23% of domestic worker respondents were out of work in November

7 in 10 workers experienced some level of food insecurity

Domestic Workers Economic Situation Report · November 2021
Source: La Alianza surveys, NDWA Labs
Released: December 3, 2021

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

Today’s NDWA Labs' Domestic Worker Economic Situation Report shows a slight increase in the percentage of jobless respondents in November compared with October 2021. However, joblessness is lower than throughout the second and third quarters of 2021. 23% of surveyed Spanish-speaking domestic workers were out of work in November, 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.

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 December 3, the BLS released new employment data for November 2021.

- The number of jobs added to the U.S. economy in November was below market expectations.
- However, the report shows a decrease in the general unemployment rate, as well as in the unemployment rates for Black, Latinx, and white adults.
- **The unemployment rate for Latina women decreased in November.**
- The unemployment rates for Black and Latinx adults continue to be higher compared to the rates for White and Asian adults, with the highest rate among Black adults.
- The share of people who have been unemployed long-term (27 weeks or more) showed little change, representing 32.1% of the total unemployed in November.

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. It has declined significantly since then, but remains higher than pre-pandemic levels, and higher compared to white adults. **The unemployment rate for Latina women declined in November 2021 with respect to October 2021.**

**NDWA Labs’ November Report shows a slight uptick in the percentage of jobless respondents in November compared with October 2021.** 23% of surveyed domestic workers were out of work in November, a substantially higher percentage compared to the 9% who reported having no jobs before COVID-19. However, joblessness is lower than throughout the second and third quarters of 2021.
November Domestic Worker Jobs and Wages

November joblessness for domestic workers increased slightly compared to October, with an average of 23% of respondents reporting zero hours of work in a weekly survey.

- On average during November, 23% of domestic worker respondents reported a week with ZERO work hours, compared with 22% in October, and 28% in September.
- While there was a slight increase in joblessness this month, the share of jobless respondents is still lower than throughout the second and third quarters of 2021, when joblessness ranged from 25% to 30%.
- The rate of joblessness in November 2021 (23%) is much lower than the 41% of respondents with zero hours of work in November 2020, but it is still more than double the share of respondents without work before the pandemic (9%).

8 in 10 respondents who had work in November were underemployed. 81% of domestic worker respondents who had at least one hour of work per week said they wanted to work more hours.

23% of domestic workers were jobless in November 2021, compared with 22% in October and 28% in September.

Source: NDWA Labs’ La Alianza Weekly Survey. November 6-20, 2020; September 3 – November 19, 2021
During November 2021, 84% of domestic worker respondents earned $15 or less per hour. This is significantly higher than the 55% of respondents who earned $15 or less before COVID-19.²

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much did you earn per hour on average last week?</th>
<th>$0-10</th>
<th>$11-15</th>
<th>$16 or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2021</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2020</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NDWA Labs’ La Allianza Weekly Survey, November 6–20, 2020; November 5–18, 2021

**Job search**

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

- More than 8 in 10 (83%) domestic worker respondents, whether or not they had current work, told us they had looked for new work in the past 30 days.
- Nearly 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.

**Housing and Food Security**

Food and housing insecurity continue to be widespread among surveyed domestic workers. However, housing insecurity in November 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 percentage who are unable to pay rent.

7 in 10 domestic workers experienced some level of food insecurity in November 2021.

In early November 2021, 10% 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.

- In comparison, during November 2020, 22% 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.

Housing insecurity remains very high. However, the share of workers unable to pay their November rent was the lowest we have seen since we began asking this question in April 2020.

- At the beginning of November, 42% of domestic worker respondents said they were unable to pay their monthly rent or mortgage.
- In comparison, at the same time last year, 63% of respondents said they were unable to pay their monthly rent or mortgage. It is important to note that housing insecurity in November 2020 was among the highest shares we have seen since the pandemic began.
**42% of domestic workers faced housing insecurity in November 2021.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nov 2021</th>
<th></th>
<th>Nov 2020</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent or mortgage</td>
<td>I could</td>
<td>Does not apply</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>I could</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>42%</strong></td>
<td><strong>8%</strong></td>
<td><strong>50%</strong></td>
<td><strong>63%</strong></td>
<td><strong>6%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NDWA Labs' La Alianza Weekly Survey, November 13, 2020; November 5, 2021
Note: Due to rounding, some percentages may not add up to 100.

**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 three weekly surveys in November 2021—we did not run a survey during Thanksgiving weekend. 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 three November weekly surveys, which includes both new and repeated respondents, was 2,647. 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 November*
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"

* The rate of joblessness is NOT seasonally adjusted. For more details on seasonal adjustment, see https://www.bls.gov/cps/seasfaq.htm