JOBLESSNESS FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS DECREASED IN OCTOBER, WITH 22% OF RESPONDENTS OUT OF WORK
Underemployment remains high, with 3 in 4 respondents saying they wanted to work additional hours

Domestic Workers Economic Situation Report · October 2021
Source: La Alianza surveys, NDWA Labs
Released: November 5, 2021

The number of new U.S. jobs in October, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Jobs Report, is above market expectations.¹ Unemployment rates remain higher than before the pandemic. However, the report shows the lowest unemployment rate since the pandemic began and a decrease in the unemployment rate for Latinx adults in October 2021.

Today's NDWA Labs' Domestic Worker Economic Situation Report shows a decrease in the percentage of jobless respondents in October compared with September 2021. Joblessness is still much higher than before the pandemic for Spanish-speaking domestic workers — 22% of domestic worker respondents were out of work, much higher than the 9% who reported having no jobs before COVID-19.²

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 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.
October 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 November 5, the BLS released new employment data for October 2021.
- The number of jobs added to the U.S. economy in October is above market expectations.
- The report shows a decrease in the general unemployment rate, which is at its lowest point since the pandemic began.
- **The unemployment rate for Latinx adults decreased in October. However, the unemployment rate for Latina women showed little change.**
- The non-seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for Latina women slightly decreased.4
- The unemployment rates for Black and Latinx adults continue to be higher compared to the rates for White and Asian adults.
- The share of people who have been unemployed long-term (27 weeks or more) decreased, representing 31.6% of the total unemployed in October.

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 of any demographic group. **The unemployment rate for Latina women showed little change in October 2021 with respect to September 2021. It remains higher than pre-pandemic levels, and higher compared to white adults.** Recovery has been slowest for Black adults.5

**NDWA Labs’ October Report shows a decrease in the percentage of jobless respondents in October compared with September 2021.** Joblessness is still much higher than before the pandemic for Spanish-speaking domestic workers, 22% of domestic worker respondents were still out of work, much higher than the 9% who reported having no jobs before COVID-19.6
October Domestic Worker Jobs and Wages

October joblessness for domestic workers decreased compared to September, with an average of 22% of respondents reporting zero hours of work in a weekly survey.

- On average during October, 22% of domestic worker respondents reported a week with ZERO work hours, compared with 28% in September and August.
- Throughout the second and third quarters of 2021, joblessness ranged from 25% to 30%. While this month’s decrease in joblessness is the largest month-to-month difference we have seen throughout the year, we saw a similar decrease in the spring followed by an uptick throughout the summer.
- The rate of joblessness in October 2021 (22%) is much lower than the 38% of respondents with zero hours of work in October 2020, but it is still significantly higher than the 9% of respondents without work before the pandemic.

3 in 4 respondents who had work in October were underemployed. 75% of domestic worker respondents who had at least one hour of work per week said they wanted to work more hours.

22% of domestic workers were jobless in October 2021, down from 28% in August and September.

Source: NDWA Labs’ La Alianza Weekly Survey, October 2 - 30, 2020; October 9 - 29, 2021

NDWA Labs - Domestic Workers Economic Situation Report - August 2021 - 3
During October 2021, 84% of domestic worker respondents earned $15 or less per hour. This share continues to be significantly higher than the 55% of respondents who earned $15 or less before COVID-19.2

In October 2021, 84% of domestic workers earned $15 or less per hour.

![Chart showing earnings distribution between Oct 2021 and Oct 2020]

Source: NDWA Labs' La Alianza Weekly Survey, October 2-30, 2020; October 8-29, 2021

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

Job search

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

- 8 in 10 (80%) 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 3 in 4 (77%) 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

Food and housing insecurity continue to be widespread among surveyed domestic workers. However, housing insecurity in October is the lowest we have seen since we first asked this question in April 2020. 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.

**77% of domestic workers experienced food insecurity in October 2021, compared with 83% in October 2020.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Will you be able to pay for food in the next two weeks?</th>
<th>Oct 2021</th>
<th>Oct 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don't know</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NDWA Labs' La Alianza Weekly Survey, October 9, 2020; October 8, 2021
Notes: Percentages shown are monthly averages. Due to rounding, some percentages may not add up to 100.

- In early October 2021, 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.
  - In comparison, during October 2020, 16% of respondents said they would not be able to afford food in the following two weeks and 66% were unsure if they would be able to.

- Housing insecurity remains very high. However, the share of workers unable to pay their October rent was the lowest we have seen since we began asking this question in April 2020.
  - At the beginning of October, 43% of domestic worker respondents said they were unable to pay their monthly rent or mortgage.
  - In comparison, at the same time last year, 54% of respondents said they were unable to pay their monthly rent or mortgage.
43% of domestic workers faced housing insecurity in October 2021, compared with 54% in October 2020.

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 four weekly surveys in October 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 October weekly surveys, which includes both new and repeated respondents, was 4,407. 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 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 October*
2. NDWA Labs (2020), *6 Months in Crisis: The Impact of COVID-19 on Domestic Workers*
4. For more details on seasonal adjustment, see [https://www.bls.gov/cps/seasfaq.htm](https://www.bls.gov/cps/seasfaq.htm)
5. Economic Policy Institute (2021), Jobs and Unemployment, *“A more comprehensive look at unemployment rates”*

* The rate of joblessness is NOT seasonally adjusted.