year 57% of respondents said they were unable to pay their monthly rent or mortgage.
Nearly half of domestic worker respondents were unable to pay their monthly rent or mortgage in July 2021.

Of domestic workers who could not pay their July rent, 58% owe two or more months of rent. For the first time in our surveys, we asked domestic workers about rent debt. Of the 48% of respondents who could not pay their July rent at the beginning of the month, 58% owe two or more months of rent.

Source: NDWA Labs Weekly Survey, July 2, 2020; July 9, 2021
Note: Due to rounding, some percentages may not add up to 100.

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Source: NDWA Labs Weekly Survey, July 9, 2021
About the surveys

La Alianza surveys Spanish-speaking domestic workers each week, via a Messenger chatbot. The employment numbers presented in this report include data from four weekly surveys in July 2021. Questions about hours worked and hourly wages are asked weekly, questions regarding underemployment and job search are asked bi-weekly. Questions around food and housing security are asked once a month.

The total number of fully completed surveys for our four July weekly surveys, which includes both new and repeated respondents, was 4,754. At the end of each survey, La Alianza provides respondents with relevant news articles and resources in Spanish. To learn more about the La Alianza survey of Spanish-speaking domestic workers, see our report.

La Alianza is a product of NDWA Labs, the innovation partner of the National Domestic Workers Alliance. NDWA Labs experiments with the ways technology can organize domestic workers and transform domestic work jobs into good jobs by bringing respect, living wages, and benefits to an undervalued and vulnerable part of the economy.

For questions, please contact us here.

Notes

1 Economic Policy Institute (2019), Domestic Workers Chartbook
2 Economic Policy Institute (2021), Jobs and Unemployment, “A more comprehensive look at unemployment rates”
3 In 2020, our main indicator for unemployment was based on those who responded ZERO to the question: “How many jobs did you have last week?” In 2021, our main indicator of unemployment is based on those who responded ZERO to the question: “How many hours did you work last week?”