

Another 275,000 Women Left the Labor Force in January

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The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) monthly jobs report shows that the economy gained 49,000 net jobs in January.¹ All of the jobs gained were women's jobs, with women gaining 87,000 jobs and men losing 38,000.² Even with January's gains, more than 2 in 5 (44.2%) of the over 22.3 million jobs lost in March and April 2020 due to the COVID-19 crisis have not returned.³ In January, 275,000 women left the labor force, meaning they are no longer working or looking for work.⁴ The total number of women who have left the labor force since the start of the pandemic reached over 2.3 million last month, leaving women's labor force participation rate – the percent of adult women who are either working or looking for work – at 57.0%. Before the pandemic, women's labor force participation rate had not been this low since 1988.⁵ By comparison, nearly 1.8 million men have left the labor force since February 2020.⁶

Nearly 1 in 16 (6.0%) women ages 20 and over were unemployed in January, down from 6.3% in December 2020.⁷ Over recent months, the decline in women's unemployment has been partially driven by women exiting the labor force altogether. The unemployment rate for women ages 20 and over is still nearly twice as high as it was in February 2020 (3.1%).⁸ Adult men ages 20 and over also had an unemployment rate of 6.0% in January, down from 6.4% in December 2020.⁹ Black women and Latinas continue to be hit particularly hard by the economic crisis: More than 1 in 12 Black women ages 20 and over (8.5%),¹⁰ nearly 1 in 11 Latinas (8.8%),¹¹ and more than 1 in 13 Asian women (7.9%) remained unemployed in January.¹² January's jobs data also indicates that many unemployed people have been out of work for most of the COVID-19 crisis. Among adult women ages 20 and over who were unemployed last month, 2 in 5 (40.3%) had been out of work for 6 months or longer. Rates of long-term unemployment were similar for Black women ages 16 and over (38.9%), Latinas ages 16 and over (38.2%), and Asian women ages 16 and over (37.7%).¹³

More than 2 in 5 of the 12.2 million women's jobs lost between February and April 2020 have not yet returned.

- Women have suffered the majority of pandemic-related job losses: Since February 2020, women have lost over 5.3 million net jobs, and account for 53.8% of overall net job loss since the start of the crisis.¹⁴
- The leisure and hospitality sector lost 61,000 jobs in January. Women accounted for 21.3% of these job losses, while making up 53.2% of the leisure and hospitality workforce.¹⁵
- The government sector gained 43,000 jobs last month, with women accounting for all of the gains. Women made up 57.6% of the government workforce.¹⁶

- The retail trade sector lost 37,800 jobs last month. Women accounted for 54.0% of those losses, while making up 48.6% of the retail trade workforce.¹⁷
- The child care sector lost 1,200 jobs last month,¹⁸ bringing the total number of child care jobs lost since the start of the crisis to 173,000. With January's losses, nearly 1 in 6 child care jobs lost since the start of the pandemic have not returned.¹⁹

Due to a misclassification error in the household survey component of every BLS Employment Situation Summary since March 2020, the reported unemployment rate for January slightly underestimates the share of the labor force that was unemployed. BLS estimates that the actual unemployment rate for January was 0.6 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.

- More than 1 in 12 Black women ages 20 and over (8.5%) were unemployed in January.²⁰ Black women's unemployment rate was up from 8.4% in December 2020 and was more than 1.7 times higher than their pre-pandemic unemployment rate (4.9% in February 2020).²¹
- Nearly 1 in 11 Latinas ages 20 and over (8.8%) were unemployed in January, down from 9.1% in December 2020.²² This is nearly 1.8 times their pre-pandemic unemployment rate (4.9% in February 2020).²³
- More than 1 in 13 Asian women ages 20 and over (7.9%) were unemployed in January, up from 6.6% in December 2020, and over 2.6 times higher than their pre-pandemic unemployment rate (3.0% in February 2020).²⁴
- By comparison, the unemployment rate for white men ages 20 and over was 5.5% in January.²⁵
- More than 1 in 9 (11.3%) women with disabilities were unemployed in January²⁶ – an increase of nearly 4 percentage points from their unemployment rate in February 2020 (7.4%).²⁷
- Pandemic-related job losses continue to hit younger women especially hard, with more than 1 in 10 (10.3%) women between the ages of 20 and 24 unemployed in January.²⁸ Unemployment rates for young Latinas between the ages of 20 and 24 (12.0%)²⁹ and young Black women between the ages of 20 and 24 (16.5%) were even higher.³⁰



Source: BLS, January 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.

Many unemployed women have been out of work for 6 months or longer, and many of those who are working are not getting the hours they want or need.

- In January, about 2 in 5 unemployed women ages 20 and over (40.3%) had been out of work for 6 months or longer. Among unemployed women ages 16 and over, 38.9% had been out of work for 6 months or longer, including 38.9% of Black women, 38.2% of Latinas, and 37.7% of Asian women.³¹
- More than 1 in 6 women ages 16 and over (17.0%) working part-time in January were doing so involuntarily, meaning they wanted full-time work. These rates were even higher for Latinas (27.9%), Black women (24.4%), and Asian women (18.5%).³²

1 NWLC calculations based on BLS, January 2021 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/empst.t17.htm>.

2 NWLC calculations based on BLS, January 2021 Employment Situation Summary, Establishment Data Table B-1 and BLS, January 2021 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/empst.t21.htm>.

3 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Establishment Data Table B-1, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbtb1.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.

4 NWLC calculations based on BLS, January 2021 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/empst.t01.htm>. Figure is seasonally adjusted and captures women ages 20 and over.

5 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Household Data Table A-1, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab1.htm>. Figures are seasonally adjusted and capture women ages 20 and over.

6 *Id.* Figure is seasonally adjusted and captures men ages 20 and over.

7 BLS, January 2021 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-1. Figures are seasonally adjusted.

8 BLS, historical data for Household Data Table A-1. Figure is seasonally adjusted.

9 BLS, January 2021 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-1. Figures are seasonally adjusted.

10 BLS, January 2021 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-2: Employment status of the civilian population by race, sex, and age, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t02.htm>. Figure is seasonally adjusted and is for Black women ages 20 and over.

11 BLS, January 2021 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-3: Employment status of the Hispanic or Latino population by sex and age, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t03.htm>. Figure is seasonally adjusted and is for Latinas ages 20 and over.

12 BLS, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Unemployment Rate – 20 yrs. & over, Asian Women, available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU04032267>. Figure is not seasonally adjusted and is for Asian women ages 20 and over.

13 NWLC calculations based on BLS, January 2021 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-36: Unemployed persons by age, sex, race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, marital status, and duration of unemployment, available at <https://www.bls.gov/web/empst/cpseea36.htm>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.

14 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/cesbtb5.htm>.

15 NWLC calculations based on BLS, January 2021 Employment Situation Summary, Establishment Data Table B-1 and BLS, January 2021 Employment Situation Summary, Establishment Data Table B-5.

16 *Id.*

17 *Id.*

18 NWLC calculations based on BLS, January 2021 Employment Situation Summary, Establishment Data Table B-1.

19 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Establishment Data Table B-1.

20 BLS, January 2021 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-2.

21 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Household Data Table A-2, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab2.htm>

22 BLS, January 2021 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-3.

23 BLS, historical data for Household Data Table A-3, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab3.htm>

24 NWLC calculations based on BLS, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Unemployment Rate – 20 yrs. & over, Asian Women.

25 NWLC calculations based on BLS, January 2021 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-2. Figure is seasonally adjusted.

26 BLS, January 2021 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/empst.t06.htm>. Figures are for women with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 64.

27 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Household Data Table A-6, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab6.htm>.

28 BLS, January 2021 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>. Figure is not seasonally adjusted.

29 BLS, January 2021 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>. Figure is not seasonally adjusted.

30 BLS, January 2021 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-13. Figure is not seasonally adjusted.

31 NWLC calculations based on BLS, January 2021 Employment Situation Summary, Household Data Table A-36.

32 NWLC calculations based on BLS, January 2021 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>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted and are for women ages 16 and over.