

Four Times More Women Than Men Dropped Out of the Labor Force in September

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The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) monthly jobs report shows job gains continued to slow in September, with the economy adding back only 661,000 jobs, compared to nearly 1.5 million added back in August.¹ Even with these gains, only about half (51.5%) of the nearly 22.2 million jobs lost in March and April due to the COVID-19 crisis have returned.² Women gained about 2 in 5 (43.3%) of the jobs added to the economy in September, while making up about half (49.7%) of the workforce.³ Over 1.1 million workers ages 20 and over dropped out of the labor force last month – meaning they are no longer working or looking for work.⁴ Of the workers who left the labor force, 865,000 (80.0%) were women,⁵ including 324,000 Latinas⁶ and 58,000 Black women.⁷

Even after September's gains, Black women and Latinas continue to be hit hard by the economic crisis: While the overall unemployment rate dropped to 7.9% in September,⁸ about 1 in 9 Black women (11.1%)⁹ and Latinas (11.0%) remained unemployed. The unemployment rate for Latinas increased from 10.5% in August, even as the unemployment rates for all other groups of workers 20 and over by race and sex improved.¹⁰

A little more than half of the 12.1 million women's jobs lost between February and April have returned.

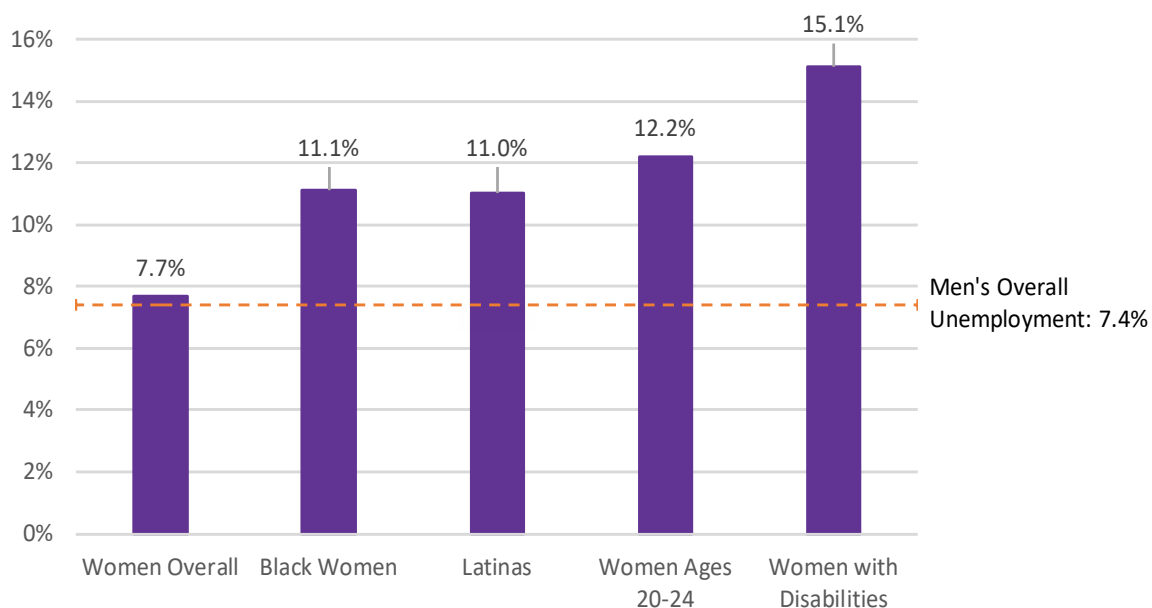
- Women have disproportionately suffered pandemic-related job losses: since February 2020, women have lost nearly 5.8 million net jobs, accounting for 53.9% of overall net job loss since the start of the crisis.¹¹
- The economy lost 182,000 net state and local government jobs last month, which includes 280,500 lost education jobs.¹² While a gender breakdown is not available for these losses, women make up the vast majority of those working education jobs in state and local government, and were likely heavily affected.¹³
- Women ages 20 and over were more likely than men ages 20 and over to be unemployed, with an unemployment rate of 7.7% compared to men's 7.4%.¹⁴ However, because people leaving the labor force drives down unemployment rates, these rates do not fully capture the effect this crisis is having on workers.
- The unemployment rate also does not account for people working part-time involuntarily and those who recently stopped searching for work or are otherwise marginally attached to the labor force. Including those workers, the unemployment rate for women ages 16 and over was 12.9% and the unemployment rate for men ages 16 and over was 11.9%.¹⁵

Due to a misclassification error in the household survey component of every BLS Employment Situation Summary since March, the reported unemployment rate for September slightly underestimates the share of the labor force that was unemployed. BLS estimates that the actual unemployment rate for September was 0.4 percentage points higher than reported. The actual unemployment rates for demographic subgroups are likely higher than reported.

The overall unemployment rate masks even higher rates for Black women, Latinas, and other demographic groups.

- About 1 in 9 Black women (11.1%) ages 20 and over were unemployed in September.¹⁶ Black women's unemployment rate was down from 12.0% in August, but still over twice as high as their pre-pandemic unemployment rate (4.8% in February).¹⁷
- Nearly 1 in 9 Latinas ages 20 and over (11.0%) were unemployed in September,¹⁸ up from 10.5% in August, and more than double their pre-pandemic unemployment rate (4.9% in February).¹⁹
- In September, the unemployment rates for Black women and Latinas were more than one and a half times higher than the rate for white men ages 20 and over (6.5%).²⁰
- In September, nearly 1 in 6 (16.3%) women with disabilities were unemployed²¹ – an increase of nearly 9 percentage points from February.²²
- Pandemic-related job losses continue to hit younger women particularly hard, with about 1 in 8 (12.2%) women between the ages of 20 and 24 unemployed in September.²³ And rates for young Black women between ages 20 and 24 (18.1%)²⁴ and young Latinas between ages 20 and 24 (16.5%) were even higher.²⁵

Women's Unemployment Rates (September 2020)



Source: BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary Tables A-1, A-2, A-3, A-6, and A-13. Unemployment rates for men overall, women overall, Latinas, and Black women are seasonally adjusted and are for people ages 20 years and over. The unemployment rate for women ages 20-24 is not seasonally adjusted. The unemployment rate for women with disabilities is not seasonally adjusted and is for women ages 16 to 64.

- 1 NWLC calculations based on BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table B-1: Employees on nonfarm payrolls by industry sector and selected industry detail, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t17.htm> (last visited October 2, 2020).
- 2 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Table B-1, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbtab1.htm> (last visited October 2, 2020). Throughout this factsheet, we measure changes since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic using the February 2020 Employment Situation Summary as a reference point.
- 3 NWLC calculations based on BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table B-1 and BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table B-5: Employment of women on nonfarm payrolls by industry sector, seasonally adjusted, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t21.htm> (last visited October 2, 2020).
- 4 NWLC calculations based on BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-1: Employment Status of the civilian population by sex and age, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t01.htm> (last visited October 2, 2020). Figure is seasonally adjusted and is for workers ages 20 and over.
- 5 *Id.* Figure is seasonally adjusted and is for women ages 20 and over.
- 6 NWLC calculations based on BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-3: Employment status of the Hispanic or Latino population by sex and age, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm> (last visited October 2, 2020). Figure is seasonally adjusted and is for Latinas ages 20 and over.
- 7 BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-2: Employment status of the civilian population by race, sex, and age, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t02.htm> (last visited October 2, 2020). Figure is seasonally adjusted and is for Black women ages 20 and over.
- 8 BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-1. Figure is seasonally adjusted and is for all workers ages 16 and over.
- 9 BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-2. Figure is seasonally adjusted and is for Black women ages 20 and over.
- 10 BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-3. Figures are seasonally adjusted and are for Latinas ages 20 and over.
- 11 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Table B-1 and BLS, historical data for Table B-5.
- 12 NWLC calculations based on BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table B-1.
- 13 Claire Ewing-Nelson, National Women’s Law Center, As State and Local Governments Face a Fiscal Crisis, Women’s Jobs Are on the Line (July 2020), available at <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Governmentworkersfactsheet-2.pdf>.
- 14 BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-1. Figures are seasonally adjusted and for women and men ages 20 and over.
- 15 NWLC calculations based on BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-1; BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-16: Persons not in the labor force and multiple jobholders by sex, not seasonally adjusted, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t16.htm> (last visited October 2, 2020); and BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-27: Persons at work in nonagricultural industries by age, sex, race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, marital status, and usual full- or part-time status, available at <https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpseea27.htm> (last visited October 2, 2020) Figure is not seasonally adjusted and is for women ages 16 and over. BLS defines people “marginally attached to the labor force” as those not in the labor force who want and are available for work, and who have looked for a job sometime in the prior 12 months (or since the end of their last job if they held one within the past 12 months), but were not counted as unemployed because they had not searched for work in the 4 weeks preceding the survey. “Discouraged workers” are a subset of “marginally attached” workers and are not currently looking for work because they believe there are no jobs available or that there are none for which they would qualify. For more information, see the BLS glossary: www.bls.gov/bls/glossary.htm.
- 16 BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-2.
- 17 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Table A-2, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab2.htm> (last visited October 2, 2020).
- 18 BLS, 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-3.
- 19 BLS, historical data for Table A-3, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab3.htm> (last visited October 2, 2020).
- 20 BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-2. Figure is seasonally adjusted and is for white men ages 20 and over.
- 21 BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-6: Employment status of the civilian population by sex, age, and disability status, not seasonally adjusted, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t06.htm> (last visited October 2, 2020). Figures are for women with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 64.
- 22 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Table A-6, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab6.htm> (last visited October 2, 2020).
- 23 BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-13: Employment status of the civilian population by age, sex, and race, available at <https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpseea13.htm> (last visited October 2, 2020). Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
- 24 *Id.*
- 25 BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-14: Employment status of the Hispanic of Latino Population by age and sex, available at <https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpseea14.htm> (last visited October 2, 2020). Figures are not seasonally adjusted.