

# At August's Rate, It Will Take Women 9 Years to Regain The Jobs They Lost In the Pandemic

**BY JASMINE TUCKER**

The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) monthly jobs report shows that the economy gained 235,000 jobs in August 2021.<sup>1</sup> Women accounted for just 11.9% of job gains last month, gaining 28,000 jobs while men gained 207,000. Women will need nearly 9 straight years of job gains at last month's level to recover the nearly 3.0 million net jobs they have lost since February 2020.<sup>2</sup>

Last month, 41,000 women ages 20 and over left the labor force, meaning they are now neither working nor looking for work. Meanwhile, 139,000 men ages 20 and over joined the labor force. Women's labor force participation fell to 57.4% in August 2021 from 57.5% in July 2021. This remains well below their pre-pandemic labor force participation rate of 59.2% in February 2020. Before the pandemic started, women's labor force participation rate had not been as low as 57.4% since December 1988.<sup>3</sup>

Over 1 in 21 (4.8%) women ages 20 and over were unemployed in August 2021, down from 5.0% in July 2021. The unemployment rate for women ages 20 and over is still over 1.5 times higher than their pre-pandemic unemployment rate of 3.1% in February 2020.<sup>4</sup> Unemployment rates for Black workers increased in August 2021, while rates for other groups ages 20 and over declined. Over 1 in 13 Black women ages 20 and over (7.9%) were unemployed last month, along with about 1 in 11 Black men ages 20 and over (9.1%). Black workers entered the labor force in large numbers in August 2021, and this increase likely contributed to increased unemployment rates.<sup>5</sup>

## Women gained just 28,000 jobs last month and are still short nearly 3.0 million jobs since February 2020.

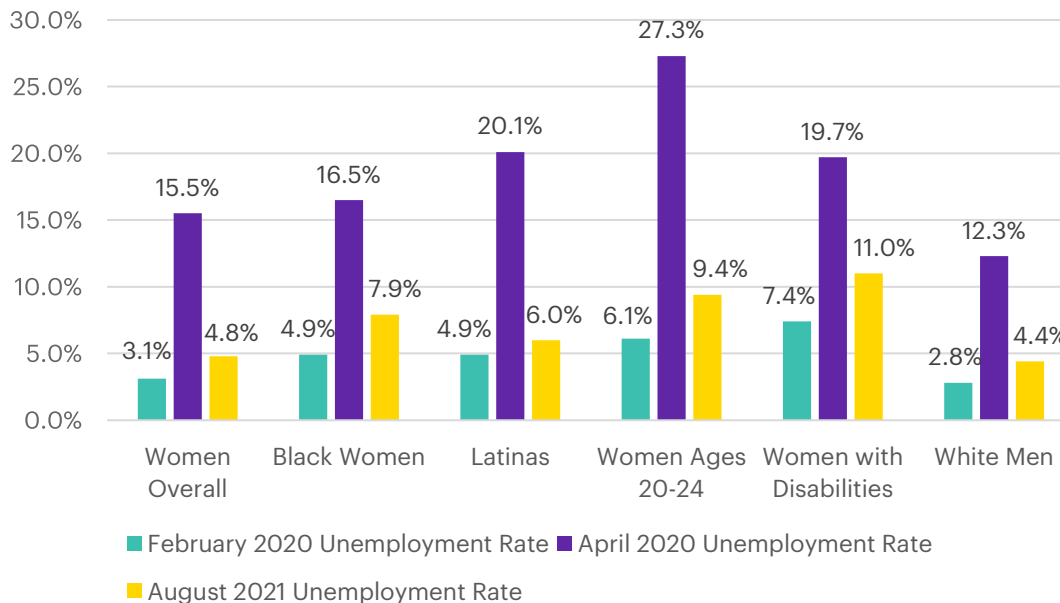
- Women lost 6,000 leisure and hospitality jobs while men gained 6,000 jobs. Women made up 52.9% of the leisure and hospitality sector's workforce.
- The government sector lost 8,000 jobs last month. Women lost 27,000 jobs while men gained 19,000 jobs in this sector. Women made up 57.9% of the government sector's workforce. Within the larger government sector, jobs were lost in both state government education (20,700) and local government education (5,700) subsectors, both of which have female dominated workforces.
- Women lost 16,000 jobs in the education and health services sector, while men gained 51,000. Women made up 77.0% of the education and health services workforce.
- Women gained 36,000 in the professional and business services sector in August 2021. Women gained 35.1% of the jobs added to this sector and made up 46.3% of the professional and business services workforce.
- The child care sector lost 5,900 jobs last month. Accounting for August's losses, the net number of child care jobs lost since February 2020 is 126,700. The child care sector has lost nearly 1 in 8 (12.1%) jobs since the start of the crisis.<sup>6</sup>

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

- Over 1 in 13 Black women ages 20 and over (7.9%) were unemployed in August 2021, up from 7.6% in July 2021. Black women's unemployment rate last month was more than 1.5 times higher than their pre-pandemic unemployment rate (4.9% in February 2020). About 1 in 11 Black men ages 20 and over (9.1%) were unemployed in August 2021, which is over 1.5 times their pre-pandemic unemployment rate of 6.0% in February 2020.<sup>7</sup>
- Over 1 in 17 Latinas ages 20 and over (6.0%) were unemployed in August 2021, down from 6.7% in July 2021. This is still over 1.2 times their pre-pandemic unemployment rate (4.9% in February 2020).<sup>8</sup>
- Over 1 in 24 Asian women ages 20 and over (4.2%) were unemployed in August 2021, down from 4.9% in July 2021, and 1.4 times higher than their pre-pandemic unemployment rate (3.0% in February 2020).<sup>9</sup>
- By comparison, the unemployment rate for white men ages 20 and over was 4.4% in August 2021.<sup>10</sup>
- Nearly 1 in 9 women with disabilities (11.0%) were unemployed in August 2021. By comparison, their pre-pandemic unemployment rate in February 2020 was 7.4%.<sup>11</sup>
- Pandemic-related job losses continue to hit younger women especially hard, with more than 1 in 11 (9.4%) women between the ages of 20 and 24 unemployed in August 2021.<sup>12</sup> The unemployment rate was even higher for Black women ages 20 to 24 at 20.0%.<sup>13</sup>

## Unemployment Rates by Month for Selected Demographics



Source: BLS, *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 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.

In August 2021, nearly 2 in 5 unemployed women ages 20 and over (38.8%) had been out of work for 6 months or longer. Among unemployed women ages 16 and over, 36.8% had been out of work for 6 months or longer, including 35.6% of unemployed Asian women, 37.5% of unemployed Black women, and 37.3% of unemployed Latinas.<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, in August 2021, more than 1 in 4 unemployed women ages 16 and over (27.2%) had been out of work for a year or longer.<sup>15</sup>

### If the over 1.6 million women who have left the labor force since February 2020 were counted among the unemployed, women's unemployment would have been 6.9% last month.

Reported unemployment rates do not capture people who have left the labor force entirely and are no longer counted as unemployed. If the over 1.6 million women who have left the labor force since February 2020 were counted as unemployed in August 2021, women's unemployment rate would have been 6.9% in August 2021 instead of the reported 4.8%. Similarly, if the over 1.2 million men who have left the labor force since February 2020 were counted as unemployed, men's unemployment rate would have been 6.5% last month instead of the reported 5.1%.<sup>16</sup>

Since February 2020, 253,000 Black women have left the labor force, along with 435,000 Latinas. If these women were counted as unemployed, the unemployment rate for Black women in August 2021 would have been 10.1% instead of 7.9% and Latinas' unemployment rate would have been 9.3% instead of 6.0%.<sup>17</sup>

- 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 *August 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: September 3, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst17.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 *August 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: September 3, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.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 *August 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: September 3, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.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 *August 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: September 3, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t02.htm>. Figure is seasonally adjusted.
- 6 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table B-1 in *August 2021 Employment Situation Summary* and BLS, Table B-5 in *August 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. State and local government education data available at <https://www.bls.gov/web/empst/cese5a.htm>. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 7 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-2 in *August 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. Historical data available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab2.htm>. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 8 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-3 in *August 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. Historical data available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab2.htm>. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 9 NWLC calculations using BLS, "(Unadj) Unemployment Rate - Asian, Women," *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey* (Washington, DC: September 3, 2021), <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU04032342>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
- 10 BLS, Table A-2 in *August 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. Figure is seasonally adjusted.
- 11 NWLC calculations using "Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Sex, Age, and Disability Status, Not Seasonally Adjusted," Table A-6 in *August 2021 Employment Situation Summary*, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t06.htm>. Historical data available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab6.htm>.
- 12 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: September 3, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/web/empst/cpseea13.htm>. Figure is not seasonally adjusted.
- 13 BLS, Table A-13 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*. Figure is not seasonally adjusted.
- 14 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-36 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
- 15 NWLC calculations using BLS, "(Unadj) Number Unemployed for 52 Weeks & Over, Women," *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey* (Washington, DC: September 3, 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.
- 16 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-1 in *August 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. To calculate these adjusted unemployment rates, NWLC added the 1,659,000 women who have dropped out of the labor force since February 2020 to the number of women in August 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.
- 17 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-2 in *August 2021 Employment Situation Summary* and BLS, Table A-3 in *August 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. To calculate these adjusted unemployment rates, NWLC added the 253,000 Black women who have dropped out of the labor force since February 2020 to the number of Black women in August 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.