



Workforce Voices:

Reflections from Latino Workers in the Inland Empire

Listening to Workers: Quantitative data show that Latino workers in the Inland Empire are driving regional growth, yet continue to face persistent challenges—from low wages to limited access to education and health coverage. These numbers tell part of the story. To understand what these conditions feel like day to day, researchers from the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute (LPPI) spoke directly with eight workers employed in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. Their reflections offer a deeper look into what makes a job meaningful, what challenges persist, and what change could look like from the ground up.

How We Gathered These Stories: Through in-depth interviews, we explored themes of career pathways, workplace conditions, and economic security. The voices featured here reflect a range of occupations and experiences, but share a common thread: a desire for work that sustains, respects, and uplifts.



What Makes a Job a “Quality Job” in the Inland Empire?¹

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.

1. A quality job must provide economic stability beyond survival.

“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.”

— Adrian, research coordinator

2. A quality job must foster respect, autonomy, and safety to ensure workers feel valued and heard.

“I feel like a quality job is... one where you can tell your boss something, and you don’t feel like you’re gonna be reprimanded for it.”

— Maria, access services assistant

3. A quality job must offer opportunities for growth and fulfillment, allowing workers to build a meaningful career.

“A quality job is not just the paycheck... but also offers an opportunity to grow. It doesn’t necessarily have to be linear. It can branch out to a variety of things.”

— Buni, case processor

“[A quality job makes] 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].”

— Roseo, communications staff member

Advice for Workers and Employers

Interview participants speak to lived struggles and hard-won insight. Their reflections reveal what it means to maintain self-worth in challenging environments and what they believe employers must do to create fair and supportive workplaces rooted in respect. Interviewees highlighted two main pieces of advice to fellow workers and their employers:



1. Holding onto Self-Worth in the Face of Fear and Judgment.

Workers described how fear and external judgment often shape their decisions, and how recognizing their own value can create new possibilities.

Pursuing new opportunities: *"I would suggest that they should give themselves that opportunity earlier on. I think that oftentimes, the things we don't dare to do can make a great difference if we were to do it. But sometimes the fear, more than anything, [stops us]."*

— Fernando, self-employed handyman

Resisting judgment: *"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 don't 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."*

— Buni, case processor

2. Reimagining Workplaces That Center Equity and Well-Being.


Others reflected on how employers shape workplace culture. They explained the need for environments where workers feel safe to speak up, grow, and be represented.

Prioritizing employee well-being: *"I would change, instead of the prestige being the priority, they should really prioritize the employee's well-being, 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."*

— Maria, access services assistant

Promoting equity in opportunities: *"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."*

— Daniel, zone mechanic



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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 legives.org/cielofund.

Endnotes

¹ Individuals can define "quality jobs" differently, but broadly, they provide sufficient pay to afford basic needs and health insurance, and offer financial stability. For more information, see Thrive Inland SoCal, *California Jobs First Regional Plan Part II*, (Inland Empire: Thrive Inland SoCal, 2025), [available online](#).