

Women in Leisure and Hospitality Are Among the Hardest Hit by Job Losses and Most at Risk of Covid-19 Infection

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The leisure and hospitality sector—which includes restaurants, hotels, museums, spectator sports, and more—is a major driver of the American economy and a source of millions of jobs; this sector alone accounted for 9.4% of the entire workforce in 2018, employing roughly 1 in 11 workers in the U.S.¹ But the spread of COVID-19 has ravaged this sector—making it the hardest-hit sector in terms of job losses²—as both public health restrictions and changes in individual behavior to avoid the virus have limited travel, dining out, and many other leisure activities. And women of color, who are disproportionately represented in leisure and hospitality jobs that have long been underpaid and undervalued, are likely to suffer the most.

Between February and April 2020, the leisure and hospitality sector shed about half of its workforce (49%, or more than 8.3 million jobs),³ with women accounting for the majority (54%) of those losses.⁴ Between April and October, 58% of the lost leisure and hospitality jobs returned⁵—but these job gains are precarious, as new spikes in infection trigger new shutdowns and as slowdowns in demand lead to temporary closures becoming permanent. As of October, the leisure and hospitality workforce is just under 80% of its February size,⁶ and there are 41% fewer women in the leisure and hospitality sector than there were in February.⁷ Moreover, there is reason to believe that many women who remain employed in the sector are working fewer hours than they would like, as discussed further below.

As the pandemic wears on, many women in leisure and hospitality who struggled to make ends meet before the crisis—working unpredictable and inadequate hours, often coupled with unpredictable and inadequate tips, in restaurants, bars, hotels, theaters, and more—continue to face a high risk of losing their jobs altogether. Many who are still employed are forced to put their and their families' health at risk to do their jobs, with decent pay and benefits too often still out of reach.

Women of Color Are Disproportionately Represented in the Leisure and Hospitality Sector

While women are just over half of all leisure and hospitality workers—roughly in line with the share of the overall workforce made up of women—women of color, women born outside of the U.S., and women with disabilities work in the leisure and hospitality sector in disproportionately high numbers, and thus are disproportionately likely to bear the financial burden of job losses caused by the pandemic. Because of the public-facing nature of the leisure and hospitality sector, they are also more exposed to the risk of COVID-19 infection on the job than are workers in many other sectors.

- Women make up just under half (48%) of the overall workforce and just over half (51%) of the leisure and hospitality workforce.⁸
- More than one in five leisure and hospitality workers are Latina (23%), and an additional 13% are Black women. By comparison, Latinas and Black women make up just under 8% and 7% of the overall workforce, respectively.⁹ Native American women and Asian American & Pacific Islander women are also disproportionately represented among leisure and hospitality workers.
- Women born outside the U.S. are 19% of the leisure and hospitality workforce, compared to less than 8% of the overall workforce.¹⁰
- Women with disabilities are about 4% of the leisure and hospitality workforce, but just under 2% of the overall workforce.¹¹

Women's Share of Leisure & Hospitality Workforce vs. Overall Workforce



Source: NWLC calculations based on 2019 CPS ASEC, using IPUMS. In the CPS, respondents self-identify their sex, race, disability status, whether they are Latinx, and whether they were born outside the U.S.

Women Working in Restaurants and Bars Have Been Particularly Hard Hit

Women working in the leisure and hospitality sector hold a broad range of jobs, from public relations specialists and museum curators to bartenders, restaurant servers, maids and housekeeping cleaners, and clerks at hotels and motels. Job losses have been widespread across the sector; since February, women have lost a net total of 1.9 million leisure and hospitality jobs, representing 34% of women’s total job losses in the pandemic-induced recession.

Five subsectors account for most of these job losses: food services and drinking places; accommodation; amusements, gambling, and recreation; performing arts and spectator sports; and museums, historical sites, and similar institutions.¹²

Women in Leisure & Hospitality Subsectors

Leisure & Hospitality Subsector	Net Job Losses for Women Between February and September	Share of Women’s Job Losses in the Leisure & Hospitality Sector	Share of Women’s Jobs Retained in Subsector Since February 2020
Food services and drinking places	-1,194,300	59.2%	81.7%
Accommodation	-410,000	20.3%	67.2%
Amusements, gambling, and recreation	-274,000	13.6%	68.6%
Performing arts and spectator sports	-108,100	5.8%	52.7%
Museums, historical sites, and similar institutions	-27,300	1.4%	75.0%

Source: NWLC calculations based on historical data for U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), historical data for Table B-5: Employment of women on nonfarm payrolls by industry sector, seasonally adjusted, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbtab5.htm>. Change in the number of jobs in leisure and hospitality subsectors and job losses calculations are using February to September 2020 data.

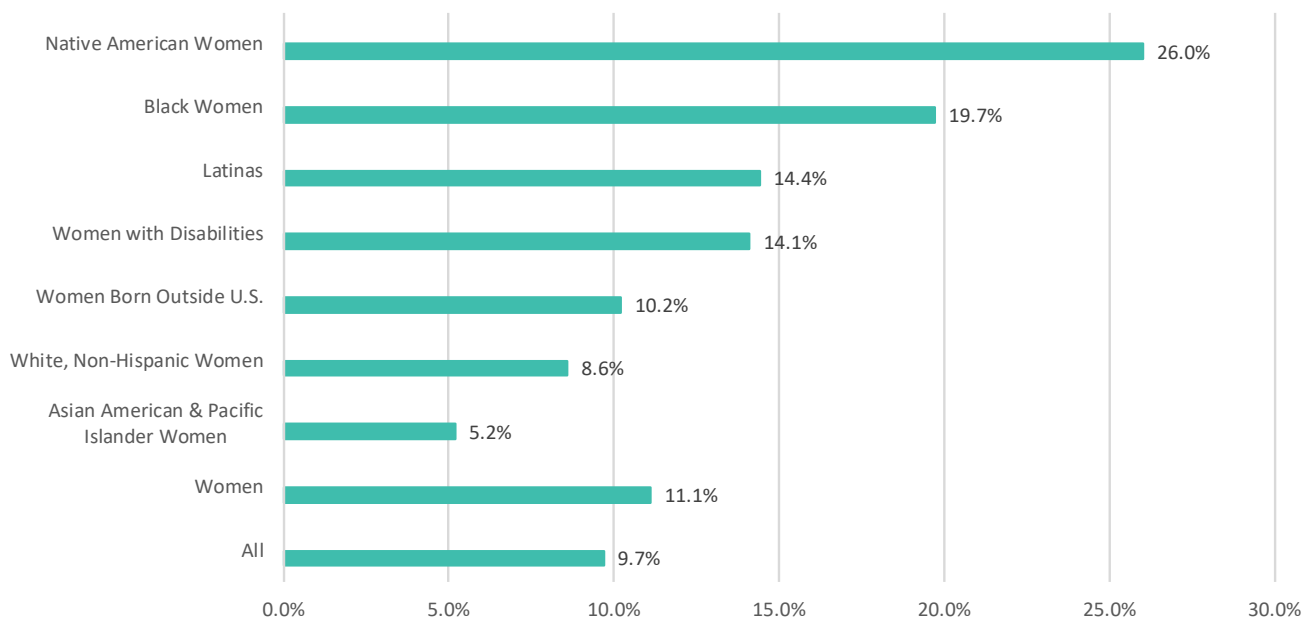
- Nearly 1.2 million women have lost jobs in the “food services and drinking places” subsector—primarily restaurants and bars. These restaurant and bar jobs represent, by far, the largest share of women’s job losses in the leisure and hospitality sector (59%) and make up 21% of women’s total job losses since February.¹³
- The food services and drinking places subsector includes restaurant servers and bartenders—two large occupations in which women make up the majority of the workforce and rely on customer tips to supplement low wages from employers. For nearly 30 years, federal law has allowed employers to pay tipped workers just \$2.13 an hour, forcing women in these jobs to rely on variable tips for virtually all of their income—and putting them at a particularly high risk of both economic insecurity and sexual harassment.¹⁴ For example, 69% of restaurant servers in 2018 were women, disproportionately women of color; even before the pandemic they typically made just \$12.02 an hour, including tips, and more than one in eight (13%) lived in poverty.¹⁵
- Tipped workers who become unemployed often find that their low and sporadic earnings qualify them for minimal, or no, unemployment benefits.¹⁶ Only 28% of leisure and hospitality workers were policyholders for employer-sponsored health insurance, compared to 51% of workers overall in 2018.¹⁷ Restaurant servers and other tipped workers also face the challenge of enforcing compliance with mask requirements and other public health measures from the same customers on whom they rely for tips.¹⁸

Leisure and Hospitality Workers Were Struggling to Make Ends Meet Before the Pandemic

Women in the leisure and hospitality sector were already underpaid and undervalued for their work before the pandemic. Now, as they face lost income from lost jobs or a heightened risk of infection if they go to work, women in this sector are in an even more precarious economic position.

- In 2018, women working full-time, year-round in leisure and hospitality made 83 cents for every dollar a man in the sector made.¹⁹ Gender-based pay disparities for women of color, women born outside of the U.S and women with disabilities are even larger.
 - Black women and Latinas working full-time, year-round in the leisure and hospitality sector were typically paid 71 cents and 63 cents, respectively, for every dollar a white, non-Hispanic man was paid in 2018.
 - Women with disabilities and women born outside of the U.S working full-time, year-round were both typically paid 74 cents for every dollar men without disabilities and men born in the U.S, respectively, were paid in 2018.
- Typical annual wages for a woman working full-time, year-round in the leisure and hospitality sector were just \$29,000 in 2018, or approximately \$13.94 per hour.²⁰ Black women working full-time, year-round in the sector typically made even less (\$28,000 per year, or \$13.46 per hour), and full-time, year-round Latina workers typically made only \$25,000 per year, or \$12.02 per hour.²¹
- In 2018, nearly 1 in 10 leisure and hospitality workers (9.7%) had incomes below the federal poverty line, meaning the poverty rate for leisure and hospitality workers was almost double the poverty rate for workers overall (5.1%). Poverty rates among Black women, Latinas, and women born outside the U.S. working in leisure and hospitality were even higher.²² Moreover, the federal poverty line, which was just \$20,231 for a parent with two children in 2018,²³ barely begins to capture what families need to make ends meet.²⁴

Poverty Rates Among Leisure and Hospitality Workers by Demographic Group (2018)



Source: NWLC calculations based on 2019 CPS ASEC, using IPUMS. In the CPS, respondents self-identify their sex, race, disability status, whether they are Latinx, and whether they were born outside the U.S.

- Many women in the leisure and hospitality sector were not working full time even before the pandemic—even if they wanted to be. In 2018, 39% of women in the leisure and hospitality workforce were working part time, compared to 27% of men.²⁵ The share of people who are working part-time involuntarily is growing due to the pandemic: while data specific to the leisure and hospitality sector is unavailable, in October 2020, 15% of women working part time wanted full-time work, but were unable to obtain it for economic reasons, such as their employer not giving them full-time hours.²⁶ In February, before the pandemic hit, only 11% of women working part-time were doing so for economic reasons.²⁷ And these estimates do not capture people who want to work part-time but receive fewer hours than they are seeking from their employer—a scenario that is common in leisure and hospitality jobs.²⁸
- Many leisure and hospitality workers lack the benefits they need to return to work safely. Only 28% of leisure and hospitality workers are policyholders for employer-sponsored health insurance, compared to 51% of workers overall.²⁹ Low-paid jobs typically provide little, if any, paid sick time or paid family and medical leave,³⁰ and many leisure and hospitality workers are excluded from the emergency paid sick days and paid caregiving leave provisions enacted in federal coronavirus relief packages due to exemptions for employers with fewer than 50 or more than 500 employees.³¹ At the same time, the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) has failed to issue—not to mention enforce—an Emergency Temporary Standard on infectious diseases that would help employers understand and implement the safest possible conditions for their workplaces.

Leisure and Hospitality Workers Need Immediate Relief and an Equitable Recovery

Before the pandemic began, the leisure and hospitality workforce was made up of nearly 16.9 million workers. By October 2020, that number had dropped to 13.4 million—a net loss of nearly 3.5 million jobs as a result of COVID-19.³² Women of color, women with disabilities, and women born outside of the U.S.—who are disproportionately represented in the leisure and hospitality sector, and in lower-paying jobs within the sector—continue to face the greatest risk of painful impacts from further losses as the pandemic persists. Policy makers must do more to support those who are unemployed as a result of the pandemic, including extending and strengthening emergency unemployment insurance; shoring up nutrition assistance, child care assistance, and other public benefits; and halting evictions and foreclosures.³³ Congress can also dramatically reduce the number of people facing unemployment by enacting the Paycheck Recovery Act, which would keep workers connected to their jobs, restore millions of workers who have been laid off or furloughed since the pandemic hit to payroll, and prevent employers of all sizes from being forced to close permanently.

At the same time, policy makers must ensure that millions of leisure and hospitality workers who continue to work are valued and protected. This includes making investments to ensure access to regular testing, PPE, and other essential supplies; instituting and enforcing stronger workplace safety standards; requiring companies to provide premium pay to essential workers; extending and expanding federal emergency paid sick time and paid leave provisions; increasing access to health care; ensuring that companies are not shielded from liability when they fail to take reasonable steps to protect their workers or the public; and strengthening protections so that workers can organize and speak up about unsafe workplace conditions without fear of retaliation.³⁴

In addition, as we rebuild our economy, policy makers should work to not only restore jobs, but improve them—with a \$15 minimum wage, equal pay, fair and flexible work schedules, and policies to ensure workers can care for themselves and their families without sacrificing their paychecks. Enacting One Fair Wage nationwide—i.e., requiring employers to pay at least the full minimum wage to everyone, before tips—is essential for millions of tipped workers in the leisure and hospitality sector. And to ensure an equitable recovery for all leisure and hospitality workers—and all working people—in the long term, Congress must strengthen our antidiscrimination, employment, and labor laws so that everyone can work with equality, safety, and dignity.

- 1 NWLC calculations based on 2019 Current Population Survey ASEC, using IPUMS, available at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps.html>.
- 2 Ella Koeze, The NY Times, "August's slowdown in job growth spanned many industries" (Sept. 2020), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/04/business/augusts-slowdown-in-job-growth-spanned-many-industries.html>.
- 3 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Table B-1: Employees on nonfarm payrolls by industry sector and selected industry detail, available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/CES7000000001>.
- 4 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), historical data for Table B-5a: Employment of women on nonfarm payrolls by industry sector, seasonally adjusted, available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/CES7000000001>.
- 5 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Table B-1: Employees on nonfarm payrolls by industry sector and selected industry detail, available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/CES7000000001>.
- 6 *Id.* As of October 2020, the leisure and hospitality workforce is 79% of its February size.
- 7 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), historical data for Table B-5a: Employment of women on nonfarm payrolls by industry sector, seasonally adjusted, available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/CES7000000001>.
- 8 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, using IPUMS-CPS, University of Minnesota, <https://cps.ipums.org/cps/>. CPS respondents self-identify their sex as either male or female.
- 9 NWLC calculations based on 2019 CPS ASEC, using IPUMS. In the CPS, respondents self-identify their sex, race, and whether they are Latinx. Persons with disabilities are those who have identified themselves as having any physical or cognitive difficulty, as measured by affirmative responses to any of the CPS' six cognitive difficulties. Women born outside of the U.S. are those who have identified themselves as born outside of U.S territories and possessions.
- 10 *Id.*
- 11 *Id.*
- 12 *Id.*
- 13 NWLC calculations based on historical data for U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), historical data for Table B-5: Employment of women on nonfarm payrolls by industry sector, seasonally adjusted, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbtb5.htm>. Change in the number of jobs in leisure and hospitality subsectors and job losses calculations are using February to September 2020 data.
- 14 See generally, Morgan Harwood, Jasmine Tucker, & Julie Vogtman, NWLC, "One Fair Wage: Women Fare Better in States with Equal Treatment for Tipped Workers" (May 2019), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/one-fair-wage-women-fare-better-in-states-with-equal-treatment-for-tipped-workers/>.
- 15 Women of color are 29.4% of restaurant servers in the leisure and hospitality sector, yet only 17.9% of the overall workforce. NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, using IPUMS-CPS, University of Minnesota, available at <https://cps.ipums.org/cps/>.
- 16 See, e.g., One Fair Wage, "A Persistent Legacy of Slavery: Ending the Subminimum Wage for Tipped Workers as a Racial Equity Measure" (August 2020), available at https://onefairwage.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/OFW_LegacyOfSlavery_USA-1.pdf.
- 17 See, e.g., Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Community and Close Contact Exposures Associated with COVID-19 Among Symptomatic Adults ≥18 Years in 11 Outpatient Health Care Facilities — United States, July 2020" (September 11, 2020) available at <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6936a5.htm>. This CDC study shows adults with positive COVID-19 test results were approximately twice as likely to have reported dining at a restaurant than were those with negative COVID-19 test results.
- 18 See, e.g., One Fair Wage, "A Persistent Legacy of Slavery: Ending the Subminimum Wage for Tipped Workers as a Racial Equity Measure" (August 2020), available at https://onefairwage.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/OFW_LegacyOfSlavery_USA-1.pdf.
- 19 *Id.* The gender earnings ratio for women overall (or "what a woman makes for every dollar a man makes") is calculated by dividing the median annual wages for women working full-time year-round by the median annual wages for men working full-time, year-round. Gender earnings ratios for AAPI women, Black women, Latinas, Native American women, and white, non-Hispanic women are calculated by dividing the median annual wages for women working full-time, year-round in each demographic group by the median annual wages for white, non-Hispanic men working full-time, year-round.
- 20 *Id.*
- 21 *Id.*
- 22 NWLC calculations based on 2019 Current Population Survey ASEC, using IPUMS, available at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps.html>.
- 23 *Id.*
- 24 U.S. Census Bureau, Poverty Thresholds for 2018, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html> (last visited October 1, 2020).
- 25 NWLC calculations based on 2019 Current Population Survey ASEC, using IPUMS, available at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps.html>.
- 26 NWLC calculations based on BLS, Table A-27 historical data. Data for all women working part-time available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU02033505>. Data for women working part-time for economic reasons available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU02033506>.
- 27 NWLC calculations based on BLS, Table A-27 historical data. Data for all women working part-time available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU02033505>. Data for women working part-time for economic reasons available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU02033506>.
- 28 See Claire Ewing-Nelson, NWLC, "Part-Time Workers Are Paid Less, Have Less Access to Benefits – and Most Are Women" (Feb 2020), available at: <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Part-Time-Workers-Factsheet-2.26.20.pdf>. See also Lonnie Golden and Jaeseung Kim, CLASP, "The Involuntary Part-time Work and Underemployment Problem in the U.S." (August 2020), available at https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2020/08/GWC2029_Center%20For%20Law.pdf.
- 29 NWLC calculations based on 2019 Current Population Survey ASEC, using IPUMS, available at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps.html>.
- 30 See, e.g., NWLC, "Expanding Paid Sick Days and Paid Family & Medical Leave in Response to COVID-19" (April 2020), available at <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/paid-fmla-fs-1.pdf>.
- 31 BLS, Monthly Labor Review, "How many workers are employed in sectors directly affected by COVID-19 shutdowns, where do they work, and how much do they earn?" (April 2020), available at <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2020/article/covid-19-shutdowns.htm>. In June 2019, 73.9% of people working in restaurants/bars and 64.6% in "entertainment" work for companies that employ 50 or fewer, or 500+, people. See also Steven Findlay, Health Affairs, "Congress Left Big Gaps In The Paid Sick Days And Paid Leave Provisions Of The Coronavirus Emergency Legislation" (April 29, 2020), available at <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20200424.223002/full/>.
- 32 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Table B-1: Employees on nonfarm payrolls by industry sector and selected industry detail, available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/CES7000000001>.
- 33 See, e.g., NWLC, "A Recovery That Works for All of Us" (Fixing Unemployment Insurance in Response to COVID-19; Expanding Income Supports In Response to COVID-19; Improving and Expanding Child Care Assistance to Stabilize Our Economy; Improving Housing Assistance in Response to COVID-19) available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/a-recovery-that-works-for-all-of-us/>.
- 34 See, e.g., NWLC, "A Recovery That Works for All of Us" (Securing Workers' Rights and Employer Accountability During COVID-19 and Beyond; Expanding Paid Sick Days and Paid Family & Medical Leave in Response to COVID-19; Promoting Equitable Access to Health Care in Response to COVID-19; Employer Immunity From COVID-19- Related Liability Endangers Women and People of Color) available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/a-recovery-that-works-for-all-of-us/>.