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Characteristics of minimum wage workers, 2024



In 2024, 80.3 million workers age 16 and older in the United States were paid hourly rates, representing 55.6 percent of all wage and salary workers. Among those paid by the hour, 82,000 workers earned exactly the prevailing federal minimum wage of $7.25 per hour, and 760,000 workers had wages below the federal minimum. The percentage of hourly paid workers earning the prevailing federal minimum wage or less, at 1.0 percent in 2024, was little changed from the prior year. This remains well below the 13.4 percent recorded in 1979, when data were first collected on a regular basis. (See table 10.)

This report presents highlights and statistical tables describing workers who earned at or below the federal minimum wage in 2024. The data are obtained from the Current Population Survey (CPS), a national monthly survey of approximately 60,000 eligible households, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Information on earnings is collected from one-fourth of the CPS sample each month. The CPS does not include questions on whether workers are covered by the minimum wage provisions of the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) or by individual state or local minimum wage laws. The estimates of workers paid at or below the federal minimum wage are based solely on the hourly wage they report, which does not include overtime pay, tips, or commissions. For more information, see the accompanying technical notes section, including a description of the source of the data and an explanation of the concepts and definitions used in this report.

Highlights

The following are highlights from the 2024 data:

Age

Minimum wage workers tend to be young. Although workers under age 25 represented one-fifth of hourly paid workers, they accounted for 43 percent of those paid the federal minimum wage or less. Among employed teenagers (ages 16 to 19) paid by the hour, 2.6 percent earned the minimum wage or less, nearly four times the rate for workers age 25 and older (0.7 percent). (See tables 1 and 7.)

Sex

Among workers who were paid hourly rates in 2024, 1.3 percent of women and 0.8 percent of men had wages at or below the prevailing federal minimum. (See table 1.)

Race and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity

The percentage of hourly paid workers with wages at or below the federal minimum differed little among the major race and ethnicity groups. Among White, Black, Asian, and Hispanic workers, about 1.0 percent earned the federal minimum wage or less. (See table 1.)

Education

Among hourly paid workers age 16 and older, 1.5 percent of those without a high school diploma earned the federal minimum wage or less, compared with about 1.0 percent of high school graduates (no college), those with some college or an associate degree, and those with a bachelor's degree and higher. (See table 6.)

Marital status

Among never-married workers—who are younger than married workers on average—1.5 percent of those who were paid hourly rates had wages at or below the federal minimum wage. This is compared with 0.7 percent for both married workers and for workers who were widowed, divorced, or separated. (See table 8.)

Full- and part-time status

Among part-time workers (people who usually work fewer than 35 hours per week), 2.4 percent of hourly paid workers were paid the federal minimum wage or less, which is four times higher than the rate for full-time workers (0.6 percent). (See table 1.)

Occupation

Among the major occupational groups, service occupations had the highest percentage of hourly paid workers earning at or below the federal minimum wage, at 3.2 percent. Nearly 3 out of 4 workers earning the minimum wage or less in 2024 were employed in service occupations, mostly in food preparation and serving-related jobs. For many of these workers, tips may have supplemented the hourly wages they received. (See table 4.)

Industry

The industry with the highest percentage of workers earning hourly wages at or below the federal minimum wage in 2024 was leisure and hospitality (5.6 percent). About two-thirds of all workers paid at or below the federal minimum wage were employed in this industry, almost entirely in restaurants and other food services. (See table 5.)

State of residence

Among hourly paid workers in Louisiana and South Carolina, the share of workers who earned the federal minimum wage or less was at or slightly above 2.0 percent. Less than 1.0 percent of hourly paid workers earned at or below the federal minimum wage in Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Washington, and Wyoming. Note that, as of 2024, 30 states and the District of Columbia had minimum wages that exceeded the federal minimum. (See table 3.)

Statistical Tables

[+] Table 1. Wage and salary workers paid hourly rates with earnings at or below the prevailing federal minimum wage, by selected characteristics, 2024 annual averages

[+] Table 2. Wage and salary workers paid hourly rates with earnings at or below the prevailing federal minimum wage, by census region and division, 2024 annual averages

[+] Table 3. Wage and salary workers paid hourly rates with earnings at or below the prevailing federal minimum wage, by state, 2024 annual averages

[+] Table 4. Wage and salary workers paid hourly rates with earnings at or below the prevailing federal minimum wage, by occupation, 2024 annual averages

[+] Table 5. Wage and salary workers paid hourly rates with earnings at or below the prevailing federal minimum wage, by industry, 2024 annual averages

[+] Table 6. Wage and salary workers paid hourly rates with earnings at or below the prevailing federal minimum wage, by educational attainment, 2024 annual averages

[+] Table 7. Wage and salary workers paid hourly rates with earnings at or below the prevailing federal minimum wage, by age and sex, 2024 annual averages

[+] Table 8. Wage and salary workers paid hourly rates with earnings at or below the prevailing federal minimum wage, by marital status, age, and sex, 2024 annual averages

[+] Table 9. Wage and salary workers paid hourly rates with earnings at or below the prevailing federal minimum wage, by usual hours worked per week on primary job, 2024 annual averages

[+] Table 10. Wage and salary workers paid hourly rates with earnings at or below prevailing federal minimum wage, by sex, 1979–2024 annual averages (Numbers in thousands)

Technical Notes

The estimates in this report were obtained from the Current Population Survey (CPS), which provides information on the labor force, employment, and unemployment. The survey is conducted monthly for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) by the U.S. Census Bureau using a nationally representative sample of about 60,000 eligible households in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The survey also provides data on earnings, which are based on one-fourth of the CPS monthly sample and are limited to wage and salary workers. All self-employed workers, regardless of whether their businesses are incorporated, are excluded from these earnings estimates.

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For more information on the data provided in this report, contact the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Division of Labor Force Statistics. Email: cpsinfo@bls.gov; Telephone: (202) 691-6378.

Concepts and definitions

Wage and salary workers are people age 16 and older who receive wages, salaries, commissions, tips, payments in kind, or piece rates on their sole or principal job. This group includes employees in both the private and public sectors. All self-employed workers are excluded, regardless of whether their businesses are incorporated.

Workers paid by the hour are wage and salary workers who report that they are paid at an hourly rate on their job. Historically, workers paid an hourly wage have made up approximately three-fifths of all wage and salary workers. Estimates of workers paid by the hour include both full- and part-time workers, unless otherwise specified.

Hourly earnings data are for wage and salary workers who are paid by the hour and pertain to earnings from a person's sole or principal job. Hourly earnings for hourly paid workers do not include overtime pay, commissions, or tips received.

Workers paid at or below the prevailing federal minimum wage include only workers who are paid hourly rates. Salaried workers and other nonhourly paid workers are excluded.

Regular collection of earnings data in the basic CPS began in 1979. The prevailing federal minimum wage for 1979, and later years, is listed in the following table.

Federal minimum wage	Effective date
$2.90	January 1, 1979
$3.10	January 1, 1980
$3.35	January 1, 1981
$3.80	April 1, 1990
$4.25	April 1, 1991
$4.75	October 1, 1996
$5.15	September 1, 1997
$5.85	July 24, 2007

$6.55	July 24, 2008
$7.25	July 24, 2009

Estimates of the average number of minimum wage workers for years when the minimum wage increased during the year reflect both minimum wage levels in effect. For example, data for 2007 reflect the number of workers at or below the federal minimum of $5.15 for January to July and $5.85 for August to December.

Full-time workers are defined as those who usually work 35 hours or more per week at their sole or principal job. The federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) does not define full- or part-time employment.

Part-time workers are defined as those who usually work fewer than 35 hours per week at their sole or principal job.

Race is reported by the household respondent. In accordance with Office of Management and Budget standards, White, Black or African American, and Asian are terms used to describe a person's race for the data presented in this report. Data for other race groups—American Indians and Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders—and for people of Two or More Races are included in totals but not separately identified in this report because the number of survey respondents is too small to develop estimates of acceptable reliability.

Hispanic or Latino ethnicity refers to people who identified themselves in the survey process as being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. People who identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino ethnicity may be of any race.

Married, spouse present refers to people who are married and living together in the same household.

Other marital status refers to people who are never married; widowed; divorced; separated; or married, spouse absent.

Separated includes people with legal separations, those living apart with intentions of obtaining a divorce, and other people permanently or temporarily separated because of marital discord.

Married, spouse absent includes married people living apart because either a husband or a wife was employed and living at a considerable distance from home, was serving away from home in the Armed Forces, had moved to another area, or had a different place of residence for any other reason except those listed in the previous definition of *separated*.

Interpreting minimum wage data

The CPS does not determine whether workers are covered by the minimum wage provisions of the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) or by individual state or local minimum wage laws. The estimates of workers paid at or below the federal minimum wage are based solely on the hourly wage that respondents report (which does not include overtime pay, tips, or commissions). It should be noted that some respondents might round their hourly earnings when answering survey questions. As a result, some workers might be reported as having hourly earnings above or below the federal minimum wage when, in fact, they earn the minimum wage.

Some workers reported as earning at or below the prevailing federal minimum wage may not, in fact, be covered by federal or state minimum wage laws because of exclusions and exemptions in the statutes. Thus, the presence of workers with hourly earnings below the federal minimum wage does not necessarily indicate violations of the FLSA or state statutes in cases where such standards apply.

Estimates of the number of minimum wage workers in this report only pertain to workers who are paid hourly rates. Salaried workers and other workers who are not paid by the hour are excluded, even though some have earnings that, if converted to hourly rates, would be at or below the federal minimum wage. Consequently, the estimates presented in this report likely underestimate the actual number of workers with hourly earnings at or below the minimum wage. BLS does not routinely estimate the hourly earnings of workers not paid by the hour because of data quality concerns associated with constructing such an estimate.

Several states have established minimum wage rates that exceed the federal level. (For more information, see the Department of Labor's State Minimum Wage Laws webpage.) Users should be cautious about comparing state estimates with CPS estimates in this report because of differing statutory minimum wages. It should also be noted that the CPS sample is based on residence; workers report their earnings on their job, which may not be located in the same state in which they live. In addition, the degree of sampling error may be quite large for some state estimates.

Reliability

Statistics based on the CPS are subject to both sampling and nonsampling error. When a sample of the population is surveyed, rather than the entire population, there is a chance that the sample estimates may differ from the true population values they represent. The component of this difference that occurs because samples differ by chance is known as sampling error, and its variability is measured by the standard error of the estimate. There is about a 90-percent chance, or level of confidence, that an estimate based on a sample will differ by no more than 1.6 standard errors from the true population value because of sampling error. BLS analyses are generally conducted at the 90-percent level of confidence.

The CPS data also are affected by nonsampling error. Nonsampling error can occur for many reasons, including the failure to sample a segment of the population, inability to obtain information from all respondents in the sample, inability or unwillingness of respondents to provide correct information, and errors made in the collection or processing of the data. For example, respondents may round their hourly earnings to whole dollars when answering survey questions.

Information about the reliability of data from the CPS is available on the BLS website in the Reliability of estimates from the CPS section of the Technical Documentation (CPS) webpage.