NDWA LABS

JOBLESSNESS AMONG DOMESTIC WORKER RESPONDENTS WAS AT 20% IN NOVEMBER

Respondents faced increased food scarcity

Domestic Workers Economic Situation Report · November 2023
Source: La Alianza surveys, NDWA Labs
Released: December 8, 2023

The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Employment Situation Report shows job growth above market expectations in November and a slight decrease in the general unemployment rate.

NDWA Labs' November data shows an increase to 20% in joblessness for surveyed domestic workers. Joblessness remains higher than 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, yet they are some of the most vulnerable and marginalized workers. They work in private homes and often have multiple employers, meaning they may have to schedule several jobs 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.

November Jobs Report - Bureau of Labor Statistics

The US BLS releases an Employment Situation Summary with employment and other labor market data each month. It's an important report to keep track of how the economy is doing. However, domestic workers and other vulnerable workers are 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 December 8, the BLS released new employment data for [November 2023](#).
- The number of jobs added in November was above market expectations.
- The general unemployment rate edged down.
- **The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for Latina women decreased.**
- The non-seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for Latina women ticked up.
- The unemployment rate for Black women decreased.
- The unemployment rates for Black and Latinx adults continue to be higher compared to the rates for white adults.
- The average hourly earnings for private nonfarm payrolls increased.

Consistent with the directional change in BLS' non-seasonally adjusted unemployment rates for Latina women, NDWA Labs' November data shows an increase in joblessness for domestic worker respondents. The increase represents a 2 percentage point increase in joblessness compared to the third quarter of 2023. The increase is even larger compared to October. However, part of this month-to-month increase is explained by a difference in the survey sample.

In September 2023, the survey sample was expanded to increase the volume of responses and address survey fatigue. We learned that respondents newly added to the survey schedule reported lower joblessness on average compared to prior respondents. This led to a sharp decrease in reported average joblessness for October. In November, we surveyed proportionally fewer new respondents, which led to a sharp increase in average joblessness, with a share that is closer to previously reported trends. To avoid this volatility going forward, we will update the rotation groups in 2024 to ensure a comparable share of "new" and "prior" respondents each week.

Note: 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.

November Domestic Worker Economic Situation at a Glance

Below are the main findings on the Economic Situation of Spanish-speaking domestic workers in November. Note that monthly numbers may be volatile, which is why we look at the findings as they relate to prior trends in the data and the economic situation of the overall economy. At the end of each quarter, we calculate quarterly averages for key economic indicators.

Note: The survey sample was expanded on September 22 to increase the volume of responses and address survey fatigue. Some of the changes reflected in this report may be due to new respondents facing a different employment situation on average compared to the population that was reflected in our prior reports this year.

Jobs and Wages

- **Joblessness worsened, increasing to 20% in November.** This represents a 2 percentage point increase compared to the third quarter of 2023.
  - It's worth noting that the sample of surveyed domestic workers was expanded starting in September 2023, and this increase partly reflects the difference in employment situations between the expanded sample and the prior cohort.
- **Underemployment worsened in November, increasing to 67%.** This represents an increase compared to the third quarter of 2023.
  - The main reason for underemployment reported was that workers could not find clients (58%), followed by taking care of a family member (16%), having a health problem (14%), and "other" (11%).
  - Underemployment was 63% on average in the third quarter.
- **The wage distribution worsened in November. 59% of working respondents earned less than $15 per hour**, a slight increase compared to the third quarter when 58% of working respondents earned less than $15 per hour on average.

Economic Security

- **Food scarcity increased slightly in November, to 84%.**
  - Domestic worker respondents said their households faced food scarcity either often (11%) or sometimes (73%).
  - This is an increase from the previous quarter's average of 81%.
- **Housing insecurity improved in November, decreasing to 47%.**
  - 7% of respondents reported that the question regarding the ability to afford rent or mortgage does not apply to them. This does not necessarily mean they are housing secure. While some of these respondents may be debt-free homeowners, others may be temporarily staying with friends or family, staying in shelters, or facing homelessness.
  - Housing insecurity was 50% on average in the third quarter.

- **Difficulty affording regular household expenses worsened in November, with 54% of respondents finding it very or somewhat difficult.**
  - Domestic worker respondents experienced varying levels of difficulty affording regular household expenses, such as food, housing, car payments, and medical expenses: 5% reported no difficulty, 40% reported little difficulty, 30% reported some difficulty, and 24% reported large difficulty.

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 the methodology section of this report.

The employment numbers presented in this report include data from four weekly surveys in November. The total number of fully completed surveys, which includes both new and repeated respondents, was 6,568.

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

For questions or feedback, please contact us here.

Notes

[1] White House Council of Economic Advisers (2023), *Go with the flow: Getting beneath the surface of the jobs report*
[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.