



## JOBLESSNESS DECREASED TO 17% IN MAY

More than six in ten (63%) domestic worker respondents were underemployed.

### Domestic Workers Economic Situation Report · May 2023

Source: La Alianza surveys, NDWA Labs

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The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics Jobs Report shows continued job growth in May. In parallel, **NDWA Labs' May Report shows a decline to 17% in joblessness for surveyed domestic workers.** This comes after a joblessness increase during the first quarter of the year. It remains over twice the rate of 9% who reported having no jobs before COVID-19.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

### May 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.<sup>3</sup> 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 June 2, the BLS released new employment data for [May 2023](#).

- The general unemployment rate increased.
- **The unemployment rate for Latina women decreased.**
- The unemployment rate for Black women increased.
- The unemployment rates for Black and Latinx adults continue to be higher compared to the rates for white adults.
- Average hourly earnings for nonfarm payroll workers increased.

**In parallel, NDWA Labs' data shows a slight decrease in joblessness for surveyed domestic workers, at 17%.** 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.

### May Domestic Worker Economic Situation at a Glance

Below are our main findings on the Economic Situation of Spanish-speaking domestic workers in May. 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*

- **Joblessness decreased to 17% in May.** This is the second consecutive month where we have seen a slight decline in joblessness. However, the share of respondents who reported more than 20 hours of work per week declined in May.
- **More than six in ten (63%) domestic worker respondents were underemployed.**
  - The main reason for underemployment that workers reported was that they could not find more clients (71%), followed by taking care of a family member (10%), having a health problem (14%), and “other” (5%).
- **The wage distribution worsened in May compared to the previous month.** Two thirds (66%) of domestic worker respondents reported earning less than \$15 per hour in May, compared to 60% during April.
  - This share remains higher than the share of respondents who earned less than \$15 per hour before COVID-19, which was at most 55%.\*\*\*

#### *Economic Security*

**Economic security showed continued signs of improvement in May**, with a decrease in housing insecurity and in the difficulty of affording regular household expenses. However, for the second consecutive month, there was an uptick in food scarcity.

- **Food scarcity increased slightly.** Eight in ten (81%) domestic worker respondents said their households faced food scarcity either often (13%) or sometimes (68%) in the week prior to being surveyed.
- **Housing insecurity decreased for the second consecutive month.** This improvement comes after a significant increase in housing insecurity during the first quarter of 2023.
  - 44% of domestic worker respondents reported they were unable to afford their rent or mortgage at the beginning of May, compared to a 46% average in April.
- **In early May, 44% of domestic worker respondents reported struggling to afford regular household expenses.** This is a considerable decrease compared to the April share of 49%.
  - In May, respondents told us that it was either very (19%) or somewhat difficult (25%) to afford regular household expenses, such as food, housing, car payments, and medical expenses, in the week prior to the survey.
  - 51% of workers told us that it was a little difficult to afford household expenses and only 5% told us that it was not difficult.

**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 May 2023, four weekly surveys in April 2023, and twelve weekly surveys throughout the first quarter of 2023. For greater detail on completions broken down by month, please see the table below.

Month	Number of weekly surveys	Total completed surveys
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May 2023	4	2,568
April 2023	4	2,576
March 2023	5	3,053
February 2023	4	2,230
January 2023	3	1,981

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

<sup>1</sup> NDWA Labs (2020), [6 Months in Crisis: The Impact of COVID-19 on Domestic Workers](#)

<sup>2</sup> Economic Policy Institute (2022), [Domestic Workers Chartbook](#)

<sup>3</sup> Koppam (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.

\*\*\* 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,<sup>2</sup> 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%.