



JUNE 2021 | FACT SHEET

Women Gained 314,000 Jobs in May, But Still Need 13 Straight Months of Growth to Recover Pandemic Losses

BY CLAIRE EWING-NELSON & JASMINE TUCKER

The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) monthly jobs report shows that the economy gained 559,000 jobs in May 2021, marking an increase in job growth after only 278,000 jobs were gained in April 2021.¹ Women accounted for 56.2% of job gains last month, gaining 314,000 jobs while men gained 245,000. Nevertheless, women would need more than 13 straight months of job gains at last month's level to recover the nearly 4.2 million net jobs they have lost since February 2020.²

Last month, 204,000 women ages 20 and over returned to the labor force, while 151,000 men ages 20 and over dropped out of the labor force, meaning they are no longer working or looking for work. Accounting for these changes, 1.79 million fewer women and 1.75 million fewer men are in the labor force compared to the start of the pandemic. Women's labor force participation rate was 57.4% last month, up from 57.2% in April 2021, but 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 57.4% since December 1988. Men's labor force participation rate was 69.6% in May 2021, compared to 71.6% in February 2020.³

Nearly 1 in 18 (5.4%) women ages 20 and over were unemployed in May 2021, down from 5.6% in April 2021. The unemployment rate for women ages 20 and over is still more than 1.7 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: Nearly 1 in 12 Black women ages 20 and over (8.2%)⁵ and nearly 1 in 13 Latinas ages 20 and over (7.4%) 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 (44.0%) had been out of work for 6 months or longer. Rates of long-term unemployment were similar for women ages 16 and over (41.9%), Asian women ages 16 and over (43.1%), Black women ages 16 and over (40.6%), and Latinas ages 16 and over (41.0%).⁷

Women gained 314,000 jobs last month but are still short nearly 4.2 million jobs since February 2020.

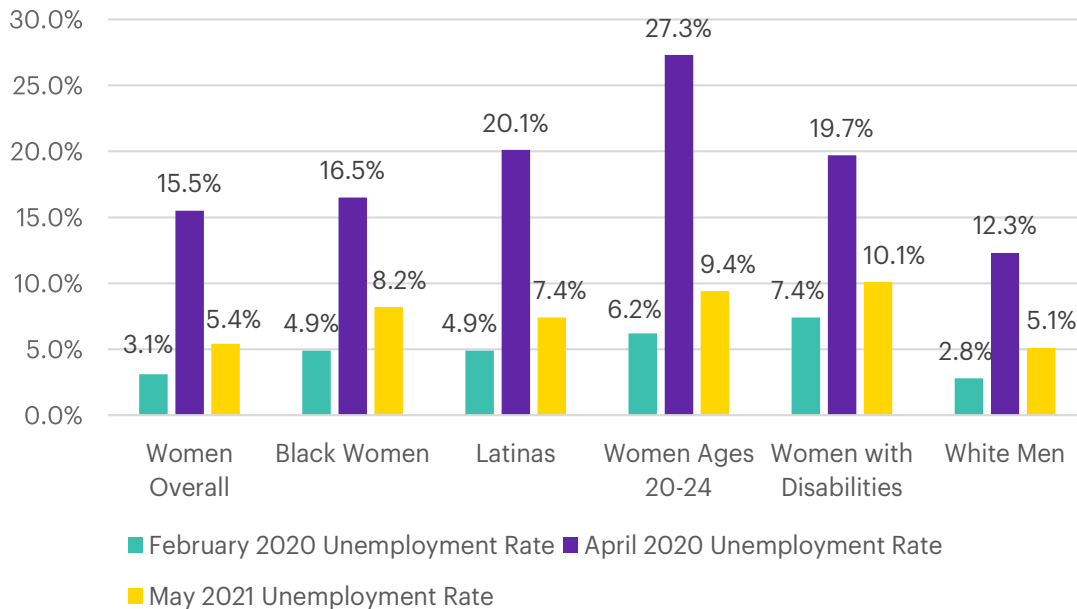
- The leisure and hospitality sector gained 292,000 jobs in May and accounted for more than half (54.8%) of women's job gains last month. Women accounted for 58.9% of last month's overall gains in the leisure and hospitality sector and made up 53.1% of the sector's workforce.
- The government sector gained 67,000 jobs last month. Women accounted for 62.7% of these gains while making up 57.6% of the government workforce.
- The retail trade sector lost 5,800 jobs last month. Women accounted for all of these losses and then some, losing 9,500 jobs while men added 3,700 retail jobs last month. Women have lost 92.3% of the 411,200 net jobs lost in the retail sector since February 2020, despite making up less than half (48.4%) of the sector's workforce.
- The child care sector gained 18,300 jobs last month but employment levels remain below pre-pandemic levels. Accounting for May's gains, the net number of child care jobs lost since February 2020 is 134,600. The child care sector has lost more than 1 in 8 (12.9%) 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 March 2021 slightly underestimates the share of the labor force that was unemployed. BLS estimates that the actual unemployment rate for May 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.

- Nearly 1 in 12 Black women ages 20 and over (8.2%) were unemployed in May 2021, down from 8.6% in April 2021. Black women's unemployment rate last month was still nearly 1.7 times higher than their pre-pandemic unemployment rate (4.9% in February 2020). Nearly 1 in 10 Black men ages 20 and over (9.8%) were unemployed in May 2021, which is more than 1.6 times their pre-pandemic unemployment rate of 6.0% in February 2020.⁹
- Nearly 1 in 13 Latinas ages 20 and over (7.4%) were unemployed in May 2021, down from 7.5% in April 2021. This is still over 1.5 times their pre-pandemic unemployment rate (4.9% in February 2020).¹⁰
- More than 1 in 20 Asian women ages 20 and over (5.1%) were unemployed in May 2021, down from 5.9% in April 2021, and 1.7 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 5.1% in May 2021.¹²
- More than 1 in 10 women with disabilities (10.1%) were unemployed in May 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 11 (9.4%) women between the ages of 20 and 24 unemployed in May 2021.¹⁴ The unemployment rate for Latinas ages 20 to 24 was even higher at 10.6%,¹⁵ and the unemployment rate for Black women ages 20 to 24 was much higher at 15.8%.¹⁶

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, and many of those who are working are not getting the hours they want or need.

- In May 2021, more than 2 in 5 unemployed women ages 20 and over (44.0%) had been out of work for 6 months or longer. Among unemployed women ages 16 and over, 41.9% had been out of work for 6 months or longer, including 43.1% of unemployed Asian women, 40.6% of unemployed Black women, and 41.0% of unemployed Latinas.¹⁷
- Additionally, in May 2021, more than 3 in 10 unemployed women ages 16 and over (30.7%) had been out of work for a year or longer.¹⁸
- Nearly 1 in 7 women ages 16 and over (13.9%) working part-time in May 2021 were doing so involuntarily, meaning they wanted full-time work. These rates were even higher for Asian women (17.5%), Black women (20.8%), and Latinas (20.8%).¹⁹

If the nearly 1.8 million women who have left the labor force since February 2020 were counted among the unemployed, women's unemployment would have been 7.6% 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 1.79 million women who have left the labor force since February 2020 were counted as unemployed in May 2021, women's unemployment rate would have been 7.6% in May 2021 instead of the reported 5.4%. Similarly, if the 1.75 million men who have left the labor force since February 2020 were counted as unemployed, men's unemployment rate would have been 7.9% last month instead of the reported 5.9%.²⁰

Since February 2020, 440,000 Black women have left the labor force, along with 484,000 Latinas. If these women were counted as unemployed, the unemployment rate for Black women in May 2021 would have been 12.0% instead of 8.2% and Latinas' unemployment rate would have been 11.0% instead of 7.4%.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 May 2021 Employment Situation Summary (Washington, DC: June 4, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst17.htm>. Historical data available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbt1.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 May 2021 Employment Situation Summary (Washington, DC: June 4, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t21.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, “Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Sex and Age,” Table A-1 in May 2021 Employment Situation Summary (Washington, DC: June 4, 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 May 2021 Employment Situation Summary (Washington, DC: June 4, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t02.htm>. Figure is seasonally adjusted.
- 6 BLS, “Employment status of the Hispanic or Latino population by sex and age,” Table A-3 in May 2021 Employment Situation Summary (Washington, DC: June 4, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.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: June 4, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/web/empst/cpseea36.htm>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
- 8 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table B-1 in *May 2021 Employment Situation Summary* and BLS, Table B-5 in *May 2021 Employment Situation Summary*. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 9 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-2 in May 2021 Employment Situation Summary. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 10 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-3 in May 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: June 4, 2021), <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU04032342>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
- 12 BLS, Table A-2 in May 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 May 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>.
- 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: June 4, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/web/empst/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: June 4, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/web/empst/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 based on BLS, March 2021 Employment Situation Summary, Establishment Data Table B-1.
- 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: June 4, 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: June 4, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/web/empst/cpseea27.htm>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted and are for women ages 16 and over.
- 20 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table A-1 in May 2021 Employment Situation Summary. To calculate these adjusted unemployment rates, NWLC added the 1,794,000 women who have dropped out of the labor force since February 2020 to the number of women in May 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 May 2021 Employment Situation Summary and BLS, Table A-3 in May 2021 Employment Situation Summary. To calculate these adjusted unemployment rates, NWLC added the 440,000 Black women who have dropped out of the labor force since February 2020 to the number of Black women in May 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.