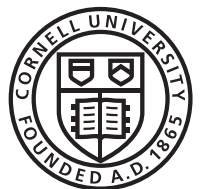


# EMPIRE STATE POLL

2024



Center for Applied Research on Work



# EMPIRE STATE POLL 2024: EMPLOYMENT AND WORK IN NEW YORK STATE

Every year researchers at the Cornell School of Industrial Labor Relations conduct the Empire State Poll to survey New York state residents (referred to herein as “New Yorkers”) about how work impacts their lives: Are they employed, do their wages meet their needs, how do costs of daily living impact their ability to work or the number of jobs they need to manage, do they feel like they can speak up at work, or are they part of a union? Most important— how do these issues together shape what concerns them most about their future? With over 2,500 residents surveyed across the entire state, this poll provides a window into New Yorkers’ daily lives, needs, and concerns related to labor and employment.<sup>1</sup>

## Methodology

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The Empire State Poll (ESP) is now in its tenth year running. Responses were collected between June 2023 and December 2023. The poll is released by the Center for Applied Research on Work (CAROW), part of Cornell University’s Industrial Labor Relations (ILR) School, in conjunction with ILR faculty and institutes, and with input from stakeholders across our state. This 2024 release analyzes data from responses that were collected between June 2023 and December 2023.<sup>2</sup> Residents from all 62 of New York’s counties participated in the ESP, through telephone interviews, online, and mailing options. The poll reached a diverse cross section of New York state residents along racial, ethnic, gender, age, and income demographics. Results were weighted to the demographic distributions of adults in New York and specific calibration benchmarks to improve the representation of the total sample.<sup>3</sup>



# TOP ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Researchers asked participants their opinion on the biggest issue related to employment, wages, and work currently facing New York State as a whole, as well as their own households.

## For New York State

Statewide, the number one issue for ESP respondents is cost of living. More than one-quarter of participants (27.3%) named this as the biggest issue currently facing New York State residents. Crime ranks second, with 17.8% of respondents claiming it as the biggest issue statewide. Rounding out the top five are economic growth and the economy (8.6%), immigration (7.4%), and taxes (6.3%).

## For Individual Households

Consistent with their biggest issue facing New York state residents, respondents said the cost of living and inflation are the biggest issues they personally face. Nearly two out of every three respondents (65.4%) cited this concern as the most important. Health care costs were a distant second (10.4%), followed by housing affordability and availability (9.6%).

Disaggregating the data by (combined) NYS Labor Market Region (LMR) shows that respondents living in the Finger Lakes and Western NY regions were most likely to report struggling with health care costs (18.2%), while downstate residents of NYC (12.9%) and Long Island (12.1%) were most likely to indicate that they experience challenges with housing affordability and availability. Concern with employment was highest for New York City respondents (13.8%). Across the state, respondents living in the Capital, Mohawk Valley, and North Country regions were most likely to state that child care is the most important issue facing their households (7.5%), while respondents from Central New York and the Southern Tier appear to have the greatest transportation needs (4.1%).

**Figure 1:**  
Single Most Important Issue Facing New York State

	Issue	NYS
1	Cost of Living	27.3%
2	Crime	17.8%
3	Economic Growth (economy)	8.6%
4	Immigration	7.4%
5	Taxes	6.3%

**Figure 2:**  
Single Most Important Issue Facing Your Household

	Issue	NYS
1	Cost of Living (including inflation)	65.4%
2	Health care costs	10.4%
3	Housing (affordability/availability)	9.6%
4	Employment	9.2%
5	Child care	3.6%

## Work and Employment

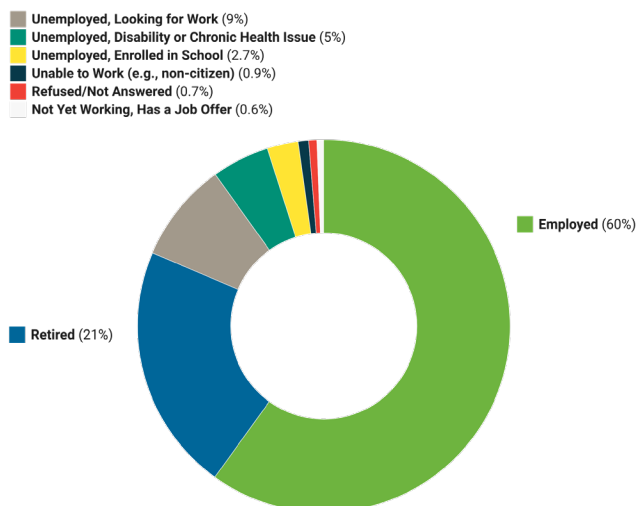
Over 60% of Empire State Poll respondents indicated that they are currently employed.<sup>4</sup> Those that are not currently employed fell into a broad range of categories: nearly 22% of respondents are retired. Just under 9% of respondents said they are unemployed and looking for work, compared to roughly 8% of respondents who are unemployed and not looking for work for reasons of school enrollment or health/disability status. Concerning the latter group, persons with disabilities who are unable to work account for 5% of respondents, and those who are unable to work for other reasons, such as citizenship, make up around 1% of ESP respondents.

When asked about economic opportunities for making a comfortable family living through good jobs and business development, over 60% of respondents said that there were “some” or “many” such opportunities (as opposed to “few”.) More respondents who were part of a union or a worker association reported that they felt there were “some” or “many” opportunities than respondents who were not part of any worker organization or association.

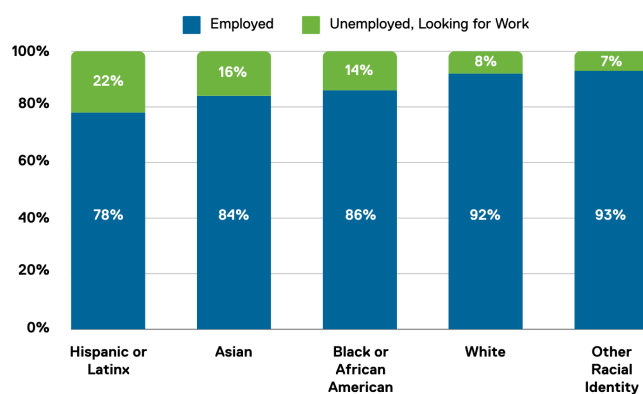


Employment status was not uniform across race and ethnicity. For those New Yorkers who were either employed or unemployed but looking for work, 92% of respondents who identified as white were employed, with 8% of this group indicating they were unemployed but looking for work. In contrast, every other racial/ethnic category had higher rates of respondents who were unemployed but looking for work,<sup>5</sup> with 22% of respondents who identified as Hispanic or Latinx reporting they were unemployed looking for work, followed by 16% of Asian New Yorkers, and 14% of Black New Yorkers. Figures 4 and 5 provide a breakdown of employment status by race, ethnicity, and gender.<sup>6</sup>

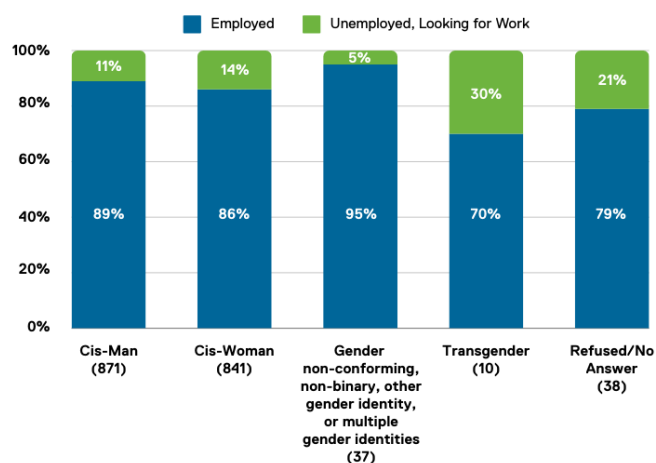
**Figure 3.**  
Work Status of ESP Respondents



**Figure 4.**  
Employment by race and ethnicity



**Figure 5.**  
Employment status by gender identity



## Union Membership and Views on Labor Unions

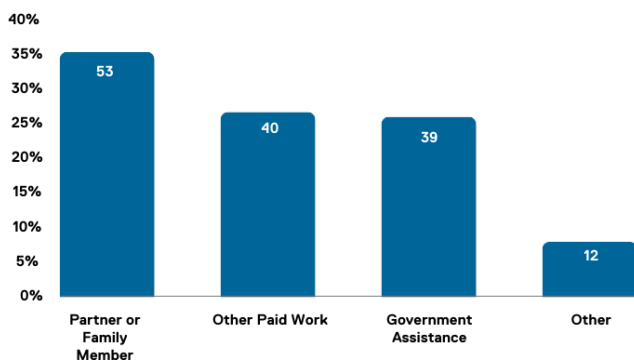
36% of ESP labor force respondents indicated that they are union members (Figure 6).<sup>7</sup> An additional 8% stated that, although they are not union members, they participate in a workers' association.

When asked if their views on labor unions have shifted in the past year, only 14% of ESP respondents (371) said yes. Of those respondents whose opinions of unions have shifted, the majority (56.7%) were in a positive direction. 43% of respondents said that their opposition to labor unions somewhat or strongly increased compared to the prior year.

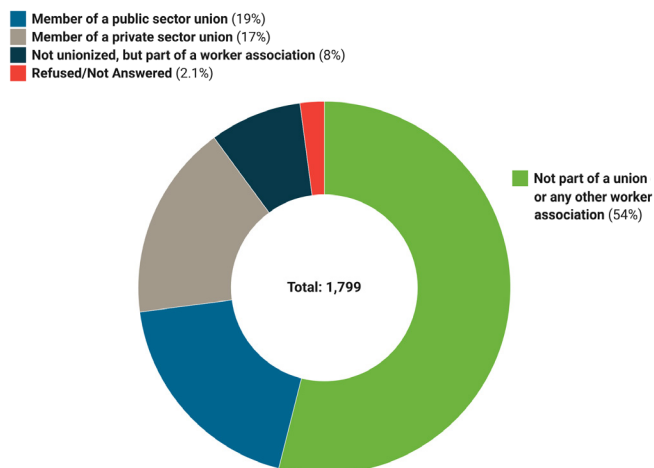
## Gig Work

Gig work continues to play a part in how New Yorkers earn income, with 14.5% of the total ESP sample indicating that they worked for an on-line platform in the past 12 months at the time of taking the survey (422 ESP respondents). For respondents who worked for on-line platforms, over one third indicated that their income was not sufficient to cover their household expenses (151 of 422 respondents who indicated that they worked for platforms). 144 of those workers who were unable to cover household expenses through their platform work provided information on how they pieced together other sources of income to make ends meet, as shown in Figure 7.

**Figure 7.**  
Ways online platform workers earn additional income<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 6.**  
Participation in workplace organization





## State Investment in Critical Industries

The ESP asked respondents to share their views about state support of home care workers, quality affordable childcare, and investments in combatting climate change.

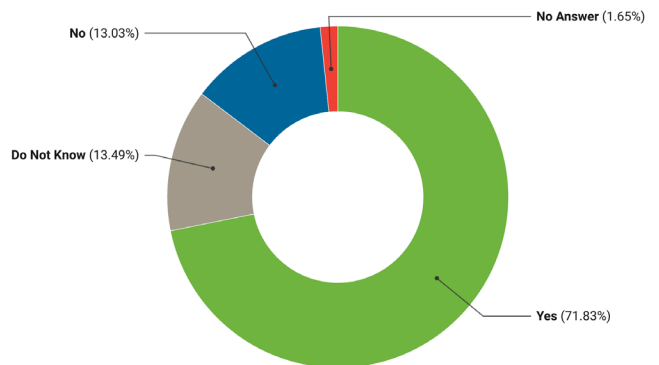
Home care workers (encompassing home health aides, personal care aides, and home attendants) are some of the lowest paid in New York State. Wages for the former two groups, which are tracked by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, average \$17.11 (with the bottom 10<sup>th</sup> percentile in the state averaging under \$15.00 ).<sup>9</sup> The ESP asked whether respondents would support state investment to raise home care workers' wages. Overwhelmingly 71.8% of respondents indicated their support. (Figure 8).

## Child Care Industry

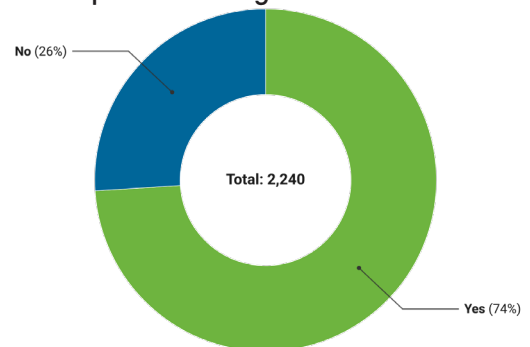
The ESP also queried participants on their ability to access childcare. Among respondents with children who answered questions regarding their child care needs<sup>10</sup>, more than two out of five respondents, or 40%, indicated that they or an adult member of their household decided to forgo paid employment outside of their home due to child care. Of the 40% of respondents who indicated that they forewent out-of-home employment due to child care needs: 52.8% identified as cis-women; 41.6% identified as cis-men; 3.3% identified as gender nonconforming or nonbinary; 1.5% did not provide a gender identity; and 0.8% identified as either transgender men or women. When asked why, more than half (51%) of those who chose to stay at home indicated that the biggest reason for their decision was the high cost of child care. Nearly one-quarter (23%) said that their biggest obstacle to employment was lack of accessible child care in their area. The remaining 24% indicated that the decision was linked to their personal child-rearing preferences (16%) or some other reason (10%).

The overwhelming majority (74%) of ESP respondents indicated that they would support public funding for universal child care, making it a free public service akin to K-12 public

**Figure 8.**  
Support for statewide investment to increase home care workers' pay



**Figure 9.**  
Support for public funding of universal child care



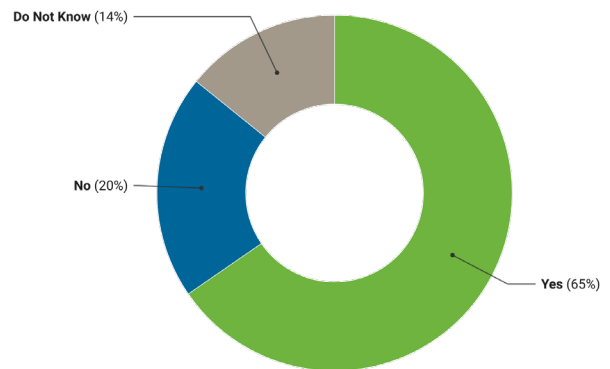
education. By an identical margin (74% Yes, 26% No), New Yorkers expressed resounding support for taking measures to increase wages in the early child care industry – namely, by uplifting early child care workers' wages to be on par with entry level salaries for elementary school teachers.

## Climate Infrastructure

The Empire State Poll asked if labor, industry, and government leaders should do more to respond to climate change. Here 65% of respondents indicated yes. Furthermore, over a third of respondents said that they are extremely concerned about the potential impact of climate change on today's children and future generations.



**Figure 10.**  
Support for increased action on climate change



## CONCLUSIONS

New Yorkers continue to weather the changes to the labor market of the last several years that have been brought about by a multiplicity of forces – changes in industry, regulation, investment, and macroeconomic fluctuations. The daily impact of these changes is felt at the individual level – in how New Yorkers experience increases in the cost of living, access to care services such as home-based care or affordable childcare, their ability to work with unions to have a voice in their workplace, and their interest in utilizing the power of the state to create sustainable and equitable industries for the future. The lived experiences, views, and goals of those who make up our state are critical to creating the successful policies of tomorrow.

## Endnotes

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- 1 The total number of survey responses was 3,394. Roughly 800 observations were associated with missing data for one or more of the variables that were used in the weighting procedure. As such, weights could not be generated for these observations. This brief, which employs survey weights, accordingly omits these missing or incomplete records. The resulting sample size is n=2,593 observations.
- 2 References to the ESP and ESP data herein refer to data collected during this period unless otherwise noted.
- 3 The total number of survey responses was 3,394. The survey was comprised of both Random Digit Dialing (RDD) and nonprobability samples. Statisticians affiliated with the Cornell University Survey Research Institute (SRI) were hired to generate survey weights for the observations weighted to the demographic distributions of adults in New York and specific calibration benchmarks to improve the representation of the total sample. Roughly 800 observations were associated with missing data for one or more of the variables that were used in the weighting procedure. As such, weights could not be generated for these observations. This brief, which employs survey weights, accordingly omits these missing or incomplete records. The resulting sample size is n=2,593 observations, for which weights were generated.  
  
For results pertaining to individual questions, the results displayed in this brief reflect the respondents who completed the entire poll and answered the question at issue (including those that completed the survey but refused to answer individual questions not pertinent to weighting). Some respondents were not asked every question (e.g. if a respondent answered that they did not have children they were not subsequently asked questions about their childcare needs). Unless otherwise noted results in this brief utilize the weighted sample data.
- 4 The employment-population (EPOP) ratio is the number of employed persons in an area divided by the number of persons aged 16 years or older in that area. The most recent EPOP for New York State was reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics on 1 March 2023 was 57.5%. See: Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Table 2. Employment-population ratios of persons 16 years of age and over by region, division, and state, 2021-22 annual averages." <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/srgune.t02.htm>
- 5 With the exception of the smallest category of "other racial identity", which had the smallest number of respondents.
- 6 The group labeled "Transgender" includes persons who identified as either transgender men or transgender women. These two categories were combined due to low observed frequencies within each individual category. The values in this graph represent the employment status of ESP respondents and should not be interpreted as official NYS unemployment rates for the groups included in the figure.
- 7 Here labor force is defined using the BLS definition which includes employed or unemployed but looking for work.
- 8 Due to the sample size of the subset of respondents who engage in on-line platform work raw response rates were used to generate the data for this chart.
- 9 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics for Home Health and Personal Care Aides (311120) in New York State, release date May 2022.



## Key ILR Institutes and Programs Impacting New York State:

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### **ILR Buffalo Co-Lab**

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The [\*Cornell ILR Buffalo Co-Lab\*](#) continues to play a leading role in Buffalo's resurgence with a more equitable economy. By partnering with Western New York businesses, unions, government, education and community organizations, the Buffalo Co-Lab impacts New Yorkers statewide through workplace health and safety programs, economic development and labor research, immersion experiences for students and many other initiatives.

### **ILR CAROW**

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The [\*Center for Applied Research on Work\*](#) exists to connect research on work with the practice of putting it to use. We support member institutes and affiliated faculty and students in their efforts to take insights about work, labor and employment and share them broadly. We are uniquely placed to seed innovative research that puts academic study into practice.

### **ILR CJEI**

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The [\*Criminal Justice and Employment Initiative\*](#) improves employment opportunities for people with criminal records by designing and delivering legal employment training to close information gaps, implement best practices, and integrate job seekers with criminal records into the workforce.

### **ILR CJJ**

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The [\*Climate Jobs Institute\*](#) is guiding New York and the nation's transition to a strong, equitable and resilient clean energy economy that tackles the climate crisis, creates high-quality jobs, confronts race and gender inequality, and builds a diverse and inclusive workforce.

### **ILR Ithaca Co-Lab**

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The [\*ILR Ithaca Co-Lab\*](#) mobilizes students and research to tackle policy challenges in the local region. These include fighting unemployment, winning a living wage, overcoming disadvantage in the job market and organizing for worker voice in the workplace.



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The [\*Labor and Employment Law Program\*](#) examines the laws and policies that impact the workplace and offers educational programs. We provide labor and employment law education for job seekers, employees, employers, government agencies, community organizations and unions in support of the Cannabis Workforce Initiative.



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The [\*Scheinman Institute\*](#) combines the academic depth of faculty in conflict/dispute resolution, employee relations and labor relations with the practical knowledge of leading practitioners in the field to provide intensive skill development for individuals and best practices for organizations.

The institute trains more students in mediation and arbitration than any other school in the United States.



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[\*The Worker Institute\*](#) engages in research and education on contemporary labor issues to generate innovative thinking and solutions to problems related to work, economy and society. The institute brings together researchers, educators and students with practitioners in labor, business and policymaking to confront growing economic and social inequalities, in the interests of working people and their families. A core value of the Worker Institute is that collective representation and workers' rights are vital to a fair economy, robust democracy and just society.



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The [\*Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability\*](#) works to advance the inclusion and full participation of people with disabilities in the workplace and community. Our research, training and technical resources expand knowledge about disability inclusion, leading to positive change.





# ILR School

Established by the New York State Legislature in 1945, the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University is the world's leading college of the applied social sciences focusing on work, labor and employment. It is guided by a commitment to social and economic justice and to improving the lives of New York's working people.

With offices in New York City, Buffalo, and Ithaca, Cornell ILR Outreach provides research, reports, education and training for New York's workers, unions, employers and government. It serves as a valuable resource for New York's policymakers to advance equitable workplaces and well-informed public policy.

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