

## Latino Employment Status, March 2009

### Latino Employment Status, March 2009

The following facts and figures use data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to illustrate how Latinos are faring in the economic recession.

#### The Latino Workforce: Immediate and Ongoing Challenges

Latinos are the fastest-growing segment of the labor force (see Table 1). Given that one in three American workers will be Latino by 2050, strengthening the Latino workforce is a national imperative.<sup>1</sup> The current recession, however, threatens to exacerbate the disparities Latinos already face in the labor market. Despite having the highest workforce participation rate (see Table 2), Latinos are employed in some of America’s lowest-quality jobs. Latinos earn the lowest median wages and have the lowest rates of employer-sponsored health and retirement plan coverage of any group.<sup>2</sup> Latino workers are also more likely to die from an injury at work than their White and Black counterparts.<sup>3</sup> The following summarizes the experience of Latino workers during the current economic downturn and their prospects for recovery.

- **In 2008, Latinos represented the largest portion of new jobseekers in the civilian labor force.**

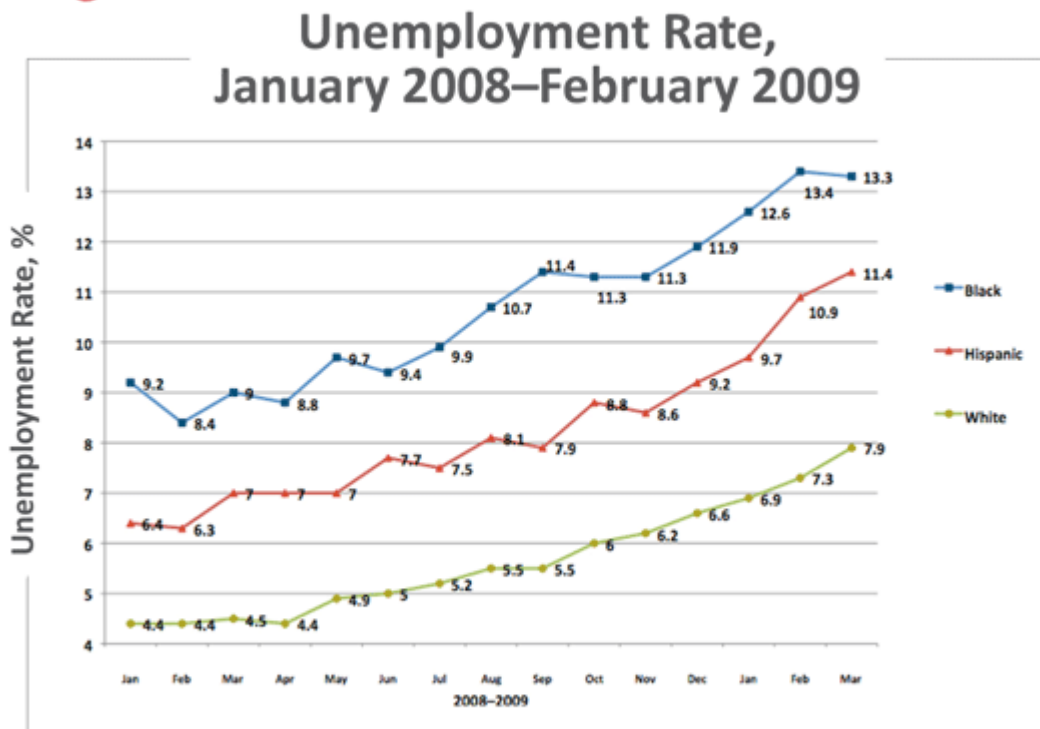
**Table 1**

<b>New Jobseekers, January–December 2008</b>		
	<b>Civilian Labor Force, Net Change (in thousands)</b>	<b>Percent of New Labor Market Entrants</b>
<b>Total Labor Force</b>	<b>735</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>54%</b>
<b>Black</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>9%</b>
<b>White</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>37%</b>

Source: NCLR calculation using U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Data Retrieval: Labor Force Statistics (CPS),” Table A-2, <http://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab2.htm>, (accessed March 6, 2009); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Data Retrieval: Labor Force Statistics (CPS),” Table A-3, <http://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab3.htm> (accessed March 6, 2009).

- Since the recession began, Latinos have experienced the largest increase in unemployment of any group.** During 2008, unemployment spread from the construction industry—where approximately one in three workers is Latino—to nearly every sector of the economy. The Hispanic unemployment rate rose from 6.4% in January 2008 to 9.7% in January 2009, the largest one-year increase for any racial or ethnic group. In March 2009, Latino unemployment was 11.4%, compared to 13.3% for Blacks and 7.9% for Whites (see Figure 1). U.S.-born Latinos made up the fastest-growing segment of the labor force in 2008, which sustained their overall employment level; meanwhile, the percentage of foreign-born Latinos who lost their jobs in 2008 (4.1%) was the largest of any group.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1**



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Data Retrieval: Labor Force Statistics (CPS),” Table A-2 and A-3.

- Latinos are eager to return to work.** Despite rising unemployment, the Hispanic workforce consistently has the highest labor force participation rate of any group. This trend continued in March 2009.

**Table 2**

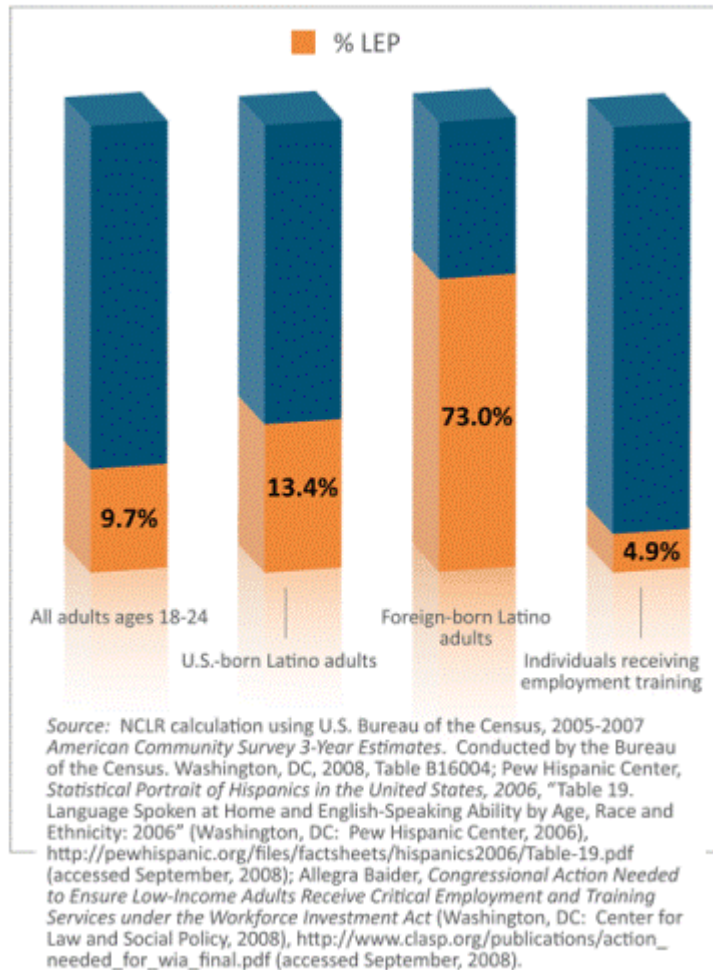
	Labor Force Participation Rate, (March 2009)
Hispanic	68.1%
Black	62.4%
White	66%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Data Retrieval: Labor Force Statistics (CPS)," Table A-2, <http://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab2.htm>, (accessed March 6, 2009); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Data Retrieval: Labor Force Statistics (CPS)," Table A-3, <http://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab3.htm> (accessed April 3, 2009).

- **Low education and skill levels and limited English proficiency threaten to block Latinos from accessing jobs created by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).** Good education, occupational skills, and linguistic ability are vital to maintaining a competitive edge in today's labor market. Yet in 2008, only 67.1% of Latino workers had completed high school or postsecondary education, compared to 92.5% of White workers and 88.2% of Black workers.<sup>5</sup> Language barriers confront 13.4% of native-born and 73% of foreign-born Hispanics of working age who speak English less than "very well."<sup>6</sup> Even the millions of jobs created by ARRA will likely prove insufficient to employ the majority of Americans out of work, making education and skills even more critical to success in the labor market.
- **Limited-English-proficient (LEP) workers are severely underserved by the public workforce system.** More than 18 million working-age Americans speak English less than "very well." Despite this vast need for language and job skills training, only 4.9% of individuals who receive training services through publicly funded programs are LEP (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

**Limited-English-Proficient Adults in the U.S.**



**Implementation of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act**

In order to compete successfully for good jobs and climb the economic ladder, Latino workers must be able to access effective job-training and adult education programs. Although ARRA does not explicitly target investments in programs that reach the LEP population, states can implement ARRA in ways that provide opportunities for LEP workers, including many Latinos.

- Support integrated training programs that open doors to employment for LEP workers.** Integrated training programs combine adult education and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) services with postsecondary education and training. Adults in integrated programs increase multiple skill sets concurrently through contextualized ESL instruction, academic coursework, and occupational skills acquisition. Several community-based integrated training programs have demonstrated excellent results for LEP workers for employment in emerging industries. These projects are “ready-to-go” in terms of launch, expansion, and replication.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Jeffrey J. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, *U.S. Population Projections: 2005-2050* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2008), <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/85.pdf> (accessed March 2008). Not all working-age adults are in the labor force.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Data Retrieval: Labor Force Statistics (CPS)," Table A-2, <http://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab2.htm>, (accessed March 6, 2009); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Data Retrieval: Labor Force Statistics (CPS)," Table A-3, <http://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab3.htm> (accessed March 6, 2009).

<sup>3</sup>In 2006 alone, 990 Hispanic were killed on the job; that year, Latinos had a fatal occupational injury rate that was 20% higher than that of White workers and 26% higher than that of Black workers. U.S. Department of Labor, *Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries*. "Fatal Occupational injuries, employment, and rates of fatal occupational injuries by selected worker characteristics, occupations, and industries, 2006." Conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Washington, DC, 2007, [http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/foi/CFOI\\_Rates\\_2006.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/foi/CFOI_Rates_2006.pdf) (accessed June 2008).

<sup>4</sup>Rakesh Kochhar, *Unemployment Rises Sharply Among Latino Immigrants in 2008* (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2009), <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/102.pdf> (accessed February 13, 2009).

<sup>5</sup>NCLR calculation using data from U.S. Bureau of the Census, "2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement," *Current Population Survey*. Conducted by the Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Washington, DC, 2008, [http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstc/cps\\_table\\_creator.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstc/cps_table_creator.html) (accessed November, 2008).

<sup>6</sup>Pew Hispanic Center, *Statistical Portrait of Hispanics in the United States, 2006*, Table 19, "Language Spoken at Home and English-Speaking Ability by Age, Race and Ethnicity: 2006" (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2006), <http://pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/hispanics2006/Table-19.pdf> (accessed September, 2008).