Today's Bureau of Labor Statistics Jobs Report shows the number of jobs added in September was below market expectations.¹ Unemployment rates for Black and Latinx women decreased in September 2021. This was due both to an increase in employment and a decrease in labor force participation. NDWA Labs' September Report shows that the percentage of jobless respondents in September was unchanged compared to August, and joblessness remains very high for Spanish-speaking domestic workers. In September 2021, 28% of domestic worker respondents were still out of work, much higher than the 9% who reported having no jobs before COVID-19.²

In this report, we compare indicators for domestic workers' joblessness, wages, housing security and food security in the third quarter of 2021 (July, August, September) versus the third quarter of 2020. While there has been some job recovery, domestic workers remain in a precarious economic situation.

- 28% of respondents were out of work on average in the third quarter of 2021, compared to 36% of respondents during the third quarter of 2020.
- In the third quarter of 2021, 47% of respondents faced housing insecurity, compared to 57% of respondents in the same quarter of 2020. 3 in 4 respondents faced some level of food insecurity in the third quarter of 2021.
- An average of 86% of domestic worker respondents earned $15 or less per hour this quarter, a slight increase compared to 85% in the third quarter of 2020.
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.\(^3\)

La Alianza survey data of **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 joblessness 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.

**September Jobs Report - Bureau of Labor Statistics**

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 October 8, the BLS released [new employment data for September 2021](https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t09.htm).

- **The unemployment rates for Black and Latina women decreased in September 2021.** This is due both to an increase in employment and a decrease in labor force participation.
- **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 34.5% of the total unemployed in September.**

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.\(^4\) **The unemployment rate for Latina women decreased in September 2021 with respect to August 2021, and remains higher compared to Black and Asian adults.**
NDWA Labs' September Report shows the percentage of jobless respondents in September was unchanged compared to August, and joblessness remains very high for Spanish-speaking domestic workers.

**September Domestic Worker Jobs and Wages**

September joblessness and underemployment for domestic workers continue to be very high. An average of 28% of respondents reported having zero hours of work in a weekly survey.

Joblessness in the third quarter of 2021 is lower compared to the same quarter in 2020. 28% of respondents were jobless on average during this quarter, compared to 36% of respondents during the third quarter of 2020. In the second quarter of 2021, 27% of respondents were out of work.

28% of domestic workers remain jobless in the third quarter of 2021, a decrease from 36% in the same quarter of 2020.

![Graph showing hours worked by domestic workers](source: NDWA Labs' La Alianza Weekly Survey, Jul 2 - Sep 25, 2020; Jul 2 - Oct 1, 2021)

- 8 in 10 respondents who had work in September were underemployed. 80% of domestic worker respondents who had at least one hour of work per week said they wanted to work more hours.
The share of domestic workers earning $15 or less per hour did not significantly change compared to the rates we saw in summer 2020. During the third quarter of 2021, an average of 86% of domestic worker respondents earned $15 or less per hour. This is only a slight increase compared to the average we saw in the corresponding quarter in 2020, when 85% of respondents earned $15 or less per hour.

○ This share is a significant increase over the 55% of respondents who earned $15 or less before COVID-19.²

Job search

Most domestic worker respondents, whether or not they had current work, looked for additional work in September.

● More than 8 in 10 (82%) domestic worker respondents, whether or not they had current work, told us they had looked for new work in the past 30 days.

● Similarly, almost 8 in 10 (79%) 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.

Source: NDWA Labs’ La Alianza Weekly Survey, Jul 2 - Sep 25, 2020; Jul 2 - Oct 1, 2021

Notes: Percentages shown are quarterly averages. Due to rounding, some percentages may not add up to 100.
Housing and Food Security

Nearly half of domestic worker respondents faced housing insecurity, and more than 3 in 4 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 afford housing costs.

47% of domestic workers faced housing insecurity in the third quarter 2021, down from 57% in the same quarter of 2020.

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Source: NDWA Labs’ La Alianza Weekly Survey, Jul 2 - Sep 4, 2020; Jul 9 - Sep 3, 2021

Notes: Percentages shown are quarterly averages. Due to rounding, some percentages may not add up to 100.

- During the third quarter of 2021, 47% of domestic worker respondents, on average, said they were unable to pay their monthly rent or mortgage. This is only a slight improvement compared to the average of 50% in the previous quarter. However, there is a larger improvement with respect to the third quarter of 2020, when 57% of respondents faced housing insecurity.
During the third quarter of 2021, an average of 13% of respondents said they would not be able to afford food in the following two weeks and 64% were unsure if they would be able to.

Comparatively, during the third quarter of 2020, an average of 17% of respondents said they would not be able to afford food in the following two weeks and 64% were unsure if they would be able to.

About the surveys

NDWA Labs surveys Spanish-speaking domestic workers each week, via La Alianza, a Messenger chatbot. The employment numbers presented in this report include data from all our weekly surveys from the third quarter of 2021. September averages reflect data from four weekly surveys in September 2021. Questions about hours worked and hourly wages are asked weekly, questions regarding underemployment and job search are asked bi-weekly, and questions around food and housing security are asked monthly.

The total number of fully completed surveys for our five September weekly surveys, which includes both new and repeated respondents, was 5,616; for August, we had 5,840 completed surveys, and 4,754 for July. At the end of each survey, La Alianza
provides respondents with relevant news articles and resources in Spanish. To learn more about NDWA Labs’ La Alianza survey of Spanish-speaking domestic workers, see our recent 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 White House Council of Economic Advisers (2021), The Employment Situation in September
2 NDWA Labs (2020), 6 Months in Crisis: The Impact of COVID-19 on Domestic Workers
3 Economic Policy Institute (2019), Domestic Workers Chartbook
4 Economic Policy Institute (2021), Jobs and Unemployment, “A more comprehensive look at unemployment rates”