

## **Office of Foreign Labor Certification Technical Release Notes for the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics Update for Wage Year 2025-26**

*Revised August 1, 2025*

The Office of Foreign Labor Certification (OFLC) will apply the 2018 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) wages for July 2025 through June 2026 wage year.<sup>1</sup> This data is based on BLS's May 2024 wage estimates.<sup>2</sup>

The metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) used for the May 2024 OEWS wage estimates were updated to reflect the delineations based on the 2020 Census.<sup>3</sup> As a result of this update, new MSAs were created, some existing MSAs underwent name and/or compositional changes, and other existing MSAs were dropped from publication. Some non-MSA areas were added, dropped, or modified due to the new MSA delineations. For the New England states, the New England City and Town Areas (NECTAs) were discontinued, and OEWS published the MSAs and non-MSA areas for these states.<sup>4</sup> BLS has published a spreadsheet of area names and definitions used in the May 2024 OEWS estimates.<sup>5</sup> OFLC will apply these updated area delineations beginning with this wage year, July 2025 through June 2026.

Below are technical release notes, which explain how OFLC will apply the 2018 SOC structure to OEWS wages for the July 2025 through June 2026 wage year. In certain instances, the 2018 SOC codes may be aggregated, may not have wage estimates due to OEWS data limitations, may not have American Competitiveness and Workforce Improvement Act (ACWIA) Higher Education wage estimates due to OEWS data limitations, or may not have Job Zone data due to the Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) data limitations. Examples of such instances are presented below.

### **2018 SOC Detailed Occupations Aggregated into a Single Broad OEWS Occupation**

OEWS has aggregated certain 2018 SOC detailed occupations into a single broad occupation. OFLC will apply the single broad occupation wage estimate to each of the 2018 SOC detailed occupations. OEWS has published a list of OEWS occupations and definitions that include

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<sup>1</sup> See Standard Occupational Classification Manual, 2018, available at [https://www.bls.gov/soc/2018/soc\\_2018\\_manual.pdf](https://www.bls.gov/soc/2018/soc_2018_manual.pdf) (providing further information regarding definitions of particular classification of occupations); see also O\*NET-SOC 2019 Taxonomy, available at <https://www.onetcenter.org/taxonomy.html#latest> (providing further information on how the O\*NET-SOC 2019 taxonomy structure has been revised based on transition to 2018 SOC).

<sup>2</sup> See Occupational Employment Wage Statistics, available at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Bulletin 23-01, available at <https://www.bls.gov/bls/omb-bulletin-23-01-revised-delineations-of-metropolitan-statistical-areas.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> New England is defined as covering the states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

<sup>5</sup> See Upcoming Changes to Metropolitan Statistical Area Delineations, available at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/notices/2024/msa-changes.htm>.

SOC detailed occupations that have been aggregated. This list can be found at [https://www.bls.gov/oes/2024/may/occupation\\_definitions\\_m2024.xlsx](https://www.bls.gov/oes/2024/may/occupation_definitions_m2024.xlsx). See example below.

*13-1020, Buyers and Purchasing Agents*: OFLC will apply the wage for this broad occupation to the following SOC detailed occupations:

- 13-1021, *Buyers and Purchasing Agents, Farm Products*
- 13-1022, *Wholesale and Retail Buyers, Except Farm Products*
- 13-1023, *Purchasing Agents, Except Wholesale, Retail, and Farm Products*

### **OEWS Was Unable to Provide Wage Estimates for One 2018 SOC Detailed Occupation Due to Data Limitations**

*45-3031, Fishing and Hunting Workers*, does not have wage estimates due to OEWS data limitations. OFLC will continue to apply the same guidelines from previous years. OFLC will apply the OEWS mean wage for the 2018 SOC major group 45-0000 *Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations* to all wage levels of 45-3031, *Fishing and Hunting Workers*. OFLC will apply the OEWS wage estimate at the most geographically specific area available.

- OFLC will first look at OEWS wage estimates published at the MSA or non-MSA level (<https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oessrcma.htm>).
- If no MSA or non-MSA data is available, OFLC will use state-level data (<https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oessrcst.htm>).
- When a location is within a multistate MSA, OFLC will use state-wide data for the first principal city listed in the MSA ([BULLETIN NO. 20-01\(whitehouse.gov\)](https://www.whitehouse.gov/bulletin/2021/01/)).
- Absent a state value, OFLC will use the national wage estimates ([https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_nat.htm](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm)).

### **SOC Detailed Occupations That Do Not Have an ACWIA Higher Education Wage Estimate Due to OEWS Data Limitation**

Certain occupations do not have ACWIA Higher Education wage estimates due to OEWS data limitations. For these occupations, OFLC will continue to apply ACWIA Higher Education wage estimates for the most closely aligned occupation based on 2018 SOC occupational definitions and wage patterns. OFLC will first select the appropriate 2018 SOC code and assess the appropriate wage level. Then, if no ACWIA Higher Education wage estimate is available, OFLC will assign a wage from the most closely aligned occupation with an ACWIA Higher Education wage estimate. See example below.

*29-1011, Chiropractors*: OFLC will apply the ACWIA Higher Education wage estimate for 29-1123, *Physical Therapists*, which is the most closely aligned occupation, based on the 2018 SOC occupational definitions and wage patterns.

## **Geographic Areas That Do Not Have an ACWIA Higher Education Wage Estimate Due to OEWS Data Limitation**

For certain occupations, an ACWIA wage estimate may be available in some but not all geographic locations. When an ACWIA wage estimate for the occupation is not available in a geographic location, OFLC will assign the ACWIA wage estimate from an adjacent geographic location that has an ACWIA wage available for that occupation. See example below.

25-3041, *Tutors*, has ACWIA wage estimates available in most geographic locations, but does not have wages available in the San Juan-Bayamon-Caguas, PR MSA. OFLC will apply the wages for the adjacent MSA, which is Arecibo, PR.

## **Application of High Wage Estimate for Geographic Areas and Occupations That Do Not Have Wage Data Due to OEWS Data Limitations**

For some occupations in certain geographic areas OEWS determines that wages are too high to provide an estimate because most of the data fall into the top, open-ended wage interval. In these geographic locations, the actual wage estimate is at or above \$115 per hour (\$239, 200.00 per year). Therefore, OFLC will issue the prevailing wage as \$115.00 per hour or \$239, 200.00 per year as indicated in the OEWS data. See examples below.

29-1216.00, *General Internal Medicine Physicians* in the Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH MSA: OFLC will issue the prevailing wage as \$115.00 per hour or \$239,200.00 per year for this occupation as indicated in OEWS wage estimates.

## **O\*NET Detailed Occupations That Do Not Have Job Zone Data**

For 2018 O\*NET detailed occupations with no available Job Zone data, OFLC will use the methodology announced in its November 15, 2021, *Federal Register* notice.<sup>6</sup> A list of the Job Zones to be applied to these occupations will be available on the OFLC website (<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/foreign-labor>).

13-2099.00, *Financial Specialists, All Other*, for example, does not have an established Job Zone in O\*NET. Therefore, OFLC assigned Job Zone 5 to this occupation by calculating the mean of the other O\*NET detailed occupations in the same SOC broad occupation, 13-2090: 13-2099.01, *Financial Quantitative Analysts*, Job Zone 5; and 13-2099.04, *Fraud Examiners, Investigators and Analysts*, Job Zone 4.

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<sup>6</sup> See Update to Appendix A to the Preamble-Education and Training Categories by O\*NET-SOC Occupations; Labor Certification for Permanent Employment of Immigrants in the United States and Procedures To Establish Job Zone Values When O\*NET Job Zone Data Are Unavailable, 87 FR 63070 (Nov. 15, 2021), available at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/11/15/2021-24813/update-to-appendix-a-to-the-preamble>.

## **OEWS Broad Occupations That Do Not Have Education Data**

OEWS has aggregated certain SOC detailed occupations into a single OEWS broad occupation. OFLC will apply the applicable education level of the OEWS broad occupation to each 2018 SOC detailed occupation. A list of the Education levels to be applied to these occupations will be available on the OFLC website (<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/foreign-labor>).

## **OEWS Wage Estimates for the State of Colorado**

BLS announced on February 20, 2025, that due to the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) suspending publication of industry and substate data for Colorado because of data quality concerns, BLS was unable to provide wage estimates for Colorado.<sup>7</sup> OEWS has since received corrected QCEW data for the Colorado wage estimates, but these estimates were not available on July 1, 2025. OFLC had intended to apply national wage estimates for all locations in Colorado from July 1, 2025, until Colorado specific wage data was available; however, to avoid the potential confusion of using national wage estimates for only a couple of weeks, OFLC decided to pause processing for the small number of prevailing wage requests in Colorado, which would have otherwise been processed in July using OEWS wages. BLS later informed OFLC that updated OEWS wage data would be available later in July 2025. In late July 2025, OFLC received updated wage estimates from BLS for the State of Colorado. OFLC has resumed and is prioritizing the processing the paused prevailing wage requests now that Colorado specific wage data is available. Note: The OFLC Wage Search tool contained OEWS national wage estimates for locations in Colorado from July 1 through July 30, 2025. Employers who used the OFLC Wage Search Tool to identify OEWS prevailing wages for worksites in Colorado for purposes of determining a prevailing wage for a Labor Condition Application from July 1 through July 30, 2025 received national wage estimates.

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.bls.gov/oes/notices/2024/colorado-data.htm>.