



Workers sound off on self-employment and side hustles

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The Federal Reserve System's Worker Voices Project looked beyond the numbers to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on how workers without a four-year degree perceive and navigate employment. [Worker Voices Special Brief: Self-Employment: Dreams Versus Reality](#) takes a deep dive into a theme that emerged during focus groups conducted in 2022—how workers look to and engage in self-employment and independent work.

This brief contributes to the literature by providing a worker-centered understanding and framework of self-employment specific to workers and job seekers in these focus groups. The Worker Voices Project was led by the Federal Reserve Banks of Atlanta and Philadelphia. The authors of the brief are Merissa Piazza, lead policy analyst at the Cleveland Fed, and Ashley Putnam, director of the Economic Growth & Mobility Project at the Philadelphia Fed.

The [Worker Voices Project](#) is a Federal Reserve System research effort to understand the experiences of workers in low-wage roles and nondegree job seekers at the start of the pandemic and the onset of its recovery. This research seeks to further explore how these workers were affected by the strong labor market, barriers to employment, and their changing expectations of employment. Focus groups took place May 2022 to September 2022, and participants were identified and recruited through community-based workforce development partners. Participants between the ages of 20 and 55 discussed these topics with researchers from the Federal Reserve in virtual focus groups across the country.
