

Stakeholders Said Jobs Report Generally Meets Their Needs, but Opportunities Exist to Improve Data Quality

GAO-26-107538

June 2026

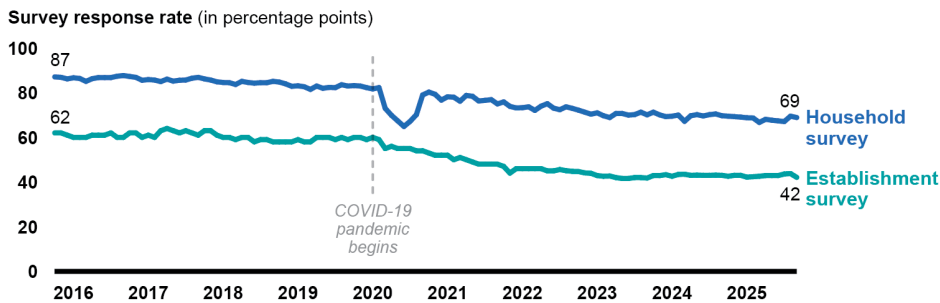
A report to congressional requesters

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What GAO Found

The Bureau of Labor Statistics’s (BLS) Employment Situation report (the Jobs Report) provides key information on the nation’s economy based on data from two surveys—one of households (the household survey) and one of employers (the establishment survey). Stakeholders with jobs data expertise said the report generally meets users’ needs. However, they said occasional large revisions can make the data less useful for informing timely decisions, and BLS faces risks to data quality due to lower survey response rates over time (see figure). BLS met its goals for the data’s precision and size of the revisions from fiscal years 2020 through 2025, but it relaxed one goal during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Response Rates to the Jobs Report Surveys, Oct 2015–Sept 2025



Source: GAO analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) information. | GAO-26-107538

BLS obtains input from data users and technical experts through various means to inform improvements to the Jobs Report. However, it does not have a plan to address gaps in obtaining regular user and technical feedback since the Departments of Commerce and Labor eliminated three advisory committees in 2025. Having a plan would help ensure that changes to the Jobs Report meet users’ needs and address technical challenges while preserving data quality.

BLS and the Census Bureau—which conducts the household survey for BLS—have met federal requirements for assessing the effects of lower survey response rates on the Jobs Report’s accuracy but released limited information on their findings. Studies by agency staff found limited effects of lower response rates on the accuracy of the household survey data. However, BLS has not released its assessments of the establishment survey due to limitations, including challenges linking the survey data with more comprehensive sources. BLS has started a new establishment survey study designed to address earlier limitations. Releasing the results could help users maintain trust in the data’s accuracy.

Agency efforts and additional options identified by stakeholders aim to enhance the quality of the Jobs Report data. For example, BLS and Census are planning to add an online response method to the household survey in 2027 to try to increase response rates and lower data collection costs. However, BLS and Census officials said recent funding constraints may delay full implementation. Also, stakeholders, researchers, and BLS officials identified additional options to address survey challenges. For instance, some suggested incorporating administrative data from private and other government sources (such as unemployment insurance data) to help mitigate lower survey response rates.

Why GAO Did This Study

Economic policymakers, businesses, and others rely on the monthly Jobs Report for accurate and timely information on the health of the nation’s economy, such as the unemployment rate. However, in recent years, questions have been raised about the quality of the data in the report.

GAO was asked to review the quality of the data in the Jobs Report. GAO’s report addresses (1) the extent to which the Jobs Report data meet users’ needs for accurate, useful, and timely information, and challenges BLS faces in producing these data, (2) the extent to which BLS and Census have followed federal requirements for assessing survey response rates and communicating findings to data users, and (3) potential options to address survey challenges and associated considerations.

GAO reviewed data on BLS’s performance goals for the quality of the Jobs Report data. GAO also reviewed relevant government and academic studies and agency documentation. GAO interviewed agency officials and 14 stakeholders that were selected to provide a range of expert perspectives on the quality of the data for informing economic policy and business decisions and on options to address survey challenges. GAO compared BLS and Census processes to federal statistical policies and relevant federal standards for internal control.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, including that BLS develop a plan to address gaps in its ability to obtain external input on the Jobs Report data and publish an assessment on the effects of survey nonresponse on the establishment survey. BLS generally agreed with the recommendations.