JOBLESSNESS FOR DOMESTIC WORKER RESPONDENTS DECREASED TO 22% IN FEBRUARY

This is more than double the 9% who reported having no jobs before COVID-19

Domestic Workers Economic Situation Report · February 2022
Source: La Alianza surveys, NDWA Labs
Released: March 4, 2022

Today's Bureau of Labor Statistics Jobs Report shows the number of jobs added in February was above market expectations. Unemployment rates for Latina women decreased slightly in February 2022, while the rates for Black women increased.

NDWA Labs' February Report shows that the percentage of jobless domestic worker respondents decreased to 22%, compared to 26% in January. While joblessness this month is back to the level we saw in the last quarter of 2021, this still represents more than double 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.

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.


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 March 4, the BLS released new employment data for February 2022.

- Similarly to last month, the number of jobs added in February is above market expectations.
- **The unemployment rate for Latina women decreased slightly in February.**
- **The unemployment rate for Black women increased compared to last month.**
- 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 26.7% of the total unemployed in February.

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. However, the recovery has been slower for Black women.

The unemployment rate for Latina women decreased slightly in February 2022 with respect to January. **Similarly, NDWA Labs’ February Report shows the percentage of jobless domestic worker respondents decreased in February compared to January.**

**February Domestic Worker Jobs and Wages**

**February joblessness decreased with respect to January 2022.** An average of 22% of respondents reported having zero hours of work in a weekly survey, compared to 26% in January.

- This is back to the level of joblessness we saw during the last quarter of 2021, after a notable increase in joblessness in January of this year.
- Before COVID, 9% of respondents reported having zero hours of work.
22% of domestic workers were jobless in February 2022, an improvement after a notable increase last month.

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

- **More than 7 in 10 domestic worker respondents earned less than $15 per hour* in February.** Similarly to January, an average of 72% of respondents this month reported earning less than $15 per hour.
  - This is significantly higher than the share of respondents who earned less than $15 before COVID-19, which was at most 55%**.

Source: NDWA Labs’ La Alianza Weekly Survey, February 5-26, 2022; December 3, 2021 - February 25, 2022
72% of domestic workers made less than $15 per hour in February 2022.

How much did you make per hour last week?

- 18% $0-9
- 55% $10-14
- 28% $15 or more

Source: NDWA Labs’ La Alianza Weekly Survey, February 4-25, 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 February.

- 8 in 10 (79%) of domestic worker respondents, whether or not they had current work, told us they had looked for new work in the past 30 days.
- 3 in 4 (75%) 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

Half of domestic worker respondents faced housing insecurity, and nearly 8 in 10 experienced food insecurity. This reflects the ongoing economic precarity that domestic workers experience, even as there was a decrease in joblessness compared to the previous month.

- In early February, 50% of domestic worker respondents, on average, said they were unable to pay their monthly rent or mortgage.
  - While this number is still very high, this is an improvement compared to the same month in 2021, when 57% of respondents faced housing insecurity.
50% of domestic workers faced housing insecurity in February 2022, down from 57% one year ago.

In early February 2022, 18% of respondents said they would not be able to afford food in the following two weeks and 61% were unsure if they would be able to.

- In comparison, during February 2021, 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.

Source: NDWA Labs’ La Alianza Weekly Survey, February 5, 2021; February 4, 2022
Note: Due to rounding, some percentages may not add up to 100.
79% of domestic workers experienced food insecurity in February 2022, compared with 82% one year ago.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Will you be able to pay for food in the next two weeks?</th>
<th>I don't know</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feb 2022</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 2021</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NDWA Labs' La Alianza Weekly Survey, February 5, 2021; February 4, 2022
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 4 weekly surveys in February 2022. 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 at the beginning of the month.

The total number of fully completed surveys for our four February weekly surveys, which includes both new and repeated respondents, was 3,441. 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 this 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 (2022), The Employment Situation in February
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”

*In January 2022 we modified the ranges for answer options in the hourly wage questions. The previous ranges were: $10 or less, $11-15, $16-20, $21-25, and $26 or more. As of January 2022, the ranges are: $9 or less, $10-14, $15-19, $20-24, and $25 or more.**

**The share of respondents earning less than $15 in January cannot be directly compared to baseline numbers before COVID-19, due to a change in answer option ranges in 2022 (see above footnote). However, since 55% of respondents reported earning $15 or less before COVID-19, a share which is inclusive of those who earned $15 per hour, we know that the share of respondents earning less than $15 is at most 55%.