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Report 1097

Women in the labor force: a databook

In 2020, the share of women who participated in the labor force fell by 1.2 percentage points to 56.2 percent, the lowest rate since 1987, and nearly 4 percentage points below the peak of 60.0 percent in 1999. By comparison, the labor force participation rate for men was 67.7 percent in 2020, down by 1.5 percentage points from the previous year and the lowest rate in the history of the series. (Both series began in 1948.) The steep declines in 2020 reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labor market.

The rapid rise in women's labor force participation was a major development in the labor market during the second half of the 20th century. Overall, women's labor force participation increased dramatically from the 1960s through the 1980s, before slowing in the 1990s and early 2000s. Labor force participation among women then began a decline that accelerated in the wake of the December 2007–June 2009 recession, hitting a prepandemic low in 2015 at 56.7 percent. The rate then rose to 57.4 percent in 2019, before the pandemic affected the labor market.

Women's involvement in the labor market has changed in notable ways over the past several decades. For example, women became much more likely to pursue higher levels of education: from 1970 to 2020, the proportion of women ages 25 to 64 in the labor force who held a college degree more than quadrupled, whereas the proportion of men with a college degree more than doubled over that time. Women also have become more likely to work full time and year round. In addition, women's earnings as a proportion of men's earnings have grown over time: women working full time earned 62.3 percent of what men earned in 1979 and 82.3 percent in 2020. More recently, over the past decade or so, women in the baby boom generation (defined as people born between 1946 and 1964) began to retire in large numbers, which had put downward pressure on their labor force participation rate.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the job market in 2020 were widespread and varied by gender and across race and ethnicity groups. For example, women were disproportionately affected by the pandemic-induced recession in the spring of 2020, in part reflecting their overrepresentation in some of the hardest hit sectors of the economy.¹

In addition to the effects of the pandemic, there are long-standing labor market differences among demographic groups. These differences are associated with many factors, not all of which are measurable. These factors include variations in educational attainment, the occupations and industries in which the groups work, the geographic areas of the country in which the groups are concentrated, and the degree of discrimination encountered in the workplace.

This report presents historical and recent labor force and earnings data for women and men from the Current Population Survey (CPS), a national monthly survey of approximately 60,000 households conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Unless otherwise noted, data are annual averages from the CPS. (For a detailed description of the source of the data and an explanation of concepts and definitions used, see the [technical notes](#).)

Selected demographic characteristics

Women's labor force participation rate was 56.2 percent in 2020, 1.2 percentage points lower than the rate in 2019. Men's labor force participation rate, which always has been much higher than that for women, also decreased in 2020; the rate for men was down by 1.5 percentage points to 67.7 percent. These declines in labor force participation reflect the impact of the pandemic on the labor market. (See [table 2](#).)

The unemployment rate for women was 8.3 percent in 2020, more than double the rate from a year earlier. The rate for men was 7.8 percent in 2020, also more than double the rate from a year earlier. Women's unemployment rates varied considerably by race and ethnicity. In 2020, Hispanic women and Black women had the highest jobless rates (11.4 percent and 10.9 percent, respectively). Unemployment rates for Asian women and White women were lower, at 9.6 percent and 7.6 percent, respectively. Men's unemployment rates exhibited a similar pattern. The rates for Black men (12.1 percent) and Hispanic men (9.7 percent) were higher than those for Asian men (7.8 percent) and White men (7.0 percent). (See [tables 2](#) and [3](#).)

Labor force participation varies by marital status and differs between women and men. Never-married women had the highest participation rate of all women, at 63.5 percent in 2020. Separated and divorced women were more likely to participate in the labor force (61.7 percent and 59.7 percent, respectively) than married women (57.4 percent). Across all marital statuses, men were more likely to participate in the labor force than their female counterparts. Married men were more likely to participate in the labor force (71.4 percent) than separated men (69.8 percent), never-married men (66.3 percent), and divorced men (63.6 percent). Labor force participation rates for widowed women and men, who tend to be older, were 17.9 percent and 23.3 percent, respectively. (See [table 4](#).)

The labor force participation rate for women with children under 18 years of age was 72.5 percent in March 2020, much lower than the rate of 93.1 percent for men with children under 18 years. Among mothers, the labor force participation rate for those with children 6 to 17 years old, at 76.4 percent, was considerably higher than for those with younger children. The rate for women with children under 6 years old was 67.4 percent, and the rate for women with children under 3 years old was 65.6 percent. By contrast, the labor force participation rate for fathers was similar regardless of the age of their children; the rate was 92.0 percent for fathers with children 6 to 17 years old, 94.5 percent for fathers of children under 6 years old, and 94.7 percent for fathers of children under 3 years old. (See [tables 5](#) and [7](#); data were collected in the 2020 Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the CPS.)

Unmarried mothers are much more likely to participate in the labor force than married mothers. In March 2020, 77.7 percent of unmarried mothers were in the labor force, compared with 70.4 percent of married mothers. (See [table 6](#); data were collected in the 2020 Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the CPS.)

Educational attainment

The educational attainment of women ages 25 to 64 in the labor force has risen substantially over the past half century. In 2020, 47.2 percent of women ages 25 to 64 held a bachelor's degree and higher, compared with 11.2 percent in 1970. In 2020, 4.8 percent of women in the labor force had less than a high school diploma—that is, they did not graduate from high school or earn a GED—down from 33.5 percent in 1970. (See [tables 9A](#) and [9B](#).)

Occupation and industry



Women accounted for 51.7 percent of all workers employed in management, professional, and related occupations in 2020, somewhat more than their share of total employment (46.8 percent). The share of women in specific occupations within this large category varied. For example, 19.4 percent of software developers, 29.3 percent of chief executives, and 37.4 percent of lawyers were women. Whereas 87.4 percent of registered nurses, 79.6 percent of elementary and middle school teachers, and 59.7 percent of accountants and auditors were women. (See [table 11.](#))

In 2020, Asian women and White women were more likely to work in higher paying management, professional, and related occupations (56.6 percent and 48.4 percent, respectively) than were Black women (40.2 percent) and Hispanic women (31.3 percent). Black women (25.3 percent) and Hispanic women (27.9 percent) were more likely than Asian women (17.3 percent) and White women (17.6 percent) to work in lower paying service occupations. (See [table 12.](#))

By industry, women accounted for more than half of all workers within several sectors in 2020: education and health services (74.6 percent), other services (52.6 percent), financial activities (51.9 percent), and leisure and hospitality (50.4 percent). (Other services include repair and maintenance services, personal and laundry services, membership associations and organizations, and private households.) Comparably, women were substantially underrepresented (relative to their share of total employment) in manufacturing (29.5 percent), agriculture (27.7 percent), transportation and utilities (24.1 percent), mining (14.5 percent), and construction (10.9 percent). (See [table 14.](#))

Earnings

In 2020, women who worked full time in wage and salary jobs had median usual weekly earnings of \$891, which represented 82.3 percent of men's median weekly earnings (\$1,082). Among women, earnings were higher for Asians (\$1,143) than for Whites (\$905), Blacks (\$764), and Hispanics (\$705). Women-to-men's earnings ratios were higher for Blacks (92.0 percent) and Hispanics (88.5 percent) than for Whites (81.5 percent) and Asians (79.0 percent). (See [table 16](#); note that the comparisons of earnings in this report are on a broad level and do not control for many factors, like occupation, that may be important in explaining earnings differences.)

Women's median usual weekly earnings vary by educational attainment. In 2020, female full-time wage and salary workers age 25 and older with less than a high school diploma had median weekly earnings of \$525. Women whose highest degree was a high school diploma had earnings of \$671, those with an associate's degree had earnings of \$809, and those with a bachelor's degree and higher had earnings of \$1,239. (See [table 17.](#))

By occupation, median usual weekly earnings of female full-time wage and salary workers were the highest in 2020 for pharmacists (\$2,160), chief executives (\$2,051), computer and information systems managers (\$1,910), other physicians (\$1,905), and physician assistants (\$1,894). Earnings for men were highest for chief executives (\$2,712), lawyers (\$2,324), other physicians (\$2,311), and pharmacists (\$2,286). (See [table 18.](#))

In 2020, 2.0 percent of women who were paid hourly rates had earnings at or below the prevailing federal minimum wage (\$7.25 per hour). Among women ages 16 to 24 who were paid an hourly rate, 5.3 percent had earnings at or below the minimum wage, compared with 1.3 percent of women age 25 and over. (See [table 20.](#))

Data in this report for the year 2020 reflect the impact of the pandemic on the labor market. Comparisons with data from prior years should be interpreted with caution. Large declines in employment in 2020, particularly among low-wage workers (who were disproportionately affected by job loss related to the pandemic), resulted in changes in the median earnings distribution. This large and abrupt shift in the earnings distribution during the year manifested as an increase in the rate of earnings growth in 2020. However, the underlying rate of growth in workers' median weekly earnings during the year is more difficult to discern because of the sudden, dramatic shift in the earnings distribution. More information is available at <https://www.bls.gov/covid19/effects-of-covid-19-pandemic-and-response-on-the-employment-situation-news-release.htm>.

Hours of work

Women are more likely than men to usually work part time—that is, less than 35 hours per week. In 2020, 22.4 percent of employed women usually worked part time. By comparison, 11.6 percent of employed men usually worked part time. (See [table 21.](#))

Of all women who worked at some point during the calendar year of 2019, 64.5 percent worked full time and year round (50 to 52 weeks), compared with 40.7 percent in 1970. The proportion of men who worked full time and year round also rose over the period, from 66.1 percent in 1970 to 75.4 percent in 2019. (See [table 23](#); data were collected in the 1971 through 2020 Annual Social and Economic Supplements to the CPS and reflect earnings and work experience in the previous calendar year.)

Married-couple families

Among opposite-sex married-couple families, 54.0 percent had earnings from both the wife and the husband in 2019. This percentage, which has changed little over the past 10 years, is below the peak of 60.4 percent in 1996 but above the 43.6 percent seen in 1967 when the series began. Couples in which only the husband worked for pay represented 16.9 percent of married-couple families in 2019 versus 35.6 percent in 1967. (See [table 24B](#); data were collected in the 1968 through 2020 Annual Social and Economic Supplements to the CPS and reflect earnings and work experience in the previous calendar year.)

The working poor

Among people who were in the labor force for at least 27 weeks in 2019, more women (3.4 million) than men (2.9 million) lived below the official poverty level. The working-poor rate (the ratio of the working poor to all individuals who were in the labor force for at least 27 weeks) was 4.5 percent for women and 3.5 percent for men. Black women and Hispanic women were much more likely to be among the working poor than White women or Asian women. The working-poor rates for Black women and Hispanic women were 8.9 percent and 7.1 percent, respectively, higher than the rates of 3.7 percent for White women and 2.3 percent for Asian women. (See [table 26](#); data are from the 2020 Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the CPS and reflect earnings and work experience in the previous calendar year.)

Worker displacement

From January 2017 through December 2019, 2.7 million workers age 20 and older were displaced from jobs they had held for at least 3 years; women accounted for 45 percent of those displaced. Labor market outcomes were similar for displaced women and men. Displaced women were about as likely as men to have found a new job in January 2020: the reemployment rate was 67.8 percent for women and 71.9 percent for men. Displaced women and men were also about equally likely to be unemployed, at 12.5 percent and 12.3 percent, respectively. In January 2020, 19.7 percent of displaced women and 15.7 percent of displaced men had left the labor force. (See [table 27](#); data are from the January 2020 Displaced Worker, Employee Tenure, and Occupational Mobility Supplement to the CPS.)

Employee tenure

In January 2020, the median number of years that employed women had been with their employers was 3.9 years, about unchanged from January 2018. Median employee tenure (the point at which half of all workers had more tenure and half had less tenure) for men held at 4.3 years. (See [table 28](#); data are from the January 2020 Displaced Worker, Employee Tenure, and Occupational Mobility Supplement to the CPS.)

School enrollment

Of the 3.1 million young people ages 16 to 24 who graduated from high school between January and October 2020, 62.7 percent (2.0 million) were enrolled in college in October of that year. For the 2020 high school graduates, the college enrollment rate continued to be higher for young women (66.2 percent) than for young men (59.3 percent). (See [table 29](#); data are from the October 2020 School Enrollment Supplement to the CPS.)

Among those enrolled in high school, young women were more likely to be in the labor force (24.8 percent) in October 2020 than were young men (20.8 percent). Among college students, women were much more likely to participate in the labor force than men, at 49.7 percent and 42.2 percent, respectively. Among young people ages 16 to 24 who were not enrolled in school in October 2020, the unemployment rate for those without a high school diploma was 11.2 percent for women and 10.2 percent for men. In contrast, the unemployment rates for young women and men with at least a bachelor's degree were 7.9 percent and 8.6 percent, respectively. (See [table 30](#); data are from the October 2020 School Enrollment Supplement to the CPS.)

Multiple jobholders and the self-employed

In 2020, 6.7 million workers had more than one job. Just over half (3.4 million) of these workers were women. The multiple jobholding rate for women, at 5.0 percent, was higher than that for men, at 4.1 percent. (See [table 31](#).)

In 2020, 5.2 percent of working women in nonagricultural industries were self-employed, compared with 6.5 percent of men. In 2020, 41.6 percent of the self-employed were women, compared with 26.8 percent in 1976. (See [table 32](#).)

Foreign born

Foreign-born women were less likely than native-born women to be in the labor force in 2020 (53.2 percent compared with 56.8 percent). By contrast, foreign-born men were more likely to be in the labor force (76.6 percent) than were native-born men (65.9 percent). The unemployment rate for foreign-born women, at 10.8 percent, was higher than for native-born women, at 7.9 percent. At 8.0 percent, the unemployment rate for foreign-born men was about the same as that for native-born men (7.8 percent). Differences in labor force indicators reflect a variety of factors, including variations in the distributions of foreign-born and native-born workers by age, educational attainment, occupation, industry, and geographic region. (See [table 33](#).)

Union membership

In 2020, 10.5 percent of female wage and salary workers were members of unions, compared with 11.0 percent of their male counterparts. For both women and men, the union membership rate in 2020 was lower than in 1983 (the first year that union membership data were regularly collected in the CPS). In 1983, union membership rates were 14.6 percent for women and 24.7 percent for men. (See [table 34](#).)

Veterans

There were 1.1 million female veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces in the labor force in 2020, accounting for 12.3 percent of the 8.9 million veterans in the labor force. Nearly half of all female veterans in the labor force in 2020 served during the Gulf War-era II period (September 2001 to present). The labor force participation rate among female Gulf War-era II veterans was 68.6 percent, significantly lower than the 80.8 percent participation from their male counterparts. Among Gulf War-era II veterans, the unemployment rate for women was 7.2 percent in 2020, similar to the rate of 7.4 percent for men. (See [table 35](#).)

People with disabilities

Of the 15.9 million women with disabilities in 2020, 2.8 million, or 17.5 percent, participated in the labor force. A little over half of women with disabilities (54 percent) were age 65 and older; labor force participation among this age group was 5.4 percent, compared with 31.5 percent for those ages 16 to 64 with disabilities. Among the 14.0 million men with disabilities, 23.8 percent participated in the labor force in 2020. Forty-seven percent of men with disabilities were age 65 and older. Among men in this age group, 10.5 percent were labor force participants, compared with 35.6 percent of men ages 16 to 64 with disabilities. Among people with a disability, the unemployment rate for women, at 13.2 percent, was higher than that for men, at 12.0 percent. These rates were considerably higher than the rates of women and men without a disability (8.2 percent and 7.6 percent, respectively). (See [table 36](#).)

Notes

¹ Sean M. Smith, Roxanna Edwards, and Hao C. Duong, "Unemployment rises in 2020, as the country battles the COVID-19 pandemic," *Monthly Labor Review*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 2021, <https://doi.org/10.21916/mlr.2021.12>.

Statistical Tables

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[+] Table 10. Employed people, by occupation and gender, 2019 and 2020 annual averages (numbers in thousands)

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[+] Table 21. Employed people, by full- and part-time status and gender, 1968–2020 annual averages (numbers in thousands)

[–] Table 22. Average weekly hours at work in all industries and in nonagricultural industries, by gender, 1976–2020 annual averages

Year	All industries			Nonagricultural industries		
	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men
1976	38.7	34.1	41.7	38.4	34.1	41.4
1977	38.8	34.2	41.9	38.5	34.2	41.6
1978	39.0	34.5	42.1	38.7	34.4	41.8
1979	38.9	34.5	42.0	38.6	34.4	41.7
1980	38.5	34.5	41.5	38.3	34.4	41.2
1981	38.1	34.1	41.1	37.9	34.1	40.7
1982	38.0	34.1	40.9	37.7	34.0	40.6
1983	38.3	34.5	41.2	38.1	34.4	41.0
1984	38.8	34.9	41.8	38.6	34.9	41.5
1985	39.0	35.2	42.0	38.9	35.2	41.8
1986	39.1	35.4	42.1	38.9	35.3	41.9
1987	39.0	35.3	42.0	38.8	35.3	41.8
1988	39.4	35.7	42.4	39.3	35.7	42.2
1989	39.6	35.8	42.6	39.4	35.8	42.4
1990	39.4	35.8	42.3	39.3	35.8	42.1
1991	39.2	35.8	42.0	39.1	35.8	41.9
1992	38.9	35.6	41.7	38.8	35.6	41.6
1993	39.4	36.0	42.2	39.3	36.0	42.1
1994	39.2	35.5	42.2	39.1	35.6	42.1
1995	39.3	35.6	42.3	39.2	35.7	42.2
1996	39.3	35.7	42.3	39.2	35.7	42.2
1997	39.5	36.0	42.4	39.4	36.0	42.3
1998	39.3	35.8	42.2	39.2	35.9	42.2
1999	39.6	36.2	42.4	39.5	36.2	42.4
2000	39.7	36.4	42.5	39.6	36.4	42.4
2001	39.2	36.1	41.9	39.2	36.1	41.8

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

Year	All industries			Nonagricultural industries		
	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men
2002	39.2	36.0	41.8	39.1	36.1	41.7
2003	39.0	35.9	41.7	39.0	35.9	41.6
2004	39.0	35.9	41.7	39.0	35.9	41.6
2005	39.2	36.1	41.8	39.1	36.1	41.7
2006	39.2	36.2	41.8	39.2	36.2	41.7
2007	39.2	36.1	41.7	39.1	36.1	41.6
2008	38.9	36.1	41.3	38.8	36.1	41.2
2009	37.9	35.3	40.2	37.8	35.3	40.1
2010	38.2	35.5	40.5	38.1	35.6	40.4
2011	38.3	35.6	40.6	38.2	35.6	40.6
2012	38.5	35.8	40.8	38.4	35.8	40.7
2013	38.6	36.0	40.9	38.5	36.0	40.8
2014	38.6	35.9	41.0	38.6	35.9	40.9
2015	38.6	35.9	40.9	38.5	35.9	40.8
2016	38.7	36.2	41.0	38.7	36.2	40.9
2017	38.7	36.2	40.9	38.6	36.2	40.8
2018	38.9	36.4	41.1	38.9	36.4	41.0
2019	39.0	36.5	41.1	38.9	36.6	41.0
2020	38.3	36.1	40.2	38.2	36.1	40.1

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

[+] Table 23. Work experience of the population, by gender and full- and part-time status, selected years, 1970–2019 (percent distribution)

[+] Table 24A. Opposite-sex married-couple families, by number and relationship of earners, 1967–2019 (numbers in thousands)

[+] Table 24B. Opposite-sex married-couple families, by number and relationship of earners, 1967–2019 (percent distribution)

[+] Table 25. Contribution of wives' earnings to family income, 1970–2019

[+] Table 26. Working poor: Poverty status of people in the labor force for 27 weeks or more, by age, gender, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, 2019 (numbers in thousands)

[+] Table 27. Displaced workers¹, by age, gender, race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, and employment status, January 2020

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[+] Table 36. Employment and disability status of people, by gender and age, 2020 annual averages (numbers in thousands)

Technical Notes

The estimates in this report were obtained from the Current Population Survey (CPS), a national monthly sample survey of approximately 60,000 eligible households that provides a wide range of information on the labor force, employment, and unemployment. The survey is conducted for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) by the U.S. Census Bureau, using a scientifically selected national sample with coverage in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

In 2020, estimates in this report reflect a change in the classification of people in same-sex marriages. In prior years, estimates of the number of married people referred to those in opposite-sex marriages only. The definition of families incorporates this change by expanding the definition of married-couple families to include same-sex married couples. Additional information about the [classification change is available from the Census Bureau](#).

Some data presented in this report were collected in supplements to the CPS, such as the School Enrollment Supplement; the Displaced Worker, Employee Tenure, and Occupational Mobility Supplement; and the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC). The ASEC, conducted in the months of February through April, includes questions about work activity and income during the previous calendar year. For instance, data collected in 2020 are for the 2019 calendar year. The 2019 data in this report are based on fewer sample responses than in recent years. The collection period for these data coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic; because in-person interviews were suspended during the collection period, the response rate for the survey was about 10 percentage points lower than in the previous year.

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Concepts and definitions

Children refers to one's own children under age 18 who live in the household. Included are sons, daughters, stepchildren, and adopted children. Not included are nieces, nephews, grandchildren, other related children, and all unrelated children living in the household.

The *civilian labor force* includes all people classified as employed or unemployed.

The *civilian labor force participation rate* represents the number of people in the civilian labor force as a percentage of the civilian noninstitutional population.

The *civilian noninstitutional population* is made up of people 16 years of age and older residing in any of the 50 states or the District of Columbia who are not confined to institutions, such as nursing homes and prisons, and who are not on Active Duty in the Armed Forces.

Disability status is determined in the CPS through a set of six questions. The questions are about physical, mental, or emotional conditions that cause serious difficulty with daily activities. For each of the questions, interviewers ask the respondent whether anyone in the household has the condition described, and if the respondent replies "yes," he or she is then asked to identify everyone in the household who has the condition. People are classified as having a disability if there is a response of "yes" to any of these questions. For more information, see the wording of the [six questions used to identify people with a disability](#), available on our website.

Displaced workers are wage and salary workers, 20 years of age and older, who lost or left jobs because their plant or company closed or moved, there was insufficient work for them to do, or their position or shift was abolished. Data are presented for long-tenured displaced workers—those who had worked for their employer for 3 or more years at the time of displacement. All self-employed workers are excluded, both those with incorporated businesses and those with unincorporated businesses. Data are collected through a biennial supplement to the January CPS.

The *employed* are people who, during the survey reference week (which is generally the week including the 12th day of the month), (a) did any work at all as paid employees, (b) worked in their own business or profession or on their own farm, or (c) worked 15 or more hours as unpaid workers in a family member's business. People who were temporarily absent from their jobs or business because of illness, vacation, a labor dispute, or another reason also are counted as employed.

The *employment-population ratio* represents the number of employed people as a percentage of the population.

The *foreign born* are people residing in the United States who were not U.S. citizens at birth. That is, they were born outside the United States or one of its outlying areas (such as Puerto Rico or Guam), and neither parent was a U.S. citizen. The foreign-born population includes legally admitted immigrants; refugees; temporary residents, such as students and temporary workers; and undocumented immigrants. The survey does not specifically identify people in these categories, however.

The *native born* are people born in the United States or one of its outlying areas or, if born abroad, had at least one parent who was a U.S. citizen.

Hispanic or Latino ethnicity refers to people who identified themselves in the survey process as being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. People who identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race and are included in estimates for the race groups (White, Black or African American, and Asian) in addition to being shown separately.

Hours at work reflects the number of hours actually worked (at all jobs) during the survey reference week, which is generally the week including the 12th day of the month. For example, people who normally work 40 hours a week but were off for 8 hours during the Columbus Day holiday would be reported as working 32 hours, even if they were paid for the holiday. (See related information on usual full- or part-time status.)

Married-couple families refers to opposite-sex and same-sex married couples (one of whom is the householder) residing together and any of their family members residing in the household.

- The *householder* is the person (or one of the people) in whose name the housing unit is owned or rented and, therefore, is the family reference person.

Workers paid at or below the prevailing federal minimum wage include only workers who are paid hourly rates. Salaried workers and other workers who are not paid by the hour are not included, even though some have earnings that, if converted to hourly rates, would be at or below the minimum wage. The estimates of workers paid at or below the federal minimum wage in this report are based solely on whether the hourly wage they report (which does not include overtime pay, tips, or commissions) is at or below the federal minimum wage. Some respondents might round hourly earnings when answering survey questions. As a result, some workers might report having hourly earnings above or below the federal minimum wage when, in fact, they earn the minimum wage.

Some workers who reported earnings below the prevailing federal minimum wage may not be covered by federal or state minimum wage laws because of exclusions and exemptions in the statutes. Thus, the presence of workers with hourly earnings below the federal minimum wage does not necessarily indicate violations of the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) or state statutes in cases where such standards apply. The CPS does not include questions on whether workers are covered by the minimum wage provisions of the FLSA or by individual state or local minimum wage laws.

The estimates presented in this report likely understate the actual number of workers with hourly earnings at or below the minimum wage. BLS does not routinely estimate the hourly earnings of workers not paid by the hour because there are data quality concerns associated with constructing such an estimate.

People *not in the labor force* are those who are neither employed nor unemployed.

Information on *occupation and industry* applies to the job held during the reference week. People with two or more jobs are classified into the occupation and industry in which they worked the greatest number of hours. The occupation and industry classification of CPS data is based on the 2018 Census occupational classification system and the 2017 Census industrial classification system, which are derived from the 2018 Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) and the 2017 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), respectively. For more information, see [Occupational and Industry classifications used in the CPS](#).

Poverty classification statistics presented in this report are based on definitions developed by the Social Security Administration in 1964 and revised by federal interagency committees in 1969 and 1981. These definitions originally were based on the Department of Agriculture's Economy Food Plan and reflected the different consumption requirements of families, predicated on the basis of factors such as family size and the number of children under 18 years of age.

The actual poverty thresholds vary because of the makeup of the family. In 2019, the weighted average poverty threshold for a family of four was \$26,172; for a family of nine or more people, the threshold was \$52,875; and for one person (unrelated individual), it was \$13,011. Poverty thresholds are updated each year to reflect changes in the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U). Thresholds do not vary geographically. (For more information, see "[Income and Poverty in the United States: 2019](#).")

Race is reported by the household respondent. In accordance with the Office of Management and Budget standards, White, Black or African American, and Asian are terms used to describe a person's race. Beginning in 2003, people in these categories are those who selected that race group only. Those who identify multiple race groups are categorized as people of Two or More Races. Before 2003, people identified one group as their main race. For more information, see [Revisions to the Current Population Survey Effective in January 2003](#). Data for other race groups—American Indians and Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders—and for people of Two or More Races are included in totals but not separately identified in this report because the number of survey respondents is too small to develop estimates of publication quality.

Self-employed workers are those who work for profit or fees in their own business, profession, trade, or farm. Estimates of the self-employed in this report reflect only people whose businesses are unincorporated. Self-employed people whose businesses are incorporated are included with wage and salary workers, unless otherwise specified.

Employee *tenure* is a measure of how long wage and salary workers had been with their current employer at the time of the survey. Tenure is presented in median years; the median is the point at which half of all workers had more tenure and half had less. Data refer to the sole or principal job of full- and part-time workers. All self-employed workers are excluded, both those with incorporated businesses and those with unincorporated businesses. The data are collected through a biennial supplement to the January CPS.

The *unemployed* are people who had no employment during the survey reference week, were available for work (except if they had a temporary illness), and had made specific efforts to find employment sometime during the 4-week period ending with the survey reference week. People who were waiting to be recalled to a job from which they had been laid off need not have been looking for work to be classified as unemployed.

The *unemployment rate* represents the number of unemployed people as a percentage of the civilian labor force.

Union membership refers to members of a labor union or of an employee association similar to a union. The data are tabulated from one-quarter of the CPS monthly sample and are limited to wage and salary workers. All self-employed workers are excluded, both those with incorporated businesses and those with unincorporated businesses.

Usual full- or part-time status is based on the number of hours people usually work per week, regardless of the number of hours worked in the reference week. Full-time workers are those who usually work 35 or more hours per week (at all jobs combined). Part-time workers are those who usually work less than 35 hours per week (at all jobs).

Usual weekly earnings reflect earnings before taxes and other deductions and include any overtime pay, commissions, or tips usually received (at the main job in the case of multiple jobholders). Since January 1994, respondents have been asked to identify the easiest way for them to report earnings (hourly, weekly, biweekly, twice monthly, monthly, annually, or other) and how much they usually earn in the reported time period. Earnings reported on a basis other than weekly are converted to a weekly equivalent. The term "usual" is determined by each respondent's own understanding of the term. If the respondent asks for a definition of "usual," interviewers are instructed to define the term as more than half the weeks worked during the past 4 or 5 months.

Earnings estimates are presented as median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers. The median is the point at which half of all workers had higher earnings and half had lower earnings.

Veterans are men and women 18 years or older who previously served on Active Duty in the U.S. Armed Forces and who were civilians at the time they were surveyed. People who are on Active Duty at the time of the survey are outside the scope of the survey and thus not in the estimates shown here. Nonveterans are men and women who never served on Active Duty in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Wage and salary workers are people age 16 and older who receive wages, salaries, commissions, tips, payment in kind, or piece rates from a private-sector employer or from a local, state, or federal government agency or entity. This includes paid employees of charities, nonprofits, and religious and civic organizations. This group also generally includes the incorporated self-employed because, legally, they are paid employees of a corporation. (Data on union membership, earnings, tenure, and displacement of wage and salary workers exclude all self-employed workers, both those with incorporated businesses and those with unincorporated businesses.)

Work experience data reflect work activity during the calendar year and are obtained from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) to the CPS. Estimates of people who worked are based on "yes" responses to the following questions in the ASEC: "Did you work at a job or business at any time during [the survey reference year]?" or "Did you do any temporary, part-time, or seasonal work even for a few days during [the survey reference year]?" Because the reference period is a full year, the number of people with some employment exceeds the level for any given month, which is based on a 1-week reference period, and the corresponding annual averages of monthly estimates.

Workers paid hourly rates are wage and salary workers who report that they are paid by the hour on their main job. Historically, workers paid an hourly wage have made up approximately three-fifths of all wage and salary workers.

The *working poor* are people who spent at least 27 weeks in the labor force (that is, working or looking for work) but whose incomes still fell below the official poverty level. The working-poor rate is the number of individuals in the labor force for at least 27 weeks whose incomes still fell below the official poverty level, as a percentage of all people who were in the labor force for at least 27 weeks during the calendar year. These data are obtained from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) to the CPS.

Reliability of the estimates

Statistics based on the CPS are subject to both sampling and nonsampling error. When a sample, rather than an entire population, is surveyed, there is a chance that the sample estimates may differ from the true population values they represent. There are two reasons this occurs: sampling error and nonsampling error. Sampling error occurs because samples differ by chance. The sampling error variability is measured by the standard error of the estimate. There is about a 90-percent chance, or level of confidence, that an estimate based on a sample will differ by no more than 1.6 standard errors from the true population value because of sampling error. BLS analyses are generally conducted at the 90-percent level of confidence.

All other types of error are referred to as nonsampling error. Nonsampling error can occur for many reasons, including the failure to sample a segment of the population, inability to obtain information for all respondents in the sample, inability or unwillingness of respondents to provide correct information, and errors made in the collection or processing of data. For more information on sampling and nonsampling errors in the CPS and estimating standard errors, see [Reliability of estimates from the CPS](#).

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