

# THE LATINA WAGE GAP IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

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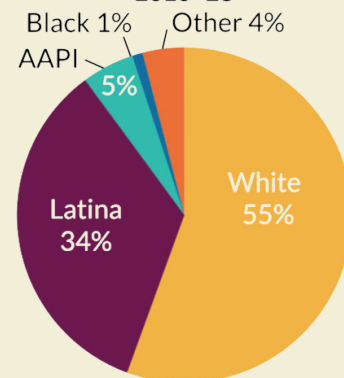
The gender wage gap—the difference between what men and women earn—remains a serious issue in the United States. For Latinas the wage gap is especially wide, including in Santa Cruz County.

In this report we use data from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates for 2019–23 to investigate Latinas’ participation in the civilian labor force and their hourly earnings. Our findings highlight the stark economic inequalities experienced by Latina workers.

## Latina Workers in Santa Cruz County

From 2019 through 2023, Latinas made up approximately 34 percent of the female civilian labor force in Santa Cruz County (fig. 1). The portion of non-Hispanic white women was larger, at 55 percent. The percentages for Black, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), and other women, which includes American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIAN), were far smaller.

Figure 1. Racial/Ethnic Background of the Santa Cruz County Female Labor Force, 2019–23



Source: Estimates calculated from 2018–2023 ACS 5-year PUMS.  
Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding error.

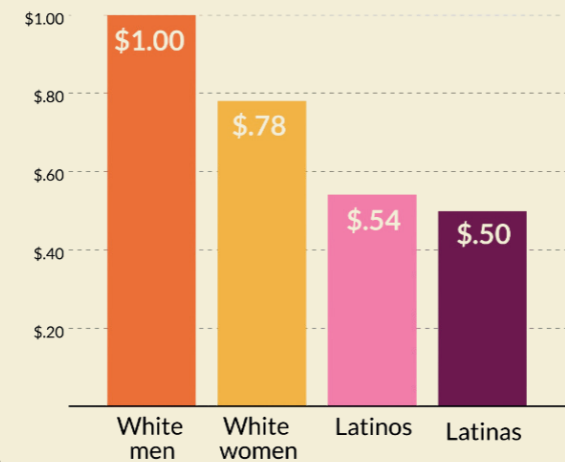
Latina workers in Santa Cruz County tend to be younger than their white female counterparts. In 2019–23, the median age for Latinas was 35, compared to 44 for white women. This younger population is essential to the future of the regional economy. Younger workers bring energy, adaptability, and innovation, and they are more likely to embrace new technologies and start new businesses.

## The Hourly Earnings Gap Faced by Latinas

Latinas experience significant inequality in hourly compensation when compared to white and Latino men. In 2019–23, Latinas in Santa Cruz County earned only 50 cents in the time it took a non-Hispanic white man to earn a dollar (fig. 2). Latino men made a little more, 54 cents, and white women were paid 78 cents. These findings evidence a racial and gender gap that especially burdens Latinas.

Differences in educational attainment and occupational status explain part of the wage gap. When compared to white residents, Latinos and Latinas tend to have poorer access to high-quality K-12 education and universities and colleges that grant bachelor's degrees.<sup>1</sup> Some women also experience immigration-related barriers to good jobs. Additionally, gender discrimination and stereotyping play a part in defining career paths, and they also contribute to lower pay for Latinas relative to men even within the same occupational categories.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 2: Gap in Hourly Earnings for White and Latina/o Residents of Santa Cruz County, by Gender, 2019–23**



Source: Estimates calculated from 2018–2023 ACS 5-year PUMS.

## Conclusion

This report highlights the pay gap that Latinas face in Santa Cruz County. Many Latinas are the primary earners in their households, and they contribute significantly as taxpayers and community members. When they are underpaid, the impact extends beyond individual workers, affecting families' ability to access housing, education, and healthcare and to plan for retirement. Because Latinas make up about a third of the female workforce in Santa Cruz County, the consequences of their financial challenges ripple across the entire region.

Wage inequality, therefore, has serious implications for the region's economic well-being and must be countered by advancing economic opportunity for all. This requires comprehensive policy solutions that include reducing occupational segregation, expanding support for family care, creating pathways to citizenship, and strengthening protections against workplace discrimination. Santa Cruz's civic and business leadership can play a role in advancing fair and equitable wages for Latinas and all other workers.

<sup>1</sup> Enrique S. Pumar, "The Differential Latinx Attainment Rate: A Comparative Analysis of Recent Trends in Educational Achievements." *Journal of Leadership, Equity, and Research* 7, no. 3 (2021). <https://journals.sfu.ca/cvj/index.php/cvj/article/view/167/303>.

<sup>2</sup> Olga Alonso-Villar and Coral del Río, "Disentangling Occupational Sorting from Within-Occupation Disparities: Earnings Differences Among 12 Gender–Race/Ethnicity Groups in the U.S." *Population Research and Policy Review* 42, no. 3 (2023): 45. doi: 10.1007/s11113-023-09791-1.

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