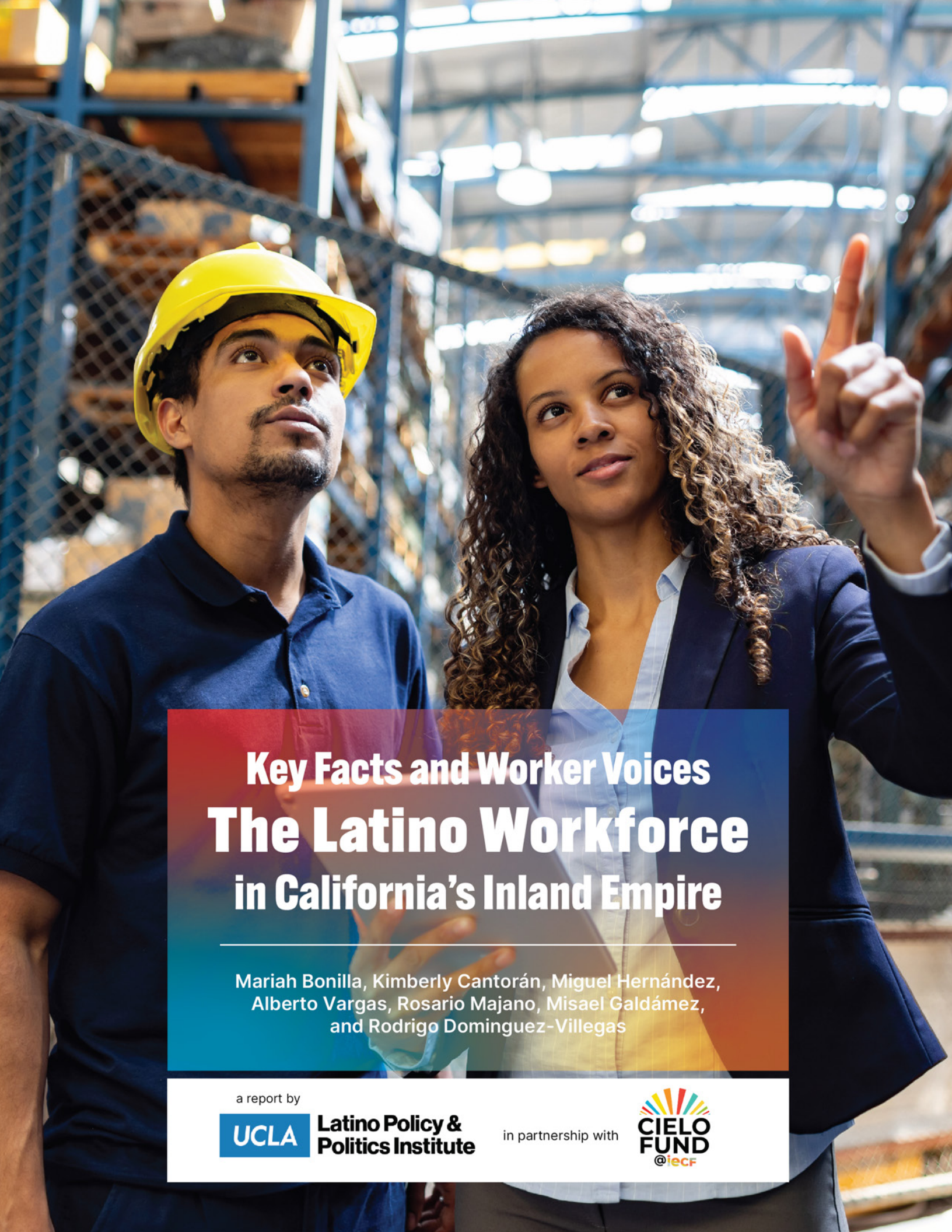

Key Facts and Worker Voices

The Latino Workforce in California's Inland Empire

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UCLA Latino Policy & Politics Institute

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This project builds on LPPI's recent research covering the Latino workforce in key California regions: the Bay Area, Los Angeles County, North San Joaquin Valley, and Central San Joaquin Valley.

The UCLA LPPI acknowledges the Gabrielino and Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar (the Los Angeles basin and Southern Channel Islands) and that their displacement has enabled UCLA's flourishing. As a land grant institution, we pay our respects to the Honuukvetam (Ancestors), Ahiihirom (Elders), and Eyoohiinken (our relatives nations) past, present, and emerging.

About the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute (LPPI)

The UCLA LPPI addresses the most critical domestic policy challenges facing Latinos and other communities of color through research, advocacy, mobilization, and leadership development to expand genuine opportunity for all Americans.

UCLA Latino Policy & Politics Institute

About the Cultivating Inland Empire Latino Opportunity (CIELO) Fund

Launched in 2022 at the Inland Empire Community Foundation, the CIELO Fund is dedicated to uplifting and investing in the Inland Empire's Latino community. The CIELO Fund supports organizations, initiatives, and innovations that are led by–and serve–Latinos in Riverside and San Bernardino counties. The CIELO Fund also invests in the next generation of leaders through the CIELO Fund Scholarship Program, commissions original research, and works on efforts that promote positive narratives for Latinos in the Inland Empire. Learn more at iegives.org/cielofund.

Disclaimer

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Executive Summary

The Inland Empire—consisting of San Bernardino and Riverside Counties—is one of California's fastest-growing regions, and boasts the 20th largest economy among U.S. metro areas.[1] Latino workers have been essential to the region's expanding economy, with workforce growth of 154% over the last two decades. Further, Inland Empire Latinos' contributions across a range of industries—from logistics and construction to education and public service—reached a gross domestic product of $71.7 billion in 2018, larger than the economies of Maine, Rhode Island, or North Dakota.[2] Despite their economic contributions, however, Latinos in the Inland Empire struggle to access high-quality, stable employment.

In light of the importance of the Latino workforce to the Inland Empire's economy, we provide a comprehensive profile of Latino workers in the Inland Empire. This report combines analysis of data from the Latino Data Hub, which draws from the 2022 pooled 5-year American Community Survey (ACS), with eight semi-structured interviews of Inland Empire workers to illuminate their lived experiences. We focused primarily on individuals who represent different segments or populations within the labor force, including individuals employed in part-time, full-time, or year-round jobs, and unemployed individuals who are actively seeking employment.

Using quantitative data, we find that:

Latinos are driving regional workforce growth: From 2000 to 2022, the number of Latino workers in the Inland Empire grew 154%, from 460,000 to 1.2 million. Latinos accounted for over three quarters (88%) of the Inland Empire's workforce growth since 2000. As of 2022, over half of all regional workers were Latino.

Latino workers have the region's highest labor force participation rates, especially among men: In 2022, about three quarters (74%) of Latino men participated in the Inland Empire labor force, the highest share of all groups. Meanwhile, Latinas had the second-highest labor force participation rate among women (58%).

Latino workers face significant disparities in educational attainment and English proficiency: In 2022, almost a quarter of Latino workers had not completed high school, and only 15% had completed a bachelor's degree, the lowest share of all groups. Latino workers—especially Latino men—were also more likely to have high Limited English Proficiency.

Latino workers, especially women, in the Inland Empire face persistent wage disparities: Latino workers in the region earned lower wages compared to their peers, with Latina women earning the lowest ($17 an hour). This trend persists even among college-educated workers, with Latino workers of both genders earning the lowest hourly wages of all groups. Among Latino workers, men consistently earn more than Latinas across most industries in the region.

Latino workers in the region face significant health coverage disparities: Latino workers are less likely to receive employer-provided insurance and are more likely to be uninsured than other workers in the region, especially Latino men and noncitizen workers.

Latino workers face persistent and compounding housing inequities: Latino workers experience the highest rates of overcrowded housing compared to other workers in the region. They also face high housing-cost burdens—whether renting or owning.

Qualitative findings from our eight interviewees highlight their experiences with career pathways, skills, job stability, economic security, and community connections, finding that:

Latino workers face job insecurity and instability, despite their qualifications: Interviewees described sudden layoffs, systemic sidelining, and a constant fear of being deemed expendable, causing financial and emotional strain.

Latino workers seek alternative pathways to formal education and training programs to build skills and advance professionally: Many interviewees experience difficulties in accessing formal education, and rely on informal learning opportunities, apprenticeships, and self-teaching to overcome barriers to formal education and credential recognition.

Limited English Proficiency can restrict access to quality jobs, training programs, and workplace advancement: Latino workers often have to develop creative strategies to overcome language barriers and succeed in environments where English fluency is expected.

Workers perceive a lack of industry diversification: Interviewees argue the regional economy is oversaturated with warehousing, logistics, and retail jobs, which they described as lacking in benefits, pay, and growth potential.

Workers expressed a desire for quality jobs that provide economic security and center well-being: When defining a "quality job," interviewees consistently emphasized economic security and well-being. Beyond providing livable wages and meeting basic needs, interviewees also underscored the importance of respect, autonomy, and safety in the workplace.

Given the central role Latino workers play in the Inland Empire's economy and communities, ensuring they have equitable access not only to economic opportunity but also to broader well-being is essential to maintaining the region's vitality. But Latino workers contribute far more than labor—they are integral members of the Inland Empire's communities, and their well-being and opportunities are deeply tied to the region's future. Yet persistent wage disparities, housing, education, and health coverage reveal deep opportunity gaps that must be addressed. Closing these gaps will require bold, targeted policies that expand access to quality education, affordable housing, health care, and dignified work.

For employers and policymakers, worker voices paint a clear agenda: Raising job quality in the Inland Empire includes livable wages, a safe and respectful work environment, and opportunities for career growth. Workers call for investment in training and mentorship, transparent promotion practices, and protections that allow them to advocate for better conditions without fearing job loss. By investing in the full potential of Latino workers—not just as economic actors, but as whole people—we can strengthen the workforce and the long-term social and economic resilience of the entire Inland Empire.

The Inland Empire: A Transportation and Warehousing Powerhouse

Located 60 miles inland of Los Angeles, the Inland Empire—consisting of San Bernardino and Riverside Counties—is one of California's fastest-growing regions.[3] Formerly known as the Orange Empire because of its citrus groves, the region has transformed from an agricultural hub to a site for military aviation and a transportation and warehousing powerhouse.[4] Today, the Inland Empire boasts the 20th largest economy among U.S. metro areas and is known primarily for its warehousing and logistics industry.[5] Approximately 40% of U.S. consumer goods are transported through the region.[6]

The Inland Empire's economy and population are expected to continue growing for several decades, and Latino workers will play an essential role in that growth, as they have already. In the past two decades, the Latino workforce grew by 154%, while the non-Latino workforce grew by 11% in the same time period.[7] Additionally, in 2018, the Latino gross domestic product (GDP) in the Inland Empire was $71.7 billion, larger than the economies of Maine, Rhode Island, or North Dakota.[8] Latino contributions to the regional economy will continue to grow alongside the Latino population, which is expected to comprise three-quarters of the Inland Empire's population by 2060.[9]

Despite their economic contributions, Latinos in the region face various inequities in accessing high-quality, stable employment. Although the region has seen significant job growth over the last decade—especially in the logistics sector—many jobs do not pay a livable wage or offer benefits like health insurance.[10] Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed labor market disparities that disproportionately affected Latino workers. Latinos experienced heavy job losses during the pandemic due to their overrepresentation in the most impacted industries (e.g., hospitality, construction, retail, and the service industry).[11] The adoption of artificial intelligence and automation technologies—which has been accelerated by the pandemic—has exacerbated workforce inequalities, especially among Latinos, who are disproportionately employed in jobs at high risk of automation.[12]

In light of the importance of the Latino workforce to the Inland Empire's economy, we provide a detailed socioeconomic profile of Latino workers ages 16 and older to highlight their employment conditions. In addition to presenting quantitative findings, this report also highlights the lived experiences of workers in the Inland Empire through representative quotes and narrative profiles developed from interviews with workers living in the region.

Data Sources and Methods

QUANTITATIVE DATA

In this report, we primarily used data from the Latino Data Hub, which draws from the 2022 pooled 5-year American Community Survey (ACS), to examine workforce composition, demographics (e.g., age and nativity), human capital, industry distribution, socioeconomic indicators, and employment conditions of Latinos in the Inland Empire. To analyze data on high automation risk occupations we adopted Frey and Obsborne's 2017 projections on occupational exposure to automation.[13]

We focused primarily on individuals who make up the labor force, including individuals employed in part-time, full-time, or year-round jobs, and unemployed individuals who are actively seeking employment. Throughout this report, we use the terms "labor force," "workforce," and "workers" interchangeably to refer to the same population of interest. Someone who is unemployed and is not actively seeking employment is not considered to be part of the labor force.

INTERVIEWS

Our research team conducted eight semi-structured interviews, each lasting between 60 and 75 minutes, with individuals who are currently or were employed in Riverside or San Bernardino Counties. We designed the interview guide to supplement the quantitative data and sought to understand the participants' lived experiences with career pathways, skills, job stability, economic security, and community connections. The interview guide also included a glossary of definitions that interviewers could access if questions arose about the topics discussed.

Interviews were conversational in nature and allowed space for both the interviewer and interviewee to discuss relevant topics and stories. Interviewees were recruited using purposive sampling from survey respondents and were selected for diversity in identity (e.g., race and ethnicity, gender, etc.), industry, and occupation. Recruitment surveys were sent out by labor-focused community organizations and local district offices in the Inland Empire.

We conducted virtual interviews using Zoom between July 2025 and August 2025, and compensated participants with a $50 gift card. We analyzed interview transcripts using inductive coding to identify key themes related to career pathways, workplace conditions, and economic security. Through this analysis, we identified representative quotes that illustrated workers' experiences in the region and developed narrative profiles that synthesize workers' stories. All participants were guaranteed anonymity and identifying information was removed.

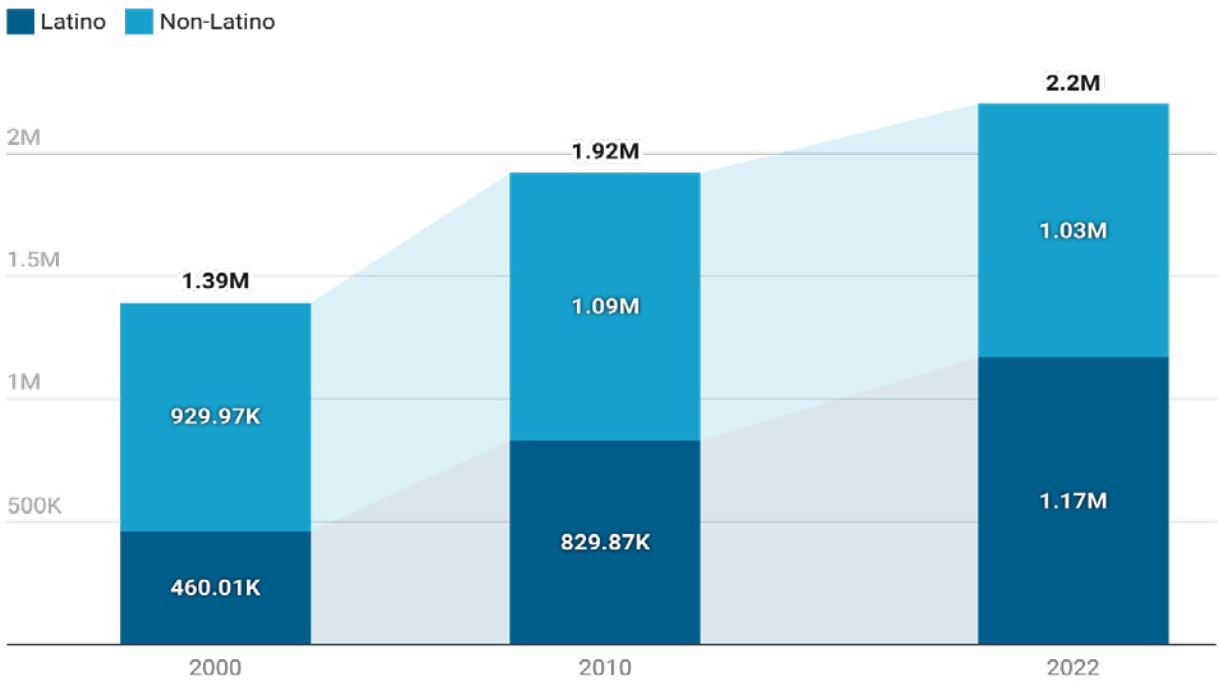
All eight of the participants interviewed identify as Latino and are of Mexican, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan descent. Four interviewees identified as women and four identified as men. Participants worked across a wide spectrum of industries, including education, public service, public administration, construction, and logistics.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the eight participants who shared their time and stories with us. For more information on the interviewees, please see their narrative profiles located at the end of this report.

HISTORICAL WORKFORCE GROWTH

Over the last two decades, the Latino workforce in the Inland Empire has grown faster than the non-Latino workforce and now makes up more than half (53%) of the total workforce. From 2000 to 2022, the number of Latino workers in the Inland Empire grew from 460,000 to 1.2 million—a 154% increase (see Figure 1)—outpacing the 11% growth of non-Latino workers in the same period. Overall, Latinos accounted for over three quarters (88%) of the Inland Empire's workforce growth since 2000.

Figure 1. The Latino Labor Force in the Inland Empire, 2000 to 2022



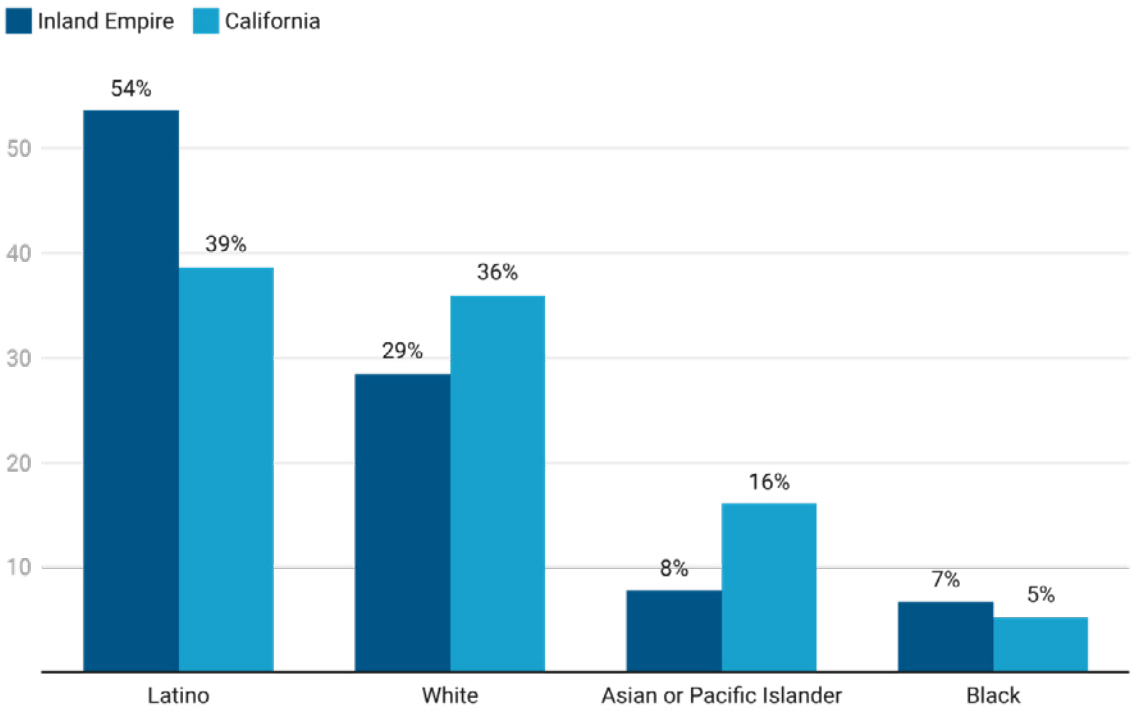
Note: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older.
Sources: Data for 2000 are based on LPPI analysis of the 2000 Decennial Census from Social Explorer, available online. Data for 2010 are based on the 2010 5-year American Community Survey (ACS) from Social Explorer, available online. Data from 2022 are from the Latino Data Hub, which primarily draws its data from the 2022 5-year ACS.

WORKFORCE COMPOSITION, LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION, AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Understanding the workforce composition, labor force participation, and unemployment rates of Latinos in the Inland Empire is crucial for ensuring equitable access to economic opportunity. By understanding differences in labor market experiences, policymakers can make investments that support the ability of all workers to provide for themselves and their households. Interviews with Latino workers in the region further illuminate the challenges of unemployment, job insecurity, and the competitive labor market.

In 2022, more than half (54%) of all workers in the Inland Empire were Latino (see Figure 2). This share is 15 percentage points higher than the Latino share of the state workforce (39%). Workers in the Inland Empire were also much less likely to be white or Asian and Pacific Islander (AAPI) compared to their respective share of the state workforce.

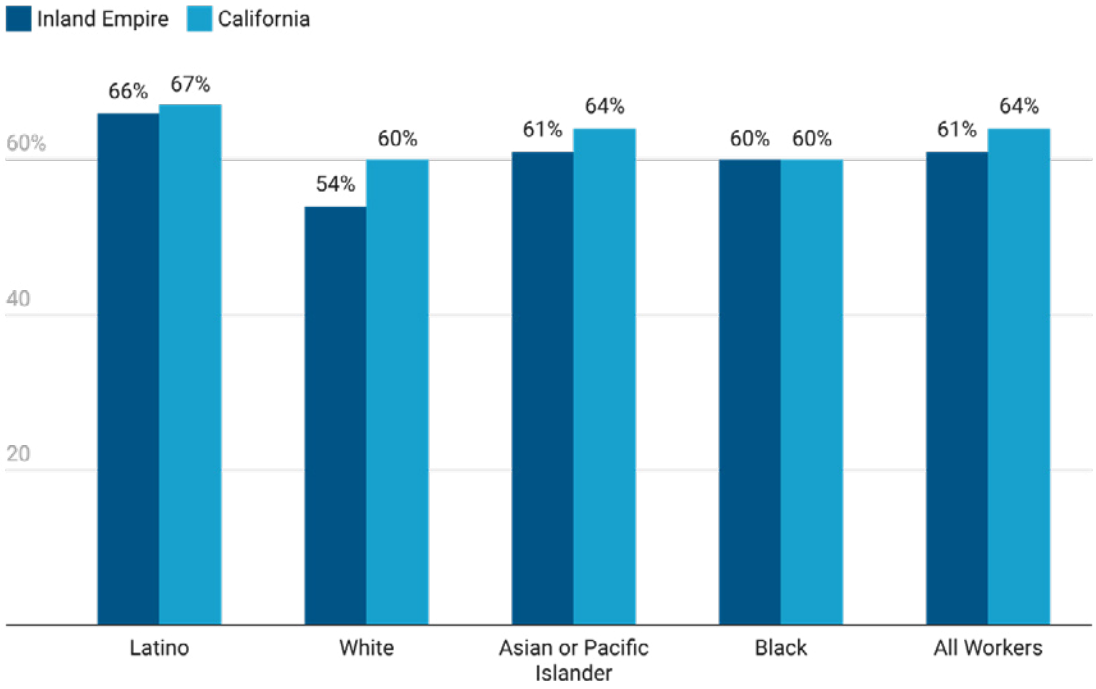
Figure 2. Labor Force Shares in the Inland Empire and California by Race and Ethnicity, 2022



Notes: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older. Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals. Only the four largest racial and ethnic groups are included in this figure. Other groups are excluded due to small sample sizes.
Source: LPPI analysis of data from the Latino Data Hub.

In the Inland Empire, Latinos participate in the workforce at a higher rate than other racial and ethnic groups. In 2022, about two-thirds (66%) of Latinos in the Inland Empire were employed or looking for work, five percentage points higher than for all workers (61%) and the next highest group, AAPI workers (61%; see Figure 3). Across major racial and ethnic groups, labor force participation rates in the Inland Empire were slightly lower than statewide levels, except for Black workers, who had similar labor force participation rates at the regional and state level.

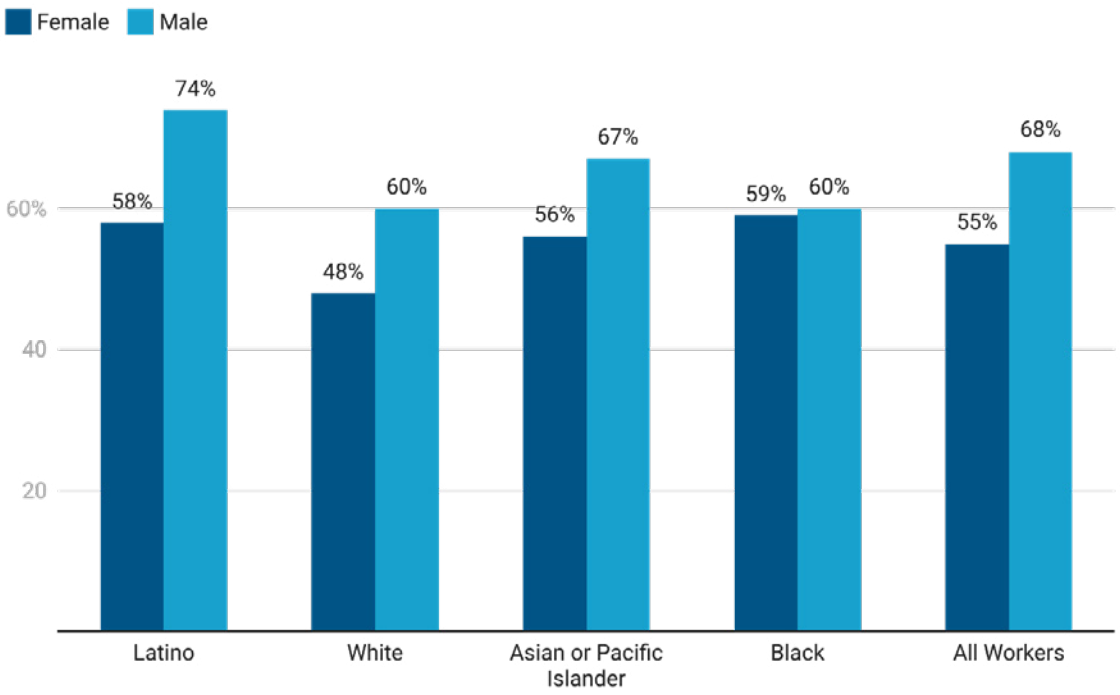
Figure 3. Labor Force Participation Rates in the Inland Empire and California by Race and Ethnicity, 2022



Notes: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older. Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals.
Source: LPPI analysis of data from the Latino Data Hub.

Latino men[14] **have the highest labor force participation rates among workers of major racial and ethnic groups in the Inland Empire.** In 2022, about three quarters (74%) of Latino men participated in the Inland Empire labor force (see Figure 4). Among women, Latinas had a similar labor force participation rate (58%) as AAPI women (56%) and Black women (59%). Further, Latinos and Latinas had the largest gender gap[15] in labor force participation compared to other racial and ethnic groups. Latino men were 16 percentage points more likely to participate in the labor force than Latina women.

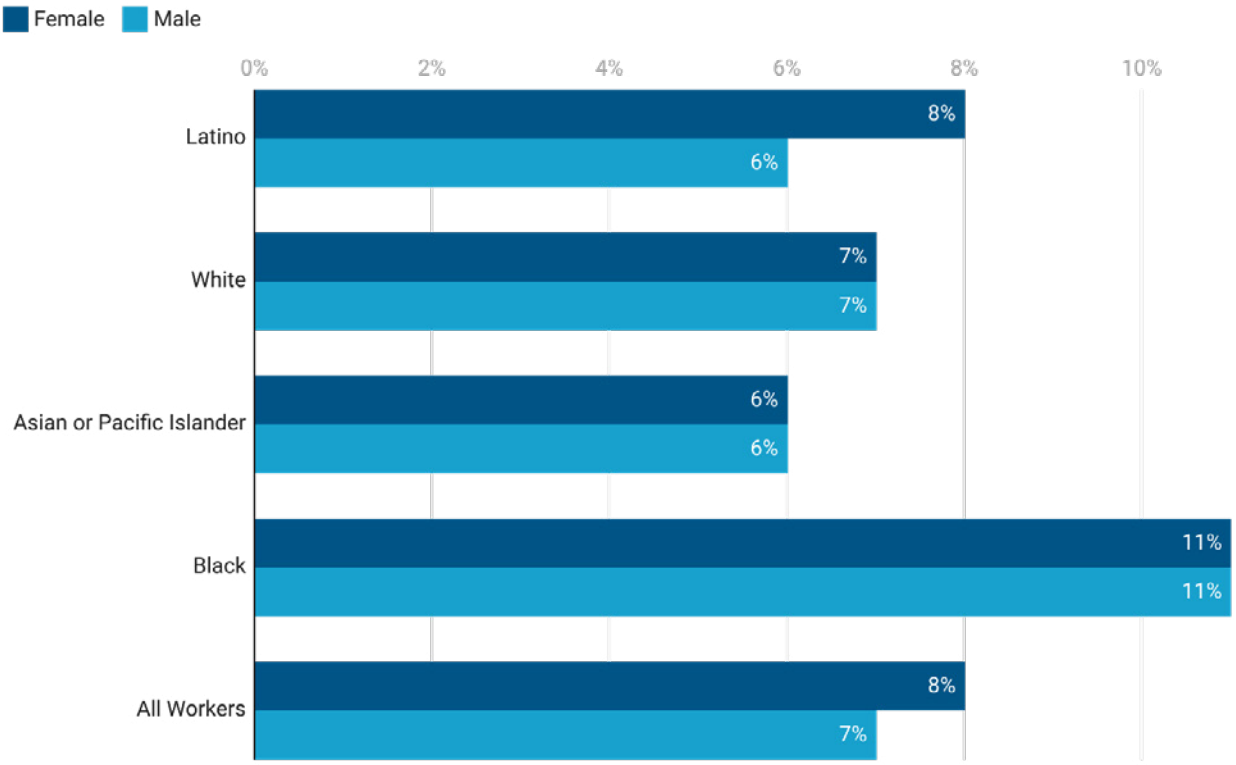
Figure 4. Labor Force Participation Rates in the Inland Empire by Race, Ethnicity, and Sex, 2022



Notes: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older. Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals.
Source: LPPI analysis of data from the Latino Data Hub.

Latina women have the second-highest unemployment rate among the Inland Empire's women workers. In 2022, the unemployment rate for Latinas matched the overall rate for women (8%) and was the second-highest after Black women at 11% (see Figure 5). In contrast, Latino men had one of the lowest unemployment rates among men at 6%—one percentage point less than that of all men.

Figure 5. Unemployment Rates in the Inland Empire by Race, Ethnicity, and Sex, 2022



Note: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older who are unemployed but seeking work. These workers are still considered part of the labor force. Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals.
Source: LPPI analysis of data from the Latino Data Hub.

Unemployment can have lasting negative effects on income, social capital, and physical and mental health.[16] And because the Inland Empire has fewer high-quality job opportunities than other regions, such as Los Angeles or Orange counties, unemployment spells can be particularly challenging.[17] Interviewees discussed the financial and emotional effects of job loss, and the challenges of reentering competitive labor markets despite their qualifications. Buni, a federal case processor in the Inland Empire, discussed her sudden layoff from her job. Buni was one of the estimated 200,000 civil servants laid off following federal cuts.[18] She described the impacts it had on her:

> *I got a generic email from a union...letting us know that we were fired...So it made it incredibly difficult to move. And it affected my health, but a week or so after that, they recall and they said, 'Oh, no, okay, we weren't allowed to fire you because you're a spouse of a disabled veteran, not my union, but my husband's union, actually won the court case that brought me back.*

Although her husband's union secured her rehiring, she found herself systematically sidelined upon her return to work. Buni was removed from the internal systems and given a new email address, which made it incredibly difficult for her to communicate with her colleagues. She explained that management eventually advised her and other new hires to take the Deferred Resignation Program because they wouldn't "survive the first wave" of further cuts.

At the time of the interview, Buni was looking for another job. Despite her confidence in her skills, she found herself at a standstill:

> *I've been working on getting a new job since February...I'm confident in the application process, I'm confident that I can pass the exams. I'm pretty confident with my interviewing skills. It's just that, with how the job market is, I always get passed up.*

Other interviewees discussed feeling insecure in their current positions, explaining they feel little confidence to find another job, should they suddenly face unemployment. Maria, an access services assistant at a university library, explained the uncertainty she feels:

> *Honestly, I don't feel that confident...If I lost my job today, I don't know...I feel like someone in my position would probably be one of the first ones to get cut,...I don't know where I'd go. I just look literally at any college in the area, in a 30-mile radius, and just hope that there's an opening... I don't know how likely it would be that I'd get hired, so I'd be pretty nervous if I lost my job. And I don't really have any other skills besides working in a library.*

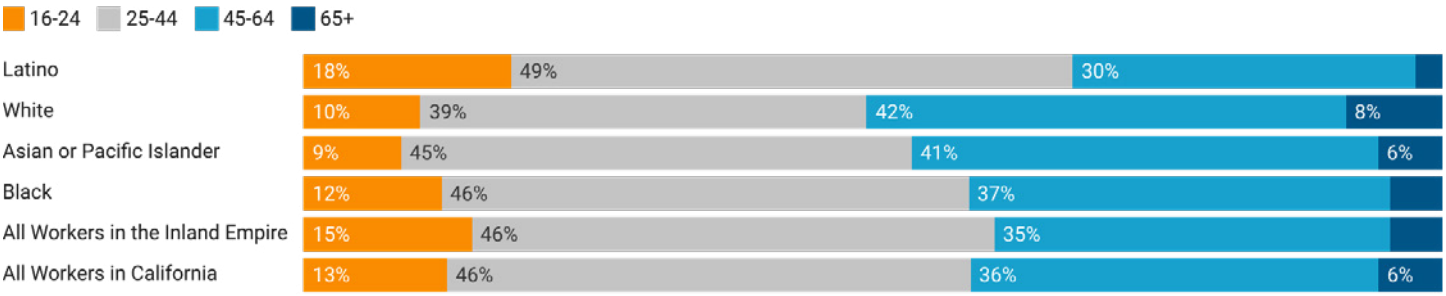
Buni and Maria's stories highlight the need to invest in opportunity industries that provide quality jobs and in policies that provide workers with legal and re-employment support systems.

AGE AND NATIVITY

Understanding the age and nativity of workers in the Inland Empire is key to identifying future workers and the unique needs of each worker group. A worker's age and nativity can affect their economic security and career pathways. This demographic information can help tailor policy for workers at various career stages and of various backgrounds. Our interviews highlight how workers navigate barriers related to age and immigration through their self-advocacy and determination to gain workforce skills and legal security.

Latino workers are younger than other racial and ethnic groups of Inland Empire workers. In 2022, 18% of Latino workers were between 16 and 24 years old—the highest share compared to workers of other racial and ethnic backgrounds (see Figure 6) and three percentage points greater than all Inland Empire workers (15%). Although the share of Latino workers ages 25 to 44 (49%) closely mirrored regional and state averages (46% for both), less than one third (30%) of Latino workers were between 45 and 64, the smallest share of all racial and ethnic groups.

Figure 6. Age Distribution of the Labor Force in the Inland Empire by Race and Ethnicity, 2022



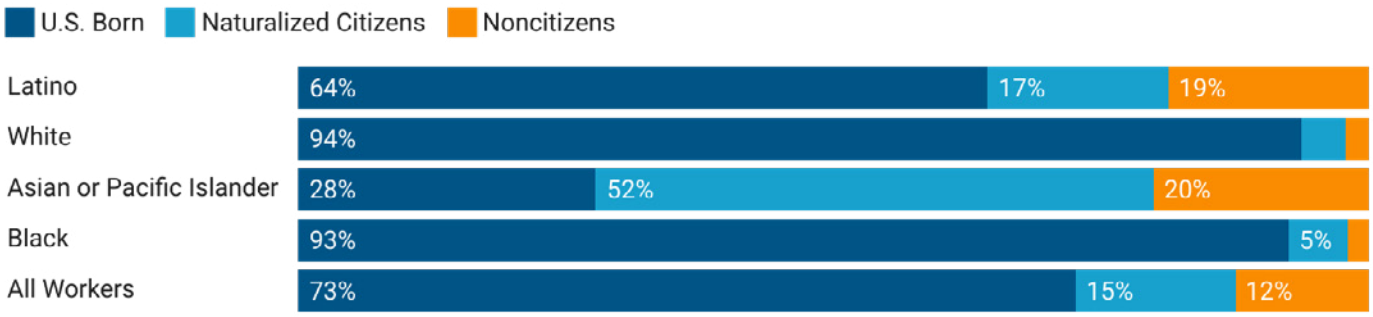
Notes: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older. Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals.
Source: Data from the Latino Data Hub.

For young workers, mentorship is essential for their entry and success in the workforce. Daniel, a zone mechanic responsible for building maintenance and repair work, began his career at 19 and reflected on the need for an invested mentor to help him succeed:

> *Being young, finding a person with experience that wasn't threatened in any way by me to show me [was important]. My willingness to learn also got me in the door. I was never afraid of trying anything new. So that's what made people more comfortable to show me the trade. The difficulty...is finding someone that's willing to show you.*

In 2022, more than one third (36%) of the Latino workers in the Inland Empire were immigrants (see Figure 7), including noncitizens and naturalized citizens. Latinos had the second-highest immigrant share among workers of major racial and ethnic groups, after AAPI workers (72%). Further, approximately one in five Latino (19%) and AAPI workers (20%) in the Inland Empire did not have U.S. citizenship.

Figure 7. Citizenship Status of the Labor Force in the Inland Empire by Race and Ethnicity, 2022



Notes: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older. Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals.
Source: Data from the Latino Data Hub.

For many immigrant workers, their citizenship status influences their career advancement, job security, and economic stability. As Mey-lan, a retired educator, explained, her career advancement depended on becoming a naturalized citizen:

> *If I really wanted to excel in the field of education, I had to be an American citizen. Because in the area of education, if you have a green card, that's not enough, no. You have to become an American citizen…*

When the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 was passed, Mey-lan was able to apply to become a naturalized citizen. Mey-lan's residency and eventual citizenship opened new employment opportunities that facilitated her upward mobility in the field of public education. However, in many instances, Mey-lan's qualifications were overshadowed by her identity as an immigrant. She shared, "What I encountered throughout nearly the entirety of my career was discrimination. There was a lot of discrimination. [There were] people that…even get angry because one comes prepared but is not born here."

The uncertainty of job security and safety for noncitizens can cause economic and emotional instability that affect workers' overall well-being. Fernando, a self-employed handyman, discussed this strain:

> *The future is uncertain and is something that we cannot predict, but [we can] prepare for [it]…For example, everything that is happening right now, right, clearly, it is an uncertain future. It is a future that causes you stress, anxiety. But we also can't hide under a bed and stay there. No, we also have to…prepare ourselves for this future.*

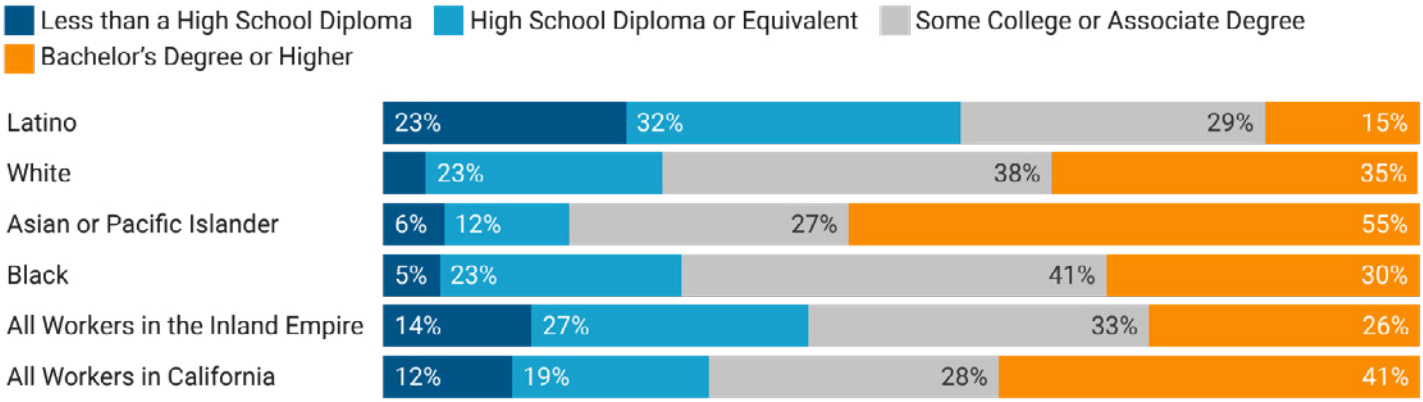
HUMAN CAPITAL

Workers' educational attainment and English proficiency frequently shape their access to quality jobs and career advancement. In the Inland Empire, Latino workers face persistent barriers in both areas, which limit their opportunities for skill-building and upward mobility. Our interviews with Latino workers in the region reveal that these barriers are deeply personal and structural, requiring Latino workers to find alternative paths to sucess in a labor market that often overlooks their potential.

EDUCATION

Latino workers have lower levels of formal education than workers of other racial and ethnic groups in the Inland Empire. In 2022, about a quarter (23%) of Latinos in the labor force had not completed high school—the highest share compared to other racial and ethnic groups (see Figure 8). Latino workers also had the lowest bachelor's degree attainment rate (15%) among major racial and ethnic groups.

Figure 8. Educational Attainment of the Labor Force in the Inland Empire by Race and Ethnicity, 2022



Note: Data reflect civilian workers ages 25 and older. Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals.
Source: Data from the Latino Data Hub.

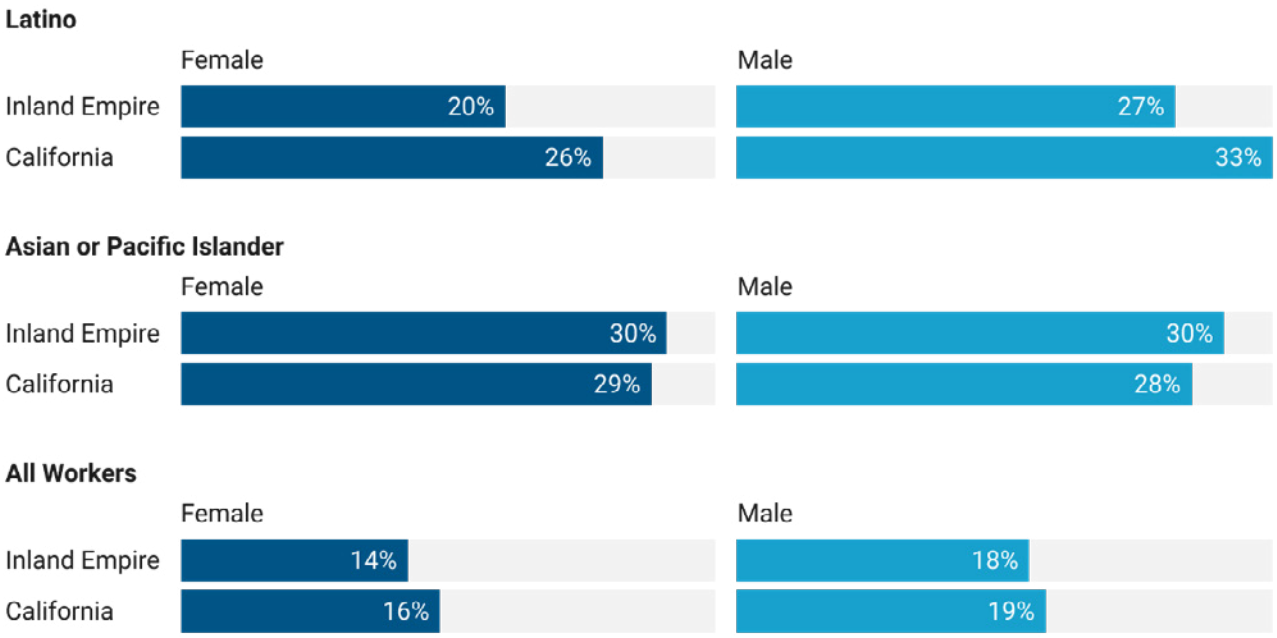
Despite difficulties in accessing formal education and attaining a bachelor's degree, several of the stories we collected reflect how Latino workers often find alternative pathways to build skills and advance professionally. Many rely on informal learning opportunities, apprenticeships, and self-teaching to overcome barriers to formal education and credential recognition. For example, Daniel explained that his career success came not from formal schooling but from hands-on experience. "What prepared me for what I do now is... learning hands-on in my apprenticeship," he said. Similarly, Fernando described how he developed his skills through part-time jobs. As he put it, "you need balance to obtain stability... I developed plumbing, painting, and carpentry skills through part-time jobs." Roseo further highlighted the lack of formal training infrastructure in the region and said he built skills by learning on the job, asking colleagues for help, and reading books.

These stories underscore the need for expanded access to formal education and credentialing pathways in the Inland Empire, as well as recognition of the informal and experiential learning that Latino workers rely on to succeed.

LANGUAGE

Latina women and Latino men in the Inland Empire have the second-highest rates of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) after AAPI workers of both genders. In 2022, one in five (20%) Latina women and more than one in four Latino men (27%) had LEP (see Figure 9). These shares were 10 and three percentage points lower than for AAPI women and men, respectively. Generally, LEP shares for Latinas and Latino men were greater than those for all Inland Empire workers (14% for women; 18% for men), but lower than those for Latinos statewide (26% for Latinas; 33% for Latino men).

Figure 9. Limited English Proficiency among the Inland Empire and California Workers by Race, Ethnicity, and Sex, 2022



Notes: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older. Data for Black workers are not available due to small sample sizes. Data for white workers are not included because their rates of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) are comparatively low and less relevant for this analysis. Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals. LEP is defined as speaking English less than "very well."
Source: Data from the Latino Data Hub.

Limited English Proficiency can restrict access to quality jobs, training programs, and workplace advancement. Latino workers often must develop creative strategies to overcome language barriers and succeed in environments where English fluency is expected. Fernando described the fear and isolation that can come with language barriers:

> *Sometimes, simply communicating with another person who does not speak your language… you believe they will not understand you. All of that makes you fearful. But when you overcome those challenges, suddenly, you gain that confidence of saying, 'Yes, I can do this.'*

Interviewees discussed the impacts of language barriers on their careers. Mey-lan, a native Spanish speaker, described language as a major challenge in entering her career in public education. "The first challenge was language. Language learning, right? And all of that is related to education," she explained, noting differences compared to her experience in Mexico. Additionally, Daniel emphasized the importance of communication skills in the trades, especially when interacting with management or clients. He observed that "a lot of the people out in the field don't know how to speak properly to an executive" or how to communicate without being shy about it.

Workers like Fernando, Mey-lan, and Daniel often teach themselves digital and interpersonal skills to compensate for limited formal training and language support. These stories demonstrate how difficulties accessing formal and culturally responsive training systems create economic mobility barriers for Latino workers.

INDUSTRY AND OCCUPATION

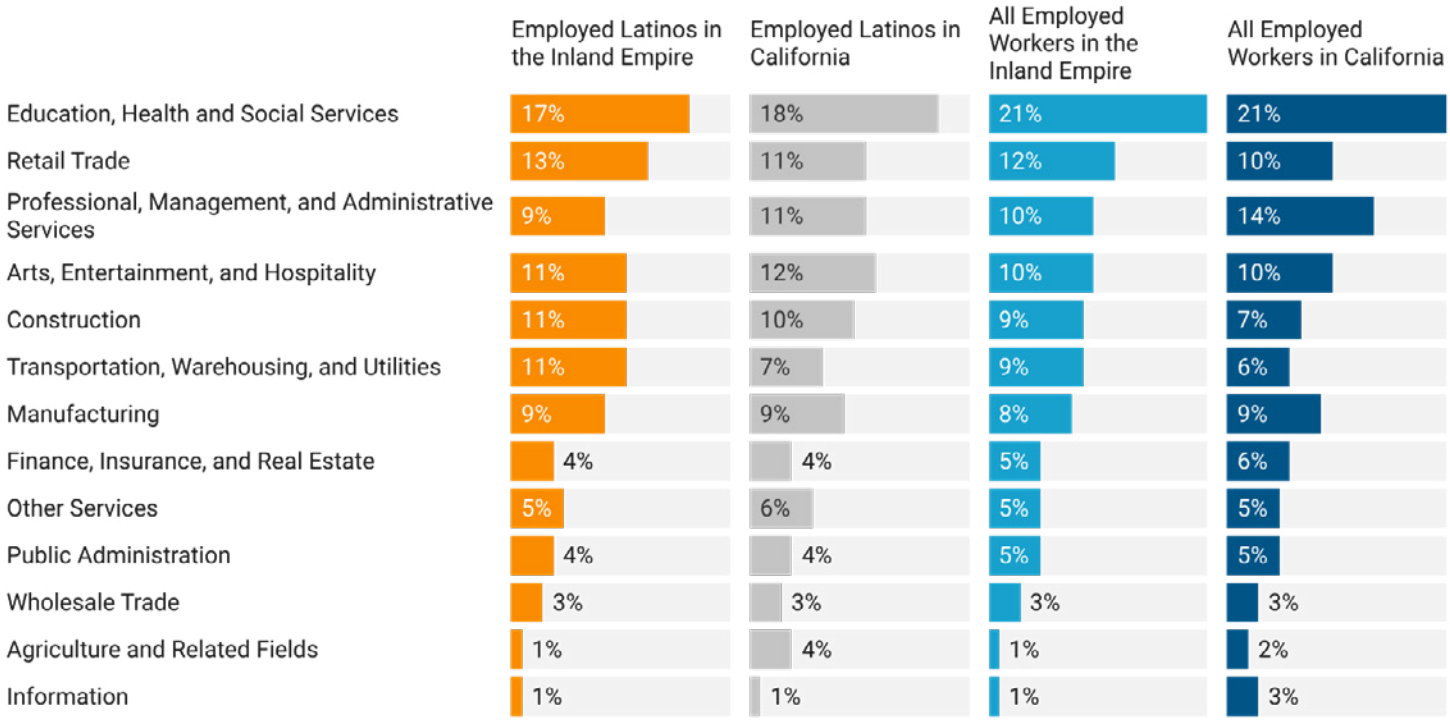
Industry refers to a group of businesses that produce similar goods or services. Occupation, on the other hand, is the specific type of job or role an individual performs, regardless of the industry. For example, a hospital and a bank belong to different industries—health care and finance, respectively—yet workers in both industries may fill similar janitorial occupations. Our interviews highlight workers' opinions on the industries and occupations available to them and provide insights into the high-quality jobs they hope to see in the region.

Compared to the state overall, the distribution of workers across industries in the Inland Empire is characterized by a greater share of workers in retail trade, construction, and transportation and warehousing (see Figure 10). Specifically, in 2022, 12% of the Inland Empire workforce was employed in retail trade compared to 10% of the state's workforce. Workers in the Inland Empire were also more likely to be employed in construction (9% vs. 7%) and transportation, warehousing, and utilities industries (9% vs. 6%) than workers across the state. However, workers in the region were less likely to be employed in professional, management, and administrative services (10% vs. 14%) and the information sector (1% vs. 3%). Apart from these noticeable differences, workers in the Inland Empire were employed at equal or only marginally different shares (by one percentage point) in all other industries compared to workers in California.

Although Latino employment in the Inland Empire generally mirrors the region's overall industry distribution, Latino workers are underrepresented in education, health, and social services and overrepresented in construction and transportation (see Figure 10). Compared to the regional shares of workers, Latinos had a lower share of workers in the education, health, and social services industries (17% vs. 21%, respectively). In contrast, Latinos had a stronger presence in construction (11% vs. 9%) and transportation and warehousing industries (11% vs. 9%).

Relative to the statewide Latino workforce, Latinos in the Inland Empire are more likely to be employed in the retail trade (13% vs. 11%) and transportation and warehousing industries (11% vs. 7%; see Figure 10). They were slightly less likely to be employed in professional services (9% vs. 11%) and the agriculture sector (1% vs. 4%). For all other industries, Latinos in the region are similarly distributed across sectors. Together, these trends suggest that Latino workers in the Inland Empire are generally underrepresented in industries associated with higher education and overrepresented in labor-intensive sectors.

Figure 10. Employed Latino Workers in the Inland Empire and California by Industry, 2022



Note: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older.
Source: Data from the Latino Data Hub.

Adrian, a lifelong resident of the Inland Empire and research coordinator at a local university, reflected on the limited industry diversification and lack of job benefits in the region's dominant sectors:

> *Yeah, it's a warehouse industry out here. A lot of people I went to high school with just branched right into a warehouse after graduating, and initially, it was pretty attractive to me, right? But historically, the pay has not really kept up with inflation and other aspects. The benefits can be tough, depending on where you work, and how long you've [worked] there, and those kinds of things.*

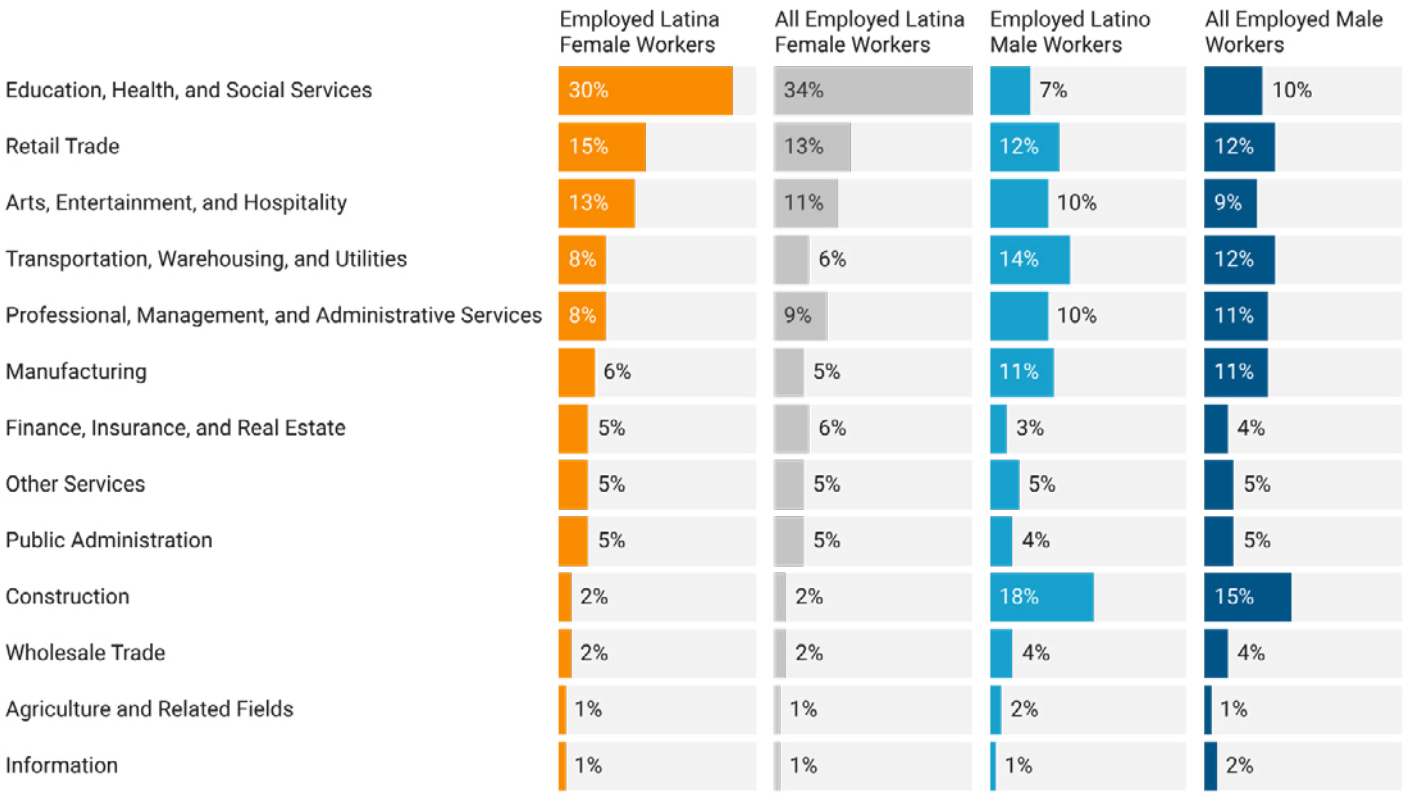
Lucía, a substitute instructional aide at local school districts, expressed a similar desire for work opportunities outside of the warehouse industry. "I'm not really interested in working at a warehouse, or, you know, trying to move up [as] a floor worker, and maybe working as a supervisor at a warehouse," she explained. "That doesn't really pique my interest as much as an office job somewhere else."

Some young workers even consider relocating in search of more professional opportunities, a trend also found in recent research on workers in the Inland Empire.[19] Lucía said she has considered moving from the Inland Empire to where her sister lives to try to find a better opportunity there.

Latina women in the Inland Empire are more likely to be employed in industries associated with higher education than Latino men. For example, the share of Latina workers employed in education, health, and social services industries (30%; see Figure 11) was more than four times higher than that of Latino men (7%). In contrast, Latino men were more concentrated than Latina women in labor-intensive industries such as transportation, warehousing, and utilities (14% vs. 8%), manufacturing industries (11% vs. 6%), and construction (18% vs. 2%).

Latina and Latino workers in the Inland Empire are employed at lower rates in education, health, and social services, and at higher rates in transportation, warehousing, and utilities, and construction compared to women and men employed in the region overall. Although Latinas and Latinos in the Inland Empire are employed at similar levels across most industries as their respective gender groups, they were employed at lower rates in education, health, and social services (30% for Latinas and 7% for Latinos; see Figure 11) than their respective gender groups in the region (34% for women and 10% for men). In contrast, a greater share of Latinas and Latinos were employed in transportation, warehousing, and utilities (8% for Latinas and 14% for Latinos) compared to all women and men employed in the region (6% for women and 12% for men). Additionally, Latino men were three percentage points more likely to be employed in construction than all men (15%).

Figure 11. Employed Latino Workers in the Inland Empire by Sex and Industry, 2022

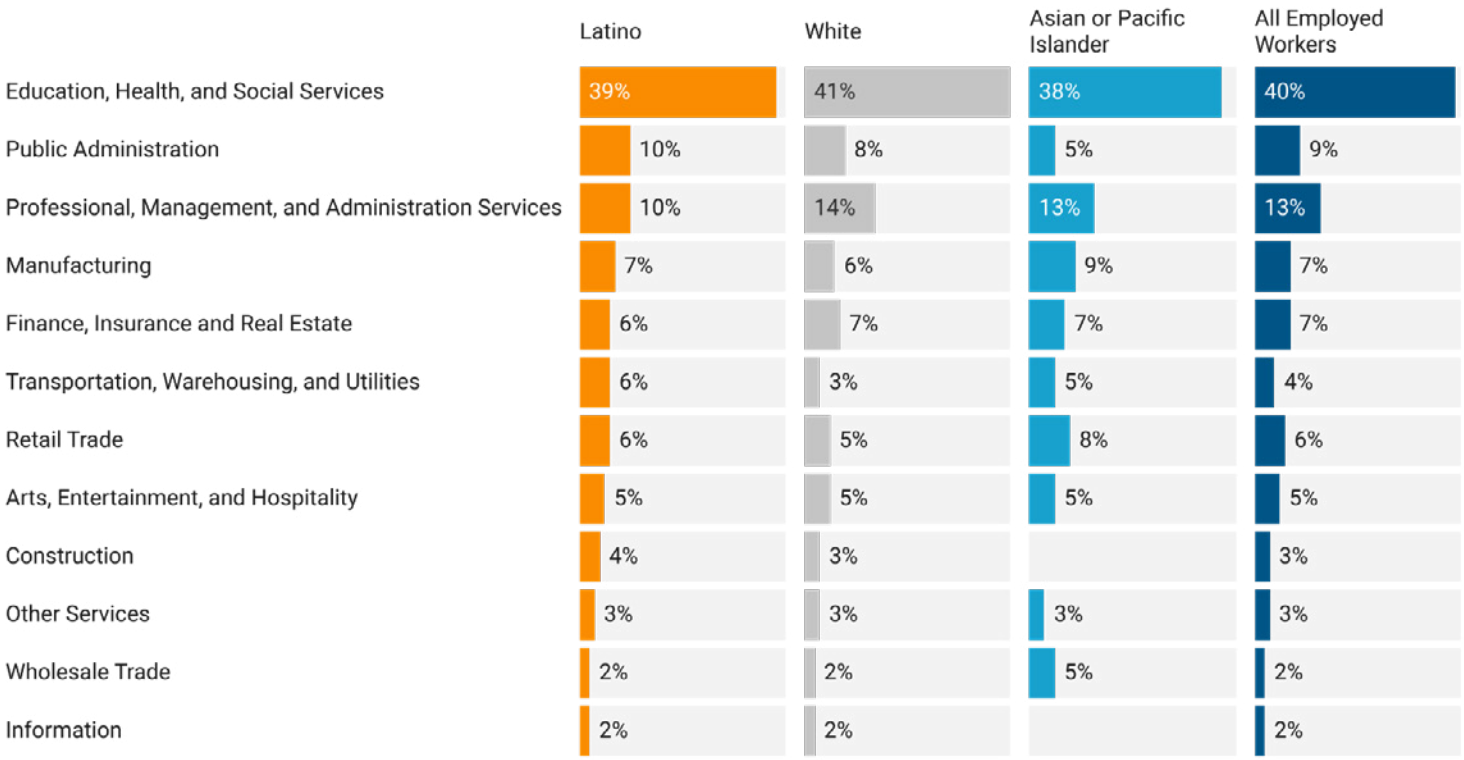


Note: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older.
Source: Data from the Latino Data Hub.

When discussing the challenges she faced entering her field, Maria highlighted gendered and racial disparities in higher-paying positions. Although women are employed at higher rates in education, health, and social services, she explained that in the library field, men were given more opportunities to grow than women. “[Men] tend to get the supervisor roles over women,” she said. “It's also a very white-dominated field. Most higher-paying positions are taken up by white people."

In 2022, college-educated Latinos in the Inland Empire were employed in health and social services at similar rates as workers of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, but were less likely to be employed in professional services. Specifically, the share of Latinos with at least a bachelor's degree employed in education, health, and social services (39%) resembled the share of AAPI workers (38%) and overall workers in the region (40%). Latinos were also more likely to be employed in public administration (10%), than white (8%), and AAPI (5%) workers. However, fewer Latino workers (10%) were employed in professional, management, and administrative service roles than white and AAPI workers (14% and 13%, respectively) and compared to all workers in the Inland Empire (13%). Together, these findings suggest Latinos who earned their bachelor's degrees may be able to access higher-paying opportunities in the Inland Empire.[20]

Figure 12. Share of Employed Workers with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher in the Inland Empire by Race, Ethnicity, and Industry, 2022



Notes: Data reflect civilian workers ages 25 and older. Due to small sample sizes, data are not available for Black workers and for AAPI workers in construction and information, and for all workers in agriculture and related fields.
Source: LPPI analysis of data from the Latino Data Hub.

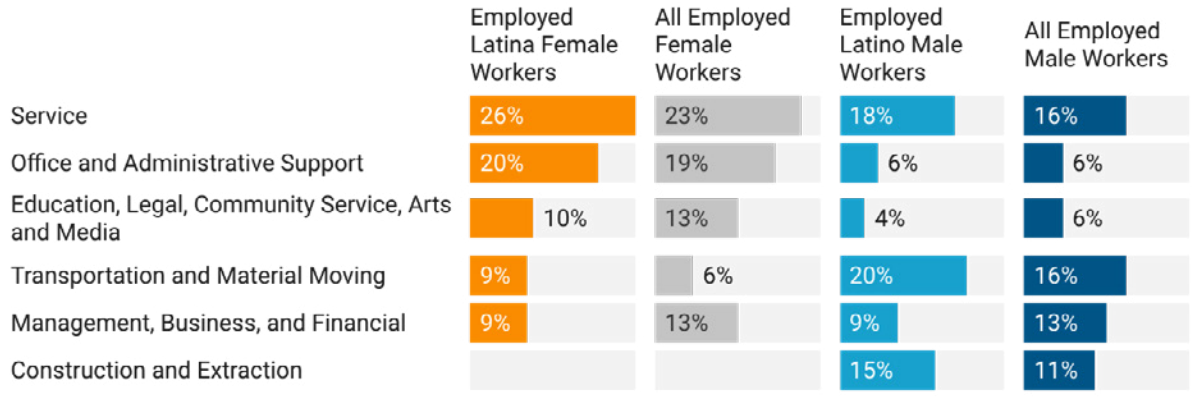
Both research and statements from our interviewees confirmed that college-educated Latino workers experience a mismatch between their employment and their educational attainment.[21] For example, Buni described how her experience applying to federal jobs reflected a disconnect between her qualifications and the roles available to her:

> *I actually started applying for federal [government] jobs in 2017, and I was always rejected, even though I had a bachelor's degree. Or I had an associate's degree in the middle of my bachelor's, and they just always wanted something more… [They wanted] a bachelor's [degree] plus three or five years of experience.*

Relative to employed workers in the Inland Empire, both Latinos and Latinas are less likely to work in high-wage, white-collar occupations. In 2022, for example, both Latinas and Latinos were four percentage points less likely than their respective gender groups overall to be employed in management, business, and financial occupations (see Figure 13), which have wages well above the regional median.[22] Additionally, Latina and Latino workers were less likely to be employed in education, legal, and community service-related occupations compared to all women and men employed in the region.

Both Latino men and Latina women are also more likely to be employed in lower-wage, labor-intensive service occupations than their respective regional gender groups. One-fifth (20%) of Latino men were employed in transportation and material moving—an occupation that pays similar to the regional median wage[23]—compared to 16% of Inland Empire men overall (see Figure 13). Latinas were similarly more likely to be employed in transportation jobs than women overall (9% vs. 6%, respectively). Additionally, more than one in four Latinas (26%) and 18% of Latino men were employed in a service occupation—a group of occupations that pays below the regional median wage, compared to 23% and 16% of Inland Empire women and men overall.[24]

Figure 13. Employed Latino Workers in the Inland Empire by Sex and Selected Occupation Groups, 2022

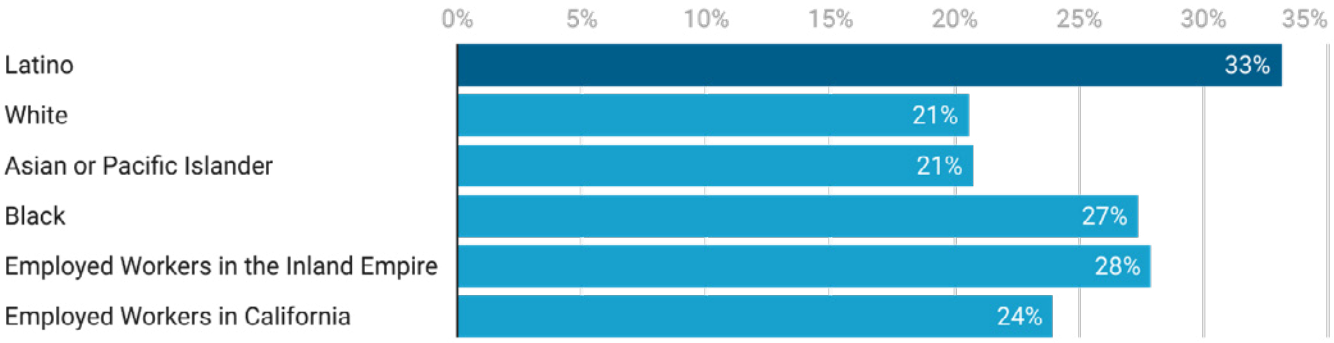


Note: The selected occupations reflect those with the most employment in the Inland Empire. Due to small sample sizes, data are not available for Latinas and all female workers in construction and extraction. The data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older.
Source: LPPI analysis of data from the Latino Data Hub.

OCCUPATIONAL VULNERABILITY TO AUTOMATION

Among Inland Empire workers, Latinos are the most likely to be employed in jobs at high risk of automation. In 2022, one in three Latinos (33%) worked in an occupation with a high risk of automation, compared to just one in five white and AAPI workers (21% for both). The share for Latinos was six percentage points higher than that of Black workers (27%; see Figure 14). Examples of occupations at high risk of automation with a large share of Latino workers include construction laborers and freight, stock, and material movers.[25] Overall, workers employed in the Inland Empire were more susceptible to automation than workers employed across the state (28% vs. 24%, respectively), with Latino workers facing the greatest risk of all major racial and ethnic groups in the region.

Figure 14. Share of Inland Empire Workers Employed in High Automation Risk Occupations by Race and Ethnicity, 2022



Notes: "High-risk occupations" group reflects civilian workers ages 16 and older employed in 20 representative occupations with high exposure to computerization. For more details, see the LPPI report, ***On the Frontlines: Automation Risks for Latino Workers in California***, available online.
Sources: LPPI analysis of data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2022 5-year Estimates microdata and Frey and Osborne (2017).

These figures reflect the structural vulnerability of Latino workers in sectors such as warehousing, transportation, and service work, where automation is rapidly reshaping the labor landscape.

Fernando, who spent years working in warehouses before becoming a handyman, witnessed firsthand how automation displaces workers, even when they are experienced and long-term employees:

> *A machine arrived to perform the labor that [my coworker] had been doing. It is sad because there is no security in those jobs. Automation suddenly arrived and replaced him…That person had been working there for 10 years before I began my role, doing the same work for 10 years.*

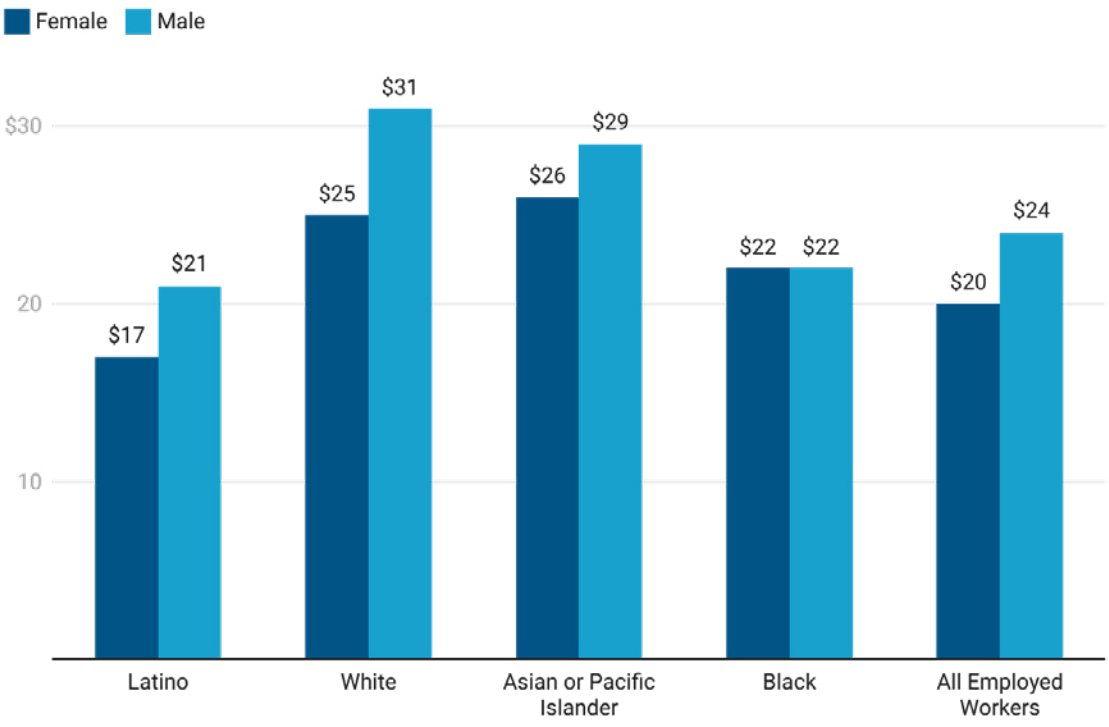
His experience illustrates the fragility of employment in logistics and warehousing—industries where Latino workers in the region are overrepresented and where technological change often comes without retraining or transition support for affected workers.

WAGES AND INCOME

Workers' wages and income determine their ability to survive and thrive, shaping their quality of life, opportunities to build wealth, and long-term economic mobility. The wages of Latino workers in the Inland Empire are lower than those of their peers in the region. Latinos, particularly Latinas, consistently earn less than other groups across industries and education levels.

Employed Latinas in the Inland Empire earn the lowest wages among workers of major racial and ethnic groups. In 2022, Latinas earned a median hourly wage of $17 an hour, $3 less than the overall median for employed women in the Inland Empire (see Figure 15). Similarly, Latino men also earned $3 less than all employed men ($21 an hour vs. $25 an hour). Latinas were paid $7 less an hour than Latino men and $14 less an hour than white men—the highest–paid workers in the region. Overall, employed Latinas and Latinos were paid the lowest wages of all major racial and ethnic groups.

Figure 15. Median Hourly Wage of Employed Workers in the Inland Empire by Race, Ethnicity, and Sex, 2022

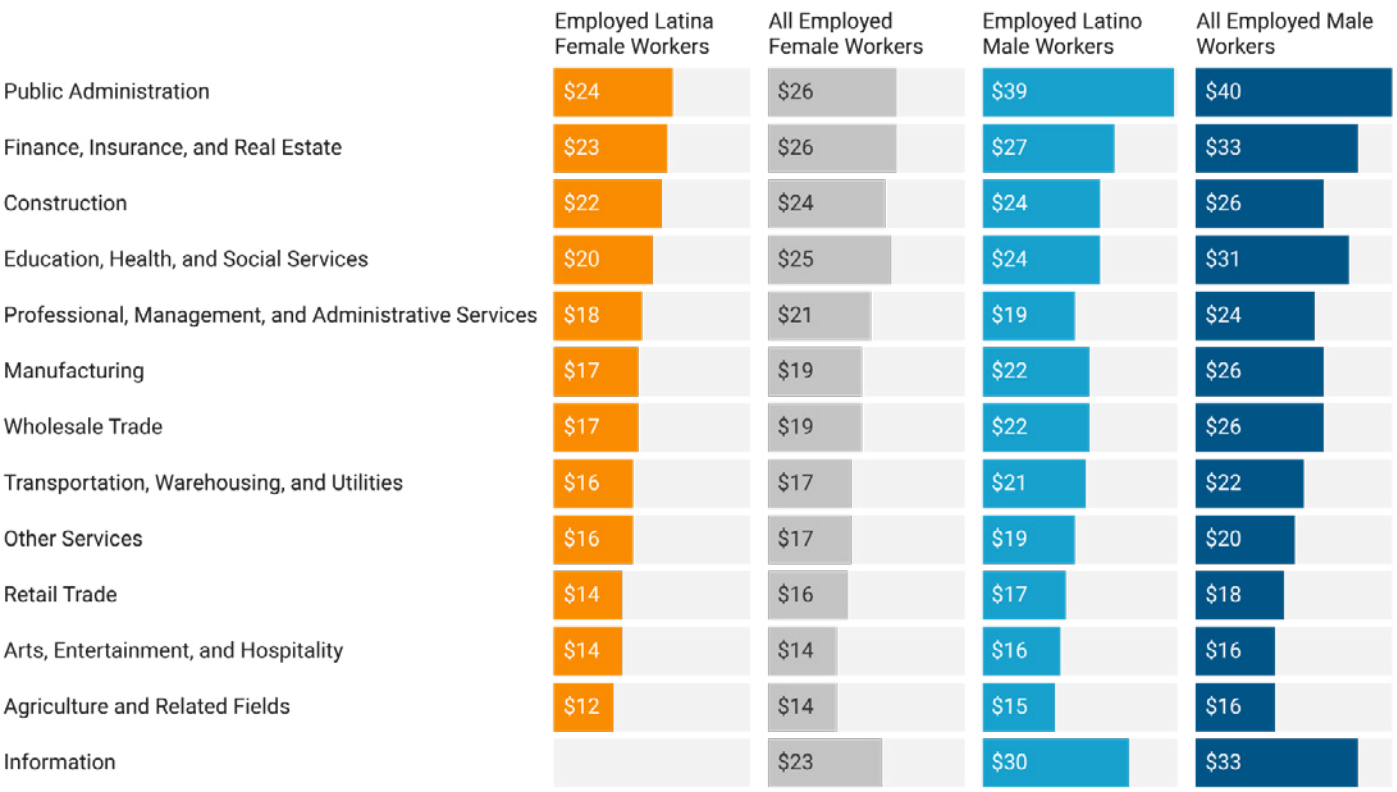


Notes: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older. Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals.
Source: LPPI analysis of data from the Latino Data Hub.

Across most industries in the Inland Empire, Latina and Latino workers are paid less than their respective gender groups overall. Pay disparities are especially notable in education, health, and social services, where, in 2022, Latina workers earned $5 less and Latino workers earned $7 less an hour than their respective gender groups (see Figure 16). This pattern persisted in finance, insurance, real estate, wholesale trade, and professional, management, and administrative services.

Additionally, Latino men consistently earned more than Latina women across all industries in the Inland Empire, except in professional services, where they earn similar hourly wages. Gender disparities in wages persisted even though Latina workers employed in the region were more likely to hold a bachelor's degree than Latino men,[26] a factor traditionally related to higher wages.

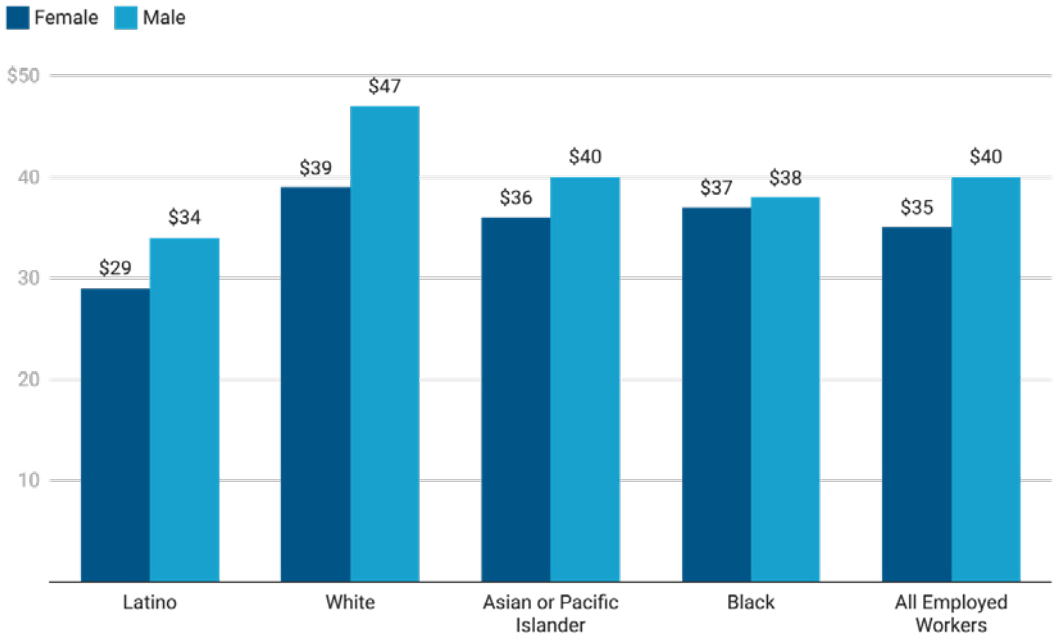
Figure 16. Median Hourly Wage of Employed Latino Workers in the Inland Empire by Sex and Industry, 2022



Note: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older. Due to small sample sizes, data are not available for Latinas in the information industry.
Source: Data from the Latino Data Hub.

Latina and Latino workers in the Inland Empire with a bachelor's degree or higher earned less than their racial and ethnic group counterparts with similar levels of education, regardless of gender. In 2022, college-educated Latinas earned the lowest wages among all employed workers ($29 per hour). Meanwhile, college-educated Latino men earned $13 less per hour than white men, the highest-earning group ($47 per hour; see Figure 17). These disparities suggest that Latino workers in the Inland Empire face barriers to accessing higher-paying jobs beyond access to education.

Figure 17. Median Hourly Wage for Employed Workers with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher by Sex, Race, and Ethnicity, 2022



Note: Data reflect civilian workers ages 25 and older.
Source: Data from the Latino Data Hub.

The experiences shared by our interviewees illustrate how a bachelor's degree alone does not shield Latino workers from wage inequities or limited career mobility. Interviewees shared that they feel undervalued despite their skills and education. Buni described the frustration she felt:

> *I was happy that I was finally getting pay that was matching the education and the experience I had…I used to be a state employee, and…they kind of kept the classification low to pay us less, in my viewpoint, so I wanted something that had a better opportunity to move up and get paid more since I have student debt.*

Yet even in a federal role, she faced instability and limited upward mobility, underscoring how wage equity is not guaranteed by education alone. She said her federal role "did not pan out" as she had hoped.

Maria discussed the compensation and work duty mismatch she experienced working as a public librarian, earning minimum wage despite having a bachelor's degree—an example of the lower pay Latinas earn in the Inland Empire:

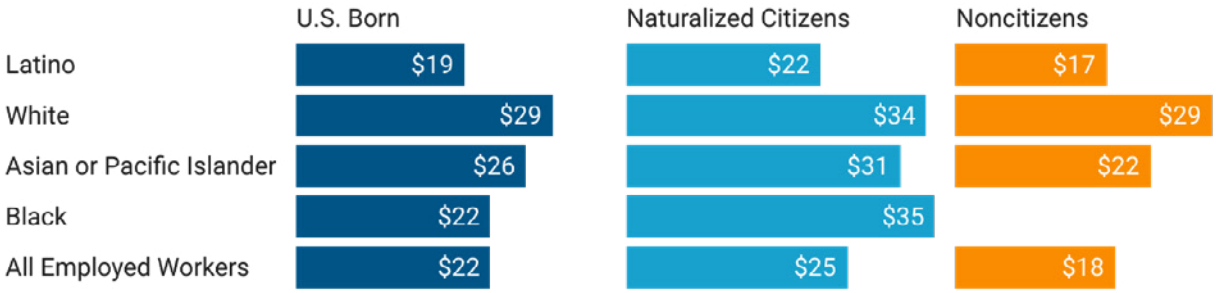
> *We weren't properly compensated for doing all the de-escalation. I also helped people with Section 8 housing. I helped people with immigration paperwork. I helped people with their citizenship exams. It was really fulfilling as someone who cares about social issues because I got to actually help my community with things that are really important. But it was challenging because I'd go home every day super stressed.*

Although Maria has since moved into a full-time position at a university library and earns better wages now, she said she feels there are limited pathways to grow in her career. "I've seen a lot of other people in my department specifically struggle with moving up, getting raises. I would say it's very hard to move up unless you have a master's [degree], but even then it's not

Regardless of citizenship status, employed Latinos in the Inland Empire earn lower wages than employed workers of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, employed Latinos without U.S. citizenship earned the lowest wages at $17 per hour (see Figure 18) compared to U.S.-born and naturalized citizen Latino workers and white and AAPI noncitizen workers. Overall, noncitizen workers all earned less than their naturalized citizen and U.S.-born counterparts, except for white noncitizen workers who earned the same wage as white U.S.-born workers ($29 per hour for both). Among Latinos, hourly wages were highest for naturalized citizens, as was the case for other racial and ethnic groups.

Differences in wages by citizenship status may reflect differences in educational attainment. For example, naturalized white (48%) and AAPI workers (58%) employed in the Inland Empire have higher rates of bachelor's degree attainment than naturalized Latino workers (14%).[27] Similarly, white and AAPI workers without U.S. citizenship (47% and 53%, respectively) are more likely to be college-educated than noncitizen Latino workers (6%).[28]

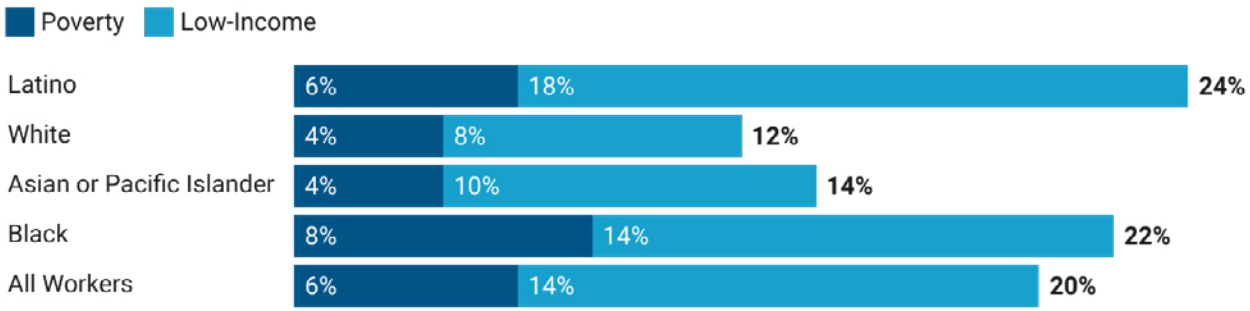
Figure 18. Median Hourly Wage of Employed Workers in the Inland Empire by Race, Ethnicity, and Citizenship Status, 2022



Notes: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older. Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals. Due to small sample sizes, data are not available for noncitizen Black workers.
Source: LPPI analysis of data from the Latino Data Hub.

In the Inland Empire, Latinos are more likely to be in the labor force while experiencing poverty or low-income conditions than workers of other racial and ethnic groups. In 2022, Latinos had the highest share of low-income workers (18%) and the second-highest share of workers in poverty (6%) after Black workers (8%; see Figure 19). In total, nearly one in four Latinos (24%) lived in poverty or low-income conditions, the highest share among workers of all racial and ethnic groups.

Figure 19. Labor Force in the Inland Empire by Race, Ethnicity, and Poverty Status, 2022



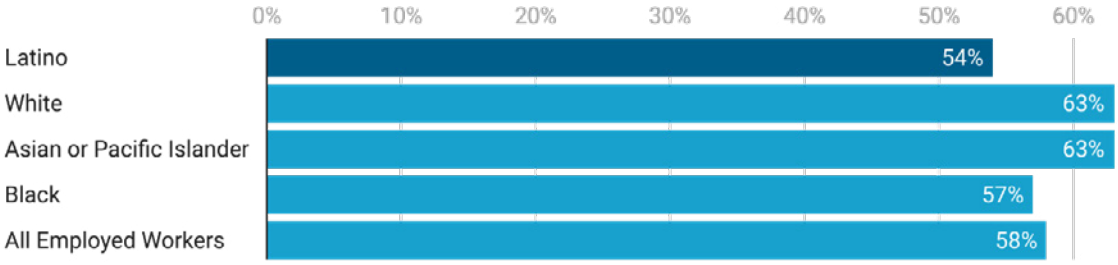
Notes: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older. Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals.
Source: LPPI analysis of data from the Latino Data Hub.

Poor economic conditions shape the daily decisions and long-term stability of many Latino families in the region. Fernando, who left warehouse work to become a self-employed handyman, described the rigid constraints of low-wage hourly jobs. "If I look back to the time that I depended on an hourly wage, I was not able to say [to my employer], 'You know what, milk costs more, eggs cost more, I need more money.' No, I had to receive the same wage." His reflection captures the lived reality behind the data: Many Latino workers are trapped in jobs where wages remain stagnant even as the cost of living rises. Without the ability to negotiate pay or access higher-wage opportunities, workers like Fernando are forced to seek alternatives, often in informal or unstable sectors, just to make ends meet.

HEALTH INSURANCE

Latinos are the least likely to have employer-provided health insurance among all workers of major racial and ethnic groups in the Inland Empire. In 2022, more than half (54%) of employed Latinos in the Inland Empire had employer- or union-provided health insurance (see Figure 20), four percentage points lower than the share for all employed workers in the Inland Empire (58%).

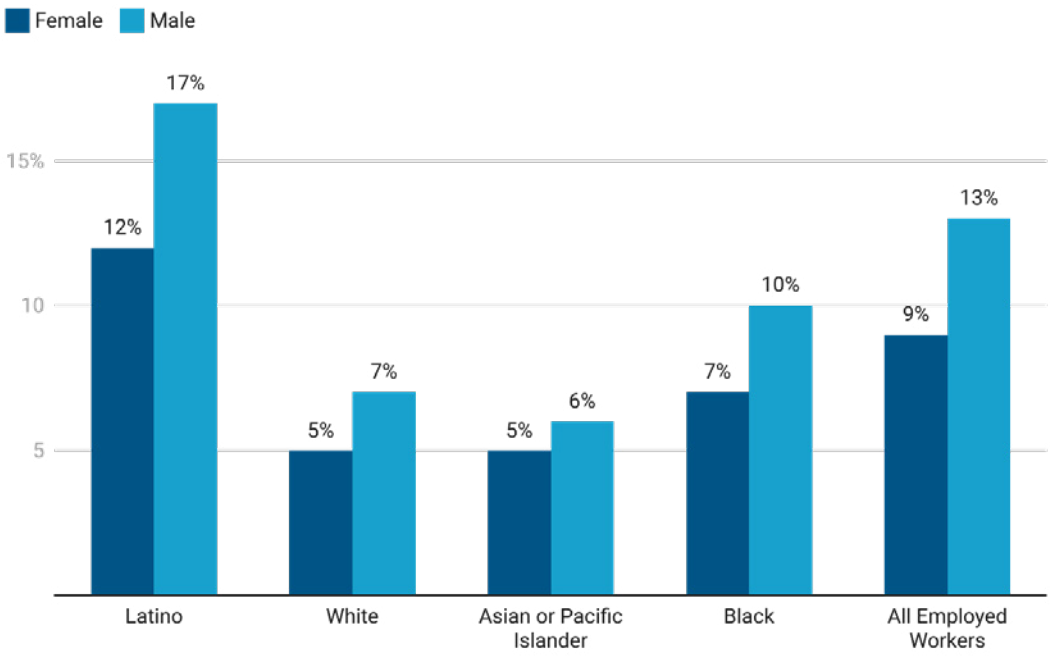
Figure 20. Employed Workers with Employer or Union Covered Health Insurance in the Inland Empire by Race and Ethnicity, 2022



Notes: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older. Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals.
Source: LPPI analysis of data from the Latino Data Hub.

Latino men employed in the Inland Empire have the highest uninsured rates among workers of major racial and ethnic groups. In 2022, 17% of Latino men were uninsured, four percentage points higher than the share for all employed men and five percentage points higher than for Latinas (see Figure 21). However, both Latinas and Latinos were more likely to be uninsured than their Inland Empire peers in other groups.

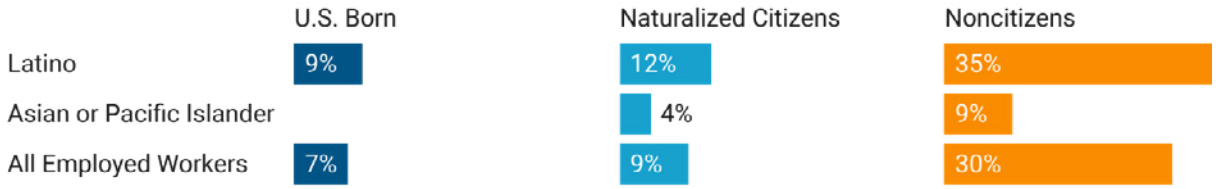
Figure 21. Uninsured Rate among Employed Inland Empire Workers by Race, Ethnicity, and Sex, 2022



Notes: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older. Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals.
Source: LPPI analysis of data from the Latino Data Hub.

In 2022, over one third (35%) of Latino employees in the Inland Empire without U.S. citizenship were uninsured, the highest rate among Latino workers by citizenship status. The uninsured rate for working noncitizen Latinos was about four times higher than for U.S.-born Latino workers (35% vs. 9%; see Figure 22). Similarly, the uninsured rate for working noncitizen Latinos was nearly four times higher than for noncitizen AAPI workers (9%) and five percentage points higher than for noncitizen workers in the Inland Empire generally (30%).

Figure 22. Uninsured Rate among Employed Workers in the Inland Empire by Ethnicity and Citizenship 2022



Notes: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older. Data for white, Black, and U.S.-born AAPI workers are not available due to small sample sizes. Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals.
Source: Data from the Latino Data Hub.

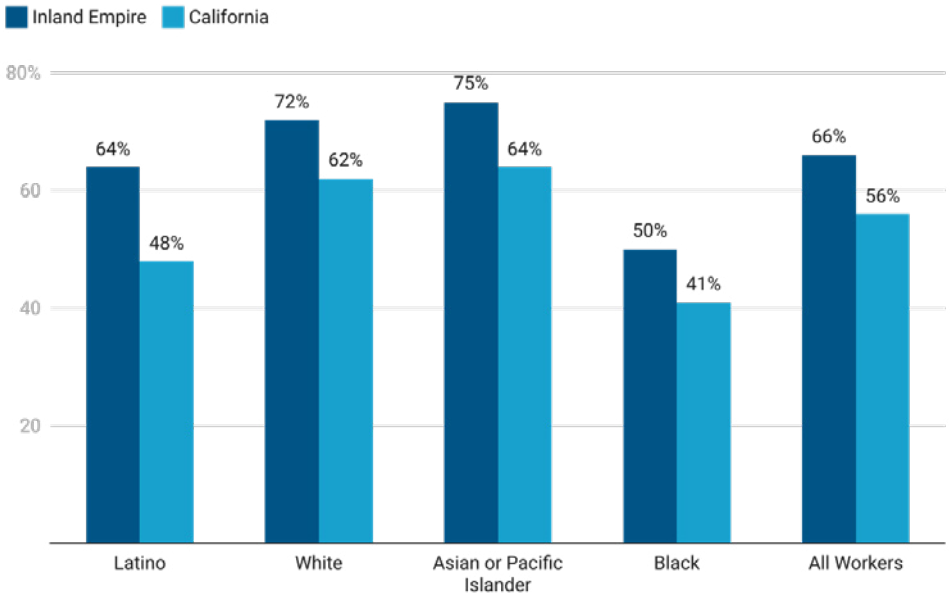
Mey-lan, a retired educator, described the financial strain of health coverage even after decades of public service. “Although I have health insurance, adding my diabetic husband to my plan would cost nearly $1,000 a month,” she said. Her experience highlights how even insured workers face affordability challenges, especially when caring for dependents with chronic conditions.

For workers in informal or unstable employment, both health insurance and access to routine health care are often out of reach. Fernando, who only has emergency health care coverage, said his family limits doctor visits due to his insurance policy. “Usually, we are very much about going to the doctor when it is absolutely necessary or check-ups, yes, but we do not see a doctor often." While self-employment allows him to support his family, the lack of employer-sponsored benefits—including health insurance—adds to his economic vulnerability.

Together, these narratives reveal how Latino workers in the Inland Empire navigate a fragmented and unequal health insurance landscape. Whether due to citizenship status, employment type, or industry, many face barriers to coverage that compound other forms of economic insecurity. Addressing these gaps will require expanding access to employer-sponsored plans, strengthening public options, and ensuring that all workers—regardless of background—can afford the care they need.

In 2022, homeownership rates for Latino workers were higher in the Inland Empire than in California overall. About two thirds (64%) of the Latino workforce in the Inland Empire owned a home compared to 48% of the state's Latino workforce (see Figure 23). Overall, workers of all major racial and ethnic groups had higher homeownership rates in the Inland Empire than across the state.

Figure 23. Share of the Labor Force in the Inland Empire and California Living in an Owned Home by Race and Ethnicity, 2022

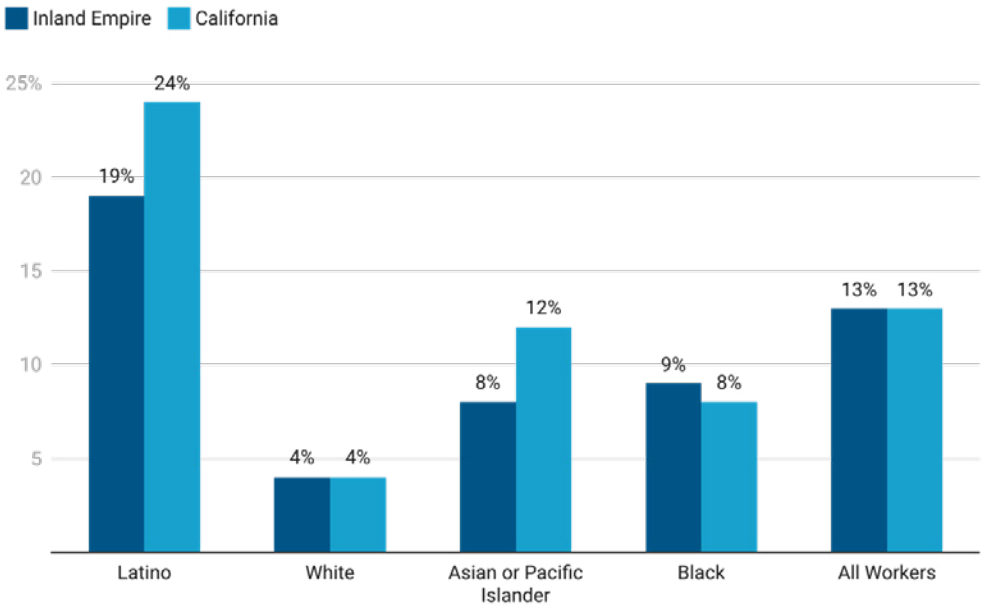


Notes: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older. Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals.
Source: LPPI analysis of data from the Latino Data Hub.

Latino workers experience the highest overcrowding rates at both the regional and state levels. In 2022, almost one in five (19%) Latino workers lived in an overcrowded home (see Figure 24). The share of Latino workers experiencing overcrowding was six percentage points higher than for workers overall (13%), but five percentage points lower than for Latino workers across the state (24%).

Mey-lan observed this trend in her own community. "I've seen that there are up to two to five families living in one home because there's no way for them to afford a house," she said.

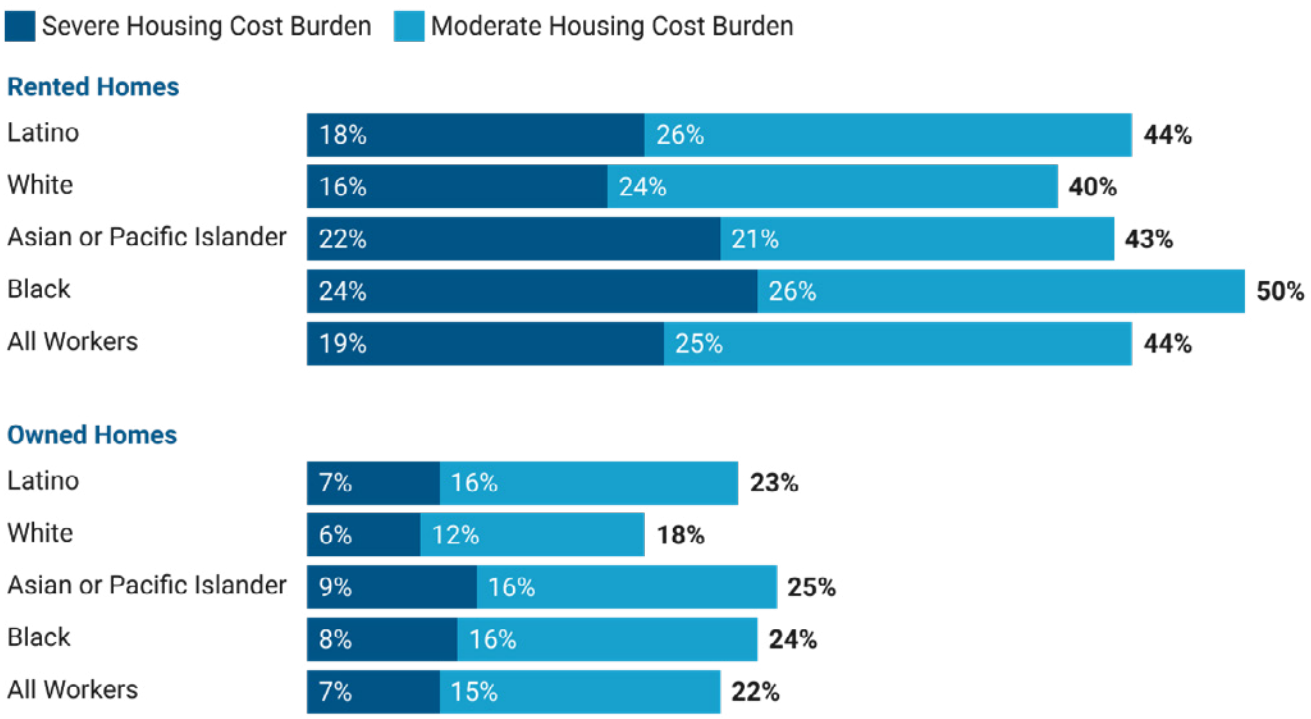
Figure 24. Share of the Labor Force in the Inland Empire and California Living in an Overcrowded Home by Race and Ethnicity, 2022



Notes: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older. Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals. An overcrowded household is defined as a home with more people than rooms.
Source: LPPI analysis of data from the Latino Data Hub.

Working renters in the Inland Empire generally face higher housing cost burdens than homeowners, especially Black and Latino workers. In 2022, Black workers were the most likely to experience rent cost burdens at 50%, followed by Latino (44%) and AAPI workers (43%; see Figure 25). Working white renters had the lowest rent cost burden of any group (40%). Among homeowners, Black, Latino, and AAPI homeowners faced similar rates of housing cost burdens (24%, 23%, and 25%, respectively). In contrast, white workers with owned homes had the lowest housing cost burden of any group (18%).

Figure 25. Housing Cost Burdens among the Labor Force in the Inland Empire by Race, Ethnicity, and Ownership of Dwelling, 2022



Notes: Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older. Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals. Moderate housing cost burdens reflect individuals whose monthly housing cost exceeds 30% of their income but is less than 50% of their income. Severe housing cost burdens reflect individuals whose monthly housing cost exceeds 50% of their income.
Source: LPPI analysis of data from the Latino Data Hub.

Five of our eight interviewees described facing housing cost burdens and feeling unstable in their housing situation. Daniel, who rents his home, discussed how unaffordable it is to own a home, the rising cost of housing, and the insecurity he feels despite his income:

> They keep putting rents up, and buying a home…isn't affordable. Even with my pay, I make close to six figures. And the rent's pretty much doubled. So, after taxes and all that…you're paying a very high, high rent for a home that you paid half as much for, you know, seven, eight years ago.

Despite the high cost of becoming a homeowner, homeownership remains an aspirational goal for workers because of the stability it promises. Buni, who purchased her home in 2020, discussed why she was eager to own her home:

> I don't want to be at the mercy of another landlord, where they keep raising the prices for no reason. They keep saying that it's for projects, and then it turns out that my house is still the same little square footage of the apartment that I had. I don't want to deal with people being greedy for more money without giving me a justification.

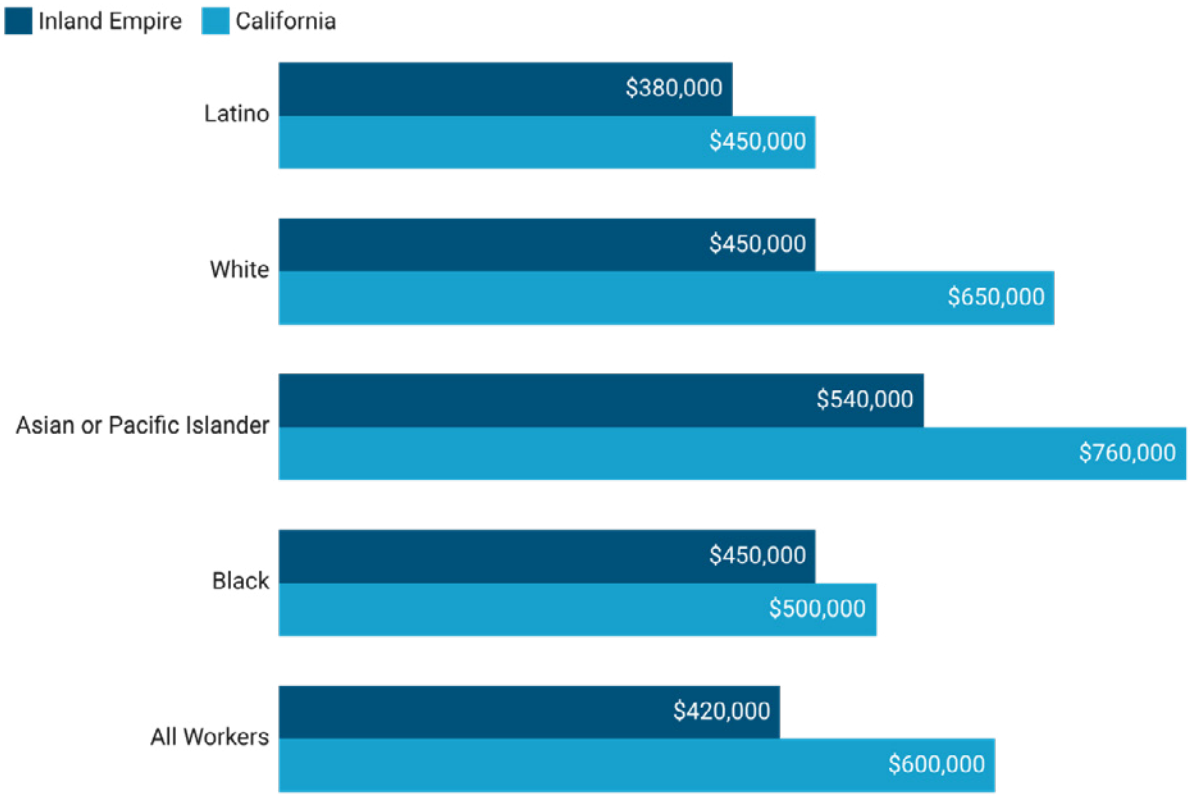
Mey-lan also owns her home. However, as a retired adult with little monthly income from Social Security, she experiences a severe cost burden:

> For retirement and what one receives from Social Security and all that, it's not enough to sustain oneself with all the high costs. I've had difficulties right now paying for housing… Almost 99% [of my income] goes towards [housing], and the 1% that is left, goes to food.

Mey-lan also sees the devastating impact of housing cost burdens on her community. “My town seems to be becoming—since I live in a small town—it's becoming what we call ghost towns. They're abandoning their houses,” she said.

Latino workers have the lowest home values compared to other racial and ethnic groups in the Inland Empire and California. In 2022, the median value of homes owned by Latino workers in the Inland Empire was $380,000—$160,000 less than the median value of homes owned by AAPI workers (see Figure 26). Statewide, the median value of homes owned by Latino workers was about $450,000 compared to $760,000 for AAPI-owned homes. Overall, median home values of workers were lower in the Inland Empire than they were statewide.

Figure 26. Median Value of Owned Homes among the Labor Force in the Inland Empire and California by Race and Ethnicity, 2022



Notes: Non-Latino groups only include non-Hispanic individuals. Data reflect civilian workers ages 16 and older.
Source: LPPI analysis of data from the Latino Data Hub.

WORKER REFLECTIONS: WHAT MAKES A JOB A "QUALITY JOB" IN THE INLAND EMPIRE?

Beyond the numbers, our interviews reveal the human face of the Inland Empire's Latino workforce. While the quantitative data reported show persistent disparities in some important metrics of job quality, when asked to define a "quality job," workers in the Inland Empire emphasized financial security, benefits, opportunity, and dignity for themselves, their families, and their communities.

While each individual defined quality jobs differently, interviewees consistently emphasized economic security and well-being. For Adrian, this is the baseline for a quality job, "I see quality jobs as sustaining your life, not just the bare minimum. They should meet your life needs: are you fed? Are you sheltered? If you're working full-time, you should be able to do that."

Beyond providing livable wages and meeting basic needs, the workers we interviewed underscored the importance of respect, autonomy, and safety in a quality job. Maria described an environment free from fear, such as "a job where you can tell your boss something, and you don't feel like you're gonna be reprimanded for it." Workers also discussed a desire for growth and purpose. Buni defined a quality job as one that "offers an opportunity to grow. It doesn't necessarily have to be linear. It can branch out to a variety of things." Roseo expanded on this, stating that a quality job must:

> *[Make] you feel good doing it. You come home and have a clear conscience, knowing I'm not doing something that's bad for people. I'm making a productive contribution to my community and society. And also, it sustains paying a mortgage or just a livable [income].*

Interviewees also offered reflections and advice for workers entering their field, and for employers to improve working conditions for other workers. Their reflections center on self-worth, advocacy, vocation, and systemic change.

Several interviewees spoke about the importance of self-worth and the courage to seek better opportunities. Fernando advised workers entering his field to overcome the fear of taking on new opportunities early in their career. "I think that oftentimes, the things we don't dare to do can make a great difference if we were to do [them]. But sometimes the fear, more than anything, [stops us]," he said. Meanwhile, Buni advised workers to stay true to themselves and resist any judgment or hatred they may endure:

> *You're kind of resisting by being there. Being your true self, and don't let hatred control you. Don't let stereotypes, stigmas, and hatred cloud you, because you're going to hear a lot of it. Listen, but take it with a grain of rice, because people will say all kinds of things, and a lot of the times, they are not true.*

Others, like Daniel and Maria, highlighted the need for employers to increase equity and support the well-being of their workers. Maria urged employers to prioritize workers' well-being, including "the employee's ability to move up and not be afraid to ask for raises or to complain about the conditions because [employers can] create a very fearful environment." Similarly, Daniel called for equity in opportunities for upward mobility. "More equality, more opportunity to see more people of color in higher positions, and seeing them given an opportunity and a fair chance. That's not seen as much anymore," he said.

Together, these voices offer a clear agenda for employers and policymakers: Invest in livable wages, safe and respectful workplaces, and real pathways for growth. Latinos play an essential role in the Inland Empire's workforce, economy, and community, and supporting their security, dignity, and aspirations is key to sustaining the region's economic vibrancy and growth.

CONCLUSIONS

Demographics and Labor Force Participation:

Latino workers have the region's highest labor force participation rates, especially among men. They are also younger and more likely to be immigrants than other racial and ethnic groups. Their skills, cultural knowledge, and global perspectives position them as a key source of labor force renewal. However, the lack of citizenship and uncertain pathways to citizenship for over a third of Latino workers in the region limit their access to stable employment, benefits, and career advancement.

Interviews revealed that citizenship status impacts many immigrant workers' career advancement, job security, and economic stability. Further, the uncertainty of job security and safety for noncitizens can cause economic and emotional instability that affects workers' overall well-being.

Human Capital:

Gaps in education are key barriers to economic opportunity and upward mobility among Latino workers in the Inland Empire. With the highest share of workers lacking a high school diploma and the lowest bachelor's degree attainment rates, Latinos face limited access to high-wage, high-growth jobs. This trend reflects the regional pattern of lower educational attainment in the Inland Empire compared to California, and aligns with the region's employment landscape, which features a high concentration of jobs that do not require a college degree. Recent job growth has been concentrated in transportation and warehousing and health care-related industries and is tied to the large share of workers without college degrees, signaling a lower demand for college graduates.[29] In addition to educational attainment, high rates of Limited English Proficiency—especially among Latino men—further restrict access to training, advancement, and workplace protections.

As a result, Latino workers are pushed to find alternative pathways to build skills and advance professionally. Many interviewees reported facing challenges accessing formal education, instead relying on informal learning opportunities, apprenticeships, and self-teaching to overcome barriers to formal education and credential recognition. Additionally, Latino workers often develop creative strategies to overcome language barriers and succeed in environments where English fluency is expected.

Industry and Occupation:

Latino workers in the Inland Empire are disproportionately concentrated in labor-intensive, lower-wage industries and occupations, limiting their access to economic mobility and long-term job stability. Latinos—especially men—are overrepresented in construction, transportation, and warehousing sectors, which are more physically demanding and offer fewer benefits. Additionally, Latino workers are the most likely to be employed in jobs at high risk of automation, such as construction laborers, and freight, stock, and material movers,[30] compounding their vulnerability in a rapidly changing labor market. Job exposure to automation is especially pronounced in the Inland Empire compared to statewide trends.

Indeed, workers we interviewed perceived a lack of industry diversification in the Inland Empire. Interviewees argue the regional economy is oversaturated with warehousing, logistics, and retail jobs, which they described as lacking in benefits, pay, and growth potential. Some interviewees have witnessed firsthand how automation displaces workers in industries such as warehousing, even when they are tenured.

On the other hand, college-educated Latino workers in the Inland Empire are employed at similar rates in professional services, education, health, social services, and public administration compared to all workers in the region, suggesting that some opportunities exist for college-educated Latinos to access higher-paying jobs.

Wages and Income:

Latino workers in the Inland Empire face persistent wage disparities across industries and education levels that limit their economic mobility. Among college-educated workers, Latinos earn far less than white and AAPI workers with the same credentials, with Latinas facing the steepest wage gaps. This suggests that Latino workers face barriers to obtaining higher-paying jobs beyond educational attainment. Latino workers are also more likely to live in poverty or low-income conditions despite being employed.

Interviewees shared feelings of being undervalued despite their skills and education. Workers including Maria and Buni discussed experiencing a mismatch between their compensation, work duties, and education. Other workers, such as Fernando, are forced to seek alternatives—often in informal or unstable sectors—with some workers thinking of leaving the region altogether in search of professional opportunities.

Health Insurance:

Latino workers in the Inland Empire face significant health coverage disparities that threaten their economic and physical well-being. Despite being employed, they are less likely to receive employer-provided insurance and are more likely to be uninsured—especially Latino men and noncitizen workers. These gaps expose Latino workers to financial risk from medical expenses and can lead to delayed care and poorer health outcomes.

The data also challenge the assumption that employment guarantees access to health coverage. Interviews revealed how Latino workers in the Inland Empire navigate a fragmented and unequal health insurance landscape. Many workers face barriers to coverage, whether due to citizenship status, employment type, or industry, compounding other forms of economic insecurity. Addressing these gaps will require expanding access to employer-sponsored plans, strengthening public options, and ensuring that all workers—regardless of background—can afford the care they need.

Housing:

Despite being a vital part of the Inland Empire workforce, Latino workers face persistent and compounding housing inequities that limit their economic mobility and stability. Although Latinos are more likely to own homes than their counterparts statewide, their homes are valued significantly lower than those owned by white and AAPI workers. At the same time, Latino workers experience the highest rates of overcrowded housing and high housing-cost burdens, whether renting or owning.

Interviewees confirmed these trends. Five of our eight interviewees described facing housing cost burdens and housing insecurity, and Mey-lan Yee observed overcrowding in her own community. These disparities reflect structural barriers in access to affordable, high-quality housing and underscore the urgent need for targeted housing policies that address affordability, overcrowding, and pathways to homeownership for Latino communities.

Given the central role Latino workers play in the Inland Empire's economy and communities, ensuring they have equitable access not only to economic opportunity but also to broader well-being is essential. Latino workers contribute far more than labor—they are integral members of the Inland Empire's communities, and their well-being and opportunities are deeply tied to the region's future. Yet persistent wage disparities, housing, education, and health coverage reveal deep opportunity gaps that must be addressed. Closing these gaps will require bold, targeted policies that expand access to quality education, affordable housing, health care, and dignified work. By investing in the full potential of Latino workers—not just as economic actors, but as whole people—we can strengthen the workforce and the long-term social and economic resilience of the entire Inland Empire.

Name: Adrian
Age: 26
Pronouns: He/Him
Ethnicity: Mexican American
Industry: Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance
Job Title: Research Coordinator

Adrian is a first-generation Mexican American who was born and raised in the Inland Empire. Throughout his life, Adrian has lived, worked, and studied in the region. Since graduating from high school, Adrian has worked in various roles, including as a retailer at a family entertainment center, a fast-food worker, a research assistant, and currently as a research coordinator at a university. As a son, brother, and uncle, Adrian underscores the importance of being connected with his family.

Adrian became interested in research while studying research methods and statistics for his lower-division psychology classes. After transferring from community college to a local university, he became more involved in research by volunteering in labs and was eventually offered a paid student position as a research assistant at a cognitive psychology lab.

Today, Adrian is a research coordinator for the same lab. He describes his role as “a little bit of everything.” He manages studies, trains new research assistants, conducts outreach to older adults in the community to recruit participants, and builds partnerships with local organizations.

The skills needed for his role have evolved from a volunteer and student staff role to a full-time position. Initially, Adrian relied on hard research skills such as research design, institutional review board procedures, data analysis, and scientific software. He learned these through university classes, independent study, and hands-on lab training. Now in his position as a research coordinator, the most critical skills he uses are soft skills including leadership, project management, conflict resolution, delegation, and checking in on colleagues to prevent burnout. As his job responsibilities grew, he learned “more leadership-based skills.”

However, a barrier to developing his technical and soft skills was the lack of structured training. Adrian had to be self-driven to seek out relevant information and now creates his own documentation to train others. “I'm doing a lot of documentation work in the lab...So, if I'm not here, can this system continue without me?"

Adrian defines a quality job by its flexibility, stability, and sense of purpose. “We spend most of our time, or a good chunk of our time, at work. You should be happy for at least some of it,” he shared. He feels his current position is a quality job and he especially values the flexibility it offers him. Adrian's advice to others entering the field is to be intentional about their growth. "To get what you can out of a lab...try it. And if it's no longer serving you, go somewhere else.” For Adrian, a career is not just a job, it’s about finding a role where you can feel “realized through your work.”

Name: Buni
Age: 34
Pronouns: She/Her
Ethnicity: Mexican, Salvadoran
Industry: Public Administration
Job Title: Case Processor

Buni is a 34-year-old Mexican and Salvadoran American who has worked as an administrative professional for state and federal government agencies across the Inland Empire for over three years. She lives in Riverside County with her husband, a disabled military veteran.

Buni has earned an associate's, a bachelor's, and most recently a master's degree in business management with a focus on human resources, and she is currently a doctoral candidate. She wanted a federal position for years before finally landing a job as a case processor with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in May 2024. "I was happy that I was finally getting pay that was matching the education and the experience I had," she said.

In previous state-level roles, Buni experienced a lack of upward mobility, bureaucratic delays, and severe workplace bullying that went largely unaddressed by management and her union. Her federal job began with promise, providing her with training opportunities and clear career pathways. However, her tenureship ended abruptly in a wave of mass firings in 2025.

Buni's experience as a federal worker was impacted by the changing political administration, which she says created a culture of fear and instability. She described a workplace where "the administration made a mockery of us," with new policies that affected the workplace environment. "They made it really obvious that... we weren't allowed to express pushback, because that would be seen as... going against the administration as well."

Amid mass firings at the IRS in February 2025, Buni was initially terminated with a generic email that was later recalled because her status as a veteran's spouse was legally protected. However, upon her return, she found herself systematically sidelined; she was removed from the internal systems and given a new email address, which made communication difficult. She explained that management eventually advised her and other new hires to take the Deferred Resignation Program (DRP) buyout offer because they wouldn't "survive the first wave" of further cuts. "I took the DRP...Essentially, I turn[ed] in my equipment, [and] I still get paid till the end of September. But I don't get to come back to the office," she explained.

Buni is now actively looking for new job opportunities and has confidence in her skillset. The skills she values most are the interpersonal ones she taught herself: She learned to be personable, communicate effectively, and advocate for herself in intimidating environments. "I am advertising myself, no matter where I go, I am selling myself in a way," she explained. She also learned the digital and procedural nuances of government work, learning to proactively troubleshoot IT issues and navigate complex agency protocols. Despite her confidence in getting interviews, she feels she "always gets passed up" because of the competitiveness of the current job market.

Despite the challenges Buni has experienced in finding stable employment, she and her husband were able to purchase a home by moving to an affordable neighborhood in Riverside County. They leveraged her husband's Veteran Affairs loan benefits to buy a house just before the COVID-19 pandemic. "I never want to be at the mercy of another landlord," she said, recalling the rapid rent increases in their previous apartment. The mortgage is affordable, but the property taxes and insurance add additional costs.

Although her job does not actively prevent her from participating in her local community, the political climate and often hostile social climate towards Latinos in her neighborhood make it difficult for her to engage in community outside of work. Buni's primary support comes from her husband and a small social circle of work friends and neighbors.

Buni defines a quality job as one that offers more than a paycheck. According to her, a quality job must provide a clear opportunity to grow, value her input, and have a plan for her development. She hopes to see more opportunities in the Inland Empire in fields that support people with housing, mental health and personal care, such as social services and assisted living.

Her advice for others entering her field is to develop resilience. "Get a thick skin," she said. "You're gonna hear a lot of things...It's important to not give in to that bait." She urges newcomers to stay true to themselves amidst workplace challenges.

Name: Daniel
Age: 43
Pronouns: He/Him
Ethnicity: Mexican American
Industry: Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance
Job Title: Zone Mechanic

Daniel is a first-generation Mexican American who has built a 20-year career working with his hands across the Inland Empire. For the past 14 years, he has held a stable job as a maintenance professional at a local university, where he is responsible for a wide range of tasks, including plumbing, electrical work, carpentry, and air conditioning. As a husband and father, his family is a primary motivator for his decisions about his employment and their housing.

Daniel's career began at 19 when he answered a newspaper ad for a plumber's apprentice. He was drawn to the trades but faced challenges finding a mentor who could provide guidance in his early career. His willingness to learn opened doors, but the cyclical nature of construction work and the fluctuating economy caused instability. He advanced in his career by moving between companies.

His desire for more stability is what led him to his current role. For years, he would drive by a local university and apply to work there, drawn by the promise of union protection, better wages, and benefits. "I always wanted to move up to a job that...[offered] more employee protection," Daniel shared. Compared to the high-stress, politically charged environments of his past jobs, he now feels "very empowered." He shared, "I'm allowed to work at my own pace... whatever resources I need, I have. Any tool I need, I have."

This job security was tested during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the campus emptied and his hours were threatened. "I was afraid of losing my job," he admitted. To navigate this uncertainty, Daniel found a second job in the same industry.

In his previous jobs, Daniel said he experienced discrimination, specifically being passed over for promotions. He explained that he has seen promotions he was qualified for disappear, "magically given to someone else with less experience, less time, less everything." He describes these slights as "pretty apparent" but rarely addressed. When reflecting on this, he values his current union all the more, which he sees as "a soldier in your corner" that forces management to listen and ensures things are "done properly and through the book."

Despite his near-six-figure salary, he experiences housing insecurity. Daniel rents his home and feels uncertain about its affordability. "Even with my pay... the rent's pretty much doubled," he said. Three quarters of his monthly income goes toward housing, making the dream of homeownership feel out of reach. Housing costs directly shape his life. He chooses to live close to work to save on costs and time, ensuring he can provide stability and quick access for his daughter.

In the future, Daniel hopes to see more equality in his industry for people of color in leadership positions. His advice for the next generation entering the trades reflects the attitude that has guided his own career: "To not be afraid. And just get it done. You know, the less you're afraid of anything, you'll probably succeed at it, you just gotta try it."

Name: Fernando
Age: 41
Pronouns: He/Him
Ethnicity: Latino
Job Title: Manufacturing
Occupation: Self-Employed Handyman

Fernando has lived in the Inland Empire for 22 years. He has worked in the Inland Empire and surrounding counties in warehousing, with local community organizations, and as a handyman. As a father and husband, Fernando describes the importance of supporting his family and being present in his children's lives. Fernando's primary motivation is to provide financial necessities for his family and have the flexibility to spend more time with his children.

Fernando currently works as a self-employed handyman, specializing in home repairs, painting, and plumbing. The need for better wages amid the rising cost of living in his area informed his decision to work as a handyman part-time to supplement his wages while he continued to work in warehouses. He has worked as a handyman full-time for about a year and a half.

While he was employed as a warehouse worker, Fernando faced various challenges including language barriers, vulnerability to labor violations, stagnant wages, and the risk of occupational displacement due to automation. These challenges compounded the financial strain of low, stagnant wages that made it difficult for Fernando to cover basic living expenses for his family and pushed him toward his new career.

Today, Fernando reflects on the differences between his experiences as a handyman and as an hourly warehouse worker. As a handyman, he has control over his work schedule and earnings, but he experiences greater job instability. He notes, "my job is not secure. But it is very convenient for me. Because if I had a secure job, I would be working in a factory, a company where I am paid an hourly wage. But those hours are not enough. The day only has 24 hours, and if I worked those 24 hours, I would not sleep. This way, I don't have to."

Managing the types and number of jobs he takes on is essential for providing financial stability for his family. Beyond his family, Fernando makes an effort to support his community by balancing higher-paying jobs with lower-cost services for clients in need. "I visualize my past self. Sometimes one lives day by day. And sometimes that small additional cost could take away from a meal out with the kids or shoes for the little girl, the little boy. So, in that way I try to support others, too."

When asked about the most essential skills he employs in his current job, Fernando listed adaptability and personal growth. Personal growth has helped Fernando overcome self-doubt and fear, enabling him to build confidence and broaden his skillset as a handyman. He has learned plumbing, painting, and carpentry skills through part-time jobs, which helped him build his expertise.

As a native Spanish speaker, he has navigated language barriers by building up his confidence in his learning capabilities and through resourcefulness. Although Fernando continues to face language barriers, he remains persistent by using digital tools, like translations apps, to support his work.

Outside of his work, Fernando volunteers with community organizations in the Inland Empire. As a volunteer, he helps distribute food, advocate for labor rights, and connect families to resources like utility assistance. For the last twelve years, his involvement in community organizations has provided him with resources and information on issues impacting his community he otherwise would not have access to.

When imagining success, Fernando prioritizes "emotional, economic, and familial stability." His advice for workers entering his field is to take on new opportunities early on and not to allow fear to hold them back from growing their skills.

Name: Lucía
Age: 28
Pronouns: She/Her
Ethnicity: Guatemalan
Industry: Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance
Job Title: Substitute Instructional Aide

Born and raised in the Inland Empire, Lucía is a first-generation Guatemalan American. Her identity as a native Spanish speaker has influenced her career in supporting bilingual students and she currently works as a substitute instructional aide.

Lucía has worked as a part-time substitute instructional aide for the past three years. In this role, she supports students with their classroom materials, provides instruction, and manages student behavior. She was drawn to this work because of her own experiences as an English learner. "I think it was being able to help students that are Spanish speakers and need more help. I was one of the students that was being pulled from the classroom setting to group settings because I'm also a bilingual student."

Being bilingual is crucial to Lucía's job because it allows her to support Spanish-speaking students. As she explains, "some students that come to the classroom struggle with understanding English at all, so being able to help them translate their worksheets makes it easier for everyone."

Prior to being a substitute instructional aide, Lucía was a work-study tutor for kindergartners, a retail worker at a movie theater, and was employed in a warehouse. Although her current role pays better than her previous retail and warehouse roles, she feels her wages are "pretty low compared to other people." When reflecting on the jobs available in her community, she feels like there are limited quality job opportunities, and wishes there was more industry diversification.

Despite the limited job opportunities in the area, Lucía feels that her job is secure because it is a "recurring role." She acknowledges that there is some instability in her hours, stating, "Every day, there's gonna be new jobs to take and they could be from three hours minimum or six hours. It just depends on the need [and] on how many aids are gonna be absent. There's usually work every day, but sometimes there's a slowdown." Although there is some unpredictability, Lucía appreciates the flexibility that comes with her position, since she can decide what positions she accepts, which grade level she works with, and how often to work. Her job's flexibility also allows her to enjoy holidays and breaks with her family.

Lucía lives with her family, where she rents a room in her parents' home. Her income as a part-time worker affects her housing options: "[The cost of living] definitely influences being able to afford an apartment on my own. [It] would be too costly and [I don't make] enough being a part-time sub aid to cover [rent]. I feel like, if anything, I would have to get a roommate, or roommates, to afford an apartment outside where I am."

Lucía defines a quality job as one that provides "stability and benefits and would probably be full-time." To improve conditions in her field, she would advocate for the return of COVID-19 protections to keep students and staff healthier. Her advice for someone entering her field is to "be patient with the kids" and to rely on adaptable teaching methods. Lucía aspires to become a full-time teacher, which she became interested in through her current work. "I feel like [being a full-time teacher] would be a good career to go into, and there would be more stability, and I feel like my family would be proud. Like a certain level of success has been reached."

Name: Maria
Age: 27
Pronouns: She/Her
Ethnicity: Latinx
Industry: Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance
Job Title: Access Services Assistant

Maria was born and raised in the Inland Empire. She works as an access services evening assistant at a university library, where she manages front-desk operations and user accounts for students and faculty.

Maria describes her path into library work as “kind of an accident.” While studying to become a teacher, Maria worked as a reading tutor and in fast food restaurants. After her work study funds ran out, she applied for campus jobs, eager to leave food service. She was hired as a digitization assistant in her university’s library. In this role, Maria explains that she felt solidarity with her supervisor, who supported her in her job search when she lost her job after graduating. He recommended she apply to work for public libraries. And eventually, when a position opened at the university library again, he encouraged her to apply, guided her through the competitive application process, and helped her to secure her current role.

In her current position, she feels some job security through union protections, but feels uncertain due to the university’s changing funding landscape, explaining that "for the most part, I do have job security because I'm unionized now, so I feel secure in that sense. But at the same time, I don't know how secure it is because there's been a lack of funding for education in general. I think there is a general fear because of the current administration...they don't want to support educators in any capacity."

Maria also feels that career advancement opportunities are limited. She believes that promotions favor workers with master's degrees, men, and white workers, leaving women of color in her library snubbed despite being qualified.

Maria’s work requires significant skills in de-escalation, problem-solving, and cultural competency, which she developed in her previous role at a public library. Despite being paid minimum wage in this role, she was expected to go above and beyond her job expectations, often helping patrons with Section 8 public housing applications, immigration paperwork, and citizenship exams. Although she felt fulfillment in supporting her community, the work affected her mental health. Despite the added pressure, she feels her past experiences prepared her to deal with all types of situations moving forward.

Maria lives in an accessory dwelling unit on her parents’ property, where she pays below-market rent. This makes her feel secure in her housing and provides financial flexibility. She explains that the Inland Empire is too unaffordable for her to move. “I don't think I'm ever going to move. My parents' home is the best I can do, so I don't even look at the housing market. It's kind of sad because I know I can't afford a house on my own. I don't even bother looking."

Maria defines a quality job as one that pays a living wage, offers benefits, and treats employees with respect. If she could change one thing about her field, it would be for employers to prioritize employee well-being and equitable career advancement. Her advice to workers entering the library field is to develop personal connections: "Sometimes it's all about who you know, and not really what you know."

Name: Mey-lan Yee
Age: 69
Pronouns: She/Her
Ethnicity: Mexican, Chinese
Industry: Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance
Job Title: Retired Teacher and Prevention Specialist, Rising Entrepreneur

Born in Mexico to a Chinese father and Mexican mother, Mey-lan Yee attended university and was employed as a teacher before she moved to the U.S. in the 1980s. She immigrated at about 30 years old to receive urgent life-saving medical care. In the U.S., Mey-lan worked alongside other immigrant workers in the hotel industry and as a farmworker in the grape industry. “We were in the fields, picking grapes or cleaning patios. We were all teachers, doctors, graduates, engineers, all because we didn't know the language, we were doing those jobs. And it’s nothing to be ashamed of,” Mey-lan shared, reflecting on her past.

When the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 was passed, Mey-lan was able to apply to become a naturalized citizen. Mey-lan’s residency and eventual citizenship opened new employment opportunities that facilitated her upward mobility in the field of public education.

Her first job in a school district was frying potatoes in a cafeteria. She reflects, “I began, you won't believe it, holding a bachelor's degree, but I began frying potatoes.” Her relentless work ethic caught the attention of a supervisor. A rumor spread through the district that a trained teacher was working in the cafeteria. After she had all her Mexican credentials, diplomas, and certifications evaluated and translated by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing in Sacramento, Mey-lan was officially considered qualified for higher positions. This led to her first break, an offer to work in an early childhood education program.

Mey-lan spent eight years in early childhood education before a director recommended her for a new role. She moved from elementary to middle school, and eventually to high school, each step backed by recommendations from supervisors who saw her dedication.

Along the way, Mey-lan faced significant challenges in her workplace, such as language barriers and discrimination. Due to her identity as an immigrant, her peers questioned her qualifications. Mey-lan’s experiences with discrimination left a lasting impact on her, noting that “it still hurts…it was several years ago, but I still remember.” Nevertheless, Mey-lan remained persistent and felt her experiences “made me stronger to move forward.”

She eventually climbed to the highest classified role in the district as a Prevention Specialist. In this position, she was the "brain,” where she managed the profiles and support plans for over 650 middle school students. Mey-lan went far beyond her job description, securing funds to purchase graduation regalia for students in need and raising over $20,000 in college scholarships.

After retiring from her role, she returned as a substitute teacher. However, in April of 2025, her 51-year career in education was abruptly halted when she was one of 50 teachers laid off over the phone by her school district. She attributes this decision to rapidly changing federal education policies.

Being laid off caused severe financial struggles. She said her pension and Social Security funds are so limited that 99% of her monthly income goes to her mortgage payment, leaving only 1% for food. This forces her to rely on food banks. Although she has health insurance, adding her diabetic husband to her plan would cost nearly $1,000 a month, further straining her resources.

In response to this instability, Mey-lan is once again adapting. She is launching her own business, viewing her layoff as a forced opportunity to become “an entrepreneur and empowered woman.”

Mey-lan defines a "quality job" by the dignity the worker brings to it, not the title. “Quality is given by oneself,” she says. Her advice to anyone entering her field is to have a true vocation, warning that without a genuine love for students, the emotional toll is "a very great punishment.”

Now, at 69, Mey-lan Yee is not just resting on a legacy of 51 years in education. She is preparing for her next venture as “an empowered entrepreneur.”

Name: Roseo
Age: 23
Pronouns: He/Him
Ethnicity: Chicano
Industry: Other Services (Except Public Administration)
Job Title: Communications Staff Member

Roseo works in the Inland Empire's nonprofit sector as a communications staff member. Roseo moved to the Inland Empire to attend university, where he was able to take advantage of educational opportunities and expand his professional networks. With prior work experience in the retail and service industries, Roseo has worked from a young age and throughout his college years. As a young worker, Roseo has learned how to navigate professional workplaces and has continued to pursue skills development opportunities beyond his college years.[31] Early in his career, Roseo's college professors and university networks provided invaluable guidance. Now, family and friends are another important support network in his life.

As a communications staff member, Roseo manages social media content, supports website development, and coordinates stakeholder communications. He also covers local events in the region through interviews with community members, photography, and press releases. Roseo's strong educational background provides him with the necessary knowledge, reading, and writing skills to succeed in his role, but he also learned many communications-related skills on the job, with the support of his colleagues.

Roseo explores opportunities for formal skills development training in communications to grow his technical skills. These include training courses through local educational institutions such as community colleges and University of California, Riverside Extension. Still, Roseo finds that opportunities for workplace skills development are limited in the Inland Empire for workers like himself. Roseo also seeks out independent skills development through books, educational podcasts, and audiobooks to expand his knowledge base and skillset.

Roseo's current role differs from his previous jobs in the retail and service industries because it provides more stability, better pay, and benefits. He describes his job as relatively stable, contingent on funding sources, and it is the highest-paying job he has held his career. Unlike his previous jobs, Roseo's current role is a salaried position (versus an hourly paid position) and provides employer-sponsored health care benefits. However, in this current role, his work-life balance has shifted from a structured workday, with scheduled breaks and lunches, to a fluid workday blurring the lines of work and life that Roseo was familiar with.
Although Roseo's job is relatively stable, he does not feel confident in finding a new job in the Inland Empire if he were to unexpectedly need to. Roseo cites a deficit of well-paying jobs in the region and a mismatch between his current skillset and the dominating industries in the region, largely made up of logistics, construction, and service industries. As Roseo explains, "there's not new, good-paying jobs. Especially out here, it's retail, it's gig work, it's logistics. And even if you want to get a high-paying job in those sectors, it would have to be like upper management-type roles. Because the economic landscape is bad already, and it's even worse, specifically, in the Inland Empire, I'm not confident [I'll] be able to look for a new job."

As a young professional working in the Inland Empire, Roseo envisions a future with a more diverse labor market that includes jobs in the fields of clean energy, law, the convention industry, and health care. To support the development of quality jobs in these industries, Roseo emphasizes the importance skills retraining programs and new investments into social infrastructure, such as law schools or health care facilities in rural areas. He would like to see existing institutions, such as public schools, universities, and colleges, pursue contracts with union-affiliated workers to promote quality job development and environmental equity in the region.

Roseo describes a quality job as one that pays a living or mortgage-sustaining wage, brings personal fulfillment, and allows him to contribute to his community. Roseo continues to live and work in the Inland Empire, where he is pursuingopportunities to contribute to the region in a meaningful way.

ENDNOTES

1 Bureau of Economic Analysis, "CAGDP1 County and MSA Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Summary," accessed March 12, 2025, available online.

2 Dan Hamilton, Matthew Fienup, David Hayes-Bautista, and Paul Hsu, "2022 Metro Latino GDP Report: Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario MSA," California Lutheran University & UCLA Health Center for the Study of Latino Health and Culture, available online.

3 David Allen, "Inland Empire Population is Still Rising in 2024, Like it or Not," The Press-Enterprise, May 12, 2024, available online.

4 Henry E. Brady, Lindsay Maple, and Meghan Hodges, Inland Empire Region: A California 100 Report (California 100, November 2023), available online.

5 Bureau of Economic Analysis, "CAGDP1 County and MSA Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Summary."

6 Patrick Sisson, "The Quest to Green an Empire of Mega-Warehouses," Bloomberg, June 14, 2021, available online.

7 LPPI analysis of the 2000 Decennial Census from Social Explorer and the Latino Data Hub.

8 Dan Hamilton, Matthew Fienup, David Hayes-Bautista, and Paul Hsu, "2022 Metro Latino GDP Report: Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario MSA," California Lutheran University & UCLA Health Center for the Study of Latino Health and Culture, available online.

9 Ileana Watchel, "A Key Economic Region of Southern California Faces Daunting Challenges," USC Dornsife News, October 5, 2023, available online.

10 Thrive Inland SoCal, California Jobs First Regional Plan Part II (Thrive Inland SoCal, 2025), available online.

11 UnidosUS, "Latino Jobs Report: December 2020," December 2020, available online.

12 Misael Galdámez, Jie Zong, Gloria Magallanes, and Citlali Tejeda, On the Frontlines: Automation Risks for Latino Workers in California (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute, January 23, 2025), available online.

13 For more information, see the LPPI report, *On the Frontlines: Automation Risks for Latino Workers in California*, available online.

14 Sex categories in the ACS data are referred to as "male" and "female"; in this brief, we refer to these groups as "men" and "women" for readability.

15 Although the ACS collects data based on sex assigned at birth, the term "gender gap" is commonly used in labor market and policy research to describe disparities between men and women in outcomes such as employment, wages, and education.

16 Austin Nichols, Josh Mitchell, and Stephan Lindner, *Consequences of Long-Term Unemployment* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, July 2013), available online.

17 Chad Shearer, Isha Shah, and Marek Gootman, *Advancing Opportunity in California's Inland Empire* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, February 2019), available online.

18 Partnership for Public Service, "Federal Harms Tracker: The Cost to Your Government," updated September 23, 2025, available online.

19 Recent findings show that nearly a quarter of Inland Empire residents commute to surrounding regions for work. For more details, see Cheylynda Barnard, Marissa Brookes, Jesus "Chuy" Flores, Gregory B. Hutchins, Jacob Kim, Michael Khvat, David Mickey-Pabello, Alice Parra Rios, Ellen Reese, and Leslie Rivas-Bautista, *State of Workers in the Inland Empire 2025* (Riverside, CA: Inland Empire Labor and Community Center, 2025), available online.

20 In 2023, the median hourly wage for all Inland Empire workers was $22. The median wage for workers employed in professional, management, and administrative services was $24; $26 for workers education, health, and social services; and $33 for workers in public administration. LPPI analysis of data from the Latino Data Hub, accessed September 11, 2025.

21 Yao Lu and Xiaoguang Li, "Vertical Education-Occupation Mismatch and Wage Inequality by Race/Ethnicity and Nativity Among Highly Educated U.S. Workers," Social Forces 100, no. 2 (December 2021), available online.

22 In 2023, management occupations in the Inland Empire paid a median hourly wage of $52 an hour, while business and financial occupations paid of $36 an hourt, well above the regional median of $23. For more information, see U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "May 2023 Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates: Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA," April 3, 2024, available online.

23 In 2023, transportation and material moving occupations in the Inland Empire paid a median hourly wage of $23, equal to the regional median hourly wage. For more information, see U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "May 2023 Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates: Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA," April 3, 2024, available online.

24 In 2022, the median service occupation wage was $16 an hour, below the regional median hourly wage. Because we group data together from various major occupation groups, we use data from the Latino Data Hub to estimate the hourly wage for service workers.

25 Galdámez et al., *On the Frontlines: Automation Risks for Latino Workers in California*.

26 In 2023, 20% of employed Latina workers in the Inland Empire held a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 13% of employed Latino workers. LPPI analysis of the Latino Data Hub, accessed September 11, 2025.

27 LPPI analysis of the Latino Data Hub, accessed September 11, 2025.

28 Ibid.

29 Hans Johnson, Cesar Alesi Perez, Kevin Cook, Selina Gomez, and Marisol Cuellar Meija, *Pathways to College Completion in the Inland Empire* (Sacramento, CA: PPIC), May 2025, available online.

30 Galdámez et al., *On the Frontlines: Automation Risks for Latino Workers in California*.

31 Existing research highlights the increasing number of students, "working learners", that work to cover educational and living expenses. A study of Los Angeles public college and university students revealed more than half of study participants worked 20 hours or more per week, and 1 in 5 worked 40 hours per week. Work commitments to cover educational and living expenses come at the cost of pursuing educational and early professional opportunities, as well as mental health and wellbeing. Reni Araque, Iliana Levine, Tanaz Toufighi and Emily Valdez. *Remapping Realities: Navigating School and Work Commitments, Financial Pressures and Well-Being* (Los Angeles: UCLA Labor Center, 2024), available online.

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