



Nobody Works in One in Five U.S. Families

Parents with children in home more likely to work

By Ali Meyer

No family member was employed in 16,069,000 U.S. families in 2016, or 19.6 percent of families, according to newly released data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The number of families with nobody employed increased by roughly 19,000 from 2015 to 2016, although the percentage slightly declined from 19.7 percent to 19.6 percent.

For the purpose of the study, the bureau counts a family as households headed by a married couple or by unmarried women or men. The definition includes households with children under 18 years old and households without children. There were 82,092,000 families in the United States in 2016, according to the bureau.

The number of families with no workers has remained relatively steady since 1995, when the bureau began compiling the data.

In 1995, 18.8 percent of families had no one working. The percentage peaked at 20.2 percent in 2011. Since then, it has been on a steady decline, from 20 percent in 2012 and 2013, to 19.9 percent in 2014, and 19.7 percent in 2015.

“Black and Hispanic families remained more likely to have an unemployed member in 2016 (10.9 percent and 8.7 percent, respectively) than White or Asian families (5.7 percent and 5.6 percent, respectively),” the bureau said.

The presence of children made parents in the family more likely to be active in the labor force. In 2016, 80.4 percent of families with children under 18 years participated in the labor force by holding a job or looking for one, compared with 56.7 percent of families with no child under 18 years.

According to Alfredo Ortiz, president and CEO of the nonpartisan Job Creators Network, said policymakers should help families find good careers by promoting training and protecting entry-level jobs.

“The fact that 20 percent of families don’t have anyone working demonstrates that the labor market still has weaknesses,” Ortiz said. “But the problem isn’t the number of available jobs.”

“There are currently 5.7 million job openings, millions of which pay roughly \$50,000 or more per year,” he said. “Policymakers need to address the skills gap that is preventing these unemployed families from seizing these available good jobs.”

“That means expanding vocational training and protecting entry-level jobs that provide the skills necessary to get good jobs,” Ortiz said. “It means a fight for \$50,000 careers, not \$15 jobs.”