

Contributions and Characteristics of Selected Airport Workers

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A report to congressional committees

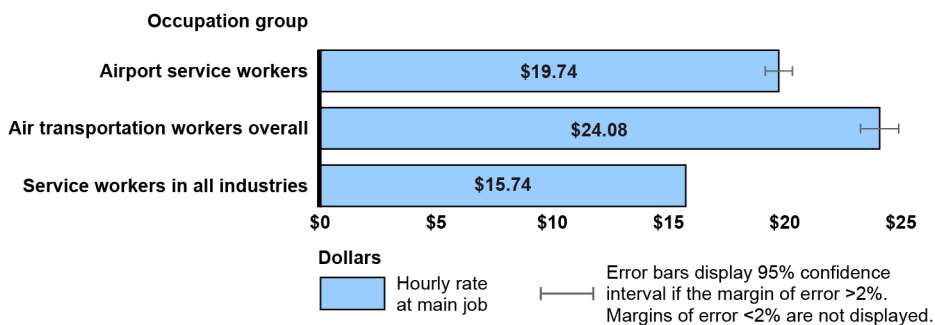
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What GAO Found

Airport service workers support the U.S. commercial air transportation industry by loading cargo and baggage, cleaning aircraft and terminals, assisting passengers with disabilities, driving shuttle buses, and providing food and beverages, among other functions. The revenue generated by businesses associated with these workers can provide insight into their economic contributions. For example, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) data show that in 2023, the nation's busiest 138 commercial service airports earned approximately \$5.9 billion in revenue from ground transportation and parking services, and \$2.3 billion from terminal concessions. These earnings accounted for nearly 30 percent of those airports' annual operating revenue.

GAO's analysis of airport service workers' economic characteristics found that they are generally better off than service workers in all industries and worse off than air transportation workers overall (a population that includes workers like flight attendants and mechanics). For example, the median wage for airport service workers paid hourly was estimated to be \$19.74 (in 2024 dollars), according to 2018 through 2024 Current Population Survey data. This wage was higher than that of service workers in all industries and lower than that of air transportation workers overall.

Median Wages for Selected Hourly Workers, 2018-2024 (in 2024 dollars)



Source: GAO analysis of data from the Current Population Survey, which is sponsored jointly by the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. | GAO-25-107678

Notes: For the purposes of this report, airport service workers are private sector employees in 36 selected occupations within the air transportation industry. Air transportation workers overall include all private sector employees in the air transportation industry, such as flight attendants and mechanics. Service workers in all industries are private sector employees—in all industries combined—working in the same 36 selected occupations as airport service workers. GAO's wage analysis only includes workers who reported that they were paid hourly.

GAO's analysis also found that approximately 7 percent of airport service workers lived at or below the poverty line when they responded to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey from 2018 through 2022. The same analysis found 15 percent of service workers in all industries lived at or below the poverty line, as did 4 percent of air transportation workers overall.

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. air transportation industry is a key component of the nation's economy, enabling the movement of goods and passengers throughout the nation and the world.

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 included a provision for GAO to conduct a comprehensive review of domestic airport service workers, including their role in, importance to, and impact on the aviation economy.

This report provides information about selected airport service workers' economic contributions to airports and their economic characteristics, among other topics.

To describe airport service workers' economic contributions to airports, GAO analyzed 2023 data from FAA's Certification Activity Tracking System. GAO also reviewed economic impact reports representing 26 large hub airports (defined as airports that have 1 percent or more of the annual national passenger boardings). In addition, GAO interviewed FAA officials and representatives from 12 organizations, including airports, airlines and other employers, and labor unions.

To describe the workers' economic characteristics, GAO analyzed the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 5-year data from 2018 through 2022. GAO also analyzed 2018 through 2024 data from the Current Population Survey, which is sponsored jointly by the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. For each of these data sources, GAO analyzed the most recently finalized data available at the time of its analysis.