



# CHANGEMAKERS: Latinas Working to Close the Pay Gap

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## INTRODUCTION: THE LATINA WAGE GAP

No matter the level of education, industry or sector, women are not paid equitably for their work. The [gender wage gap](#) is the difference between what white, non-Hispanic male workers and women workers are paid. Equal pay day observances began in 1996 as a public awareness event to illustrate the gap between men's and women's wages. It was created by the National Committee on Pay Equity and was originally called 'National Pay Inequity Awareness Day' and changed to Equal Pay Day in 1998.<sup>1</sup>

Latinas are among the women who face the widest wage gap in the United States. Most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that Latinas are paid, on average, **54 cents for every dollar made by white, non-Hispanic men.**<sup>2</sup> On average, white men working full time and part time are paid **\$50,624** per year.\* For Latina women, this average is just **\$25,312** per year, and for Latinas who were not born in the United States, it is **\$23,287.**<sup>3</sup>

Consider these numbers in the context of the poverty threshold in the United States.

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The Department of Health and Human Services' poverty guidelines indicate the 2021 poverty threshold for a family of three living in the 48 contiguous states or Washington D.C. is \$21,960 per year.<sup>4</sup> Many [Black and Latina women are more likely to be breadwinners](#) for their families, demonstrating that despite their many contributions to the labor force, working Latinas are living at or near the poverty line throughout the United States.

## **#LatinaEqualPay: LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND**

Historically, many women workers were excluded in the wage gap calculations because the data used was limited to earnings from women who worked full time, year round. Using this set of data

\* For the purposes of this fact sheet, when we refer to "white men," they are defined as white, non-Hispanic men born and living in the United States who are working full time, year round; part time; and/or part year. "Latinas" are Hispanic women working full time, year round; part time and/or part year in the United States.

means only individuals who worked between **50-52 weeks of the year and at least 35 hours per week** were included in the gender wage gap calculations. These qualifiers demonstrate that even among jobs more likely to be salaried and higher paying, the wage gap was very wide, averaging **57 cents** paid to Latina women for every dollar made by white, non-Hispanic men.<sup>5</sup>

As a result, for decades there have been millions of working women, including migrant and seasonal workers, whose reality was not reflected by the numbers that political leaders and advocates widely used in their analysis and related

solutions. Ensuring data collection and subsequent calculations are inclusive is crucial to understanding the experiences of women working across the United States. This understanding better positions policy makers, advocates, businesses and agencies to address unequal and unjust pay by developing solutions that do not leave behind the most vulnerable workers.

In 2022, for the first time, wage gap calculations include earnings data from both full-time and part-time workers.<sup>†</sup> By using a more expansive definition of workers from data that already exists, the wage gap calculation includes **33 million** additional working women. For Latinas,

## GLOSSARY

**Full time worker:** An individual 16 years of age or older who works at least 35 hours per week, regardless of how many weeks of the year.

**Year round worker:** An individual 16 years of age or older who works 50-52 weeks of the year, regardless of how many hours during the week the individual works.

**Part year worker:** An individual 16 or older who works less than 50 weeks per year, regardless of how many hours during the week the individual works.

**Part time worker:** An individual 16 or older who works 1-35 hours per week, regardless of how many weeks.

**Example:** *A Latina woman who picks tomatoes full time during the summer months, but not outside of these months due to the seasonal nature of the work, could be a full time, part year worker.*

**Example:** *A Latina woman who works the entire year in a fast food job, but works fewer than 30 hours a week could be a part time, year round worker.*

2 <sup>†</sup> This shift was a result of the leadership of Justice for Migrant Women and the National Asian Pacific Women's Forum (NAPAWF), with the support from the Equal Pay Today! Coalition and other pay equity advocates.

a more inclusive wage gap calculation illustrates a truer depiction of the state of all Latinas working in the United States. Data presented in this research explores median annual earnings for Latinas across sectors, ethnicity, sexual orientation and country of origin for full time, year round; part time; and part year workers.

## WAGE GAP EXISTS ACROSS SECTORS

A popular myth is that the Latina gender wage gap is one of the widest because Latinas work in low paid jobs. The reality is Latinas in all industries and sectors experience the gender wage gap, including those working in low paid jobs. The scenarios in which the underpayment occurs are not all of the same, are sometimes complicated and are often misunderstood.

*Research from the Washington Center for Equitable Growth* demonstrates that the largest contributor to the wage gap remains unexplained by “human capital<sup>§</sup>,” which consists of knowledge, social and emotional capital, as well as relationships that people develop over time. Therefore, regardless of factors such as education or networks, Latinas still face a significant wage gap, demonstrating the impact of discrimination on the pay Latinas receive.

<sup>§</sup> OECD defines *human capital* as knowledge, skills and other personal characteristics embodied in people that helps them to be productive.

## Community Connection

Latina immigrants and non-immigrant Latinas who work in sectors that are more likely to be migratory or seasonal in nature are paid some of the lowest wages, despite the essential, skilled and sometimes dangerous, nature of the work. Justice for Migrant Women is in *community* with many migrant and rural women who are farmworkers. *Over 83% of farmworkers identify as Latinx.* Farmworker women, many of whom have migrated for work and some of whom are immigrants, are directly affected by the Latina wage gap.

Yet, for years their experiences were not reflected in the conversation related to the wage gap because their work does not often qualify as full time, year round due to the seasonal nature of the job.

## Median Annual Earnings for Latinas Across Occupations Compared to White, non-Hispanic Men

| <b>Occupation</b>                             | <b>Median Annual Earnings White, Non-Hispanic Men*</b><br><i>*Median annual earnings for white, non-Hispanic men born and living in the United States who are working full and part time</i> | <b>Median Annual Earnings Latina Women**</b><br><i>**Median annual earnings for Latina women working full and part time in the United States</i> |
|---|--|--|
| Personal Care and Service                     | \$20,617   | \$15,839   |
| Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance | \$26,492   | \$17,313   |
| Farming, Fishing & Forestry                   | \$28,800   | \$16,493   |
| Transportation and Material Moving            | \$32,735   | \$20,617   |
| Office and Administrative Support             | \$38,141   | \$30,000   |
| Business and Financial Operations             | \$77,312   | \$50,000   |
| Healthcare Practitioner                       | \$80,000   | \$48,000   |
| Computer and Mathematical Science             | \$82,466   | \$56,091   |
| Architecture and Engineering                  | \$82,466   | \$63,000   |
| Legal   | \$121,498  | \$51,541   |

Source: Median Earnings by Race & Ethnicity and Gender, 2016-2020 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

## Community Connection

I immigrated to the United States 18 years ago. I split my time between Ohio and Florida. In Ohio, I pick cucumbers, peppers and pumpkins. I used to pick tomatoes, but the farmer retired. In November, we migrate to Florida to start the strawberry season. We will stay in Florida until April when we come back to Ohio. There were three years in which we did not make this journey. When the tomatoes stopped, we spent three years going to New Jersey, North Carolina and Michigan, following the work. **That's the thing about being a farmworker — you go where the jobs are. Unlike other workers, we have no job stability. Once the harvest season is over, we have to fight and scramble to find the next job.**

[Learn more about Rosa's story here.](#)



## WOMEN FACE WIDER PAY DISCREPANCIES BASED ON COUNTRY OF ORIGIN & ETHNICITY

When understanding who is most vulnerable to discrimination and wage theft, data demonstrates that a person's place of birth significantly impacts their pay. Latinas who live in the United States but were not born in the United States face a wider wage gap. Even amongst immigrants, there are some Latinas who experience greater pay discrepancies.

For example, Latinas from Honduras or Guatemala have less annual earnings than

those from Colombia. It is important to note that women from countries in the [Northern Triangle](#) - Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador - are [fleeing violence](#) and come to the United States seeking safety and economic security. Yet, living with such low wages exacerbates already existing vulnerabilities. Low wages create conditions that expose migrant women to the risk of further physical and mental harms, as well as related trauma.

## Median Annual Earnings Based on Place of Birth

| Place of Birth     | <b>Median Annual Earnings* of Women Living in the United States</b><br><i>*Median annual earnings for women working full time year round; part time; and/or part year in the United States</i> |
|--------------------|--|
| Europe             | \$40,000   |
| United States      | \$33,412   |
| Haiti              | \$27,832   |
| Ecuador            | \$25,312   |
| Puerto Rico        | \$28,000   |
| Colombia           | \$26,967   |
| Venezuela          | \$25,343   |
| Dominican Republic | \$23,020   |
| El Salvador        | \$22,678   |
| Mexico             | \$21,573   |
| Honduras           | \$20,400   |
| Guatemala          | \$20,250   |

Source: Median Earnings by Race & Ethnicity and Gender, 2016-2020 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

## Median Annual Earnings By Ethnicity

| Ethnicity    | <b>Median Annual Earnings** of Women Living in the United States</b><br><i>**Median annual earnings for women working full time year round; part time; and/or part year in the United States</i> |
|--------------|--|
| Not Hispanic | \$35,000   |
| Puerto Rican | \$30,000   |
| Colombian    | \$28,863   |
| Peruvian     | \$28,000   |
| Venezuelan   | \$25,700   |
| Dominican    | \$24,740   |
| Mexican      | \$24,287   |
| Salvadoran   | \$23,231   |
| Honduran     | \$21,000   |
| Guatemalan   | \$20,617   |

Source: Median Earnings by Race & Ethnicity and Gender, 2016-2020 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.



**Catalina**

## Community Connection

“Living in the United States has lived up to my expectations, but at a very high cost. When I moved, I felt – and I was – invisible. **I suffered greatly in my jobs because I was discriminated against. They would give me the worst jobs, I was low-paid, and I did not have the power to protest because I did not have a voice or a vote.** I wish the community would take the time to get to know us so that they can understand that we are not like the stereotypes that are spread. I wish they would understand that Mexico, and our home countries, are beautiful countries, with intelligent and capable people. It brings me great sadness to see these representations of my identity.”

Now a proud business owner, [learn more about Catalina's journey.](#)

Photo by: Sheri Trusty

## IMPACT OF THE INTERSECTION OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION & GENDER IDENTITY ON ECONOMIC SECURITY

The [TransLatin@ Coalition](#) highlights the challenges that Trans Latinas face in obtaining and maintaining employment due to discrimination and stigma, among other external factors. The LGBTQ+<sup>‡</sup> community faces unique challenges in the workforce, which are not always captured in the wage gap calculation. Furthermore, [COVID-19 exacerbated barriers](#) created as a result of a system that was not created to serve women, particularly LGBTQ+ Black, Latina women.

To more efficiently understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on households across the country, the U.S. Census Bureau collaborated with multiple federal agencies to collect new data to inform how to better rebuild from the pandemic. The [Household Pulse Surveys](#) from December 1, 2021, to March 14, 2022, explored the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation. It shows that Black, Latina women who identify as LGBTQ+ were more likely to experience economic insecurity.

<sup>‡</sup> While we recognize the use of LGBTQIA+ as more inclusive terminology, for the purposes of sharing this data we are utilizing the term LGBTQ+ in accordance with terminology from the Household Pulse Surveys .

For example:

- When asked if anyone in their household had experienced a **loss of employment** in the last 4 weeks, **39.2% of people identifying as female, LGBTQ+ and Black, Hispanic answered “yes.”** This is juxtaposed to 11.1% of people identifying as straight, white, non-Hispanic females indicating they’d experienced a loss of employment.<sup>6</sup>
- When asked how **difficult** it was for their households to **afford usual household expenses, 32.7% of people identifying as Black, Hispanic LGBTQ+ females responded “very difficult,”** as opposed to 10.9% of people identifying as straight, white, non-Hispanic females.<sup>7</sup>
- When asked if their households were caught up on **rent or mortgages, 22.8% of people identifying as Black, Hispanic LGBTQ+ females responded “no,”** compared to 7.1% of people identifying as white, non-Hispanic straight females.<sup>8</sup>

## LET’S MAKE CHANGE

When considering the factors of country of origin and occupation, it becomes clear that Latinas who work in agriculture, as well as other occupations which are migratory and seasonal in nature, experience one of the widest wage gaps across all demographics. This year’s data

calculations are significantly more inclusive, and there is still more equity needed in data collection and subsequently, calculation. Recent surveys demonstrate the increased economic insecurity faced by the LGBTQIA+ Afro-Latina community, but overall there remains insufficient data about the wage and wealth gap facing transgender and nonbinary community members and Afro-Latinas. Furthermore, there are Latinas, some of whom are immigrants, whose earnings are not reported by their employer, and therefore, would not be included in any data set used to calculate the wage gap.

The impacts of a lack of economic security are far reaching and have an impact on the mental and physical health of Latinas. Concerns over feeding one’s family, saving for retirement or a lack of generational wealth can contribute to mental health challenges. Physical safety is also not guaranteed without economic security, including in the workplace. The inability to be able to support oneself, particularly for immigrant women, can lead to added vulnerabilities and continuing to live and work in places where violence exists, including sexual violence.

Stories, such as those from Rosa and Catalina, demonstrate that migrant and rural women are leading transformation in communities across the country. Justice for Migrant Women invites policymakers to use their power to support this transformation.

## CONGRESS SHOULD:

- Pass the [\*Pregnant Workers Fairness Act\*](#), which would strengthen and affirm protections for pregnant workers.
- Pass the [\*Paycheck Fairness Act\*](#), prohibiting employers from retaliating against employees who discuss wages and from requiring salary history for hiring, and reduce barriers to demonstrating that pay discrimination has occurred.
- Pass the [\*Be HEARD in the Workplace Act\*](#). This is the first comprehensive federal legislation to address workplace harassment in the wake of #MeToo. It is bold legislation that responds to the needs of working

people, and sets out a vision for what it means to appropriately respond to—and prevent—all forms of harassment, including sexual assault in the workplace.

- Pass a pathway to citizenship for essential workers to ensure that the most vulnerable workers can receive protections in the workplace.

## THE ADMINISTRATION SHOULD:

Prioritize serving working women who have been pushed to the margins and collaborate with the organizations that serve them, including those with intersecting identities, to ensure that data is collected and reported in the way that is most equitable and useful to these communities.



Join us this year on December 8, 2022, to observe National Latina Equal Pay Day, honor Latinas working in all sectors across the country and make CHANGE! Visit [justice4women.org/latina-equal-pay](https://justice4women.org/latina-equal-pay) to get involved.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was authored by Mónica Ramírez and Catherine Hinshaw, with support from the Justice for Migrant Women team. Mónica Ramírez is an attorney, author, and activist fighting for the rights of farmworkers, migrant women workers, and the Latine(x) community. She is the founder of Justice for Migrant Women and co-founder of The Latinx House and Poderistas. Catherine Hinshaw is the Policy Manager at Justice for Migrant Women.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> [Source: U.S. Census Bureau: Equal Pay Day March 2022](#)

<sup>2</sup> Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Median Earnings by Race & Ethnicity and Gender, 2016-2020 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau (2020 dollars).

<sup>4</sup> [Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation](#)

<sup>5</sup> Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Source: Household Pulse Surveys between December 1, 2021-March 14, 2022 U.S. Census Bureau.

<sup>7</sup> Source: Household Pulse Surveys between December 1, 2021-March 14, 2022 U.S. Census Bureau.

<sup>8</sup> Source: Household Pulse Surveys between December 1, 2021-March 14, 2022 U.S. Census Bureau.



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