

# Despite Slight Gains in May, Women Have Still Been Hit Hardest by Pandemic-Related Job Losses

BY CLAIRE EWING-NELSON

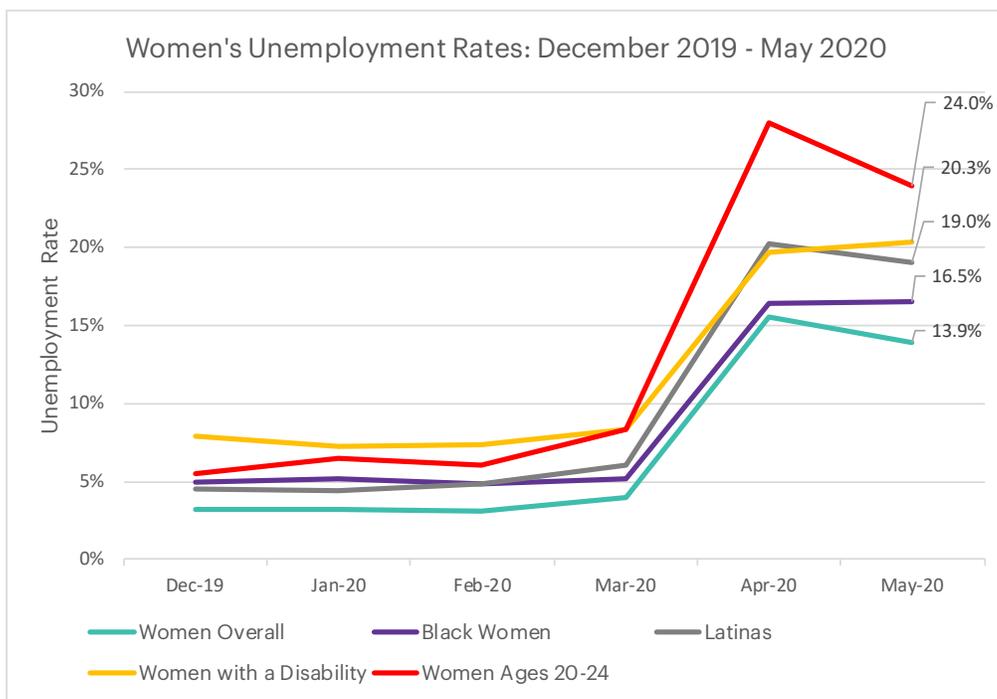
The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) monthly jobs data shows that the economy rebounded slightly between April and May 2020, gaining 2.5 million jobs.<sup>1</sup> These numbers, based on survey results from mid-May, bring the net number of jobs lost since the pandemic started to nearly 19.6 million.<sup>2</sup> The COVID-19 crisis has laid bare the disastrous consequences of longstanding racial and gender inequities, and women have proven particularly vulnerable to the pandemic's economic consequences. Women are overrepresented in the front-line workforce, making up the vast majority of workers risking their lives to provide health care, child care, and other essential services.<sup>3</sup> Women are also far more likely than men to work in part-time,<sup>4</sup> low-paid,<sup>5</sup> and/or tipped jobs,<sup>6</sup> meaning women were often struggling to make ends meet before the crisis hit—and faced a higher risk of losing their jobs as retail stores, restaurants, and other service sector businesses were forced to lay off workers or close their doors entirely.

## Women gained 1.1 million jobs in May, meaning only 1 in 10 of the 11.3 million women's jobs lost in April alone have returned

- The majority of the jobs gained back in May went to men. Women accounted for 46% of May's gains, while making up 49% of the workforce.<sup>7</sup>
- Since February 2020, women have lost 10.9 million jobs total, accounting for 56% of all jobs lost since the start of the pandemic.<sup>8</sup>
- Overall, more than 1 in 8 people ages 16 and over (13.3%) were unemployed last month. Adult women ages 20 and over were more likely than adult men ages 20 and over to be unemployed, with an unemployment rate of 13.9% compared to men's 11.6%.<sup>9</sup> The unemployment rate for women in May is 1.7 times higher than the highest unemployment rate for women during the Great Recession and subsequent recovery (8.4%).<sup>10</sup>

## The overall unemployment rate masks higher unemployment rates for women of color and other demographic groups

- Despite improvements for nearly everyone else, the unemployment rate for Black women increased slightly to 16.5% from 16.4% in April, meaning about 1 in 6 Black women was unemployed in May.<sup>11</sup>
- Despite slight improvements from April, nearly 1 in 5 Latinas (19.0%) remained unemployed in May.<sup>12</sup>
- By comparison, May’s unemployment rate for white men was 10.7%.<sup>13</sup>
- In May, more than one in five (20.3%) women with disabilities were unemployed – an increase of nearly 13 percentage points from February.<sup>14</sup>
- Pandemic-related job losses continue to hit younger women particularly hard, with nearly 1 in 4 (24.0%) women between the ages of 20 and 24 unemployed in May.<sup>15</sup> And rates for young Black women between the ages of 20 and 24 (27.8%)<sup>16</sup> and young Latinas between the ages 20 and 24 (29.2%) were even higher.<sup>17</sup>

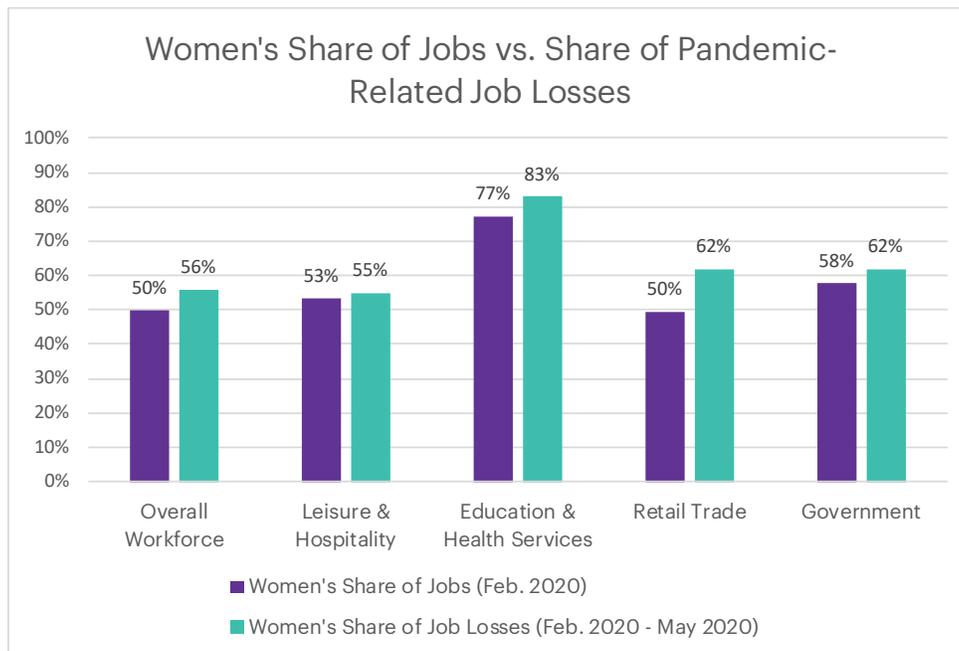


Source: NWLC calculations based on historical data for BLS Employment Situation Summary Tables A-1, A-2, A-3, A-6, and A-10. Unemployment rates for women overall, Latinas, and Black women are seasonally adjusted and are for women 20 years and over. The unemployment rate for women ages 20-24 is also seasonally adjusted. The unemployment rate for women with a disability is not seasonally adjusted, and is for women ages 16 to 64.

## Even accounting for May’s gains, women have been hit hard by job losses in the industry sectors most affected by COVID-19

- About half of May’s job gains came in the leisure and hospitality sector, which includes business such as restaurants and bars.<sup>18</sup> Even with this improvement, the leisure and hospitality sector has lost over 7 million net jobs since February.<sup>19</sup> Women have accounted for the majority (55%) of these losses, despite making up 53% of the workforce in February.<sup>20</sup>

- More than 1 in 6 (16.9%) of the 2.5 million jobs gained in May were in the education and health services sector, which includes jobs like teachers in nurses.<sup>21</sup> May's gains bring the net number of education and health services jobs lost since February to over 2.3 million.<sup>22</sup> Women made up 77% of the education and health services workforce in February but have lost 83% of the job losses in this sector since then.<sup>23</sup>
- Since February, women have lost over 1.2 million net jobs in retail trade, making up 62% of job losses in that sector, despite making up half (50%) of the retail trade workforce in February.<sup>24</sup> In May alone, the retail trade sector gained nearly 368,000 jobs, with women accounting for 49% of the gains.<sup>25</sup>
- Despite gains in many other sectors, 585,000 government jobs were lost last month, with women accounting for 62% of those losses.<sup>26</sup> Since February, the number of government jobs has decreased by nearly 1.6 million, with women losing 967,000 (62%) government jobs.<sup>27</sup>



Source: NWLC calculations based on historical data for BLS Employment Situation Summary Tables B-1 and B-5.

## While some jobs have returned, many women are not working the hours they want or need

- In May, nearly three in ten women (29%) working part-time wanted full-time work, but were unable to obtain it for economic reasons, such as their employer not giving them full-time hours.<sup>28</sup> In February, only 11% of women working part-time were doing so for economic reasons.<sup>29</sup>
- Rates of involuntary part-time work were higher for women of color: 31% of Black women, 37% of Asian women, and 39% of Latinas working part time in May were doing so for economic reasons.<sup>30</sup>

- 1 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), May 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table B-1: Employees on nonfarm payrolls by industry sector and selected industry detail, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t17.htm> (last visited June 5, 2020).
- 2 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Table B-1, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbtat1.htm> (last visited June 5, 2020). Throughout this factsheet, we measure changes since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic using the February 2020 Employment Situation Summary as a reference point.
- 3 Hye Jin Rho, Hayley Brown, & Shawn Fremstad, Center on Economic and Policy Research, A Basic Demographic Profile of Workers in Frontline Industries (Apr. 2020), available at <https://cepr.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2020-04-Frontline-Workers.pdf>. Under CEPR's definition, women are 64 percent of all workers in front-line industries, including 77% of all health care workers, and 85% of workers in child care and social services.
- 4 Claire Ewing-Nelson, National Women's Law Center, Part-Time Workers Are Paid Less, Have Less Access to Benefits – and Most Are Women (Feb. 2020), available at <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Part-Time-Workers-Factsheet-2.26.20.pdf>.
- 5 Jasmine Tucker & Julie Vogtman, National Women's Law Center, When Hard Work Is Not Enough: Women In Low-Paid Jobs (Apr. 2020), available at [https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Women-in-Low-Paid-Jobs-report\\_pp04-FINAL-4.2.pdf](https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Women-in-Low-Paid-Jobs-report_pp04-FINAL-4.2.pdf).
- 6 National Women's Law Center, Women in Tipped Occupations, State by State (May 2019), <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Tipped-workers-state-by-state-2019.pdf>.
- 7 NWLC calculations based on BLS, May 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table B-1 and Table B-5: Employment of women on nonfarm payrolls by industry sector, seasonally adjusted, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t21.htm> (last visited June 5, 2020). Figures are seasonally adjusted and capture total non-farm employment.
- 8 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Table B-1 and historical data for Table B-5, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbtat5.htm> (last visited June 5, 2020).
- 9 NWLC calculations based on BLS, May 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-1: Employment status of the civilian population by sex and age, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t01.htm> (last visited June 5, 2020). Figures are seasonally adjusted and for women and men ages 20 and over.
- 10 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Table A-1, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab1.htm> (last visited June 5, 2020).
- 11 BLS, May 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-2: Employment status of the civilian population by race, sex, and age, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t02.htm> (June 5, 2020). Figure is seasonally adjusted and is for Black women ages 20 and over.
- 12 BLS, May 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-3: Employment status of the Hispanic or Latino population by sex and age, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.nr0.htm> (last visited June 5, 2020). Figures is seasonally adjusted and is for Latinas ages 20 and over.
- 13 BLS, May 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-2. Figure is seasonally adjusted and is for white men ages 20 and over.
- 14 NWLC calculations based on BLS, May 2020 Employment Situation Summary Table A-6: Employment status of the civilian population by sex, age, and disability status, not seasonally adjusted, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t06.htm> (last visited June 5, 2020) and historical data for Table A-6, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab6.htm> (last visited June 5, 2020). Figures are for women ages 16 to 64.
- 15 NWLC calculations based on BLS, May 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-10: Selected unemployment indicators, seasonally adjusted, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t10.htm> (last visited June 5, 2020).
- 16 BLS, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Table A-13: Employment status of the civilian population by age, sex, and race, available at <https://www.bls.gov/web/empst/cpseea13.htm> (last visited June 5, 2020). Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
- 17 BLS, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Table A-14: Employment status of the Hispanic of Latino Population by age and sex, available at <https://www.bls.gov/web/empst/cpseea14.htm> (last visited June 5, 2020). Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
- 18 NWLC calculations based on BLS, May 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table B-1.
- 19 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Table B-1.
- 20 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Tables B-1 and B-5. In this section, figures for women's share of industry-specific workforces are from the February 2020 Employment Situation Summary, which we use as a pre-pandemic baseline.
- 21 NWLC calculations based on BLS, May 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table B-1.
- 22 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Tables B-1.
- 23 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Tables B-1 and B-5.
- 24 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Tables B-1 and B-5.
- 25 NWLC calculations based on BLS, May 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Tables B-1 and B-5.
- 26 NWLC calculations based on BLS, May 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table B-1.
- 27 NWLC calculations based on BLS, May 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Tables B-1 and B-5.
- 28 NWLC calculations based on BLS, May 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-27: Persons at work in nonagricultural industries by age, sex, race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, marital status, and usual full- or part-time status, available at <https://www.bls.gov/web/empst/cpseea27.htm> (last visited June 5, 2020). Figures are not seasonally adjusted and are for women ages 16 and over.
- 29 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Table A-27. Data for all women working part-time available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU02033505>. Data for women working part-time for economic reasons available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU02033506>.
- 30 NWLC calculations based on BLS, May 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-27.