

Still working for too little in Cincinnati

All working people — no matter their race, gender, or the kind of job they do — should be paid enough to live a good life and provide for their families. Labor market pressures forced many employers to increase pay during the pandemic. Federal stimulus stabilized people's incomes. The health care crisis created a host of urgent needs. But in 2021, four of the Cincinnati area's 10 most common occupations paid so little that a worker with a family of three would need food aid to get by. These four occupations alone employ 81,070 people.

Wages up, but not enough: From 2019 to 2021, employers increased median pay for eight of the 10 most common jobs in the Cincinnati area. Changes ranged from general and operations managers being paid \$4.92-per-hour less (-9.8%) to laborers and freight movers being paid \$2.28-per-hour more (+15.0%). Considering nearly two decades of wage suppression that predated COVID, average annual change in pay ranged from a 1-cent-per-hour pay cut for stockers and order fillers to a pay boost of 23 cents for registered nurses over the whole span from 2000 to 2021.

Wages up since 2019, but working people are still underpaid in Cincinnati

Pay growth recovered lost ground in most common Cincinnati area jobs

Top 10 occupations 2021	2021 jobs	2021 hourly pay	Pay growth 2000-2019	Pay growth since 2019	Percent pay growth since 2019	Annualized pay growth 2000-2021	2021 pay as a share of poverty
Laborers & Freight, Stock, & Material Movers, Handlers	26,440	\$17.48	\$0.15	\$2.28	15.0%	\$0.12	166%
Retail Salespersons	24,300	\$13.08	-\$0.86	\$1.21	10.2%	\$0.02	124%
Registered Nurses	23,940	\$36.24	\$2.60	\$2.18	6.4%	\$0.23	343%
Stockers & Order Fillers	23,410	\$14.56	-\$1.36	\$1.14	8.5%	-\$0.01	138%
Customer Service Representatives	22,660	\$18.01	-\$1.48	\$0.60	3.5%	-\$0.04	171%
Cashiers	21,070	\$11.04	\$0.27	-\$0.09	-0.8%	\$0.01	105%
Fast Food & Counter Workers	21,010	\$10.78	-\$0.34	\$0.73	7.3%	\$0.02	102%
General & Operations Managers	18,850	\$45.48	\$7.52	-\$4.92	-9.8%	\$0.12	431%
Office Clerks, General	16,370	\$18.09	\$1.78	\$0.09	0.5%	\$0.09	171%
Waiters & Waitresses	14,690	\$9.95	\$0.04	\$0.04	0.4%	\$0.00	94%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Survey, May 2000, May 2019, and May 2021. Estimates, available at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>, accessed April 12, 2022. Largest detail occupations in Cincinnati by employment. Median annual earnings shown as a share of the poverty threshold for a family of three in 2021 (\$21,960). The gross monthly income threshold for food assistance is 130% of poverty (\$28,548) or less. All wages are adjusted for inflation using May 2021 dollars.

COVID disproportionately destroyed low-paying jobs

COVID-19 disproportionately destroyed the jobs of low-paid Ohioans: people in economic precarity even before the pandemic. Statewide, these jobs are typically more likely held by Black and brown Ohioans, and women.

Seven of greater Cincinnati's 10 most common pre-COVID occupations lost jobs from 2019 to 2021. As people scaled back dining out, employers laid off 13,170 fast food workers and 4,260 waiters and waitresses. Movement to online shopping meant fewer retail salespeople and cashiers, and more stockers and order fillers. General managers gained 4,420 jobs, suggesting better paid workers with more power in the labor market disproportionately kept their jobs.

Many common occupations in Cincinnati lost jobs between 2019 and 2021						
Ten most common Cincinnati MSA occupations by employment, 2019						
Top 10 occupations 2019 pre-COVID-19	2019 rank	2021 rank	2019 jobs	2021 jobs	Change in jobs	Percent change
Fast Food & Counter Workers	1	7	34,180	21,010	-13,170	-39%
Retail Salespersons	2	2	29,160	24,300	-4,860	-17%
Laborers & Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Handlers	3	1	28,060	26,440	-1,620	-6%
Customer Service Representatives	4	5	24,690	22,660	-2,030	-8%
Registered Nurses	5	3	24,480	23,940	-540	-2%
Cashiers	6	6	20,960	21,070	110	1%
Office Clerks, General	7	9	20,310	16,370	-3,940	-19%
Stockers & Order Fillers	8	4	19,110	23,410	4,300	23%
Waiters & Waitresses	9	10	18,950	14,690	-4,260	-22%
General & Operations Managers	10	8	14,430	18,850	4,420	31%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Survey, May 2000, May 2019, and May 2021. Estimates, available at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>, accessed April 12, 2020. Largest detail occupations in Cincinnati by employment. Median annual earnings shown as a share of the poverty threshold for a family of three in 2021 (\$21,960). The gross monthly income threshold for food assistance is 130% of poverty (\$28,548) or less.