

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

An Overview of Research to Date

Last updated: December 3, 2020

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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

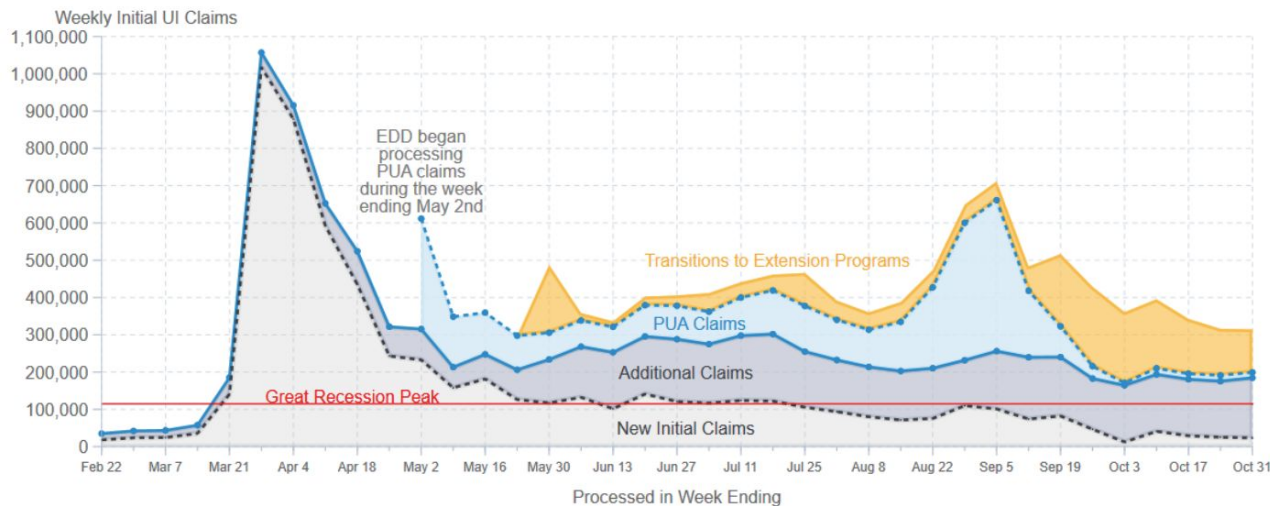
- More than 20.3 million Americans were [receiving UI benefits](#) as of October 31.
- The CA unemployment rate [increased](#) from 5.5% in February to 16.4% in May, but has since fallen to 11.0% as of September.
- Nearly 44% of California workers [have filed for unemployment insurance](#) since March 15.

Number of unemployment claims, California

(February 22 – October 31)

Source: [California Policy Lab](#)

Note: PUA is Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, which provides unemployment benefits to individuals not eligible for regular unemployment compensation. Additional Claims are claims that are re-opened after a claimant's temporary return to work.



Distribution of unemployment claims across industries, California

(March 15 – October 31)

Source: [California Policy Lab](#)

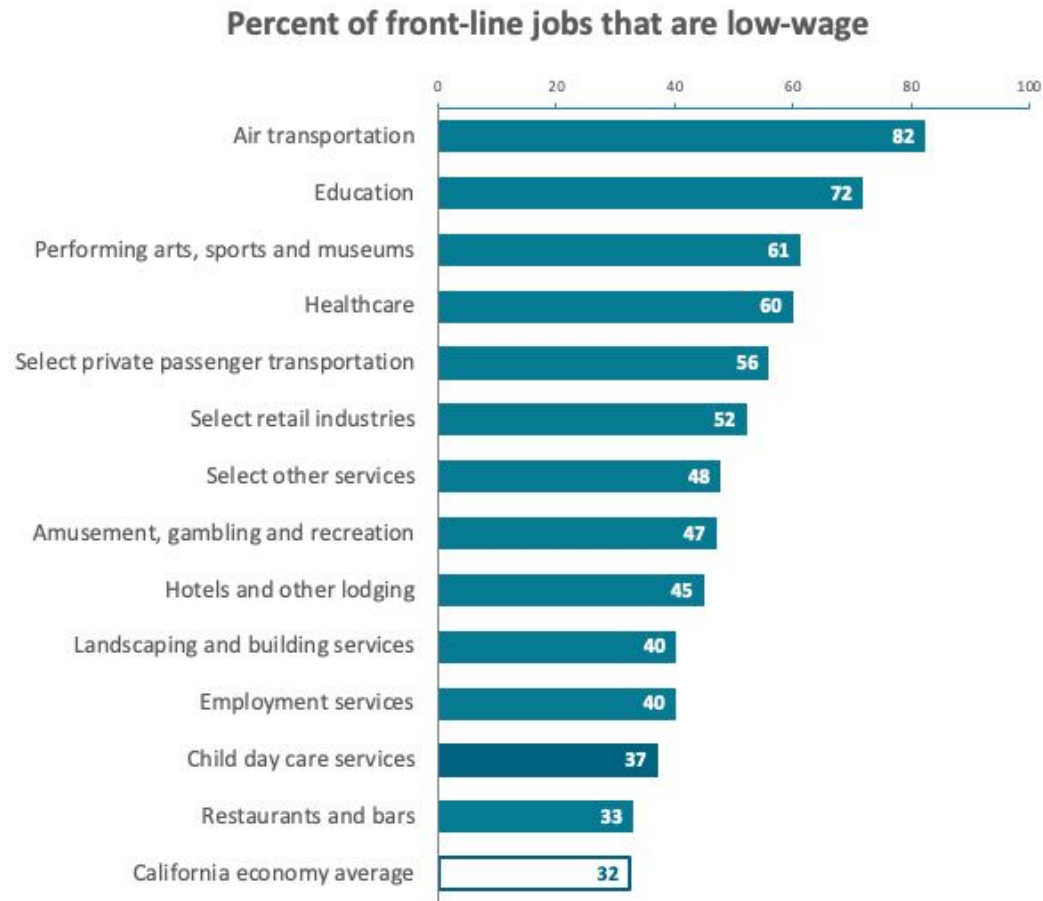
Note: Does not include PUA claims

	Number of unique claimants, 3/15-10/31	Industry share of claims (%)
Accommodation and food services	809,477	17.1
Retail trade	641,433	13.5
Health care and social assistance	587,465	12.4
Admin. support, waste mgmt & remediation services	391,585	8.3
Manufacturing	302,457	6.4
Construction	274,744	5.8
Education services	263,707	5.6
Professional, scientific & technical services	241,976	5.1
Other services	226,910	4.8
Arts, entertainment & recreation	208,093	4.4
Transportation, warehousing, utilities	188,947	4.0
Wholesale trade	173,288	3.7
Information	144,427	3.0
Real estate and leasing	83,702	1.8
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	78,488	1.7
Finance and insurance	61,675	1.3
Public Administration	43,944	0.9
Management	24,417	0.5
Mining, oil, gas	5,114	0.1
Column total	4,746,335	100

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

(based on 2018 data)

Source: [UC Berkeley Labor Center](#)



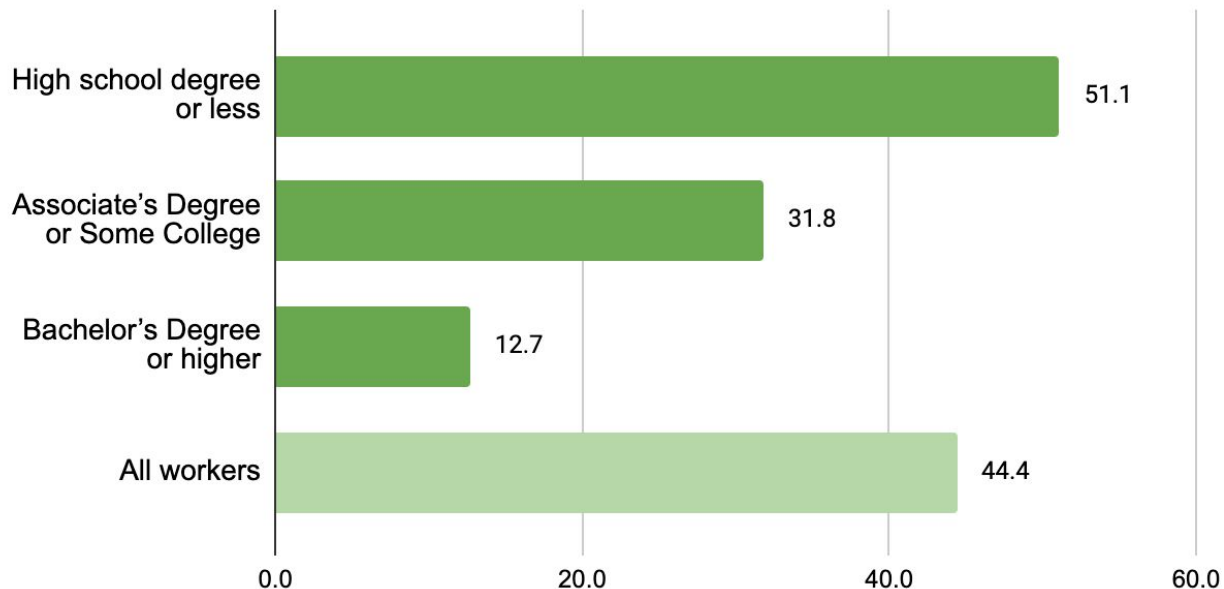
Workers with a high school degree or less were much more likely to file for unemployment in California

(March 15 – October 31)

Source: [California Policy Lab](#)

Note: Regular UI claims only (do not include PUA claims)

Percent of each education group filing for unemployment insurance



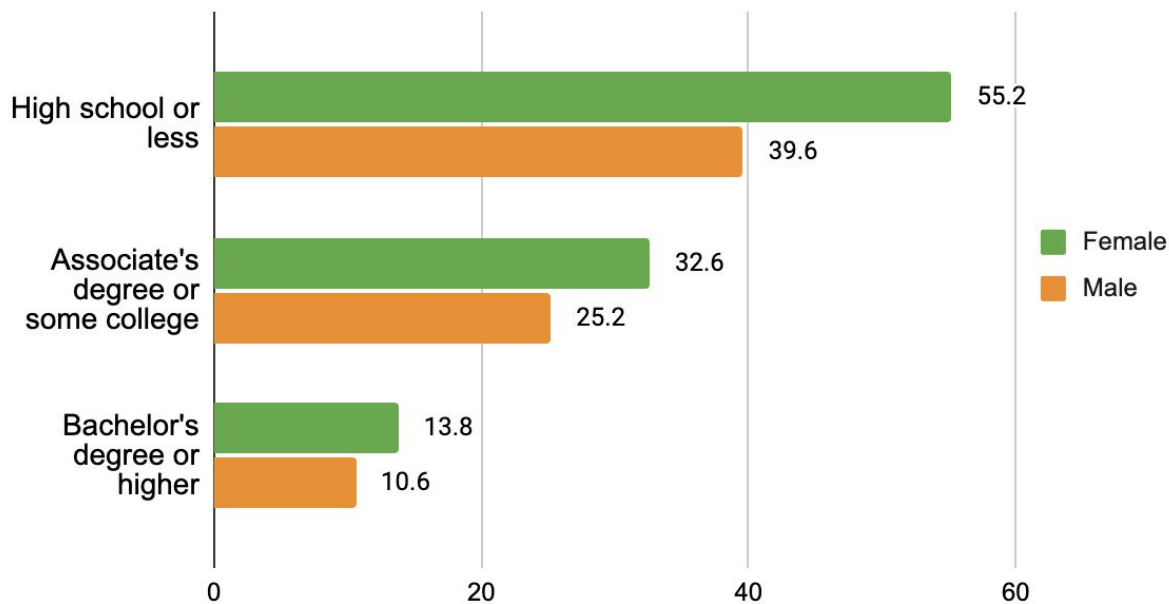
Women, especially those without a high school degree, were more likely to file for unemployment in California than men

(March 15 – October 31)

Source: [California Policy Lab](#)

Note: Does not include PUA claims

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

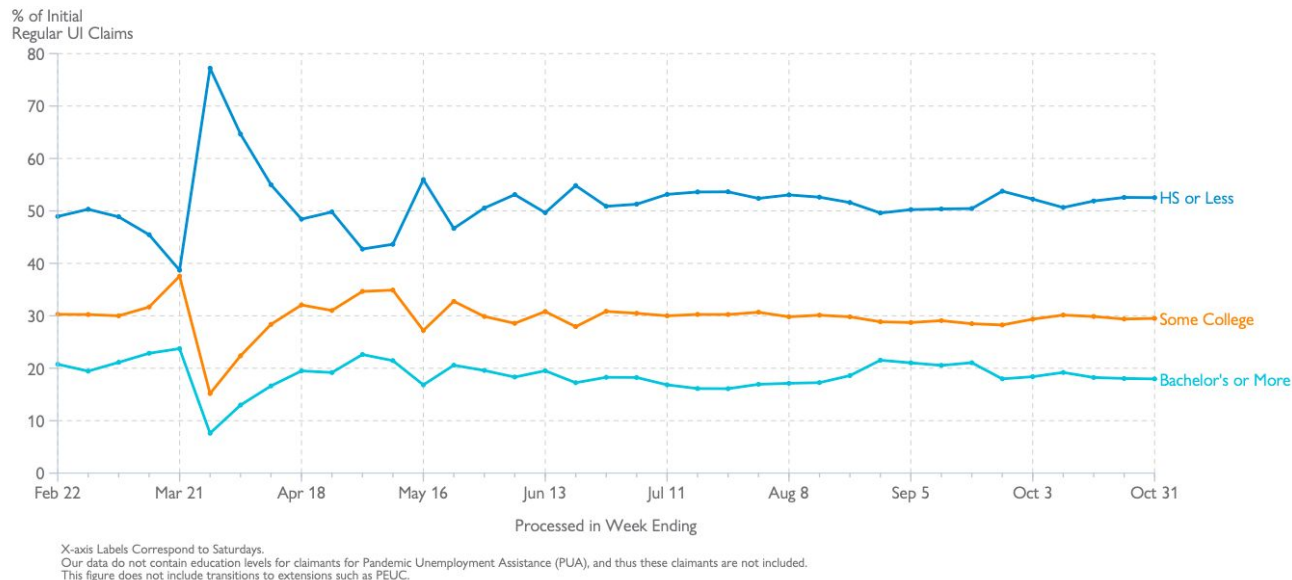


Workers with a high school degree or less made up a large and recently growing proportion of unemployment claims in California

(February 29 – October 31)

Source: [California Policy Lab](#)

Note: Does not include PUA claims



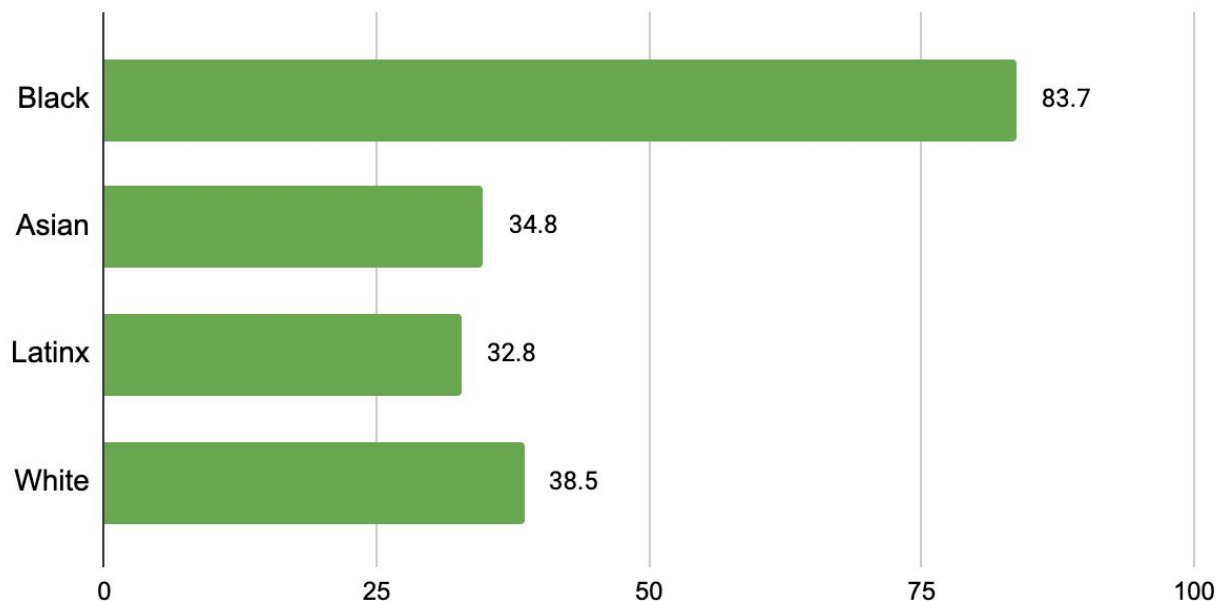
Over 80 percent of Black workers in California have filed unemployment claims during the pandemic

(March 15 – October 31)

Source: [California Policy Lab](#)

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

Percent of each racial/ethnic group filing for PUA and regular unemployment insurance

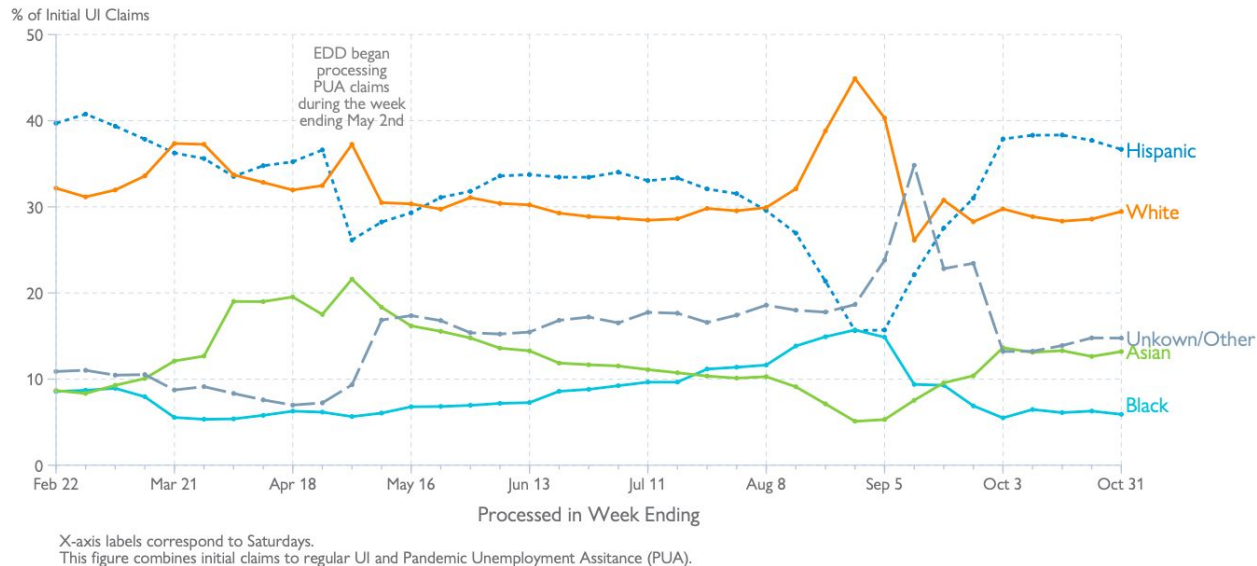


California unemployment claims by race/ethnicity

(February 22 – October 31)

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
- Recent studies estimate that between [357,000](#) and [500,000](#) immigrants without legal status are out of work 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:

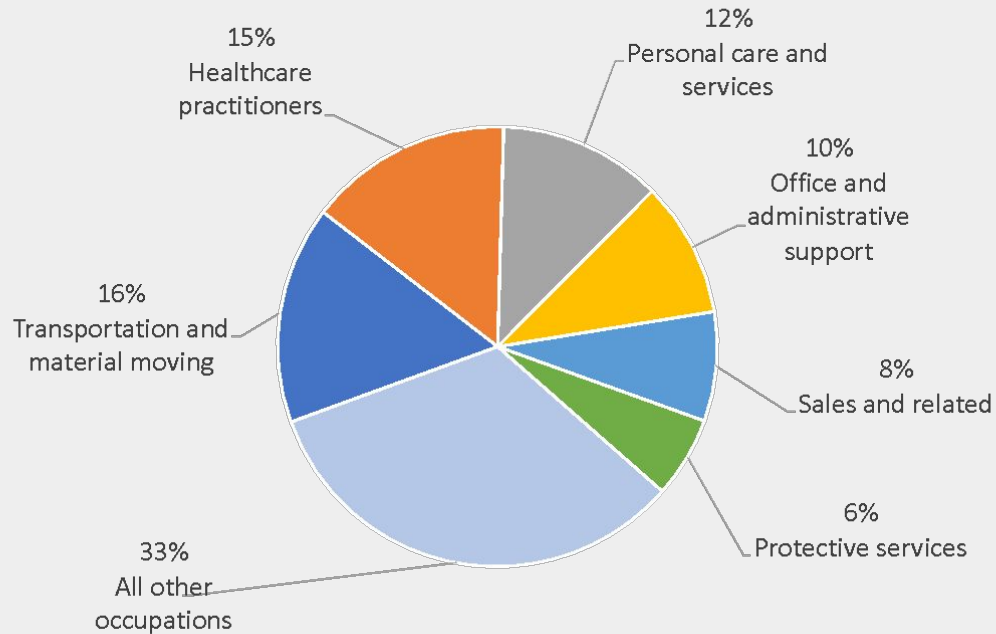
- PUA claims made up only 15% of total initial claims during the week ending in October 31, down from a peak of 63% in the final week of August.
- As of August 6, 60% of self-employed workers had filed a claim under the PUA program.
- PUA filers were disproportionately White, older, and concentrated 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

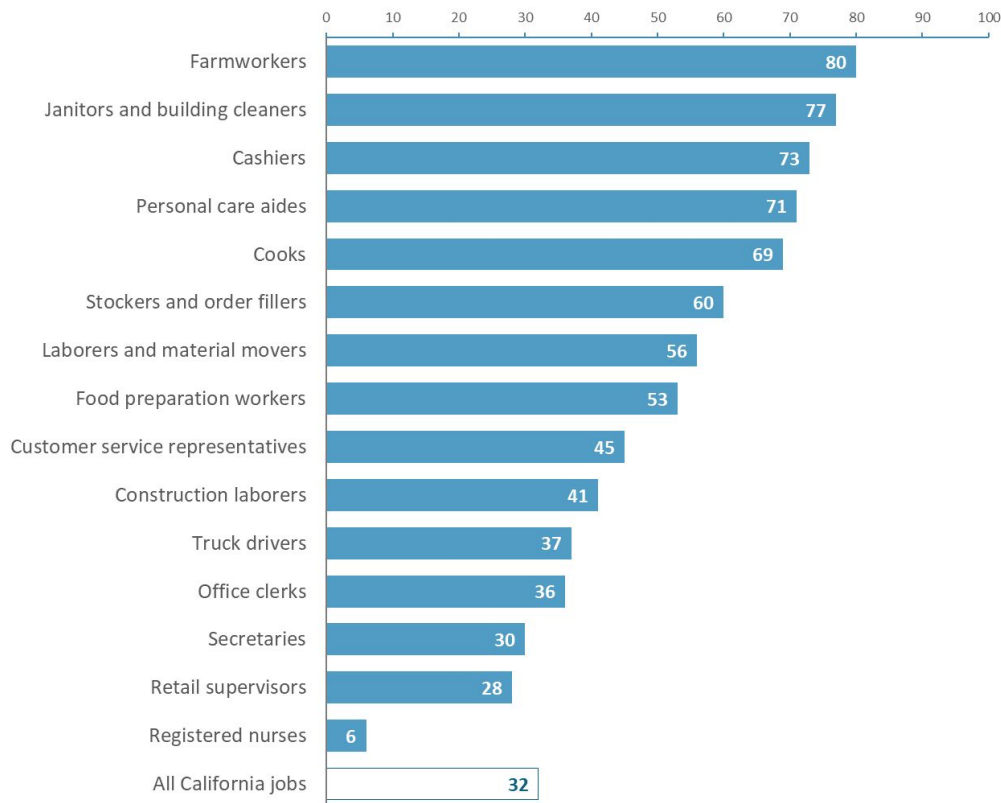
Source: [Public Policy Institute of California \(PPIC\)](#)

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

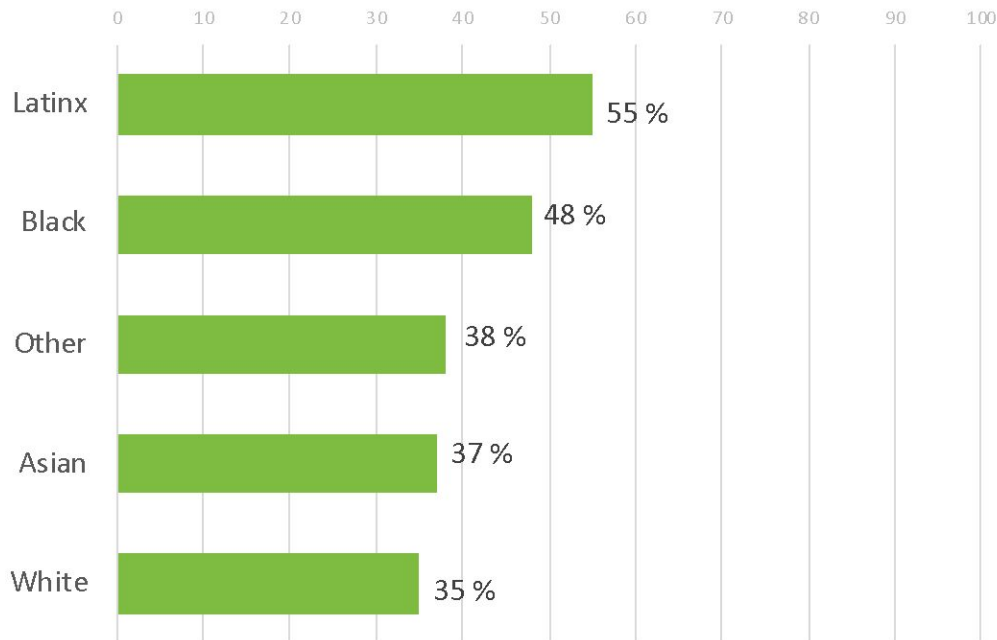


Latinx and Black workers are more likely to be employed in essential front-line jobs in California

(based on 2018 data)

Source: [UC Berkeley Labor Center](#)

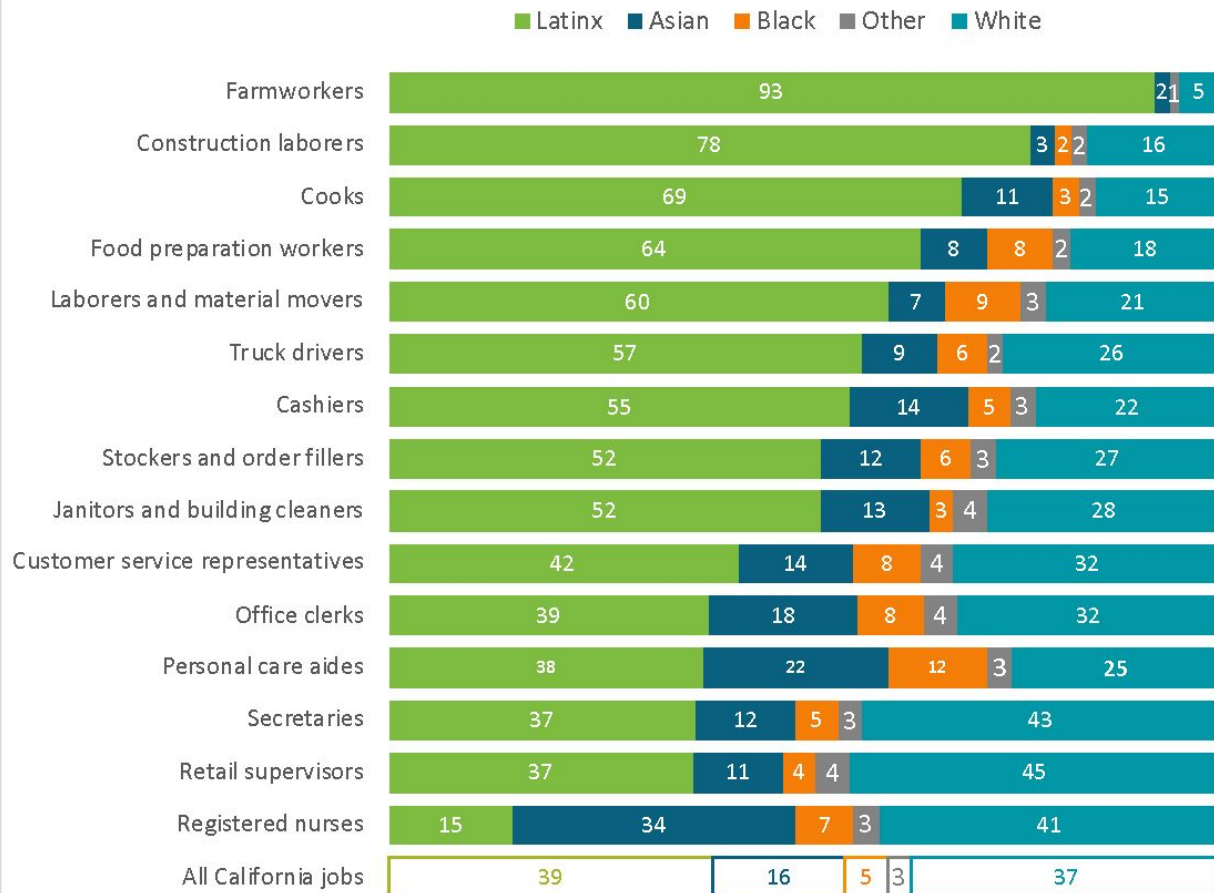
Percent of each race/ethnic group employed in front-line essential jobs



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

(based on 2018 data, top 15 essential occupations)

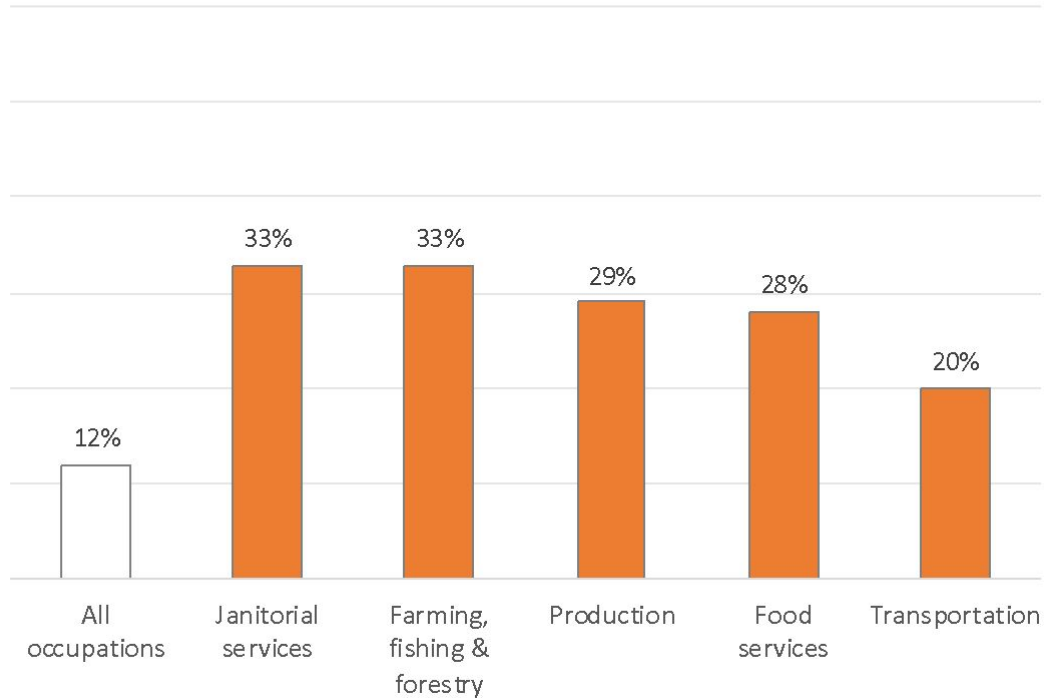
Source: [UC Berkeley Labor Center](#)



Undocumented workers are overrepresented in key essential occupations

Chart source: [USC Dornsife Center](#)

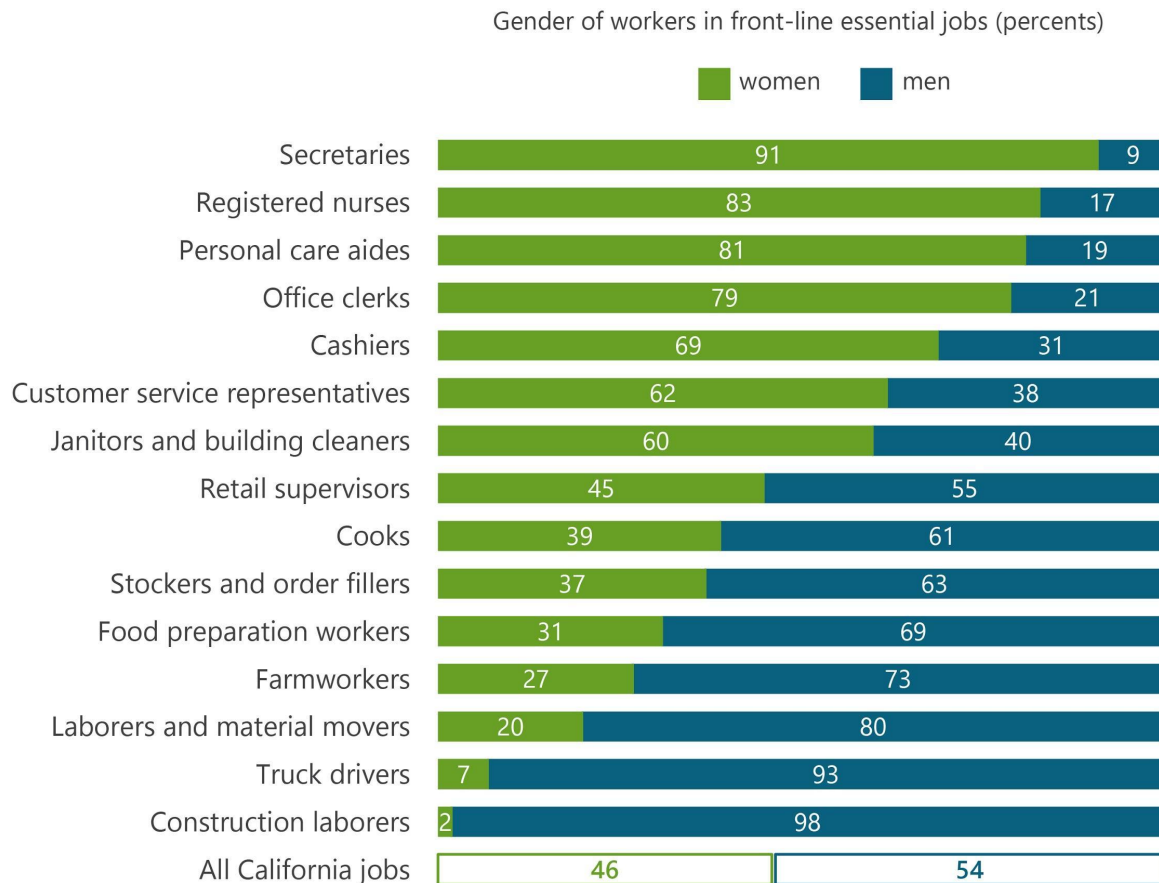
Percent of workers who lack legal status,
LA County, 2017



Gender of California's essential workers, by occupation

(based on 2018 data, top 15 essential occupations)

Source: [UC Berkeley Labor Center](#)



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 benefits expired July 25; Congress is currently debating renewal)
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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