

Nearly 2.2 Million Women Have Left the Labor Force Since February

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The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) monthly jobs report shows job gains continued to slow in October, with the economy adding back only 638,000 jobs, compared to nearly 672,000 added back in September.¹ Even with these gains, only about half (54.5%) of the nearly 22.2 million jobs lost in March and April due to the COVID-19 crisis have returned.² Women gained only 43.9% of the jobs added to the economy in October, while making up about half (49.7%) of the workforce.³ In October, 480,000 women ages 20 and over re-entered the labor force (meaning they are either working or looking for work),⁴ but there were still nearly 2.2 million fewer women in the labor force in October than there were in February, before the pandemic.⁵

Nearly 1 in 15 women ages 20 and over (6.5%) were unemployed in October, down from 7.7% in September.⁶ The unemployment rate for women in this age group is still more than twice as high as it was in February (3.1%).⁷ Adult men ages 20 and over had an unemployment rate of 6.7% in October, down from 7.4% in September.⁸ These unemployment rates do not account for people working part-time involuntarily and those who recently stopped searching for work or those who are otherwise marginally attached to the labor force. Including those workers, the unemployment rate for women ages 16 and over was 11.7% and the unemployment rate for men ages 16 and over was 11.4%.⁹ Even after October's gains, Black women and Latinas continue to be hit hard by the economic crisis: About 1 in 11 Black women (9.2%)¹⁰ and Latinas (9.0%) remained unemployed.¹¹ This marks the first month since the pandemic started that either of these groups have seen an unemployment rate below 10.0%.¹²

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 over 5.5 million net jobs, and account for 54.5% of overall net job loss since the start of the crisis.¹³
- More than 2 in 5 (42.5%) of the jobs gained in October were in the leisure and hospitality sector. About 6 in 10 (60.5%) of the jobs gained in this sector last month were women's jobs. Most of the overall leisure and hospitality gains (70.9%) were in the food services and drinking places subsector, which includes bars and restaurants.¹⁴ As coronavirus cases continue to surge over the winter, these jobs could prove precarious if businesses are forced to shut down again.
- The retail trade sector gained 103,700 jobs in October. Women accounted for only 11.4% of those gains, despite making up nearly half (48.4%) of the retail trade workforce.¹⁵

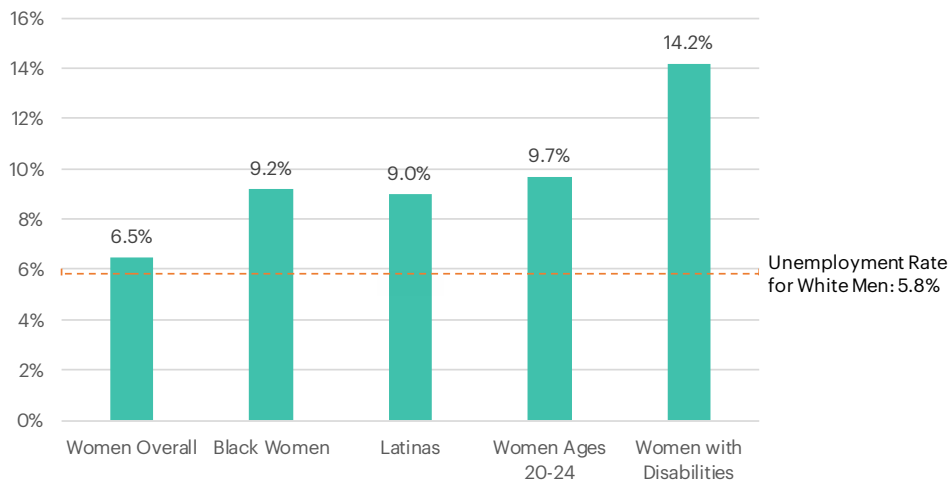
- The economy lost 159,200 education jobs in state and local government last month.¹⁶ While a gender breakdown is not available for these losses, women make up the vast majority of those working education jobs in state and local government, and were likely heavily affected.¹⁷

Due to a misclassification error in the household survey component of every BLS Employment Situation Summary since March, the reported unemployment rate for October slightly underestimates the share of the labor force that was unemployed. BLS estimates that the actual unemployment rate for October was 0.3 percentage points higher than reported. The actual unemployment rates for demographic subgroups are also likely higher than reported.

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

- About 1 in 11 Black women (9.2%) ages 20 and over were unemployed in October.¹⁸ Black women’s unemployment rate was down from 11.1% in September, but was still nearly 1.9 times higher than their pre-pandemic unemployment rate (4.8% in February).¹⁹
- Nearly 1 in 11 Latinas ages 20 and over (9.0%) were unemployed in October, down from 11.0% in September,²⁰ and more than 1.8 times their pre-pandemic unemployment rate (4.9% in February).²¹
- In October, 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 (5.8%).²²
- Nearly 1 in 7 (14.2%) women with disabilities were unemployed in October²³ – an increase of nearly 7 percentage points from February’s rate (7.4%).²⁴
- Pandemic-related job losses continue to hit younger women particularly hard, with nearly 1 in 10 (9.7%) women between the ages of 20 and 24 unemployed in October. The rate for young Black women between the ages of 20 and 24 (15.0%) was even higher.²⁵ For young Latinas between the ages of 20 and 24, the unemployment rate was 9.4% in October.²⁶

Women's Unemployment Rates (October 2020)



Source: BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary Tables A-1, A-2, A-3, A-6, and A-13. Unemployment rates for white men, 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 16-64.

- 1 NWLC calculations based on BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Establishment Data Table B-1: Employees on nonfarm payrolls by industry sector and selected industry detail, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst17.htm>.
- 2 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Establishment Data Table B-1, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbt1.htm>. 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, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Establishment Data Table B-1 and BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Establishment Data Table B-5: Employment of women on nonfarm payrolls by industry sector, seasonally adjusted, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst17.htm>.
- 4 NWLC calculations based on BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-1: Employment Status of the civilian population by sex and age, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst101.htm>. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 5 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Household Data Table A-1, available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNS11000026>. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 6 BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-1. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 7 BLS, historical data for Household Data Table A-1. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 8 BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-1. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 9 NWLC calculations based on BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-1; BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data 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/empst16.htm>; and BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data 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/empst/cpseea27.htm>. 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.
- 10 BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-2: Employment status of the civilian population by race, sex, and age. Figure is seasonally adjusted and is for Black women ages 20 and over.
- 11 BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-3: Employment status of the Hispanic or Latino population by sex and age. Figure is seasonally adjusted and are for Latinas ages 20 and over.
- 12 BLS, historical data for Household Data Table A-2, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab2.htm> and BLS, historical data for Household Data Table A-3, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab3.htm>.
- 13 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Establishment Data Table B-1 and BLS, historical data for Establishment Data Table B-5, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbt5.htm>.
- 14 NWLC calculations based on BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Establishment Data Table B-1 and BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Establishment Data Table B-5.
- 15 *Id.*
- 16 NWLC calculations based on BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Establishment Data Table B-1.
- 17 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-ciw49tixgw5lbbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Governmentworkersfactsheet-2.pdf>.
- 18 BLS, September 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-2.
- 19 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Household Data Table A-2.
- 20 BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-3.
- 21 BLS, historical data for Household Data Table A-3.
- 22 NWLC calculations based on BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-2. Figure is seasonally adjusted.
- 23 BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data 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/empst106.htm>. Figures are for women with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 64.
- 24 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Household Data Table A-6, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab6.htm>.
- 25 BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-13: Employment status of the civilian population by age, sex, and race, available at <https://www.bls.gov/web/empst/cpseea13.htm>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
- 26 BLS, October 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-14: Employment status of the Hispanic or Latino population by age and sex, available at <https://www.bls.gov/web/empst/cpseea14.htm>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.

