



Women See Gains In Employment In 2021

Nearly 1.8 million women left the workforce amid the pandemic due to schools closing, layoffs and more, and while there are millions of jobs to recover before getting back to pre-pandemic levels, more women than men joined the workforce in 2021.

According to independent, nonprofit newsroom *The 19th*, approximately a million women, which is twice the number of men, entered the workforce.

Many of the women who returned to the workforce last year were Latinas and Black women, who lost the most in 2020 because many were in people-facing jobs such as hospitality and healthcare at the start of the pandemic. *The 19th* reports that 1.1 million Latinas and 754,000 Black women were out of work between February and August 2020.

According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the demographic breakdown of how many women rejoined the workforce between December of 2020 and December of 2021 was as follows:

- 400,000 Latina/Latinx
- 337,000 Black women
- 284,000 Asian women
- 227,000 White women

While unemployment rates among women have dropped, there's still work to be done — especially with regards to Black women, who have experienced a shaky recovery. Black women saw the smallest change in the unemployment rate at just 6.2% in December 2021, although this number was up from the 4.9% seen in November.

There are several factors that contributed to the gains in employment for women throughout the year, including higher vaccination rates and children being able to get vaccinated as well as less virtual learning and school closures.

Lauren Bauer, a fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution, told *The 19th* that with schools reopening and kids not having to learn online, that lessened the amount of caregiving responsibilities that fell on women at the start of the pandemic, leading to employment stability.

“When children have a safe and reliable place to be, moms are going back to work,” Bauer said. “The key story for the coming year is to make that continue to be true for everyone’s sake.”

To entice workers to physically come back into work once offices started to reopen, some companies reevaluated their benefits and began offering ones that extended to childcare in the form of backup childcare, on-site day-care services and stipends for affordable tutoring.

One company that saw a rise in the need for its services was Bright Horizons Family Solutions, which manages employer-sponsored childcare and facilitates childcare along with educational benefits.

In 2020, Bright Horizons saw more than 100 of its clients add backup care benefits. Backup care allows parents to take their children to a Bright Horizons daycare center at the last minute if needed. The company added that the use of this service was 20 times higher than pre-pandemic levels and continued to increase throughout the pandemic.

Some companies also offered shortened days in the office and continued offering a few work-from-home days to provide more flexibility to employees. Diane Swonk, Chief Economist at Grant Thornton, told *CNBC* that the last time the world saw employers really “bend over backwards to increase the participation of women in the labor market” was in the late 1990s.

“There’s no muscle memory, to what we’re going through in terms of labor market tightness, there’s something unprecedented about us all trying to open up at the same time,” she said. “Consumers are spending and businesses are scrambling to ramp up faster than workers are either able or willing to come back.”