

Women Need 28 Months of Job Gains at April's Level to Recover Their Pandemic Losses

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The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) monthly jobs report shows that the economy gained 266,000 net jobs in April 2021, marking a slowdown in job growth after 770,000 jobs were gained in March 2021.¹ Women accounted for 60.5% of job gains last month, gaining 161,000 jobs while men gained 105,000. Nevertheless, women would need more than two years (28 straight months) of job gains at last month's level to recover the over 4.5 million net jobs they have lost since February 2020.²

After 2 months of gains in women's labor force participation, that trend reversed in April, as 165,000 women ages 20 and over dropped out of the labor force, meaning they are neither working nor looking for work. Accounting for these losses, the net number of women who have left the labor force since the start of the pandemic is nearly 2 million. By comparison, 355,000 men entered the labor force in April 2021, meaning that more than 2.2 men entered the labor force last month for every woman who exited. Women's labor force participation rate was 57.2% last month, down from 57.4% in March 2021, and lower than their pre-pandemic labor force participation rate of 59.2% in February 2020. Before the pandemic, women's labor force participation rate had not been as low as 57.2% since October 1988. Nearly 1.6 million net men have left the labor force since February 2020, and men's labor force participation rate was 69.8% in April 2021, compared to 71.6% in February 2020.³

Nearly 1 in 18 (5.6%) women ages 20 and over were unemployed in April 2021, slightly down from 5.7% in March 2021. The unemployment rate for women ages 20 and over is still more than 1.8 times higher than their pre-pandemic unemployment rate of 3.1% in February 2020.⁴ 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 (8.6%)⁵ and nearly 1 in 13 Latinas ages 20 and over (7.5%) were unemployed last month.⁶ Last month's jobs data also indicates that many unemployed people have been out of work for extended periods of time. Among women ages 20 and over who were unemployed last month, more than 2 in 5 (44.2%) had been out of work for 6 months or longer. Rates of long-term unemployment were similar for women ages 16 and over (42.0%), Asian women ages 16 and over (45.5%), Black women ages 16 and over (45.8%), and Latinas ages 16 and over (41.3%).⁷

Women gained 161,000 jobs last month but are still short over 4.5 million jobs since February 2020.

- The leisure and hospitality sector gained 331,000 jobs in April and was the primary driver of women's job gains last month. Women gained 150,000 leisure and hospitality jobs, with this sector accounting for more than 9 in 10 (93.2%) of the 161,000 jobs women gained last month. But women accounted for just 45.3% of last month's overall gains in the leisure and hospitality sector and made up 53.0% of the sector's workforce.
- The government sector gained 48,000 jobs last month. Women accounted for 93.8% of these gains while making up 57.6% of the government workforce.
- The retail trade sector lost 15,300 jobs last month. Women accounted for all of these losses and then some, losing 26,700 jobs while men added 11,400 retail jobs last month. Women have lost 94.3% of the nearly 400,000 net jobs lost in the retail sector since February 2020, despite making up 48.4% of the sector's workforce.
- The child care sector gained 11,500 jobs last month. Accounting for these gains, the net number of child care jobs lost since February 2020 is 152,800. The child care sector has lost more than 1 in 7 (14.6%) jobs since the start of the crisis.⁸

Due to a misclassification error in the household survey component of every BLS Employment Situation Summary since March 2020, the reported unemployment rate for April 2021 slightly underestimates the share of the labor force that was unemployed. BLS estimates that the actual unemployment rate for April 2021 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.

- More than 1 in 12 Black women ages 20 and over (8.6%) were unemployed in April 2021, down from 8.7% in March 2021. Black women's unemployment rate last month was still nearly 1.8 times higher than their pre-pandemic unemployment rate (4.9% in February 2020). Similarly, more than 1 in 10 Black men ages 20 and over (10.2%) were unemployed in April 2021, which is 1.7 times their pre-pandemic unemployment rate of 6.0% in February 2020.⁹
- Nearly 1 in 13 Latinas ages 20 and over (7.5%) were unemployed in April 2021, up from 7.3% in March 2021. This is still over 1.5 times their pre-pandemic unemployment rate (4.9% in February 2020).¹⁰
- Nearly 1 in 16 Asian women ages 20 and over (6.1%) were unemployed in April 2021, up from 5.7% in March 2021, and over 2 times higher than their pre-pandemic unemployment rate (3.0% in February 2020).¹¹
- By comparison, the unemployment rate for white men ages 20 and over was 5.3% in April 2021.¹²
- Nearly 1 in 11 women with disabilities (9.0%) were unemployed in April 2021. By comparison, their pre-pandemic unemployment rate in February 2020 was 7.4%.¹³
- Pandemic-related job losses continue to hit younger women especially hard, with more than 1 in 12 (8.5%) women between the ages of 20 and 24 unemployed in April 2021.¹⁴ The unemployment rate for Latinas ages 20 to 24 was even higher at 9.8%,¹⁵ and the unemployment rate for Black women ages 20 to 24 was much higher at 15.1%.¹⁶

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 April 2021, more than 2 in 5 unemployed women ages 20 and over (44.2%) had been out of work for 6 months or longer. Among unemployed women ages 16 and over, 42.0% had been out of work for 6 months or longer, including 45.5% of Asian women, 45.8% of Black women, and 41.3% of Latinas.¹⁷
- Additionally, in April 2021, nearly 3 in 10 unemployed women ages 16 and over (28.4%) had been out of work for a year or longer.¹⁸
- More than 1 in 8 women ages 16 and over (12.9%) working part-time in April 2021 were doing so involuntarily, meaning they wanted full-time work. These rates were even higher for Asian women (16.5%), Black women (19.4%), and Latinas (19.8%).¹⁹

If the nearly 2 million women who have left the labor force since February 2020 were counted among the unemployed, women’s unemployment would have been 8.1% last month.

Reported unemployment rates do not capture people who have left the labor force entirely, as they are no longer counted among those who are unemployed. If the nearly 2 million women who have left the labor force since February 2020 were counted as unemployed in April 2021, women’s unemployment rate would have been 8.1% in April 2021 instead of the reported 5.6%. Similarly, if the nearly 1.6 million men who have left the labor force since February 2020 were counted as unemployed, men’s unemployment rate would have been 7.8% last month instead of the reported 6.1%.²⁰

Since February 2020, 418,000 Black women have left the labor force, along with 622,000 Latinas. If these women were counted as unemployed, the unemployment rate for Black women in April 2021 would have been 12.2% instead of 8.6% and Latinas’ unemployment rate would have been 12.1% instead of 7.5%.²¹

1 National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) calculations using Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), “Employees on Nonfarm Payrolls by Industry Sector and Selected Industry Detail,” Table B-1 in *April 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: May 7, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t17.htm>. Historical data available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbtab1.htm>. Figures are seasonally adjusted.

2 NWLC calculations using BLS, “Employment of Women on Nonfarm Payrolls by Industry Sector, Seasonally Adjusted,” Table B-5 in *April 2021 Employment Situation Summary*, (Washington, DC: May 7, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t21.htm>. Historical data available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbtab5.htm>. Throughout this factsheet, we measure changes since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic using February 2020 as a reference point.

3 NWLC calculations using BLS, “Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Sex and Age,” Table A-1 in *April 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: May 7, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t01.htm>. Historical data available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab1.htm>. Figures are seasonally adjusted and capture women and men ages 20 and over.

4 *Ibid.*

5 BLS, “Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Race, Sex, and Age,” Table A-2 in *April 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: May 7, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t02.htm>. Figure is seasonally adjusted.

6 BLS, “Employment status of the Hispanic or Latino population by sex and age,” Table A-3 in *April 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: May 7, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t03.htm>. Figure is seasonally adjusted.

7 NWLC calculations using BLS, “Unemployed Persons by Age, Sex, Race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, Marital status, and Duration of Unemployment,” Table A-36 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey* (Washington, DC: May 7, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpseea36.htm>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.

8 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table B-1 in *April 2021 Employment Situation Summary* and BLS, Table B-5 in *April 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. Figures are seasonally adjusted.

9 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-2 in *April 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. Figures are seasonally adjusted.

- 10 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-3 in *April 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 11 NWLC calculations using BLS, "(Unadj) Unemployment Rate – Asian, Women," *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey* (Washington, DC: May 7, 2021), <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU04032342>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
- 12 BLS, Table A-2 in *April 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. Figure is seasonally adjusted.
- 13 NWLC calculations using "Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Sex, Age, and Disability Status, Not Seasonally Adjusted," Table A-6 in *April 2021 Employment Situation Summary*, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t06.htm>. Historical data available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab6.htm>.
- 14 BLS, "Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Age, Sex, and Race," Table A-13 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey* (Washington, DC: May 7, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpseea13.htm>. Figure is not seasonally adjusted.
- 15 BLS, "Employment Status of the Hispanic or Latino Population by Age and Sex," Table A-14 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey* (Washington, DC: May 7, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpseea14.htm>. Figure is not seasonally adjusted.
- 16 BLS, Table A-3 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*. Figure is not seasonally adjusted.
- 17 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-36 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
- 18 NWLC calculations using BLS, "(Unadj) Number Unemployed for 52 Weeks & Over, Women," *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey* (Washington, DC: May 7, 2021), <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU03008735> and BLS, Table A-36 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*. Figure is not seasonally adjusted.
- 19 NWLC calculations using BLS, "Persons at Work in Nonagricultural Industries by Age, Sex, Race, Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, Marital Status, and Usual Full- or Part-Time Status," Table A-27 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey* (Washington, DC: May 7, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpseea27.htm>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted and are for women ages 16 and over.
- 20 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-1 in *April 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. To calculate these adjusted unemployment rates, NWLC added the 1,998,000 women who have dropped out of the labor force since February 2020 to the number of women in April 2021 who were in the labor force and to the number of women who were unemployed and recalculated the share of women in the labor force who were unemployed. The same was done for men.
- 21 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-2 in *April 2021 Employment Situation Summary* and BLS, Table A-3 in *April 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. To calculate these adjusted unemployment rates, NWLC added the 418,000 Black women who have dropped out of the labor force since February 2020 to the number of Black women in April 2021 who were in the labor force and to the number of Black women who were unemployed and recalculated the share of women in the labor force who were unemployed. The same was done for Latinas.