

NATIONAL DOMESTIC WORKERS ALLIANCE

Special Report

“JUST WHEN SHE WAS ASKING FOR AN EXTRA DOLLAR”

Domestic worker job loss, competition, and their economic and immigration-related drivers in 2025-2026

June 2026

In the second half of 2025, domestic workers experienced record-high financial insecurity and spikes in poor mental health amidst intense immigration enforcement activity and growing economic uncertainty. Towards the end of the year, domestic workers [reported](#) worsening power dynamics with employers (especially for [immigrant workers](#)), an influx of new workers from other industries, and a cascading economic crisis affecting not only domestic workers, but also their employers.

Cognizant of and deeply concerned about these patterns, in Spring 2026, the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) set out to investigate the experiences of domestic workers who had lost their jobs in the past year. This report presents worker testimonies from over two dozen in-depth peer interviews and group discussions conducted by members of [NDWA's Worker Councils](#) between March 20 and April 27, 2026. It also presents supporting findings from longitudinal surveys of Spanish-speaking domestic workers who subscribe to [La Alianza](#) conducted between January 1, 2025 and May 15, 2026.

Summary

- Domestic worker job loss increased in the past year, and unemployment sometimes recurred multiple times and/or took months to resolve.
- Job loss affected domestic workers across sectors (housecleaners, home care workers, nannies), immigration statuses, years of experience, and employer types, but immigrant domestic workers were most deeply affected.
- Workers testified that—faced with rising costs of living and widespread harms of immigration enforcement—employers were either firing domestic workers they could no longer afford or finding new workers who would do the same work for less pay.
- Domestic workers who lost jobs faced heightened competition and immigration-related scrutiny on the job market that, together, drove down wages.

The scale of the problem

La Alianza survey data indicated that domestic worker unemployment was concerningly and increasingly common since the start of 2025. Results also showed that unemployment could sometimes recur and take months to resolve.

Between January 1, 2025 and May 15, 2026, 17.1% of all La Alianza survey respondents were unemployed at least once (1,401 out of 8,175 unique respondents). Among those workers, 26.6% (n = 372) were unemployed twice or more during this period.

After unemployment among domestic workers decreased for years in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the percent of survey respondents who were unemployed in a given quarter spiked in 2025 and remained high into 2026, only just beginning to stabilize. The share of respondents who were unemployed was 12.2% in Q1 2025, 12.4% in Q2, 13.6% in Q3, 14.7% in Q4, and 14.1% in Q1 2026. As [reported](#) earlier this year, domestic worker unemployment as measured in the La Alianza survey (in which nearly all respondents identify as Latina) was far higher than the national unemployment rate for [Hispanic women](#).

A separate, one-time survey of 577 Spanish-speaking domestic workers in February 2026 found that 30% of respondents had not had a paid domestic work job in the previous three months. Among these respondents without a recent domestic work job, 60% had no job at all. Others had found different work, with the most common job being office cleaning.

Workers impacted by job loss

Interviews underscored the widespread nature of job loss among domestic workers. They also revealed that job loss in the past year had affected domestic workers across sectors, immigration statuses, years of experience, and employer types (agency versus private pay).

- Worker council members reported evidence of job loss across all three domestic work sectors, with housecleaners often losing their clients “little by little”, home care workers facing reduced hours or outright job loss, and nannies often losing their jobs altogether.
 - Survey data among Spanish-speaking domestic workers supported these insights by showing that nannies were most likely to report unemployment in recent quarters, followed by home care workers and finally housecleaners. For example, in Q1 2026, 19.3% of nanny respondents were unemployed, followed by 16.0% of home care workers, and 12.5% of housecleaner respondents.
- U.S.-born workers and immigrants both lost domestic work jobs in the last year, but immigrant workers were most deeply affected.
- Years of experience did not protect workers from job loss. Workers interviewed had anywhere from a few months to over 20 years of experience working with a particular employer before losing their job.
- Neither private pay nor agency-employed workers were protected from being terminated.

Drivers of job loss

When asked why they lost their jobs, workers relayed a range of employer rationale undergirded by a central pattern: faced with rising costs of living, an unstable economy, and the widespread harms of immigration enforcement, employers were either firing domestic workers they could no longer afford or—in an increasingly competitive domestic work job market—replacing them with someone who would do more work for the same or less pay.

In several cases, workers testified that economic strain was leading families to slash domestic services from their budget, resulting in job loss for workers. For example, one housecleaner described gradually losing the 10 homes she cleaned over the past year. As summarized by a home care worker in Connecticut:

“I spoke to housecleaners and home care workers. And what surprised me is that all of them that I interviewed, their hours have decreased or, if they cleaned houses, they have lost homes that they clean. And the question that I asked was ‘Why?’ And the majority of the cleaners, they are feeling that it’s targeting the homeowners. It’s targeting their pockets, and because it’s targeting their pockets, the first expense they want to recuperate is house cleaning.”

Together with economic pressures on employers and workers, increased immigration enforcement fueled competition for domestic work jobs. Workers testified that, in addition to the experienced domestic workers looking for new jobs because they recently lost theirs, new workers were entering the domestic work labor market after family members of theirs had been deported or lost their jobs in industries affected by immigration enforcement, like construction.

Workers also alluded to the fact that employers felt they had a position of heightened power relative to workers in the context of this enforcement and economic crisis. This led employers to demand more work for the same or less pay and, in many cases, terminate their current domestic workers. As summarized by a nanny from Chicago:

“Why do employers play games with us? It’s a betting game—I like you, but if you want the wage she’s asking for, they pit us against each other to do more work for less pay.”

In one interview, a home care worker’s employer tried to lower her salary after years on the job and no change in her responsibilities. When she said she couldn’t accept lower pay, she was let go. In another case, a nanny was told by her employer they had to let her go because the employer’s husband had lost his job. Only later did she discover that the family had hired someone else who accepted the same nanny position for a lower wage. After over two years working for a family, another nanny asked for a one dollar per hour raise and sick time off. Instead of granting this raise and benefit, the employer told the nanny they would be looking for a different nanny, claiming it was because she didn’t have a valid driver’s license in the state.

Experiences in the wake of job loss

Workers who lost their jobs reported depleting their savings, pivoting to short-term income generating activities, and facing increased competition and unrelated and potentially unlawful questions to assess workers' fear of immigration enforcement while seeking new work, which sometimes took months to find.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many workers who had previously built up savings saw them [depleted](#) as they navigated skyrocketing and often long-lasting unemployment. When job loss surged again in 2025 and into 2026, a similar pattern emerged. Several domestic workers found themselves out of work for multiple months—despite actively looking for work—and relied on their meager savings in the meantime. As described by the home care worker quoted above who lost her job as her employer expanded her responsibilities:

“It took me about four months to find another job. During that time, I lived off the little savings my husband and I had, and I also had to rely on food assistance to cover our expenses. Now that I’ve been out of work again for two weeks, I’ve turned to the food pantry once more.”

Workers also reported selling food or other items prepared at home as an alternative income source and turning to temporary work when repeated attempts at finding adequate employment failed. For example, one worker lost her job as a nanny and housecleaner when her employer of six years could no longer afford her services. She immediately looked for new work but struggled to find new clients, leading her to a temporary employment agency providing short-term placements as a housecleaner, nanny, or home care worker. Despite her efforts, she has taken on debt to cover household expenses. The worker council member who interviewed this worker captured the financial challenges associated with job loss:

"Imagine going into debt just because you can't find work... and having to use what was supposed to be your future."

The same type of competition that, as noted above, contributed to job loss also drove down wages among domestic work job seekers. One home care worker, a lawyer in her home country who came to the U.S. as a legal permanent resident, summarized her experience looking for a permanent job after losing a long-time client and taking on multiple temporary jobs:

“My experience hasn’t been easy. There are factors like language, age, and the fear of losing my [legal] status in these times. That makes it difficult to find a job that offers the benefits and perks you’re entitled to, and the fear of demanding them in these times. In these times when everyone judges you based on stereotypes and there’s a lot of competition from people who charge less and undervalue your work, it puts employers in a position of power—they make you compete on salary, so you end up working harder for a raise while earning less than what you’re actually worth.”

As shown in this quote, immigrant domestic workers' economic challenges were compounded by immigration-related fears. For example, some workers with legal status had not claimed workers' compensation after work-related injuries or other benefits they are entitled to out of fear that filing complaints would put them at risk of immigration enforcement:

"They keep working - injured, post-surgery, everything - and don't even ask for their medical expenses to be covered, out of fear."

When navigating the job market, workers also reported that agency and family employers were using indirect questioning to probe workers' legal status and vulnerability to immigration enforcement. As described by a home care worker in Connecticut:

"They don't want to come out and ask, but they're throwing questions as to what's happening. They ask, 'What do you think of what's happening with [President] Trump?' They want to know if you get involved in that immigration conversation to see what they can take away from you."

In addition to the financial implications of these patterns of job loss and difficulty finding new and adequate work, workers also elevated concerns around mental health. One worker council member interviewed three domestic workers in North Carolina and relayed their shared immigration-related fears, challenges, and resilience in relation to difficulty finding and keeping work:

"I think mental health is being severely affected—extremely affected—regardless of whether a person has documentation or not, or whether they're healthy or not. I think the fear is terrifying.

But another thing I also saw in the interviews is that, even with these obstacles, people feel they have no room for fear. One person told me, 'I can't be afraid; I have to keep the money coming in, I have to keep moving forward, so I have to figure out how to adapt—as they say, by shifting to another industry, like selling food—and reinvent myself until this difficult situation passes.'"

Why this matters

This report and [other recent](#) mixed-methods NDWA research reports show that, in the second half of 2025 and the first months of 2026, domestic workers have navigated deteriorated employment and economic conditions, including heightened joblessness.

Faced with rising costs of living, continued economic uncertainty, and the widespread harms of aggressive immigration enforcement activity, employers have cut back on housecleaning services and home care hours, asked their long-time home care workers to continue providing the same essential services for less pay, fired workers who asked for a raise, and terminated one nanny to replace them with another who agreed to do the same job for a lower wage.

When these domestic workers seek new jobs, they again encounter intense competition—including from people newly entering the field of domestic work—and heightened immigration-related scrutiny that, together, drive down wages and working conditions for all.

As NDWA and allied organizations advance trailblazing new [campaigns](#), [programs](#), and [tools](#) to address pernicious issues like low wages and poor working conditions in domestic work, these insights about job precarity, competition, and employer behavior should inform discussions about how to maximize urgently-needed improvements to wages and working conditions and minimize potential unintended harms for workers. More broadly, this report underscores the need for robust quantitative and qualitative domestic worker-centered data collection and analysis to understand domestic workers' changing needs and how their experiences on the labor market may both reflect and differ from patterns in the broader U.S. economy.