



Still working for too little in Cleveland, 2024

Michael Shields

Everyone who works for a living should be paid a wage that enables them to cover the basics for themselves and their families. Yet last year, four of Cleveland’s 10 largest occupations paid their median worker so little they would qualify for and likely depend on food aid to feed a family of three. That’s a wage less than \$32,318 in 2023.¹ These four occupations alone employ 83,000 people (8.3% of all workers in the area). The table shows where pay fell short of food subsistence in Cleveland, and where pay and the number of jobs grew and shrank over the course of the recovery.

Many of Cleveland’s 10 most common jobs pay near poverty							
Changes in jobs and pay among Cleveland’s most common jobs in 2023							
Top 10 occupations	2023 jobs	Change since 2019	Percent Change since 2019	2023 median hourly pay	2023 median annual pay	2023 pay as % of poverty level	Percent change in pay since 2019*
Registered Nurses	30,650	5,050	20%	\$ 38.58	\$ 80,240	323%	-2%
General & Operations Managers	27,500	14,760	116%	\$ 46.89	\$ 97,530	392%	-19%
Fast Food & Counter Workers	23,590	-6,320	-21%	\$ 13.38	\$ 27,820	112%	18%
Cashiers	21,970	740	3%	\$ 13.57	\$ 28,230	114%	10%
Stockers & Order Fillers	21,840	8,930	69%	\$ 17.71	\$ 36,830	148%	20%
Retail Salespersons	20,370	-9,460	-32%	\$ 14.68	\$ 30,530	123%	12%
Laborers & Freight, Stock, & Material Movers, Hand	19,240	-2,440	-11%	\$ 18.09	\$ 37,630	151%	7%
Home Health & Personal Care Aides	16,780	-2,190	-12%	\$ 14.39	\$ 29,920	120%	13%
Customer Service Representatives	16,730	-6,850	-29%	\$ 19.07	\$ 39,670	160%	-7%
Office Clerks, General	16,020	-7,470	-32%	\$ 19.99	\$ 41,570	167%	2%

*Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Survey, May 2019, and May 2023. Estimates, available at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>, updated April 3, 2024. Largest detail occupations in Cleveland MSA by employment. Median annual pay shown as a share of the poverty threshold for a family of three in 2023 (\$24,860). **Red text** indicates annual income below 130% of poverty for a family of three, (\$32,318), the threshold for food assistance. Note that BLS implemented a change to the data estimation methodology between 2019 and 2023, so comparisons with prior reports may vary slightly. See Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Survey Methods and Reliability Statement for MB3 Research Estimates of the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics Survey.” We have used the updated MB3 method for both years. **Orange text** marks a decrease in jobs or wages. *Percent change in pay since 2019 is given as a change in pay as a share of the poverty level for the year in which it was reported.*

¹ The gross monthly income threshold for food assistance is 130 percent of poverty for Ohio and most states. The poverty level depends on the family size and was \$24,860 for a family of three in 2023. See [Health and Human Services Federal Poverty Level 2023](#).



This report covers the 10 most common jobs in the Cleveland Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) as ranked by the number of workers holding them.² Together these 10 occupations account for nearly 215,000 jobs, 21% of all jobs in the MSA.

Jobs still missing from Cleveland

Cleveland is among a majority of Ohio MSA's which have yet to fully recover jobs from the COVID recession. With 1,067,500 jobs by February 2024, the Cleveland MSA was still missing 15,700 jobs (-1.4%) compared with its pre-COVID February 2020 number.³

Policy solutions must create access to jobs and ensure livable wages for all

Policymakers at all levels must ensure that the job market enables everyone who wants a job to find one; support childcare infrastructure that provides a safe place for children while parents work; ensure a robust unemployment system that enables working people to withstand times of joblessness and use them to train for better jobs; and pass a wage floor and other policies that enable Ohioans to take home a wage that covers the basics and better reflects their worth on the job. Priorities include:

- Pay all Ohioans a minimum wage of at least \$15 per hour.
- Support working parents with robust childcare.
- Pass a slate of pro-worker policies.

Conclusion

Too many of Cleveland's most common jobs pay too little. Everyone who works deserves to be paid a wage that dignifies the value of their work and meets the cost of living. It's time for state leaders to make that a reality for all working people in Cleveland and across Ohio.

² Data are from newly released May 2023 figures from Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS). The survey uses three years of sample data to estimate wages for the year, making this release the first since the COVID recession to exclude data from the highly irregular 2020 labor market disrupted by COVID-19. <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics, with Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Labor Market Information, Current Employment Statistics, February 2020 and February 2024, seasonally adjusted data, available at: https://ohiolmi.com/Home/CES/DS_Results_CES