NDWA LABS

JOBLESSNESS AMONG DOMESTIC WORKER RESPONDENTS DECREASED SLIGHTLY TO 21% IN FEBRUARY
Joblessness remains higher than during the second half of 2022

Domestic Workers Economic Situation Report · February 2023
Source: La Alianza surveys, NDWA Labs
Released: March 10, 2023

The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics Jobs Report shows the general unemployment rate increased slightly, and the number of jobs added was above market expectations.[1] The unemployment rate for Latina women increased for the third consecutive month.

NDWA Labs' February Report shows that the joblessness rate for domestic worker respondents edged down to 21%. However, it remains higher than during the second half of 2022, and it is more than twice the rate of 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. They work in private homes, and often have multiple employers. This means they may have to schedule several jobs in a given week in order to make ends meet. Domestic workers earn less than the average US worker and are three times as likely to be living in poverty.[3]

La Alianza survey data from **Spanish-speaking domestic workers** shows how respondents continue to face low wages and high levels of unemployment and underemployment.

February 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.[4] 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 10, the BLS released new employment data for February 2023.
- The number of jobs added in February was above market expectations.
- The general unemployment rate ticked up.
- **The unemployment rate for Latina and Black women increased.**
- The unemployment rates for Black and Latinx adults continue to be higher compared to the rates for white adults.

NDWA Labs' data shows a slight decrease in joblessness for surveyed Spanish-speaking domestic workers, but joblessness remains at a higher rate compared to the second half of 2022. While the share of joblessness for domestic workers is not directly comparable to the unemployment rate nationwide*, looking at trends in the data for Spanish-speaking domestic workers in the context of national trends can support our understanding of the sector as it relates to the broader economy.

February Domestic Worker Economic Situation at a Glance

Methodological note

In 2023, we began implementing some methodological improvements to our surveys, following recommendations from survey design and methodology experts at NORC. Beginning with our January surveys, we made some changes to the wording of some questions.**

We tested slight language changes with a subgroup of respondents to make sure the changes did not affect how respondents answered our questions before sending the survey to the full sample. We assigned the original and updated versions of the survey to random subgroups and confirmed that differences in responses were not statistically significant before we shared the updated survey with a larger sample of workers. However, we cannot definitively rule out that some differences in our findings compared to prior surveys may be partially due to wording changes.

Main Findings

Below are our main findings on the Economic Situation of Spanish-speaking domestic workers in February. Note that monthly numbers may be volatile, which is why we look at our findings as they relate to prior trends in the data, and the economic situation of the overall economy.

Jobs and Wages

- **21% of domestic worker respondents were jobless in February 2023,** a slight decrease from 22% in January. Joblessness was higher than any point during the second half of 2022.
- **55% of worker respondents were underemployed in February 2023, down from 62% in January.** The main reason for underemployment that workers reported was that they could not find clients (67%), followed by having a health problem (13%), taking care of a family member (11%), and "other" (8%).
- **The wage distribution improved only slightly in February, with fewer (62%) domestic worker respondents earning less than $15 per hour.** In comparison, during the fourth quarter of 2022, 63% of respondents earned less than $15 per hour.
    - This share is still higher than the share of respondents who earned less than $15 per hour before COVID-19, which was at most 55%.***

Economic Security

- **In early February, 77% of domestic worker respondents said their households faced food scarcity** either often (11%) or sometimes (66%) in the week prior to the survey.
    - The prevalence of food scarcity decreased from 80% in January.
    - NOTE: We introduced this question in January, asking workers about food availability in their households in the seven days prior to the survey. Previously, we had gauged food security by asking respondents whether they would be able to afford food in the two weeks following the survey.**
- **Domestic workers' housing insecurity showed a notable decrease compared to January, but it remains higher than in the fourth quarter of 2022.** 45% of domestic workers were unable to pay their rent in February, down

from a 24-month high of 52% in January 2023. However, housing insecurity was higher compared to the 41% average during the fourth quarter of 2022.

- **In early February, nearly half (48%) of domestic worker respondents told us that it was either very (22%) or somewhat difficult (26%) to afford regular household expenses**, such as food, housing, car payments, and medical expenses, in the week prior to the survey. 45% of workers told us that it was a little difficult to afford household expenses and only 7% told us that it was not difficult.
  - This was an improvement compared to January, when 54% of respondents reported difficulty affording regular expenses.

About the surveys

NDWA Labs surveys Spanish-speaking domestic workers each week, via La Alianza, a Messenger chatbot. 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](#).

The employment numbers presented in this report include data from four weekly surveys in February 2023. The total number of fully completed surveys in February, which includes both new and repeated respondents, was 2,230.

Questions about hours worked and hourly wages are asked weekly, questions regarding underemployment and job search are asked bi-weekly, and questions around economic security are asked monthly.

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 or feedback, please contact us [here](#).

Notes

[1] White House Council of Economic Advisers (2023), *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 (2022), *Domestic Workers Chartbook*
[4] Kopparam (2022), [What federal statistical agencies can do to improve survey response rates among Hispanic communities in the United States](#)

* Unlike unemployment rates, joblessness for domestic workers may include people who are not working but are currently unavailable to work, or not actively looking for jobs. Additionally, the NDWA Labs' joblessness rate for surveyed domestic workers is NOT seasonally adjusted, while BLS unemployment rates are adjusted.

**We modified the wording of some questions to ensure specificity and consistency in period reference formatting. The goal was to reduce cognitive burden and potential measurement error. For example, where we previously asked: "How many hours did you work on the week of January 9?", we changed the question to: "During the last 7 days, how many hours did you work?"

*** The share of respondents earning less than $15 in 2022 cannot be directly compared to baseline numbers before COVID-19, due to a change in answer option ranges (see above footnote). However, since 55% of respondents reported earning $15 or less before COVID-19,[2] 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%.