



A JUST FUTURE BEGINS WITH BOLD IDEAS.

# Quick Figure

Quick Figure #Q103

April 2022

## **WOMEN MAKE GAINS IN MEN-DOMINATED JOBS, BUT STILL LAG BEHIND IN COVID-19 RECOVERY**

### **Key Findings**

- March 2022 brought another month of **strong payroll job growth for women**, yet women's jobs on payroll are still 1.1 million below pre-COVID-19 levels, while men's are 473,000 below.
- **The lack of recovery in child care and nursing care center jobs is holding back women's recovery.** These care jobs have seen little growth throughout the pandemic and are still 11.8 percent below February 2020 levels, compared to 1.0 percent for all payroll jobs.
- **While child care, nursing care, and other low-wage sectors are falling behind in the recovery, women have gained jobs in men-dominated fields,** such as construction and transportation and warehousing, where their numbers are now higher than before the pandemic.
- **The numbers of Black and White women in the labor force are still substantially below pre-pandemic levels** (1.6 and 1.7 percent below, respectively) while the number of Latinas and Asian women is higher (by 0.3 and 2.7 percent, respectively).
- **Another month of falling unemployment brings the rate of unemployment for adult women close to pre-pandemic levels** (3.3 compared with 3.1 percent). Yet, steep racial and ethnic differences remain, with Black women's rate of unemployment almost twice as high as White women's, and Latinas' 1.5 times as high.

Monthly employment data released on April 1, 2022<sup>1</sup> show another month of strong job growth, with 431,000 additional jobs on non-farm payrolls. Women gained 271,000 new jobs, the large majority (62.9 percent) of total job growth. March job growth means that the economy has recovered 99 percent of payroll jobs lost during the COVID-19 pandemic, yet women are still much further than

men from reaching pre-pandemic levels. Compared to February 2020, women still hold 1.1 million fewer jobs on payroll, more than twice the size of men's jobs deficit of 473,000 (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Steady Payroll Jobs Recovery for Women and Men, but Women Continue to be Further Below Pre-COVID-19 Jobs Numbers than Men Deficit in Payroll Jobs Compared to February 2020, by Gender (Thousands)**



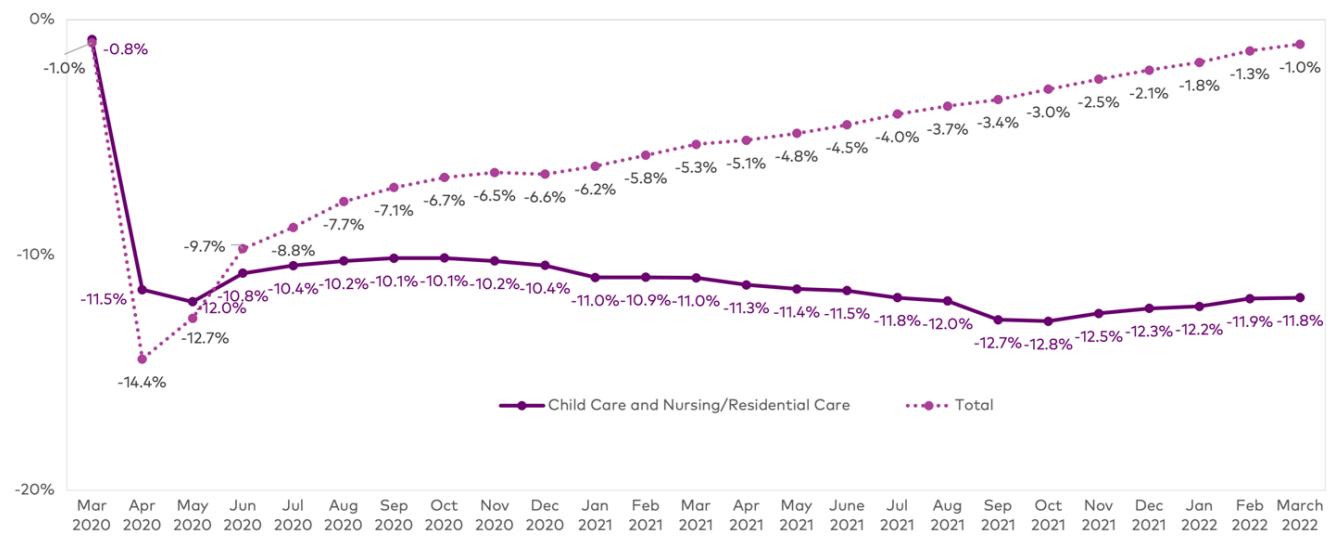
**Source:** IWPR analysis of U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics (accessed April 1, 2022).

### Slow Recovery of Care Jobs Is Holding Back Women's Recovery

One reason for continuing gender differences in the recovery is the stagnating recuperation of jobs in child care and nursing and residential care centers. Such care jobs are still 11.8 percent below where they were in February 2020—just marginally above numbers during April 2020, the worst month of the COVID recession (Figure 2).

## Figure 2. Job Growth in Child Care, Nursing, and Residential Care Has Stagnated, and the Care Gap Has Widened

*Percent of Jobs Behind February 2020 Payroll Numbers, Child Care and Nursing/Residential Care Compared to Total Non-Farm Payrolls, February 2020–March 2022*



**Source:** IWPR analysis of U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics (accessed April 1, 2022).

The lack of child care and elder care recovery hits women in two ways: as workers and as caregivers. Women are by far the majority of workers in these sectors: More than nine in ten child care center workers and about eight in ten workers in residential and nursing care home are women. Women have been slow to return to such jobs because of comparatively poor pay and working conditions.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the lack of the child and nursery recovery is forcing more women than men to reduce or leave paid work<sup>3</sup> because they are more likely than men to have care responsibilities.

### Recovery in Low-Wage, Women-Dominated Sectors Lags, but Women Are Gaining Jobs in Better-Paid Sectors

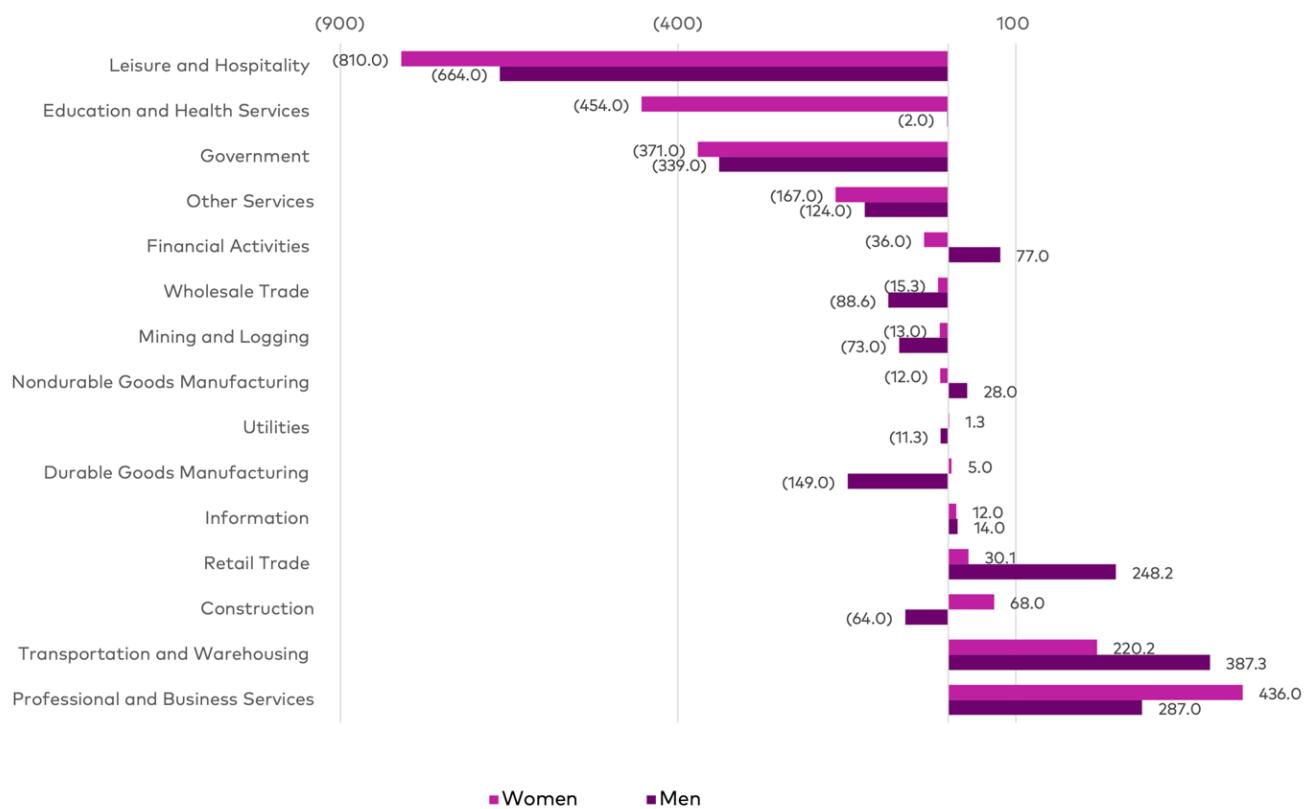
Child, nursing, and residential care are part of the larger sector of health and educational services, which is still almost half a million jobs below pre-COVID-19 levels. Job deficits there are almost as high as in leisure and hospitality, the sector with the highest jobs deficit and 810,000 fewer women on payroll than pre-pandemic (Figure 3). Both sectors predominantly employ women,<sup>4</sup> a fact that has prolonged women's jobs recovery.

At the same time, however, women have made inroads in traditionally men-dominated sectors, such as transportation and warehousing, and construction.

In March 2022, there were 220,000 more women on payroll in transportation and warehousing, a 15.0 percent increase, and 68,000 more women in the construction industry, a 7.0 percent increase. Jobs in these sectors traditionally pay substantially more than jobs in more women-dominated sectors at the same level of education.<sup>5</sup> The most substantial increase in women's payroll jobs compared to pre-COVID-19 levels has come in professional and business services, with 436,000 more jobs on payroll than in February 2020 (Figure 3).

### **Figure 3. Unequal Growth: Women's Jobs on Payroll Are Above Pre-COVID Levels in Some Sectors and Far Below in Others**

*Change in Number of Jobs on Payrolls for Women and Men, February 2020–March 2022 (in Thousands)*



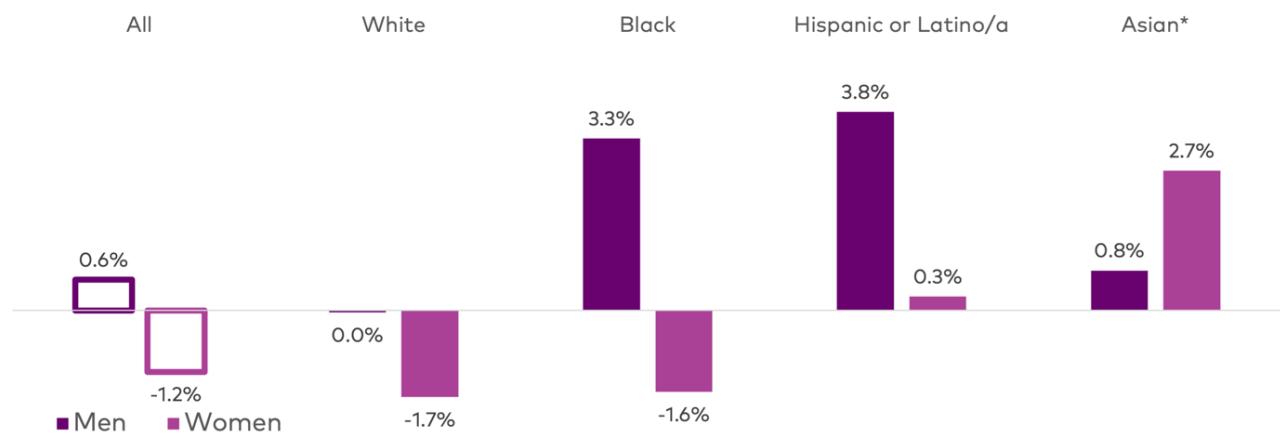
**Source:** IWPR analysis of U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics (accessed April 1, 2022).

## Black and White Women's Labor Force Numbers Still Below Pre-Pandemic Levels, while Latina and Asian Women's Are Up Slightly

Compared to pre-COVID-19, women's numbers in the labor force are down by 872,000 (1.2 percent), while men's numbers are up by almost half a million (493,000, or 0.6 percent). Yet, while labor force numbers are down for Black (1.6 percent) and White (1.7 percent) women, the number of Latinas and Asian women in the labor force are slightly higher (by 0.3 and 2.7 percent, respectively) than pre-pandemic (Figure 4).

### Figure 4. Compared to February 2020, Black and White Women Are Less Likely to Be in the Labor Force, and Hispanic and Asian Women Are More Likely

*Percent Change in Number in Civilian Labor Force, Ages 20 and Older, February 2020–March 2022 (Seasonally Adjusted\*, Thousands)*



**Note:** \*Data for Asians is not seasonally adjusted because seasonally adjusted data for Asian workers is not published by gender.

**Source:** IWPR analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey Data (accessed April 1, 2022).

The decline in labor force participation rates partly reflects different age profiles, with higher share of White workers near retirement age.<sup>6</sup> The pandemic has accelerated retirement trends,<sup>7</sup> more so for women than for men, and for White workers than for other workers.<sup>8</sup> Yet, not least because of inequality in wealth and retirement savings, retirement often is less of an option for women of color.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the decline in the number of Black women in the workforce likely also points to other underlying factors, such as lack of child care. Black mothers are much more likely than other groups of women to single parents and the sole provider for their family.<sup>10</sup>

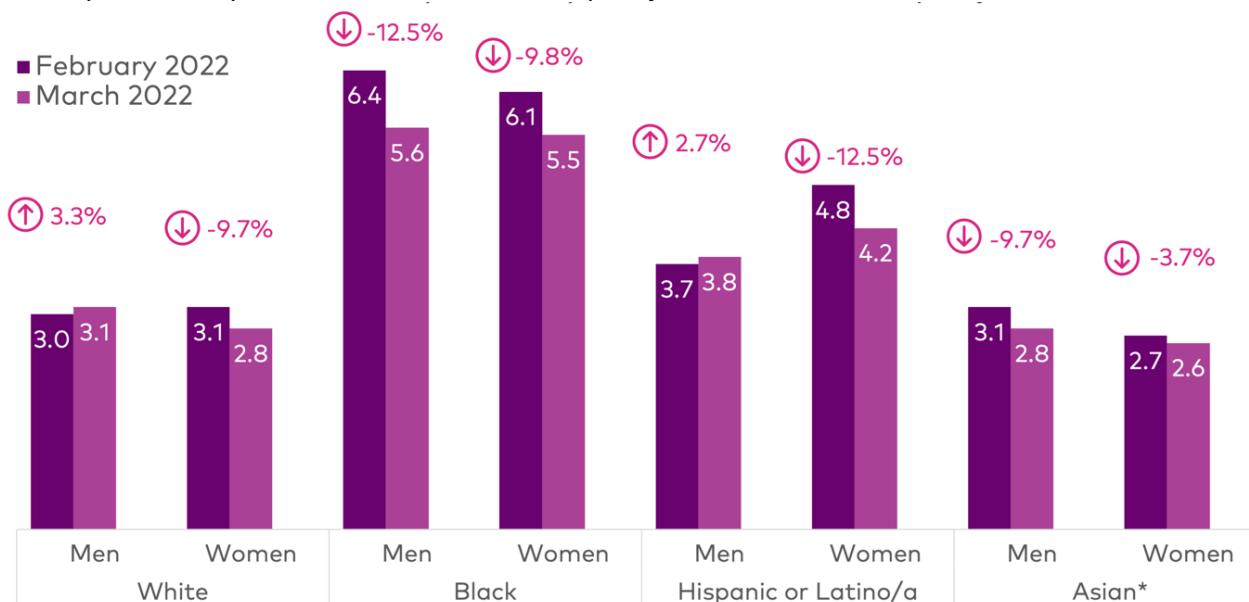
## Unemployment for Black Women Is Twice as High as for White Women

March 2022 was another month of improvements in unemployment for adult women and men of all major racial and ethnic groups, with the exception of White and Hispanic/Latino men whose rates increased slightly (Figure 5).

Rates of unemployment for adult Latinas and Asian women are now lower than pre-pandemic levels: In February 2020, the rates were 4.9 and 3.0 percent respectively, compared to 4.2 and 2.6 percent in March 2022. Unemployment rates are close to pre-COVID levels for all adult women (at 3.3 compared to 3.1 percent) and men (3.4 compared to 3.2 percent; data not shown elsewhere). Yet, even after improvements last month, adult Black women's unemployment is still substantially higher than it was before the pandemic (5.5 compared with 4.8 percent), and almost twice as high as White women's rate (Figure 5).

**Figure 5. The Rate of Unemployment Fell for Women Across Racial and Ethnic Backgrounds, but Steep Differences Continue**

*Unemployment Rates for Women and Men Aged 20 Years and Older by Race and Ethnicity, February–March 2022 (Seasonally Adjusted\*)*



**Note:** \*Seasonally adjusted unemployment data for Asians by gender are not published by the BLS. In March 2022, the rate of unemployment for all women workers was 3.3 percent, a 8.3 percent decrease from February 2022. The rate of unemployment for all men workers was 3.4 percent, a decrease of 2.9 percent.

**Source:** IWPR analysis of U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey (accessed April 1, 2022).

## Conclusion

The economy has recovered rapidly from the depths of the COVID-19 recession, yet stark differences in the speed of the recovery along gender and racial lines are reason for concern. Without targeted policy interventions, the recovery will be characterized by growing inequality. Women are gaining jobs in better-paid sectors, and are making inroads into men-dominated fields such as construction and transportation. Yet, women are being held back by the lack of recovery in the child care and nursing care sectors. Women of all backgrounds, but particularly women of color who have fewer resources to pay for care and are more likely to be paid care workers themselves, need investments in the care sector. Families need access to quality affordable child and elder care services to allow them to participate in the paid economy, and workers providing those services need decent wages that truly value this crucial work.

*This Quick Figure was prepared by Ariane Hegewisch and Eve Mefford. It was made possible with the support of Pivotal Ventures, an investment and incubation company created by Melinda French Gates.*

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment Situation Summary March 2022* (Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022), <<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>>.

<sup>2</sup> Heather Long, "'The Pay Is Absolute Crap': Child-Care Workers Are Quitting Rapidly, a Red Flag for the Economy," *Washington Post*, September 19, 2021,

<<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/09/19/childcare-workers-quit/>>; Caitlin McLean, Lea J. E. Austin, Marcy Whitebook, and Krista L. Olson, *Early Childhood Workforce Index 2020* (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2021),

<<https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/Early-Childhood-Workforce-Index-2020.pdf>>; Danielle Brown, *Low wages, Low Respect: CNA Perceptions Fuel Staff Exodus* (Northbrook, IL: McKnight's Long Term Care News, 2022),

<<https://www.mcknights.com/news/low-wages-low-respect-cna-perceptions-fuel-staff-exodus/>>; Elise Gould, Marokey Sawo, and Asha Banerjee, "Care Workers Are Deeply Undervalued and Underpaid," Economic Policy Institute blog (July 16, 2021),

<<https://www.epi.org/blog/care-workers-are-deeply-undervalued-and-underpaid-estimating-fair-and-equitable-wages-in-the-care-sectors/>>.

<sup>3</sup> Jasmine Tucker and Julie Vogtman, *Resilient but Not Recovered* (Washington, DC: National Women's Law Center, 2022), <<https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FINAL-NWLC-Resilient-But-Not-Recovered-3.29.22.pdf>>.

<sup>4</sup> Ariane Hegewisch and Zohal Barsi, "Economy Adds More Jobs for Women Than Men, But Women Still 8 Million Jobs-on-Payroll Below February and Majority of All Who Lost Jobs," Quick Figure, IWPR #Q084 (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2020), <<https://iwpr.org/iwpr-issues/esme/economy-adds-more-jobs-for-women-than-men-but-women-still-majority-of-all-who-lost-jobs/>>.

<sup>5</sup> Ariane Hegewisch et al., *Pathways to Equity: Narrowing the Wage Gap by Improving Women's Access to Good Middle-Skill Jobs*, Report, IWPR #C438 (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2016), <<https://iwpr.org/iwpr-general/executive-summary-pathways-to-equity-narrowing-the-wage-gap-by-improving-womens-access-to-good-middle-skill-jobs/>>; Ariane Hegewisch and Eve Mefford, *A Future Worth Building: What Tradeswomen Say about the Change They Need in the Construction Industry*, Report, IWPR #C508 (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2021), <[https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/A-Future-Worth-Building\\_What-Tradeswomen-Say\\_FINAL.pdf](https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/A-Future-Worth-Building_What-Tradeswomen-Say_FINAL.pdf)>.

<sup>6</sup> Katherine Schaeffer, *The Most Common Age among Whites in U.S. is 58 – More than Double that of Racial and Ethnic Minorities* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2019), <<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/30/most-common-age-among-us-racial-ethnic-groups/>>.

<sup>7</sup> Owen Davis, *Employment and Retirement Among Older Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic* (New York, NY: Schwartz Center for Economic Policy Analysis, 2022), <[https://www.economicpolicyresearch.org/images/Retirement\\_Project/Tale\\_of\\_Two\\_Retirements\\_Jan\\_2022.pdf](https://www.economicpolicyresearch.org/images/Retirement_Project/Tale_of_Two_Retirements_Jan_2022.pdf)>.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Fry, *Amid the Pandemic, a Rising Share of Older U.S. Adults Are Now Retired* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2021), <<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/11/04/amid-the-pandemic-a-rising-share-of-older-u-s-adults-are-now-retired/>>.

<sup>9</sup> Advisory Council on Employee Welfare and Pension Benefit Plans, *Gaps in Retirement Savings Based on Race, Ethnicity and Gender* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 2021),

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<<https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/EBSA/about-ebsa/about-us/erisa-advisory-council/2021-gaps-in-retirement-savings-based-on-race-ethnicity-and-gender.pdf>>.

<sup>10</sup> Elyse Shaw, C. Nicole Mason, Valerie Lacarte, and Erika Jauregui, *Holding Up Half the Sky: Mothers as Workers, Primary Caregivers, & Breadwinners During COVID-19*, Report, IWPR #Q081 (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2020), <<https://iwpr.org/iwpr-issues/esme/holding-up-half-the-sky-mothers-as-workers-primary-caregivers-breadwinners-during-covid-19-2/>>.