

# Key Facts and Worker Voices: The Latino Workforce in California's Inland Empire

## Executive Summary

Latino workers are the backbone of the Inland Empire's economy. They make up more than half of the region's workforce and have driven nearly 90% of its labor force growth since 2000. Despite their essential contributions, Latino workers face persistent disparities in wages, education, health coverage, and housing that limit their economic mobility and well-being.

This report draws on data from the Latino Data Hub and interviews with eight Inland Empire workers to paint a fuller picture of the region's Latino workforce.<sup>1</sup> Their stories reveal not only the barriers they face but also their resilience, creativity, and vision for a better future.

### Latino Workers Are Driving the Region's Growth:

- **Workforce growth:** In just two decades, the Latino workforce grew by 154%—from 460,000 in 2000 to 1.2 million in 2022—and now makes up 53% of all workers in the Inland Empire.
- **Latino workers have the highest labor force participation rates:** Latino men have the highest labor force participation—74% are working or actively looking for work. Among women, Latinas rank second at 58%.
- **Young Latino workers are shaping the future of the workforce:** Latino workers are younger than other groups—18% are aged 16–24, compared to 15% overall—making them a key source of emerging talent.

### Latino Workers Face Persistent Disparities In:

- **Wages:** Latinas earn the lowest median hourly wage (\$17/hour). Even college-educated Latinos of both genders earn the lowest hourly wages of all groups.
- **Access to Education:** Only 15% of Latino workers hold a bachelor's degree, and 23% lack a high school diploma—limiting access to higher-wage jobs.
- **English Proficiency:** Latino workers—especially men—are more likely to have high Limited English Proficiency.

- **Exposure to Automation Risk:** One-third (33%) of Latino workers are employed in jobs at high risk of automation—more than any other group in the region.
- **Health Coverage:** Latino men are the most likely to be uninsured (17%), and 35% of noncitizen Latino workers lack coverage.
- **Housing Conditions and Cost Burden:** Nearly 1 in 5 Latino workers live in overcrowded housing, and 44% of Latino renters are cost-burdened.

### How Workers Experience These Disparities:

Interviewees reveal how these inequities play out in daily life:

- **They face unstable and insecure employment:** Latino workers described sudden layoffs, limited protections, and a constant fear of being expendable—even when qualified—leading to financial stress and emotional strain.
- **They are forced to turn to informal paths to build skills:** Facing barriers to formal education and training, many Latino workers rely on self-teaching, apprenticeships, and on-the-job learning to advance professionally.

- **They work around language barriers with little support:** Limited English Proficiency often restricts access to quality jobs and advancement. Workers must develop creative strategies to succeed in environments where English fluency is expected.
- **They see limited options beyond low-wage work:** Workers described a regional economy dominated by warehousing, logistics, and retail industries that offer few benefits, low pay, and little room to grow. Many feel stuck and want access to more diverse and upwardly mobile job opportunities.
- **They seek dignity and security in their jobs:** When asked what defines a “quality job,” workers emphasized economic stability, respect, autonomy, and safety conditions they often find lacking in their current roles.

### The Bottom Line:

Latino workers contribute far more than labor—they are integral members of the Inland Empire’s communities, and their well-being is deeply tied to the region’s future. For employers and policymakers, worker voices paint a clear agenda: raising job quality 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 as whole people, we can strengthen the workforce and the long-term social and economic resilience of the entire Inland Empire.

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**About UCLA 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.

**About the CIELO Fund:** Launched in 2022 at the Inland Empire Community Foundation, the Cultivating Inland Empire Latino Opportunity Fund (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. Learn more at [iegives.org/cielofund](https://iegives.org/cielofund).

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Data for 2000 are based on LPPI analysis of the 2000 Decennial Census 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. While findings are discussed in the present tense, note that most quantitative data reflect conditions as of 2022.