

# There Are Now 10,000 More Women in the Labor Force Than in February 2020

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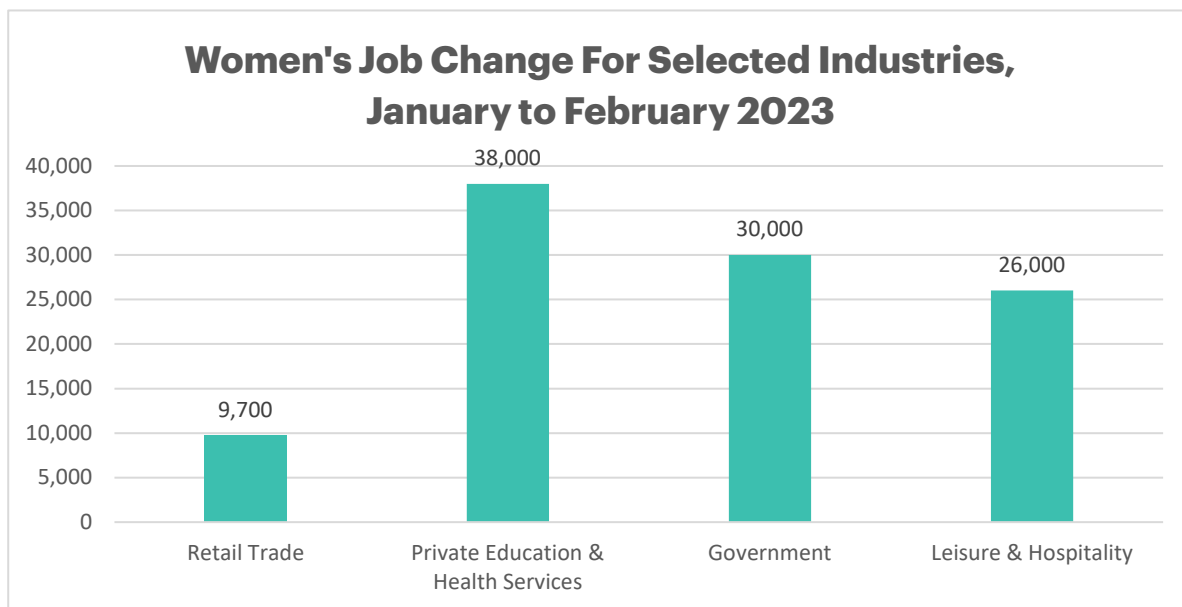
The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data showed that for the first time since the pandemic began, the number of women in the labor force exceeds pre-pandemic numbers: there are now 10,000 more women ages 20 and over in the labor force than in February 2020. Meanwhile, there are over 1.4 million more men in the labor force now than in February 2020. This means it took women three years to return to their pre-pandemic labor force size. By comparison, men returned to their pre-pandemic labor force size in less than two years. While the number of women in the labor force now exceeds the number immediately before the pandemic, women's labor force participation rate remains lower, because the population has grown over the last three years. Specifically, women's labor force participation was 58.5% in February, up from 58.3% in January, but still below their pre-pandemic labor force participation rate of 59.3% in February 2020.<sup>2</sup>

The data also showed the economy added 311,000 jobs in February, 153,000 of which (49.2%) were women's jobs. This different measure indicates that after February's job gains, women now hold over 1.1 million more net jobs than in February 2020; by comparison, men hold over 1.8 million more net jobs now than in February 2020. By this different measure, from a separate data source, women's net jobs reached pre-pandemic levels in August 2022, while men's net jobs reached pre-pandemic levels in March 2022.<sup>3</sup>

## Women gained 153,000 jobs last month but women's job gains over the last three years still lag behind men's job gains.

- Since February 2020, the economy has experienced a net gain of nearly 3.0 million jobs. Those jobs have disproportionately gone to men. In February 2023, men held over 1.8 million more net jobs, while women held over 1.1 million more net jobs compared to February 2020.
- The retail trade sector gained 50,100 jobs in February 2023. Women gained 9,700 jobs, or 19.4% of the jobs added. Women make up 48.4% of the retail trade workforce. Three years into the pandemic, however, women held 146,100 fewer retail trade jobs in February 2023 than in February 2020.

- The leisure and hospitality sector gained 105,000 jobs in February 2023. Women gained 26,000 jobs in this sector, or 24.8% of the jobs added<sup>4</sup>—but while leisure and hospitality jobs have been a key driver of the recovery for women, many of these jobs have low wages, unpredictable hours, and minimal benefits.<sup>5</sup> Women make up 52.5% of the leisure and hospitality workforce. Three years into the pandemic, however, women held 306,000 fewer leisure and hospitality jobs in February 2023 than in February 2020.
- The government sector gained 46,000 jobs in February 2023. Women gained 30,000 jobs, or 65.2% of the jobs added. Women make up 58.3% of the government workforce. Three years into the pandemic, however, women held 110,000 fewer government jobs in February 2023 than in February 2020.
- The private education and health services sector gained 74,000 jobs in February 2023. Women gained 38,000 jobs, or 51.4% of the jobs added. Women make up 76.8% of the private education and health services workforce. Compared to February 2020, women held 217,000 more private education and health services jobs in February 2023.
- The child care services sector gained 4,200 jobs last month. A net 59,800 child care sector jobs have been lost since February 2020<sup>6</sup>—and ongoing staffing shortages in this sector particularly impede an equitable recovery, as they also make it harder for parents to secure the child care they need to work. Women make up 92.4% of the child care workforce.<sup>7</sup>



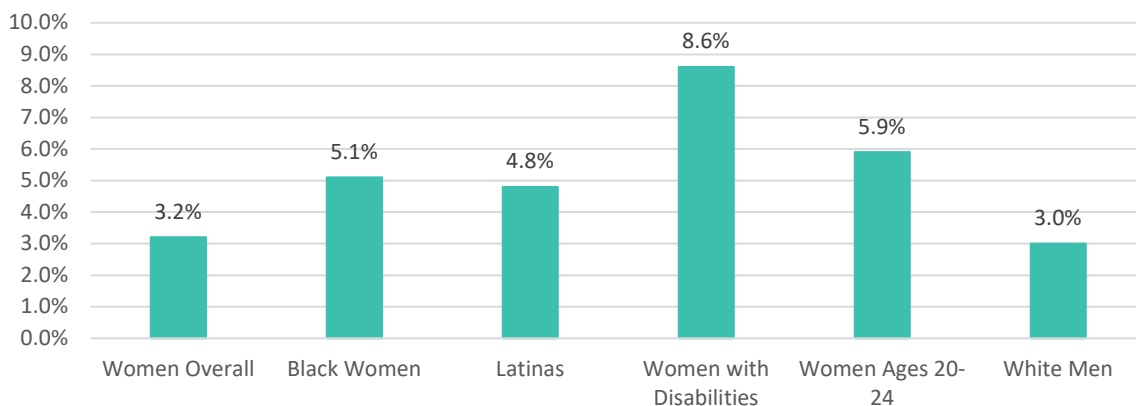
Source: BLS, Employment Situation Summary Table B-5. Figures are seasonally adjusted.

## The overall unemployment rate masks higher rates for Black and Latina women, disabled women, and other groups.

- The unemployment rate for women ages 20 and over increased from 3.1% in January to 3.2% in February. The unemployment rate for men ages 20 and over similarly increased from 3.2% in January to 3.3% in February.<sup>8</sup>
- The unemployment rate for Black women ages 20 and over increased from 4.7% in January to 5.1% in February. The unemployment rate for Black men ages 20 and over decreased from 5.3% in January to 5.1% in February.<sup>9</sup>
- The unemployment rate for Latinas ages 20 and over increased from 4.4% in January to 4.8% in February. The unemployment rate for Latinos ages 20 and over increased from 4.3% in January to 5.0% in February.<sup>10</sup>
- The unemployment rate for Asian women ages 20 and over increased from 2.6% in January to 3.0% in February.<sup>11</sup>

- The unemployment rate for women with disabilities ages 16-64 increased from 7.6% in January to 8.6% in February.<sup>12</sup>
- The unemployment rate for young women ages 20-24 decreased from 6.7% in January to 5.9% in February. Similarly, the unemployment rate for Latinas ages 20-24 also decreased from 9.3% in January to 6.4% in February. In contrast, the unemployment rate for Black women ages 20-24 increased 7.7% in January to 12.4% in February.<sup>13</sup>
- By comparison, the unemployment rate for white men ages 20 and over increased from 2.9% in January to 3.0% in February.<sup>14</sup>

## Unemployment Rates for Selected Demographics, February 2023



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 with disabilities is not seasonally adjusted and is for women ages 16-64. The unemployment rate for women ages 20-24 is also not seasonally adjusted.

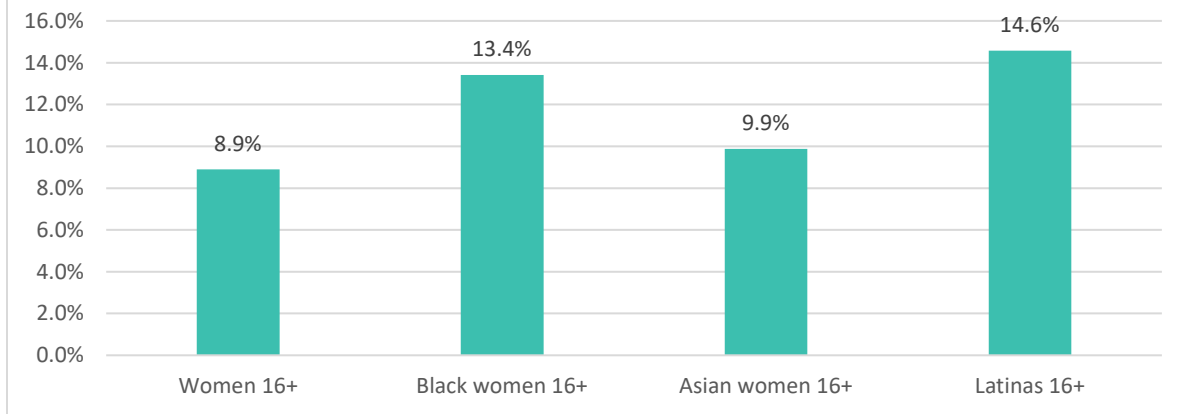
### Many unemployed women have been out of work for 6 months or longer.

In February 2023, over 1 in 6 unemployed women ages 20 and over (17.4%) had been out of work for six months or longer. Among unemployed women ages 16 and over, 17.1% had been out of work for six months or longer, including 29.1% of unemployed Asian women, 18.4% of unemployed Black women, and 12.7% of unemployed Latinas.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, in February 2023, about 1 in 11 unemployed women ages 16 and over (9.1%) had been out of work for a year or longer.<sup>16</sup>

### Many women working part-time are doing so involuntarily.

Nearly 20.4 million women ages 16 and over were working part time in February. Nearly 1 in 11 (8.9%) of these women were doing so for economic reasons, such as slack business conditions, meaning they wanted to be working more hours but were unable to do so. This includes 14.6% of Latinas ages 16 and over working part time, 13.4% of Black women ages 16 and over working part time, and 9.9% of Asian women ages 16 and over working part time.<sup>17</sup> In addition, many women work part time for reasons that BLS considers “voluntary” but may in fact reflect inadequate access to child care or other supports for working caregivers.<sup>18</sup> Women, especially those with caregiving responsibilities, disproportionately shifted from full-time to part-time work during the pandemic.<sup>19</sup>

## Share of Part-Time Workers Who Are Doing So Involuntarily for Selected Demographics, February 2023



Source: BLS, *Employment Situation Summary Table A-27*.

1. Data factchecked by Sarah Javid.
2. NWLC calculations using BLS, "Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Sex and Age," Table A-1 in February 2023 Employment Situation Summary (Washington, DC: March 10, 2023), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empstat.t01.htm>. Historical data available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab1.htm>. Throughout this factsheet, changes since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic are measured using February 2020 as a reference point. Each year when January data is released, the Bureau of Labor Statistics adjusts its data to incorporate new methodologies and population estimates from the most recent decennial Census and other sources. However, BLS does not revise historical figures with these new estimates and therefore cautions the comparability of figures across years. At the end of each year, BLS also updates the seasonal adjustment factors and revises some historical, seasonally adjusted data to improve comparability. This impacts seasonally adjusted data through January 2018.
3. NWLC calculations using BLS, Table B-1 in February 2023 Employment Situation Summary and BLS, "Employment of Women on Nonfarm Payrolls by Industry Sector, Seasonally Adjusted," Table B-5 in February 2023 Employment Situation Summary (Washington, DC: March 10, 2023), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empstat.t21.htm>. Historical data available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbtabs.htm>.
4. NWLC calculations using BLS, Table B-1 in February 2023 Employment Situation Summary and BLS, Table B-5 in February 2023 Employment Situation Summary. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
5. More information on women's job quality during COVID-19 economic recovery can be found at Brooke LePage, "Women's Jobs Are Being Added Back to the Economy—But Many Need Improving" (National Women's Law Center, May 2022), <https://nwlc.org/resource/womens-jobs-are-being-added-back-to-the-economy-but-many-need-improving/>.
6. NWLC calculations using BLS, Table B-1 in February 2023 Employment Situation Summary and BLS, Table B-5 in January 2023 Employment Situation Summary. Figures are seasonally adjusted. Historical data for Table B-1 is available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbtabs1.htm>. Historical data for table B-5 is available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbtabs5.htm>.
7. NWLC calculations using BLS, Table B-1 in February 2023 Employment Situation Summary and BLS, "Women Employees, Thousands, Child Day Care Services" from the Current Employment Statistics Survey (National), <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/CES6562440010>. Figures are seasonally adjusted. Women's share of the child care workforce is for January 2023.
8. NWLC calculations using BLS, "Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Sex and Age," Table A-1 in February 2023 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.
9. NWLC calculations using BLS, "Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Race, Sex, and Age" Table A-2 in February 2023 Employment Situation Summary (Washington, DC: March 10, 2023), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empstat.t02.htm>.
10. NWLC calculations using BLS, "Employment status of the Hispanic or Latino population by sex and age," Table A-3 in February 2023 Employment Situation Summary. (Washington, DC: March 10, 2023), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empstat.t03.htm>.
11. NWLC calculations using BLS, "(Unadj) Unemployment Rate – Asian, Women," Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU04032342>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
12. BLS, "Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Sex, Age, and Disability Status, Not Seasonally Adjusted," Table A-6 in February 2023 Employment Situation Summary (Washington, DC: March 10, 2023), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empstat.t06.htm>.
13. BLS, "Employment Status of the Civilian Noninstitutional Population by Age, Sex, and Race," Table A-13 in Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey (Washington, DC: March 10, 2023), <https://www.bls.gov/web/empstat/cpseea13.htm>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
14. BLS, Table A-2 in February 2023 Employment Situation Summary. Figure is seasonally adjusted.
15. NWLC calculations based on 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: March 10, 2023), <https://www.bls.gov/web/empstat/cpseea36.htm>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
16. NWLC calculations using BLS, "(Unadj) Number Unemployed for 52 Weeks & Over, Women," Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU03008735> and BLS, Table A-1 in February 2023 Employment Situation Summary. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
17. 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: March 10, 2023), <https://www.bls.gov/web/empstat/cpseea27.htm>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
18. Brooke LePage, "Part-Time Workers Are Facing Heightened Uncertainty During COVID—and Most Are Women." (National Women's Law Center, February 2022), <https://nwlc.org/resource/part-time-workers-factsheet/>.
19. More information on how women shifted from full-time to part-time work can be found in Shengwei Sun, "Part-Time Working Caregivers Need Unemployment Insurance Reform" (National Women's Law Center, October 2022), <https://nwlc.org/resource/part-time-working-caregivers-need-unemployment-insurance-reform/>.