

Black Women's Unemployment Falls Sharply to 5% in November

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The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) monthly jobs report shows that the economy gained 210,000 jobs in November 2021.¹ Women gained 36.2% of these jobs, or 76,000, while men gained 134,000 jobs last month.² Despite these gains, it would take over 18 months of growth at November's level to gain back the over 3.9 million jobs the economy has lost since February 2020.³

In addition, last month, 274,000 women ages 20 and over joined the labor force, meaning they are now working or looking for work. 320,000 men ages 20 and over also joined the labor force last month. Even with women rejoining the labor force in October, women's labor force participation was still just 57.5% in November 2021, up from 57.3% in October 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 57.5% since 1989, more than a generation ago.⁴

Unemployment rates trended down across the board.⁵ Most notably, Black women's unemployment dropped from 7.0% in October to 5.0% in November. 212,000 fewer Black women were unemployed in November compared to the previous month. However, this drop in unemployment was driven both by job gains and labor force exits: 91,000 Black women left the labor force, even during a month when women overall reentered the labor force in significant numbers, while 121,000 Black women gained jobs.⁶ Except for Black women, every group ages 20 and over experienced gains in labor force participation in November.

Women gained 76,000 jobs last month and are still short nearly 2.3 million jobs since February 2020.

- Since February 2020, the economy has experienced a net loss of over 3.9 million jobs; women account for 58.2% of those losses.
- The leisure and hospitality sector gained 23,000 jobs in November 2021; 13,000 of these jobs went to women. Women accounted for 56.5% of last month's gains in the leisure and hospitality sector and make up 52.9% of the sector's workforce.

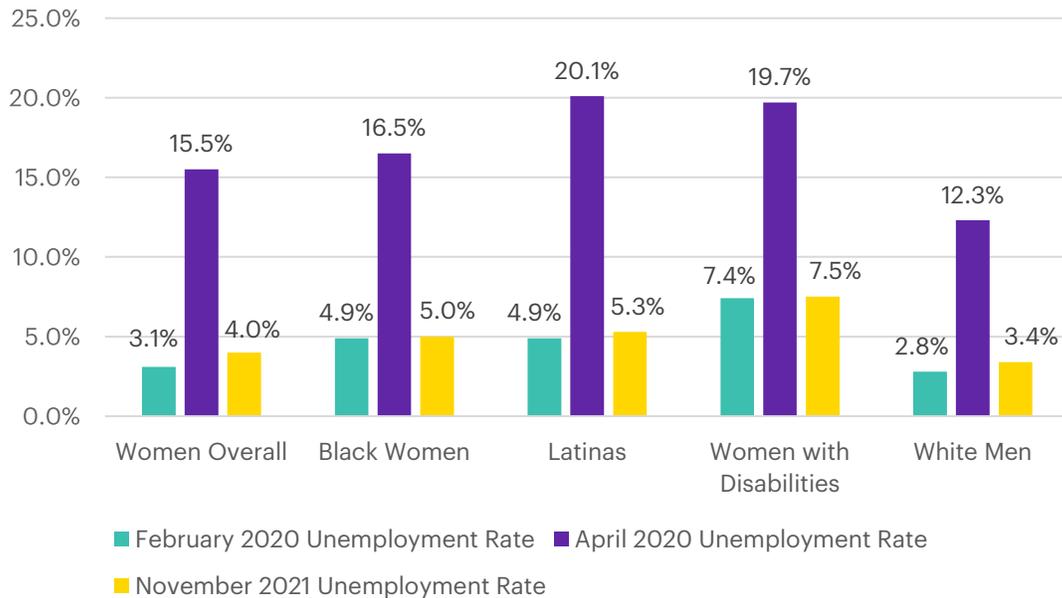
- The retail trade sector lost 20,400 jobs in November 2021; men accounted for all of these losses while women gained 9,900 retail jobs. Women make up 48.9% of the sector's workforce.
- The government sector lost 25,000 jobs last month. Women lost 18,000 jobs in this sector while men lost 7,000 jobs. Women make up 57.8% of the government sector's workforce. Within the larger government sector, jobs were lost in both state government education (3,000) and local government education (12,600) subsectors, both of which have workforces dominated by women.
- The education and health services sector gained 4,000 jobs in November 2021; women accounted for all of these gains while men lost 2,000 jobs. Women make up 77.0% of the education and health services workforce.
- The child care sector lost 2,100 jobs last month. The net number of child care jobs lost since February 2020 is 108,100. The child care sector has lost more than 1 in 10 jobs (10.3%) since the start of the crisis.⁷

Due to a misclassification error in the household survey component of every BLS Employment Situation Summary since March 2020, the reported unemployment rate for November 2021 slightly underestimates the share of the labor force that was unemployed. BLS estimates that the actual unemployment rate for November 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 higher rates for Black women, Latinas, and other demographic groups.

- About 1 in 20 Black women ages 20 and over (5.0%) were unemployed in November 2021, down from 7.0% in October 2021. Over 1 in 14 Black men ages 20 and over (7.3%) were unemployed in November 2021, down from 8.3% in October 2021.⁸
- Over 1 in 19 Latinas ages 20 and over (5.3%) were unemployed in November 2021, down from 5.7% in October 2021.⁹
- Over 1 in 26 Asian women ages 20 and over (3.9%) were unemployed in November 2021, down from 4.4% in October 2021.¹⁰
- By comparison, the unemployment rate for white men ages 20 and over was 3.4% in November 2021, down from 3.6% in October 2021.¹¹
- Nearly 1 in 13 women with disabilities (7.5%) were unemployed in November 2021, down from 10.7% in October 2021.¹²

Unemployment Rates by Month for Selected Demographics



Source: BLS, Employment Situation Summary Tables A-1, A-2, A-3, and A-6. 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 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 November 2021, over 1 in 3 unemployed women ages 20 and over (35.0%) had been out of work for six months or longer. Among unemployed women ages 16 and over, 32.5% had been out of work for six months or longer, including 38.8% of unemployed Asian women, 38.0% of unemployed Black women, and 30.6% of unemployed Latinas.¹³

Additionally, in November 2021, nearly 1 in 4 unemployed women ages 16 and over (23.0%) had been out of work for a year or longer.¹⁴

If the over 1.4 million women who have left the labor force since February 2020 were counted among the unemployed, women's unemployment would have been 5.8% 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 1.4 million women who have left the labor force since February 2020 were counted as unemployed in November 2021, women's unemployment rate would have been 5.8% instead of the reported 4.0%. Similarly, if the 921,000 men who have left the labor force since February 2020 were counted as unemployed, men's unemployment rate would have been 5.0% last month instead of the reported 4.0%.¹⁵

Since February 2020, 434,000 Black women have left the labor force, along with 256,000 Latinas. If these women were counted as unemployed, the unemployment rate for Black women in November 2021 would have been 8.8% instead of 5.0%, and Latinas' unemployment rate would have been 7.2% instead of 5.3%.²²

- 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 *November 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: December 3, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t17.htm>. Historical data available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbtat1.htm>. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 2 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table B-1 in *November 2021 Employment Situation Summary* and BLS, "Employment of Women on Nonfarm Payrolls by Industry Sector, Seasonally Adjusted," Table B-5 in *November 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: December 3, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t21.htm>. Historical data available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbtat5.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 *November 2021 Employment Situation Summary*.
- 4 NWLC calculations using BLS, "Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Sex and Age," Table A-1 in *November 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: December 3, 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.
- 5 BLS, Table A-1 in *November 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 *November 2021 Employment Situation Summary* (Washington, DC: December 3, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t02.htm>. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 7 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table B-1 in *November 2021 Employment Situation Summary* and BLS, Table B-5 in *November 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. State and local government education data available at <https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cese5a.htm>. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 8 BLS, Table A-2 in *November 2021 Employment Situation Summary*, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t02.htm>. Figure is seasonally adjusted.
- 9 BLS, Table A-3 in *November 2021 Employment Situation Summary*, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t03.htm>. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 10 BLS, "(Unadj) Unemployment Rate - Asian, Women," *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey* (Washington, DC: December 3, 2021), <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU04032342>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
- 11 BLS, Table A-2 in *November 2021 Employment Situation Summary*, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t02.htm>. Figure is seasonally adjusted.
- 12 BLS, "Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Sex, Age, and Disability Status, Not Seasonally Adjusted," Table A-6 in *November 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>.
- 13 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-36 in *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
- 14 NWLC calculations using BLS, "(Unadj) Number Unemployed for 52 Weeks & Over, Women," *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey* (Washington, DC: December 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.
- 15 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-1 in *November 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. To calculate these adjusted unemployment rates, NWLC added the 1,443,000 women who have dropped out of the labor force since February 2020 to the number of women in November 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.
- 16 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-2 in *November 2021 Employment Situation Summary* and BLS, Table A-3 in *November 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. To calculate these adjusted unemployment rates, NWLC added the 434,000 Black women who have dropped out of the labor force since February 2020 to the number of Black women in November 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.