

Breaking Down Barriers and Unlocking Success for Hispanic/Latinx Workers

The number of [Hispanics in the workforce](#) is expected to climb to almost 36 million in 2030. Despite their growing presence in the workplace, Hispanics often encounter unique challenges that can hinder their professional development, job satisfaction and well-being.

“A huge cost to businesses is training new employees, so removing barriers and fostering an inclusive workplace is an investment in retention,” says Jonathan Fisher, Chief Economist and Research Advisor at the Washington Center for Equitable Growth. “This not only benefits the company but benefits the workers and, ultimately, benefits the economy.”

Lack of Access to Good Jobs

The [unemployment rate](#) for Hispanic workers fell to 3.8% in 2022, a record low. However, the Center for American Progress (CAP) notes many more Hispanic and Latinx people would like to work but cannot find jobs. Among the Hispanic Americans with jobs, they tend to be concentrated in service occupations.

“When you look at the top occupations that Hispanic Americans tend to be employed in like chefs, cooks, drivers, laborers, maids, housekeeping cleaners, or childcare workers – those types of occupations tend to be low-wage occupations, with less access to paid family and medical leave,” says Rose Khattar, Director of Economic Analysis, Inclusive Economy at the CAP.

Experts cite education disparities as one of the reasons behind the lack of good jobs. [Research](#) indicates Hispanic students face lower high school graduation rates and are less likely to pursue higher education than their white counterparts.

“We need to work with the private sector to ensure they transfer the way they do their sourcing in their hiring into skills-based,” says Luis Quiñones, Deputy Vice President of Workforce Development and Adult Education at UnidosUS. “The way that they write their job descriptions. How they source those candidates. What is the process that they have in place to have a fair process that is equitable?”



Language barriers can also be a significant challenge for Latinx/Hispanic Americans.

“You were probably an engineer in Peru and came here,” says Quiñones. “You have the skill set, but you don't have the language. How do we mitigate that? How do we have programs that can work on contextualized language acquisition? They don't need to go to school for 12 years to learn all the English. They need to learn the English they will be using at their job because they understand the mechanics of it.”

Fewer Advancement Opportunities

Khattar believes the employment outlook for Hispanic Americans can be solved in two parts.

“You can meet them where they're at and lift up the quality of the jobs they were already working in,” she says. “You could raise the minimum wage, for example. You could mandate paid family and medical leave. On the other end, there are already jobs out there that are good quality jobs. So you need to create pathways for Hispanic Americans to be able to get into those jobs and have career advancement as well.”

Climbing the corporate ladder tends to be harder for Hispanic Americans. While they comprise 19% of the U.S. population, they only account for 4% of leadership positions.

“Coqual finds that Latinx professionals report fewer advancement opportunities overall. Thirty-two percent of Latinx men and 19% of Latinx women say their time to promotion is longer than their peers, and nearly one in four Latinx men say they have been passed over for promotion in favor of another colleague,” says Dr. Nathan M. Castillo, Ph.D., Vice President, Research at Coqual.

Companies can improve the career trajectory of Hispanic/Latinx professionals by establishing mentorship and leadership development programs that pair them with senior leaders. The connections can prepare workers for leadership roles within the company.

Employee resource groups (ERGs) that focus on Hispanic/Latinx culture and issues can also provide a platform for employees to connect, share experiences and advocate for their needs. Fair360's Top 50 Companies for Diversity have ERGs that focus on Latinx or Hispanic professionals.

Pay Inequality

Hispanic/Latino workers are overrepresented in low-wage occupations and are less likely to have employer benefits. The wage gap is among the factors holding back their economic mobility.

“Latino professionals make just 73 cents for every dollar earned by white Americans,” says Castillo. “Only 19% of working Latinos earn more than 50,000 per year, compared with 50% of non-Latino white workers.”

The disparity is even worse for Latinas.

On average, Latinas are paid 46% less than white men and 26% less than white women in the U.S., according

to [Lean In](#). This adds up to over a million dollars in lost income in the average Latina's career.

“Latinos tend not to negotiate their salaries, especially Latina women,” says Quiñones. “Culturally, we're meant to believe that we need to be grateful for every opportunity given to us. You put your head down and say, ‘yes, ma'am, thank you so much.’”

Hispanic students also face lower high school graduation rates and are less likely to pursue higher education than their white counterparts, contributing to the pay disparities.

“The higher levels of education you have, the more likely you are to earn higher wages, and Black and Hispanic people have lower rates of having a bachelor's degree,” says Manjari Raman, Program Director of the Project on Managing the Future of Work at Harvard Business School.

“That being said, there's ample evidence of discrimination in the labor market. Even if it's not overt or covert discrimination, the way hiring happens often is through social networks, which are mostly populated by white people.”

Fair360's Top 50 Companies for Diversity have systemic efforts to detect and correct pay equity and combat unconscious bias.



Employers can conduct regular pay equity analyses to identify and assess any disparities in compensation. Fair and transparent pay practices are also necessary to ensure that decisions are based on objective criteria and not influenced by ethnicity or other discriminatory factors.

Feelings of Exclusion

Hispanics participate in the labor market at higher-than-average rates. Yet, three-quarters of Hispanics don't feel included in the [workplace](#) and nearly half actively seek new jobs. Unhappy workers are two times more likely to quit.

Microaggressions, often rooted in unconscious bias, are subtle yet damaging behaviors that can perpetuate exclusion. Hispanics frequently encounter comments, stereotypes or actions that belittle their heritage or capabilities, creating an unwelcoming atmosphere.

"How many times have I heard, 'you speak English very well, for somebody who's not from here,'" says Quiñones. "What do you mean by that?"

Hispanic job seekers may also encounter bias during hiring, based on their names, accents or perceived immigration status. Similarly, discriminatory practices can impact promotions and salary negotiations.

Quiñones believes the lack of representation in leadership, mentoring opportunities and Hispanic/Latino-focused ERGs all contribute to Hispanics feeling excluded in the workplace.

"If you don't have those things in place, of course I'm gonna feel that I don't belong, that I'm not accepted. I'm not being celebrated and can't bring my full authentic self into my job," he says.

