

Women Gained 57% of Jobs Added to the Economy in October But Still Need Almost 8 Months of Growth at October's Level to Recover Pandemic Losses

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The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) monthly jobs report shows that the economy gained 531,000 jobs in October 2021.¹ Women gained 57.3% of these jobs, or 304,000, while men gained 227,000 jobs last month.² Despite these gains, it would take nearly eight months of growth at October's level to gain back the over 4.2 million jobs the economy has lost since February 2020.³

In addition, last month, 251,000 women ages 20 and over joined the labor force, meaning they are now working or looking for work. Meanwhile, 158,000 men ages 20 and over left the labor force last month. Even with women rejoining the labor force in October, women's labor force participation was still just 57.3% in October 2021, up from 57.1% in September 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 57.3% since 1988, more than a generation ago.⁴

While unemployment rates have been trending down in recent months, several groups experienced increases in unemployment between September and October 2021, including women overall (4.2% to 4.4%),⁵ white women (3.7% to 3.9%),⁶ Asian women (3.4% to 4.4%),⁷ Latinas (5.6% to 5.7%),⁸ and Black men (8.0% to 8.3%).⁹ These elevated unemployment rates were likely driven by increases in labor force participation among these groups, and the fact that not everyone who re-entered the labor force last month found work.

Women gained 304,000 jobs last month and are still short over 2.4 million jobs since February 2020.

- Since February 2020, the economy has experienced a net loss of over 4.2 million jobs; women account for 57.3% of those losses.

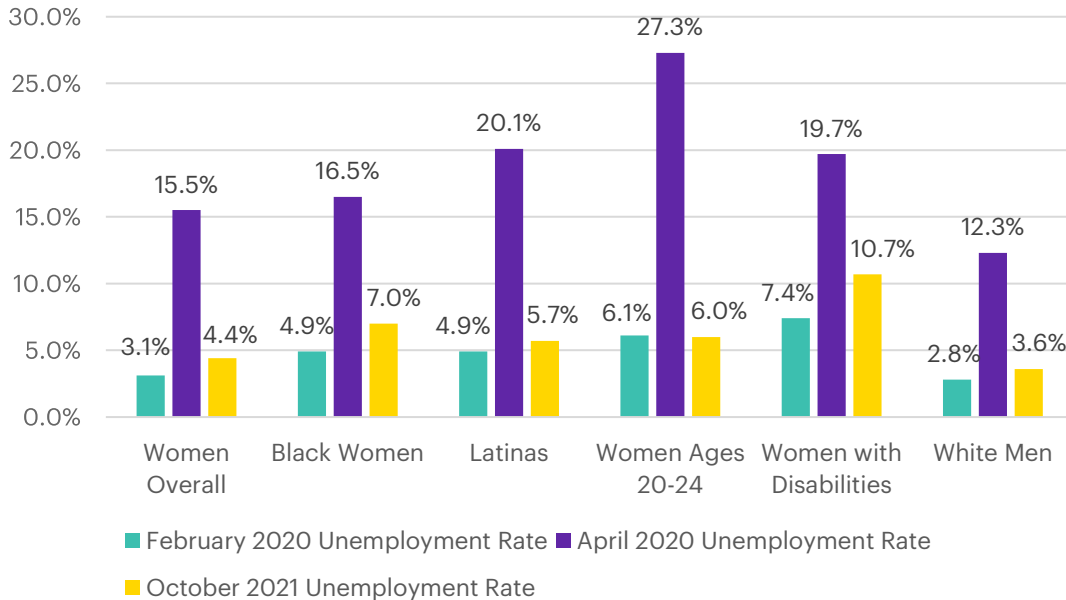
- The leisure and hospitality sector gained 164,000 jobs in October 2021; 96,000 of these jobs went to women. Women accounted for 58.5% of last month's gains in the leisure and hospitality sector and make up 52.9% of the sector's workforce.
- The retail trade sector gained 35,300 jobs in October 2021; all of these gains went to women while men lost 4,300 retail jobs. Women make up 48.7% of the sector's workforce.
- Combined, jobs added to the leisure and hospitality and retail trade sectors accounted for 44.6% of women's job gains in October 2021.
- The government sector lost 73,000 jobs last month. Women bore nearly all of these losses: women lost 72,000 government jobs, while men lost 1,000 jobs in this sector. Women make up 57.8% of the government sector's workforce. Within the larger government sector, jobs were lost in both state government education (21,500) and local government education (43,400) subsectors, both of which have workforces dominated by women.
- The education and health services sector gained 64,000 jobs in October 2021; 58,000 of these jobs went to women. Women accounted for 90.6% of last month's gains in the education and health services sector and make up 77.0% of the education and health services workforce.
- The child care sector gained just 700 jobs last month. The net number of child care jobs lost since February 2020 is 105,400. The child care sector has lost more than 1 in 10 jobs (10.1%) since the start of the crisis.¹⁰

Due to a misclassification error in the household survey component of every BLS Employment Situation Summary since March 2020, the reported unemployment rate for October 2021 slightly underestimates the share of the labor force that was unemployed. BLS estimates that the actual unemployment rate for October 2021 was 0.1 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.

- Nearly 1 in 14 Black women ages 20 and over (7.0%) were unemployed in October 2021, down from 7.3% in September 2021. About 1 in 12 Black men ages 20 and over (8.3%) were unemployed in October 2021, up from 8.0% in September 2021.¹¹
- Nearly 1 in 17 Latinas ages 20 and over (5.7%) were unemployed in October 2021, up from 5.6% in September 2021.¹²
- Over 1 in 23 Asian women ages 20 and over (4.4%) were unemployed in October 2021, up from 3.4% in September 2021.¹³
- By comparison, the unemployment rate for white men ages 20 and over was 3.6% in October 2021, down from 4.2% in September 2021.¹⁴
- More than 1 in 10 women with disabilities (10.7%) were unemployed in October 2021, down from 10.8% in September 2021.¹⁵
- Nearly 1 in 16 young women between the ages of 20 and 24 (6.0%) were unemployed in October 2021.¹⁶ The unemployment rate was higher for Latinas ages 20 to 24 at 6.9%¹⁷ and even higher for Black women ages 20 to 24 at 10.9%.¹⁸

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 October 2021, nearly 1 in 3 unemployed women ages 20 and over (32.6%) had been out of work for six months or longer. Among unemployed women ages 16 and over, 30.7% had been out of work for six months or longer, including 36.8% of unemployed Asian women, 30.0% of unemployed Black women, and 27.1% of unemployed Latinas.¹⁹

Additionally, in October 2021, nearly 1 in 4 unemployed women ages 16 and over (23.7%) had been out of work for a year or longer.²⁰

If the over 1.7 million women who have left the labor force since February 2020 were counted among the unemployed, women's unemployment would have been 6.6% 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 1.7 million women who have left the labor force since February 2020 were counted as unemployed in October 2021, women's unemployment rate would have been 6.6% instead of the reported 4.4%. 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 5.7% last month instead of the reported 4.3%.²¹

Since February 2020, 343,000 Black women have left the labor force, along with 383,000 Latinas. If these women were counted as unemployed, the unemployment rate for Black women in October 2021 would have been 10.0% instead of 7.0%, and Latinas' unemployment rate would have been 8.6% instead of 5.7%.²²

Over 1.8 million women are underemployed.

Reported unemployment rates also do not capture people who are working fewer hours than they want to be. Nearly 18.6 million women worked part time last month, 9.7% of whom (over 1.8 million) were doing so involuntarily, meaning they wanted but could not get full-time work.²³

- 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 *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: November 5, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst117.htm>. Historical data available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbt1.htm>. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 2 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table B-1 in *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary* and BLS, "Employment of Women on Nonfarm Payrolls by Industry Sector, Seasonally Adjusted," Table B-5 in *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: November 5, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst121.htm>. Historical data available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbt5.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, Table B-1 in *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary*.
- 4 NWLC calculations using BLS, "Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Sex and Age," Table A-1 in *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: November 5, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst101.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.
- 5 BLS, Table A-1 in *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. 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.
- 6 BLS, "Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Race, Sex, and Age," Table A-2 in *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: November 5, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst102.htm>. Figure is seasonally adjusted.
- 7 BLS, "(Unadj) Unemployment Rate – Asian, Women," *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey* (Washington, DC: November 5, 2021), <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU04032342>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
- 8 BLS, "Employment status of the Hispanic or Latino population by sex and age," Table A-3 in *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: November 5, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst103.htm>. Figure is seasonally adjusted.
- 9 BLS, Table A-2 in *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary*, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst102.htm>. Figure is seasonally adjusted.
- 10 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table B-1 in *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary* and BLS, Table B-5 in *September 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. State and local government education data available at <https://www.bls.gov/web/empst/cese5a.htm>. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 11 BLS, Table A-2 in *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. Figure is seasonally adjusted.
- 12 BLS, Table A-3 in *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 13 BLS, "(Unadj) Unemployment Rate – Asian, Women," *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey* (Washington, DC: November 5, 2021), <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU04032342>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
- 14 BLS, Table A-2 in *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. Figure is seasonally adjusted.
- 15 BLS, "Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Sex, Age, and Disability Status, Not Seasonally Adjusted," Table A-6 in *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary*, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst106.htm>. Historical data available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab6.htm>.
- 16 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: November 5, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/web/empst/cpseea13.htm>. Figure is not seasonally adjusted.
- 17 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: November 5, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/web/empst/cpseea14.htm>. Figure is not seasonally adjusted.
- 18 BLS, Table A-13 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*. Figure is not seasonally adjusted.
- 19 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-36 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
- 20 NWLC calculations using BLS, "(Unadj) Number Unemployed for 52 Weeks & Over, Women," *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey* (Washington, DC: November 5, 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.
- 21 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-1 in *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. To calculate these adjusted unemployment rates, NWLC added the 1,717,000 women who have dropped out of the labor force since February 2020 to the number of women in October 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.
- 22 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-2 in *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary* and BLS, Table A-3 in *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. To calculate these adjusted unemployment rates, NWLC added the 343,000 Black women who have dropped out of the labor force since February 2020 to the number of Black women in October 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.
- 23 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 *October 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: November 5, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/web/empst/cpseea27.htm>.