



Vulnerable Populations Study – Leveraging Public Survey Data for Informed Labor Policy: Final Report

SUMMARY

In 2022, the Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) funded contractor Westat Insight to conduct the Vulnerable Populations Study to highlight examples of analyses that researchers and policymakers can conduct using publicly available population surveys. This report underscores the value of leveraging publicly available survey data to analyze the changing demographic landscapes of populations impacted by labor policies and programs. Survey data available through the Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and other federal agencies are accessible and well documented, providing researchers and policymakers with the tools needed for quick, informative analyses of a variety of populations. To demonstrate the types of analyses possible with publicly available survey data, this report presents the findings of analyses using the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year period data for the 2005–2009 and 2015–2019 periods (referred to as 2009 and 2019, respectively, below) to consider shifts in population characteristics for low-wage workers and unemployed veterans.

This Department of Labor-funded study contributes to the labor evidence-base to inform [data, methods, and tools](#) that build evidence on Departmental programs and policies and addresses Departmental strategic goals and priorities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How can publicly available survey data be effectively utilized to analyze demographic changes within specific population groups relevant to labor policies?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Nationally representative data from surveys like the ACS, Current Population Survey, and Household Pulse Survey enable researchers and policymakers to analyze trends in the distribution of populations of interest across various geographic levels and characteristics like sex, age, race, ethnicity, English proficiency status, education level, disability status, household income level, marital status, and more.
- While the population of low-wage workers increased by 7% between 2009 and 2019, demographic and geographic distributions of low-wage workers remained relatively consistent; however, there were some statistically significant changes that may have important policy implications. For example, this ten-year period saw a statistically significant increase in the number of low-wage workers who identify as Asian and who identify as Hispanic or Latino, which may suggest that resources intended to reach low-wage workers should account for an expanded set of languages to improve accessibility across the growing population.



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- Between 2009 and 2019, the population of unemployed veterans fell by 38%, but the demographic and geographic distributions of unemployed veterans remained relatively consistent. In five states (California, Iowa, Nebraska, New Jersey, and Ohio), the percentage of all unemployed individuals who are unemployed veterans fell significantly. Given these findings, further analysis of the unemployed veteran populations in these states may help uncover trends in effective strategies to support veterans as they seek employment.

[SEE FULL STUDY](#)

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