

# The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Workers in California

## An Overview of Research to Date

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# The two groups of workers being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic:

## Unemployed workers

are at risk of:

- Loss of income
- Loss of healthcare
- Loss of housing
- Economic instability
- Increased stress and anxiety

## Essential workers

are at risk of:

- Greater exposure to the coronavirus
- Higher rates of illness and death
- Exposing their family members and especially elders
- Increased stress and anxiety

# 1. Unemployed workers

# Unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic

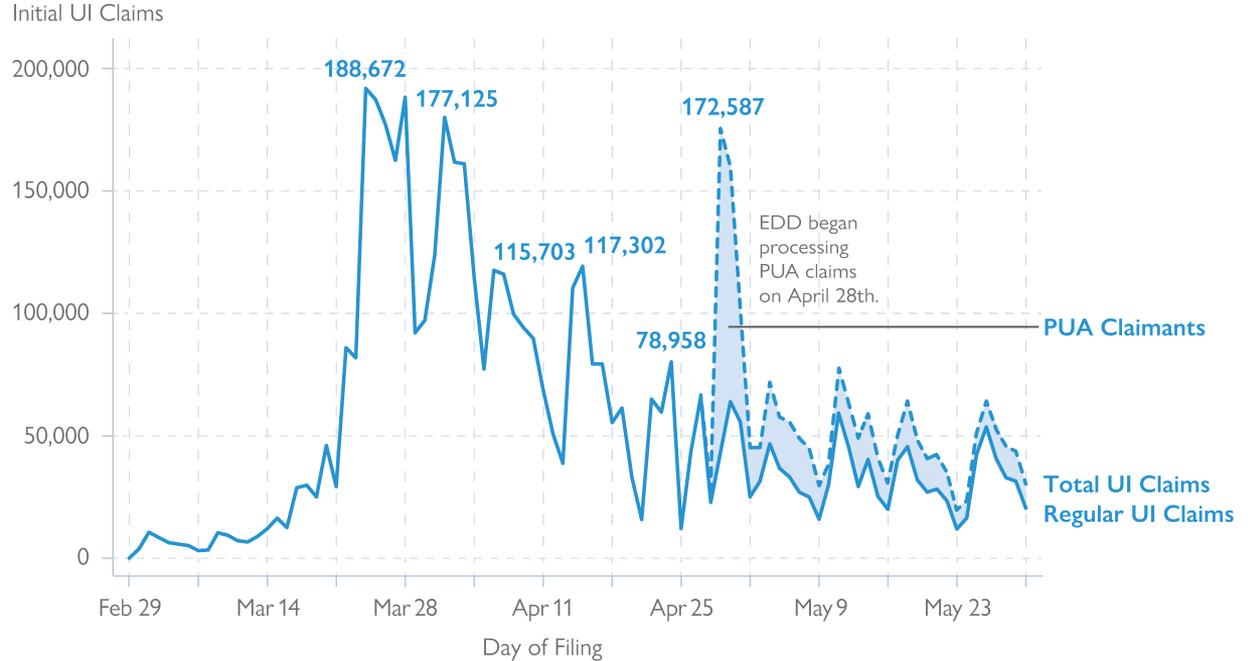
- More than 40 million Americans [have filed for](#) unemployment to date
- The CA unemployment rate [increased](#) from 5.5% in February to 15.5% in April
- Just under 29% of California's workers (including those who are self-employed) [have now filed](#) for unemployment insurance -- over 5.5 million initial claims were filed in the eleven weeks between March 15th and May 30<sup>th</sup>

# Number of unemployment claims, California

(February 29 - May 30)

Source: [California Policy Lab](#)

Note: PUA is Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, which provides unemployment benefits to individuals not eligible for regular unemployment compensation.



X-axis labels correspond to Saturdays.

Total UI claims combines initial claims to regular UI and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA).

# Distribution of unemployment claims across industries, California

(March 15 - May 30)

Source: [California Policy Lab](#)

Note: Does not include PUA claims

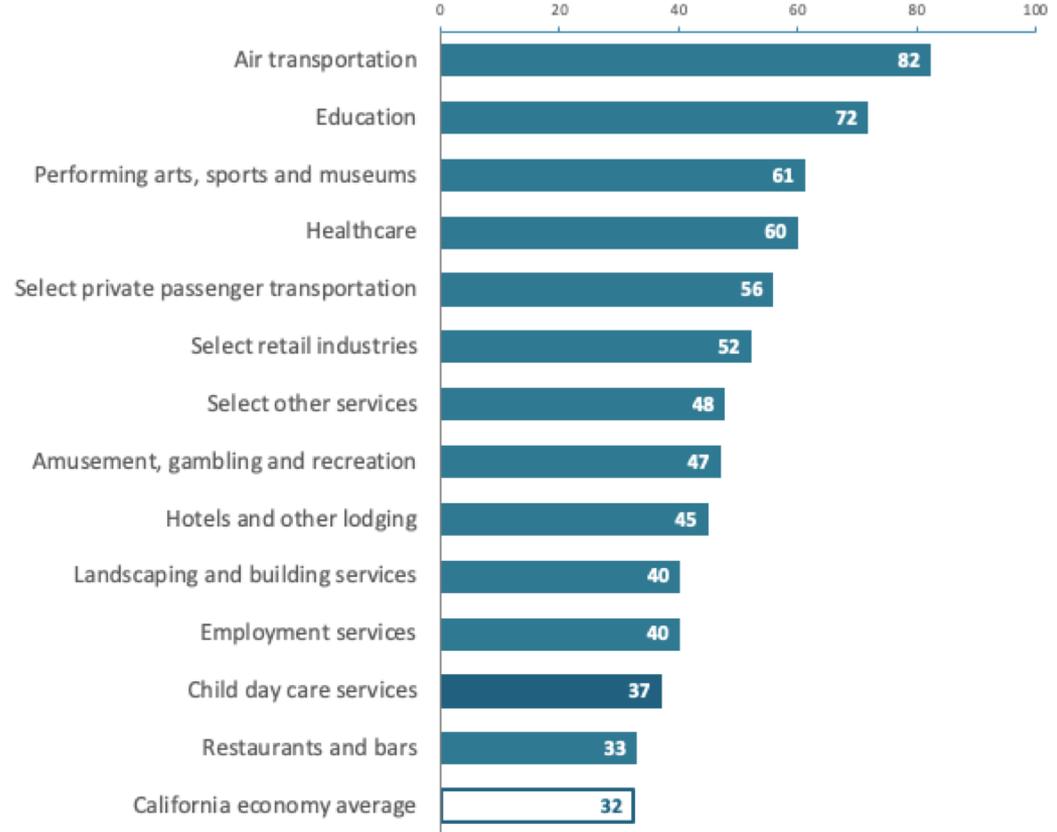
	Total number of claims, 3/15-5/30	Industry share of claims
Accommodation and food services	739,439	18.4
Retail trade	563,919	14.0
Health care and social assistance	515,434	12.8
Admin. support, waste mgmt & remediation services	292,870	7.3
Construction	260,500	6.5
Manufacturing	259,931	6.5
Other services	205,927	5.1
Professional, scientific & technical services	204,374	5.1
Arts, entertainment & recreation	192,853	4.8
Wholesale trade	162,105	4.0
Education services	158,546	3.9
Transportation, warehousing, utilities	147,766	3.7
Information	129,282	3.2
Real estate and leasing	73,292	1.8
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	44,422	1.1
Finance and insurance	43,764	1.1
Management	20,513	0.5
Mining, oil, gas	4,761	0.1
Column total	4,019,698	100.0

# High job loss industries often pay low wages to their front-line workers in California

(based on 2018 data)

Source: [UC Berkeley Labor Center](#)

## Percent of front-line jobs that are low-wage



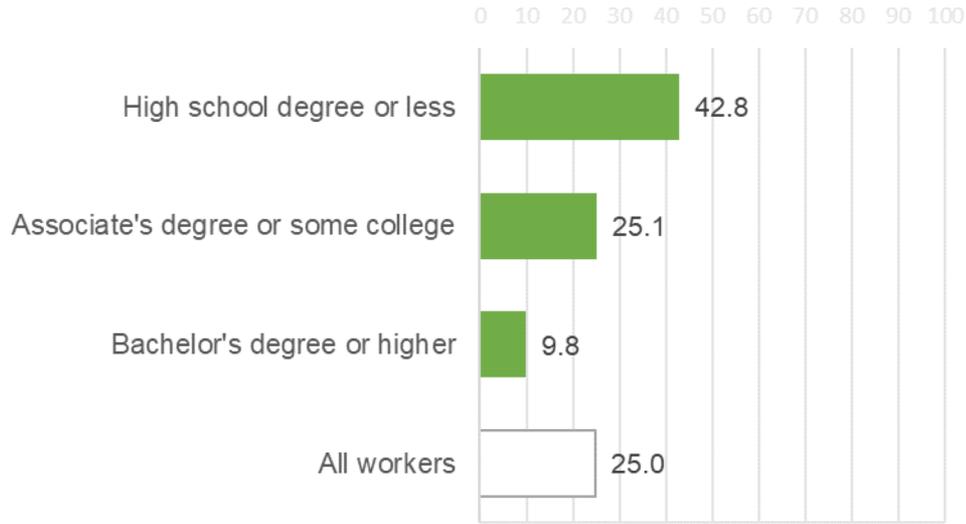
# Workers with a high school degree or less were much more likely to file for unemployment in California

(March 15 – May 30)

Source: [California Policy Lab](#)

Note: Does not include PUA claims

Percent of each education group filing for unemployment insurance



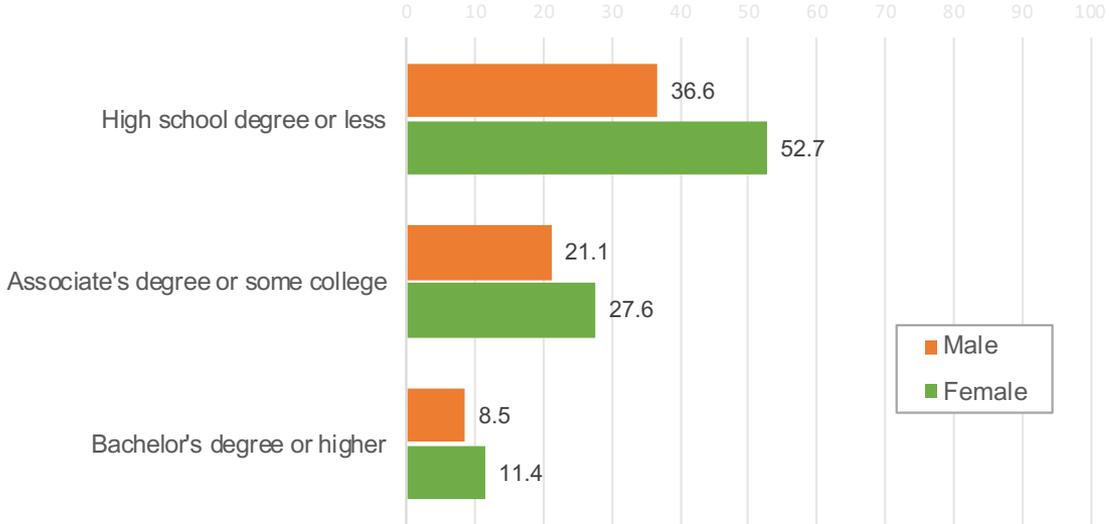
Women, especially those without a high school degree, were more likely to file for unemployment in California than men

(March 15 – May 30)

Source: [California Policy Lab](#)

Note: Includes PUA claims

Percent of each education group filing for unemployment insurance, by gender

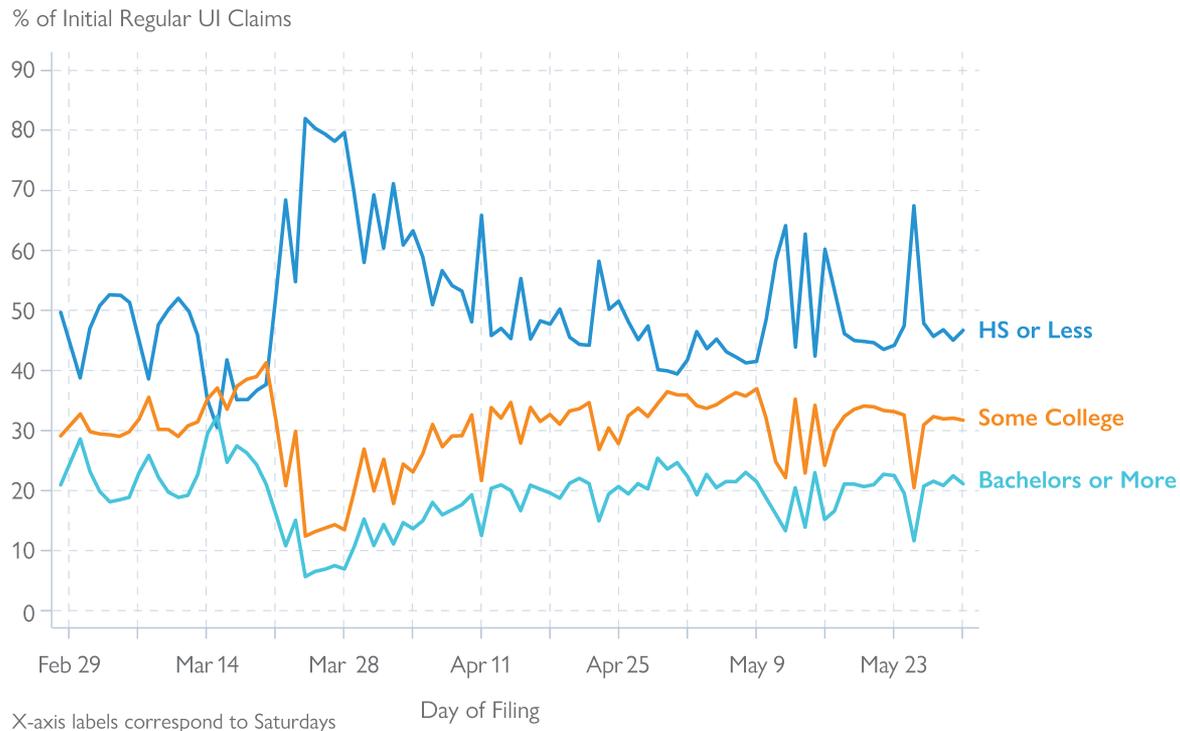


# Workers with a high school degree or less made up a large proportion of early unemployment claims in California

(February 29 – May 30)

Source: [California Policy Lab](#)

Note: Does not include PUA claims



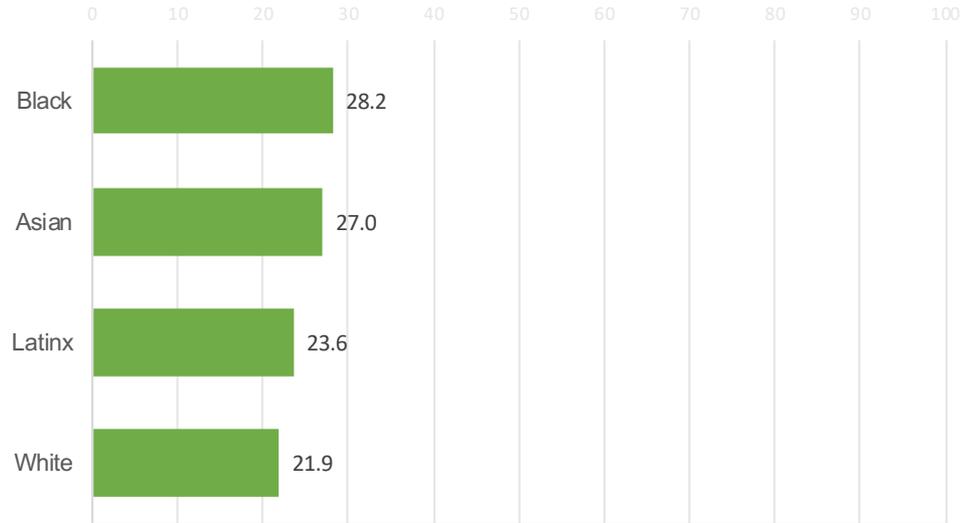
A higher proportion of Black and Asian workers have filed unemployment claims compared to other workers

(March 15 – May 30)

Source: [California Policy Lab](#)

Note: Undocumented workers not eligible for benefits are not included in these data. PUA claims are not included.

Percent of each race/ethnic group filing for unemployment insurance

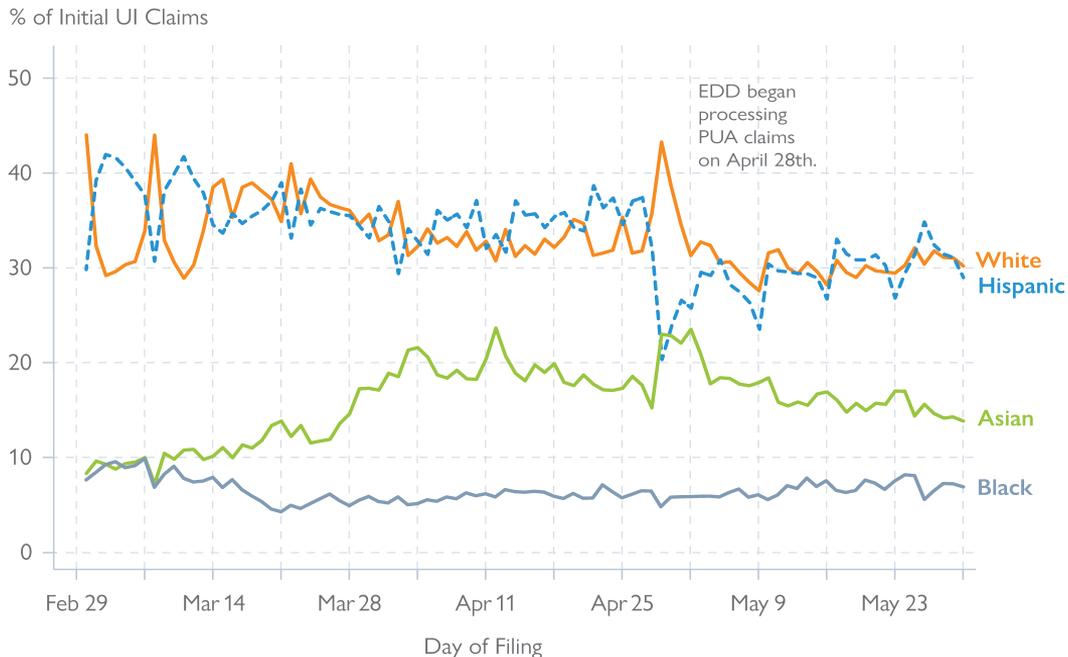


# California unemployment claims by race/ethnicity

(February 29 – May 30)

Source: [California Policy Lab](#)

Note: Undocumented workers not eligible for benefits are not included in these data. Includes PUA claims.



# Undocumented workers

- We currently have little comprehensive information about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on undocumented workers
- But a [recent study](#) estimates that through April, about 289,000 immigrants without legal status lost their jobs in California as a result of the pandemic
- The consequences of unemployment are especially severe for undocumented workers because of their inability to access most safety net programs (California's state aid to undocumented residents is a modest one-time program that is [estimated to cover](#) only 150,000 individuals).

# Independent contractors

Starting April 28th, California began accepting unemployment claims under the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program (PUA), which covers workers such as self-employed individuals who do not normally qualify for unemployment benefits.

In California, the [California Policy Lab](#) finds that:

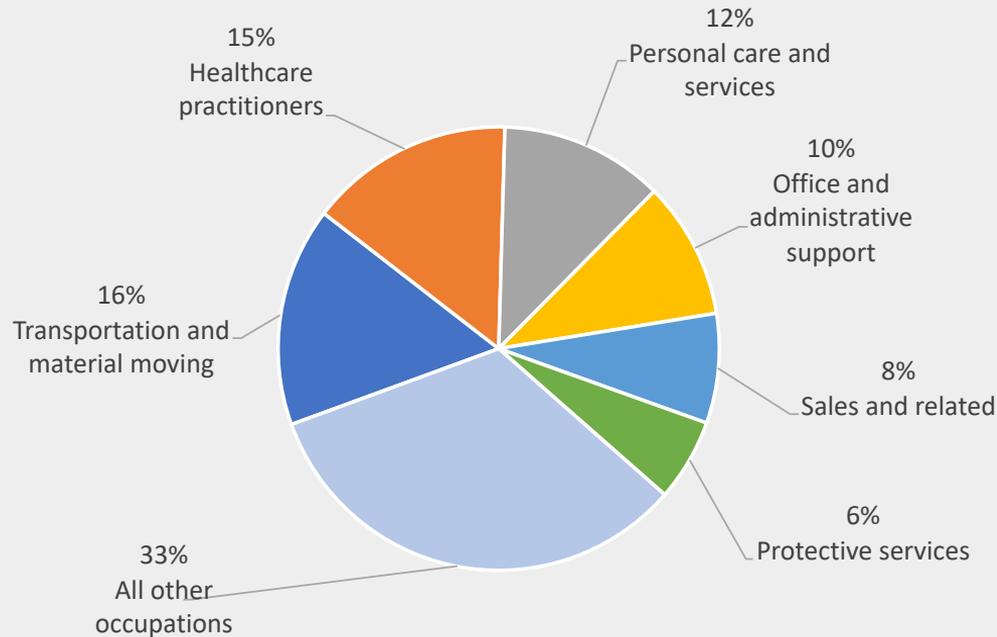
- PUA claims made up 45 percent of all claims in the first two weeks that they were accepted (April 28<sup>th</sup> to May 9<sup>th</sup>). Claims for PUA decreased to 24 percent of all claims in the week of May 30.
- 19 percent of self-employed workers have filed a claim under the PUA program
- PUA filers are disproportionately White and Asian, older, and concentrated in large urban counties

## 2. Essential workers

# The size of the essential workforce

- Estimates suggest that to [34%](#) to [56%](#) of the US workforce are essential workers, depending on the definition used
- We don't have good estimates of the number of CA essential workers currently on the job (as defined by Governor Newsom's [executive order](#)), in part because the definition of "essential" has changed over time

# Essential jobs by occupation in California



Note: Based on 2018 data

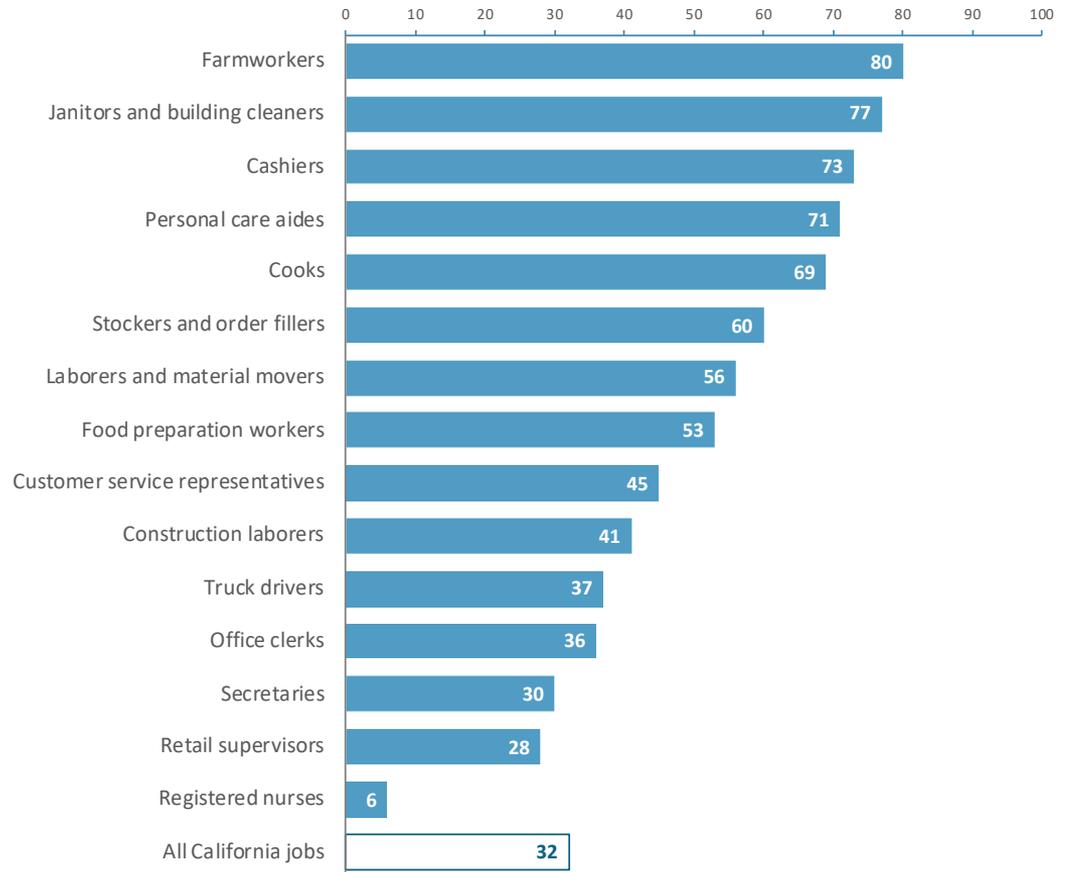
Source: [Public Policy Institute of California \(PPIC\)](#)

# Essential occupations often pay low wages to their front-line workers in California

(based on 2018 data, top 15 essential occupations)

Source: [UC Berkeley Labor Center](#)

Percent of front-line jobs that are low-wage, in top 15 essential occupations

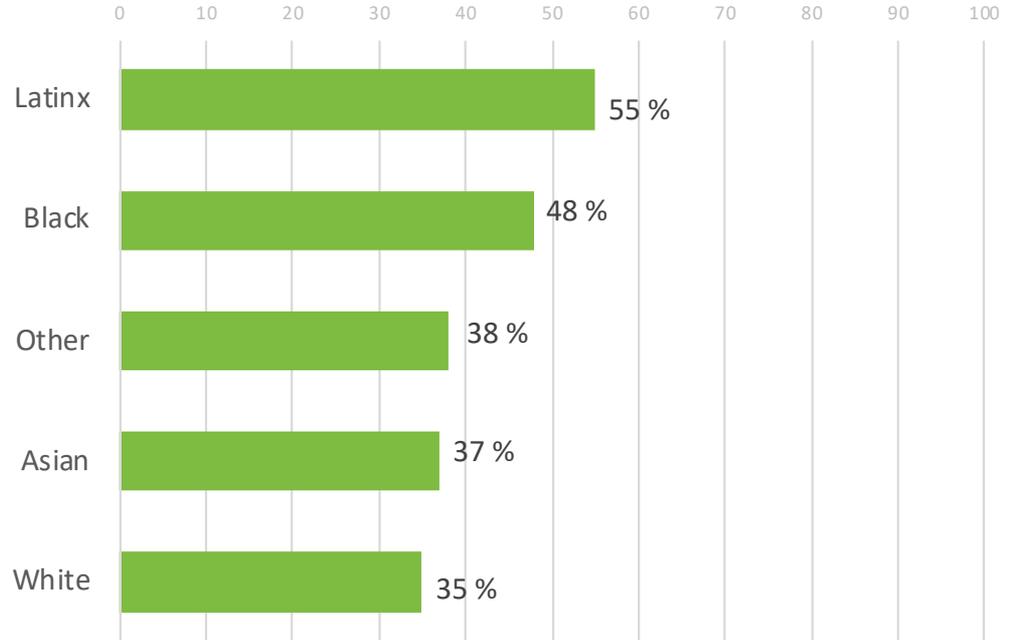


# Latinx and Black workers are more likely to be employed in essential front-line jobs in California

(based on 2018 data)

Source: [UC Berkeley Labor Center](#)

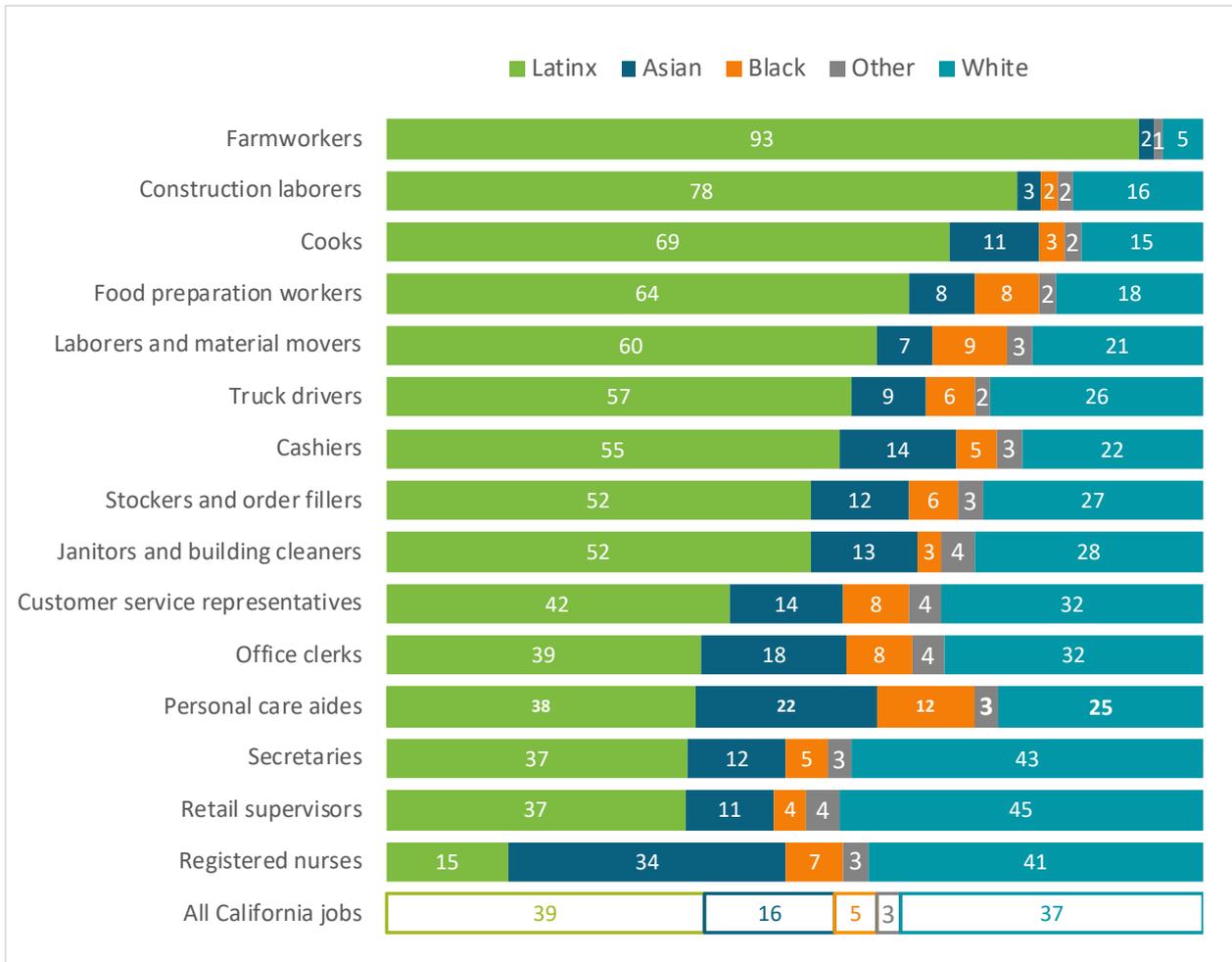
Percent of each race/ethnic group employed in front-line essential jobs



# Race/ethnicity of California's essential front-line jobs, by occupation

(based on 2018 data, top 15 essential occupations)

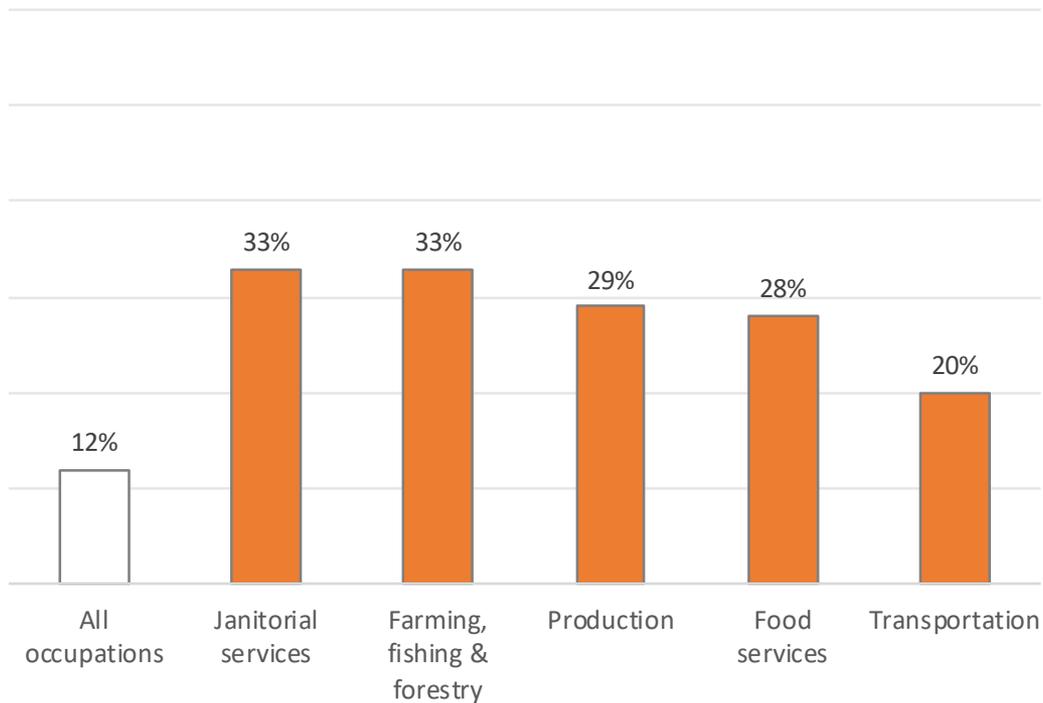
Source: [UC Berkeley Labor Center](#)



Undocumented workers are overrepresented in key essential occupations

Chart source: [USC Dornsife Center](#)

Percent of workers who lack legal status,  
LA County, 2017

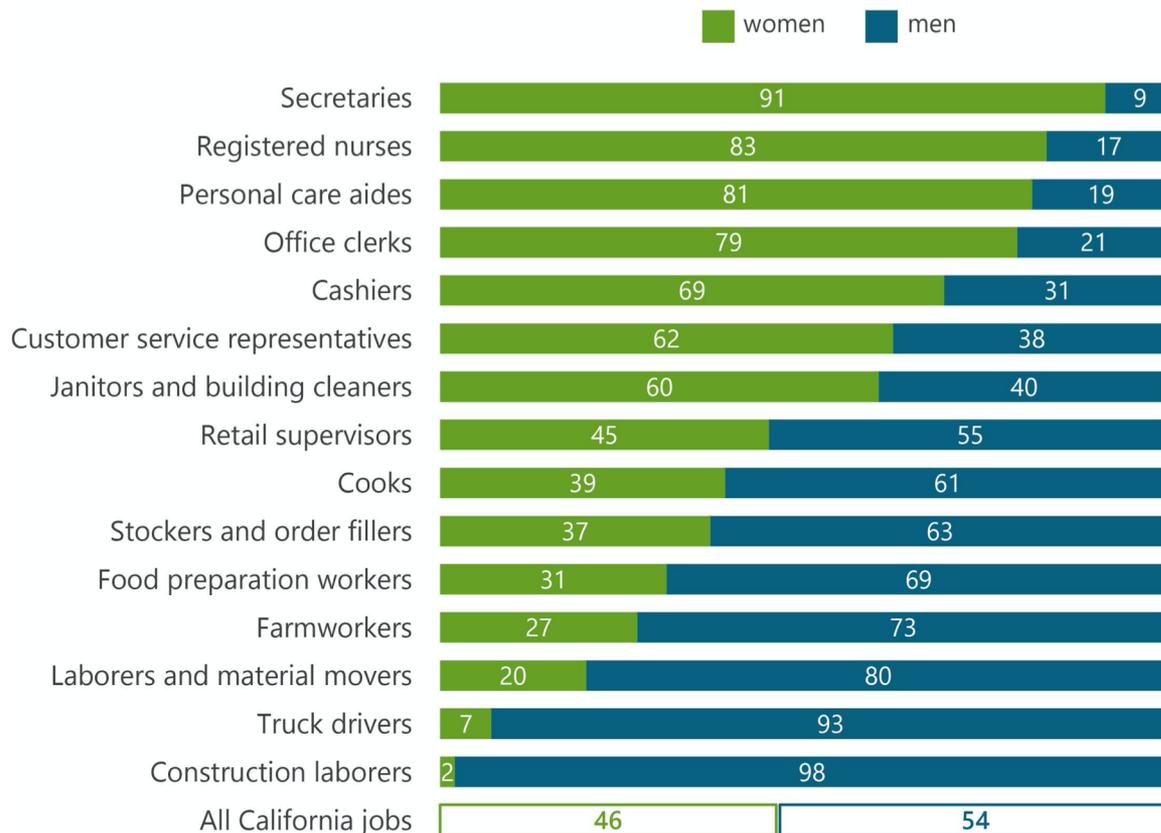


# Gender of California's essential workers, by occupation

(based on 2018 data, top 15 essential occupations)

Source: [UC Berkeley Labor Center](#)

Gender of workers in front-line essential jobs (percents)



## Working conditions for essential workers

“We risk our lives to take care of our recipient. It’s not for money, but it’s for the love of my job. This is something bigger than all of us.”

[Karen Reynolds](#)

Home care provider  
San Bernardino County

- The [majority of workers](#) who are still on the job fear that they will infect their family members
- Two-thirds of workers at grocery and other retail stores in Massachusetts [report feeling unsafe](#) at work
- Many essential workers now have more responsibilities, such as [additional cleaning](#) or making sure that customers follow social distancing policies – the majority [are not](#) being paid extra for this work
- Not all essential workers are provided with Personal Protective Equipment – in a recent survey of front-line workers in variety of service industries, [only 19%](#) reported that their employer had made masks available.

## 3. Looking ahead

# It's very hard to predict what the CA labor market will look like through the summer and into the fall

That said, some concerns about potential scenarios:

1. Not all the jobs come back (economists are [debating](#) which jobs will return)
2. Employers ramp back up with temporary and gig workers
3. Workers return to workplaces without adequate health and safety protection
4. Additional state funding for undocumented workers and families is not forthcoming
5. Congress fails to renew the additional weekly \$600 in federal unemployment benefits, which have been a [lifeline](#) to millions (the current benefits expire July 31)
6. On all fronts, low-wage workers, workers of color, and immigrants will be at greater risk

# The scale of the challenge

		Someone in household:		
		Has been laid off or lost their job	Has had their work hours reduced or pay cut	Has had difficulty paying the rent or mortgage
All California households		35%	51%	27%
Household income	Under \$40,000	47	63	42
	\$40,000 to under \$80,000	34	52	22
	\$80,000 or more	22	38	13
Race/ethnicity of person responding to survey	Latinx	49	66	44
	Black	35	60	33
	Asian	34	48	21
	White	24	39	15

Questions or suggestions for additional  
research to summarize?

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