

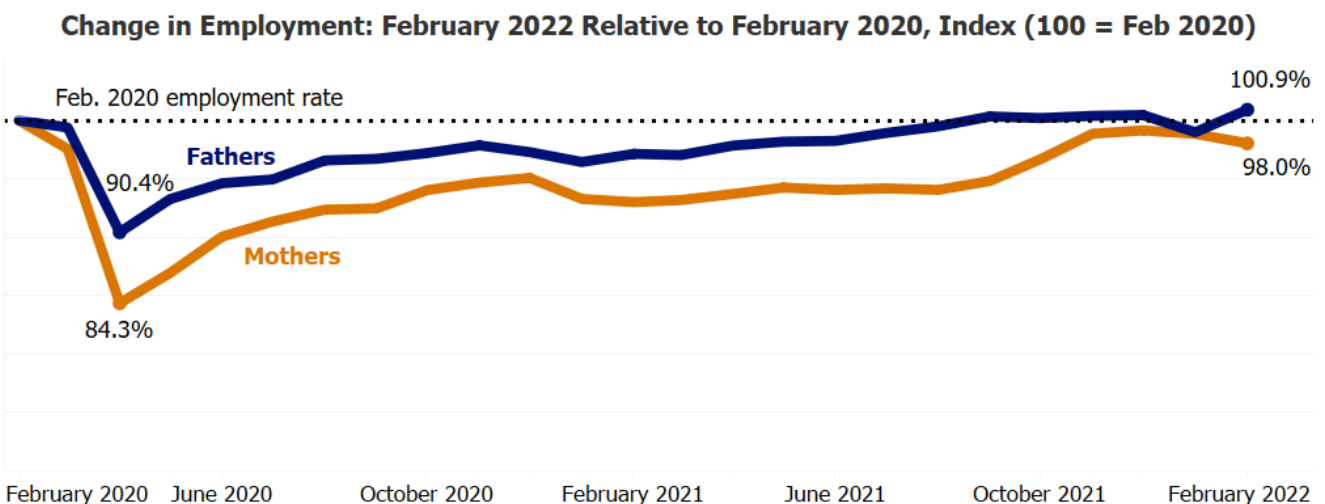
Mothers' Employment Two Years Later: An Assessment of Employment Loss and Recovery During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Liana Christin Landivar and Mark deWolf
Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor
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Since the COVID-19 pandemic became widespread in early 2020, maternal employment has experienced significant disruptions. Here, we show how steeply maternal employment declined in 2020, how much improvement there has been in maternal employment two years later, and where disparities remain in employment recovery. In the analyses presented, we primarily focus on employment among parents with children under the age of 13, as they experienced the largest increase in [caregiving hours](#) during the pandemic.¹

Maternal employment fell steeply and has not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels

Maternal employment declined by 15.7% in April 2020, a larger decline than the 9.6% reduction fathers experienced at that time. Throughout the pandemic, mothers' employment has recovered more slowly and remains 2.0% below their February 2020 employment rate, representing about 333,500 working mothers. Fathers' employment has fully recovered to pre-pandemic employment levels.



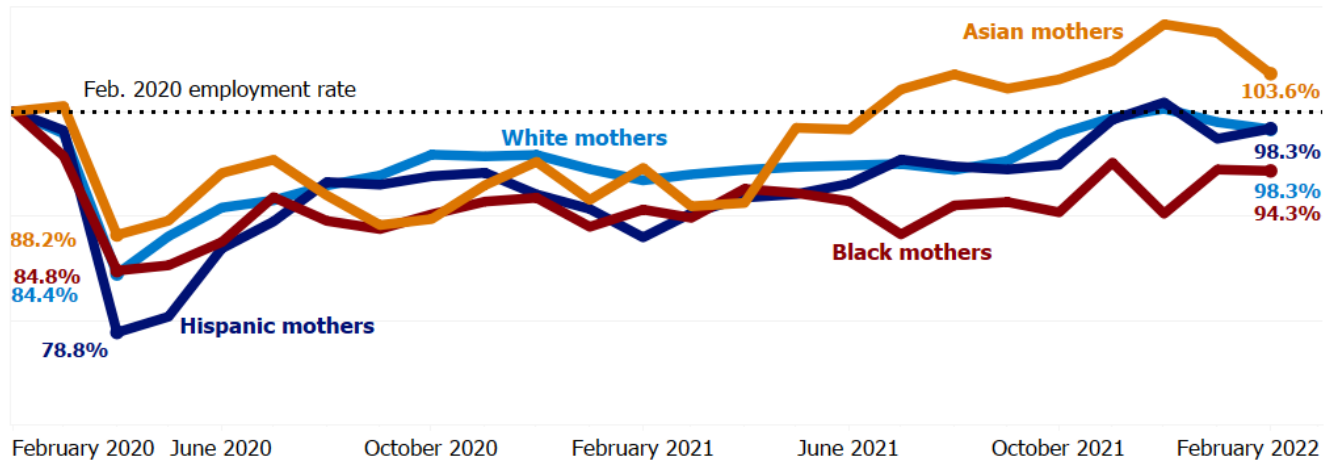
Note: Employment rates for mothers and fathers ages 25 to 54 with children under 13 living in the household.
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey IPUMS (not seasonally adjusted)
Graphic: Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor

Hispanic mothers experienced the largest decline in employment rates but Black mothers have experienced the slowest employment recovery

Hispanic mothers had the largest initial decline in employment rates, falling 21.2% in April 2020 relative to February 2020. Black mothers' employment fell 15.2% and remains 5.7% below February 2020 levels. Longstanding discriminatory labor market policies and practices reflected in [occupational segregation](#), [unequal pay](#), and lower access to employment [benefits](#) and [protections](#) and remote work are among

some of the factors that have hindered Black and Hispanic mothers' employment recovery.² Black and Hispanic mothers were also more likely to reside in areas with disrupted [childcare](#) services and reduced availability of in-person school [instruction](#).³

Change in Mothers' Employment Rates by Race: February 2022 Relative to February 2020, Index (100 = Feb 2020)

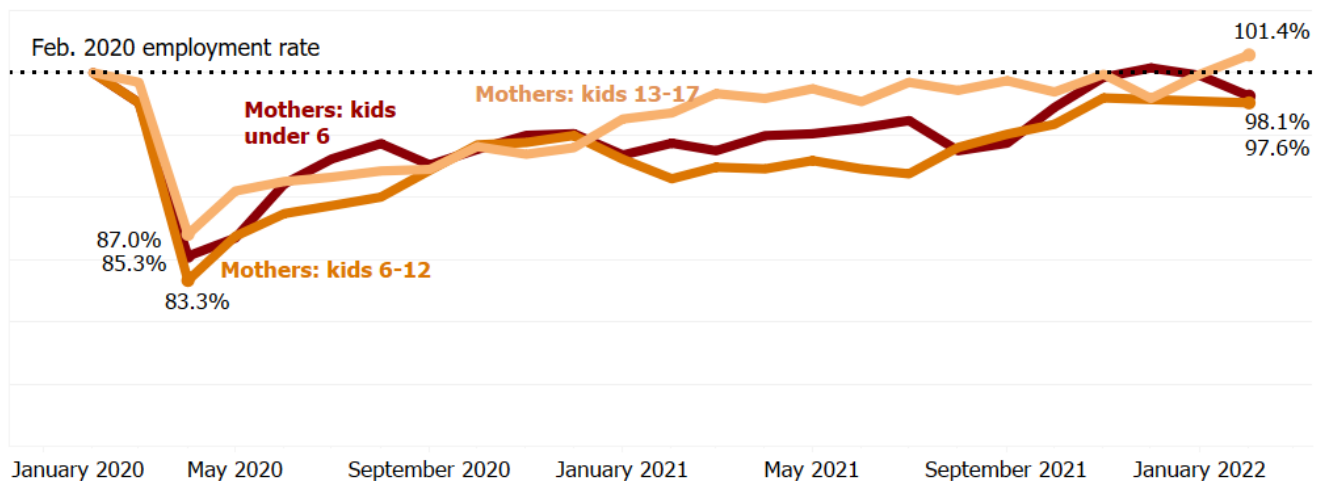


Note: Employment rates for mothers ages 25 to 54 with children under 13 living in the household.
 Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey IPUMS (not seasonally adjusted)
 Graphic: Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor

Mothers of younger children experienced more disruptions to employment

Mothers of young school age children (6-12) experienced the steepest declines in employment rates in April 2020 as schools throughout the country closed to in-person instruction. Among mothers, they also have the lowest employment rate recovery, still 2.4% behind their pre-pandemic level.

Change in Mothers' Employment Rate by Age of Youngest Child: February 2022 Relative to February 2020, Index (100 = Feb 2020)



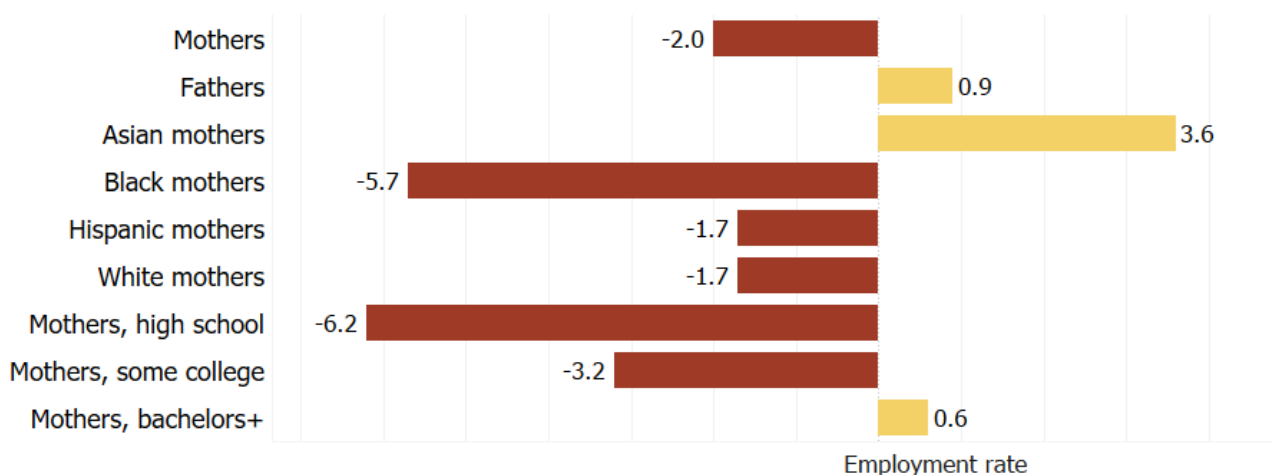
Note: Employment rates for mothers ages 25 to 54 with children under 18 living in the household.
 Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey IPUMS (not seasonally adjusted)
 Graphic: Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor

Mothers of the youngest children (under 6) also experienced significant reductions in employment rates early in the pandemic as childcare options were disrupted and remain 1.9% below pre-pandemic employment levels. Mothers of older children (13-17) and fathers of children across all three age groups of children have recovered their pre-pandemic employment levels.

Mothers with lower levels of educational attainment remain below their pre-pandemic employment rates

Although mothers with a bachelor’s degree or higher level of education are now above pre-pandemic employment, employment rates among mothers with lower levels of educational attainment remain 3.2 to 6.2% below their pre-pandemic levels. The ability to [telework](#) was crucial early in the pandemic to maintain employment and workers with lower levels of educational attainment were less likely to have access.⁴ In May 2020, when the Bureau of Labor Statistics first started tracking pandemic-related telework, 63.1% of mothers with a bachelor’s degree reported teleworking due to the pandemic compared with 17.9% of mothers with a high school diploma.

**Percent Change in Employment Rates by Selected Characteristics:
February 2022 relative to February 2020**



Note: Respondents ages 25 to 54. Parents with children under age 13 living in the household.

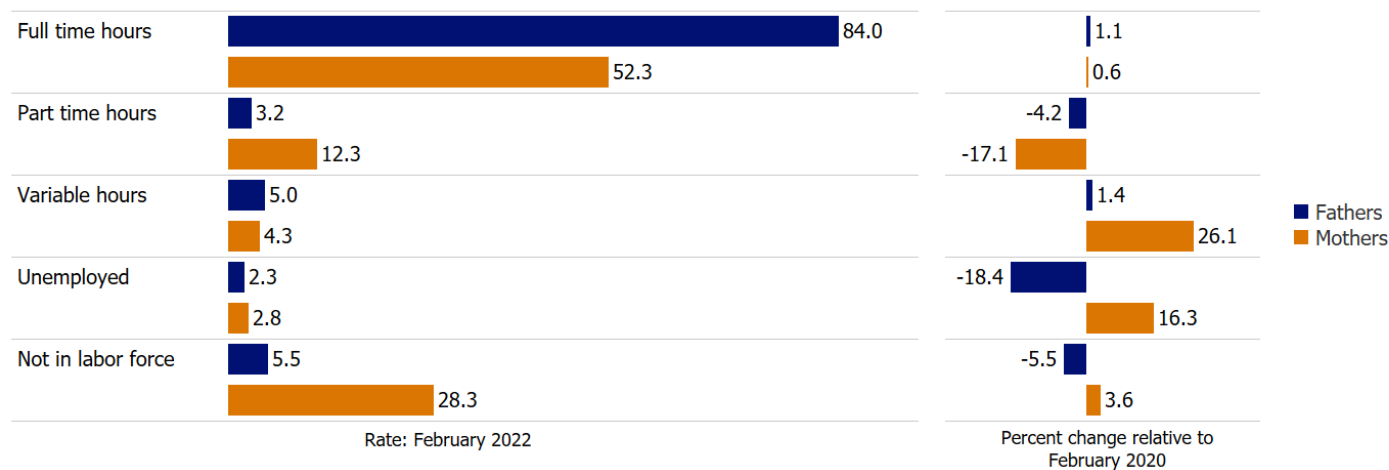
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey IPUMS

Graphic: Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor

Since the start of the pandemic, employment losses have disproportionately impacted women in service occupations and part-time workers. These jobs are more likely to be poorly compensated, [lack paid leave](#) and have limited telework options which support employment continuity.⁵ Employment in service occupations, which includes food preparation and serving, childcare workers, and building and grounds cleaning, lags behind other major occupational groups in its employment recovery. Many service occupations also disproportionately employ part-time workers. Compared with February 2020, mothers’ employment rate in part time work is down by 17.1%. Many of those transitioning out of part-time employment likely exited the labor force, became unemployed, or experienced greater work hour variability if they remained employed. Compared with fathers, mothers were more likely to exit the

labor force, enter unemployment or variable work hour employment, and less likely to gain full time hours.

Parents' Employment Status and Work Hours in February 2022 and Change Relative to February 2020



Note: Respondents ages 25 to 54. Parents with children under age 13 living in the household.
 Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey IPUMS
 Graphic: Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor

Care infrastructure is also a critical employment support. As schools have reopened to in-person instruction, we may see improvement in employment for mothers of younger kids. However, employment in child day care services, including after school care which is a critical support for parents with young school-aged children, remains 11% below pre-pandemic levels. The Census Bureau shows that households continue to [report work disruptions](#) due to a lack of childcare. As recently as February 2022, 5.9 million women in households with children under 5 and 4.9 million women in households with children ages 5 to 11 reported at least one type of work disruption, such as working reduced hours, taking leave, or losing a job, for a member of the household due to a lack of childcare. Even as childcare disruptions were more widespread early in the pandemic, parents continue to [lack access to affordable childcare](#) with recent increases in childcare prices exceeding inflation and with availability that has become even more constrained as many childcare providers closed permanently during the pandemic.⁶

Expanded access to paid family and medical leave, fair scheduling, improved compensation, and greater investment in care infrastructure can help achieve a more equitable recovery.

Endnotes

¹ Bauer, Lauren, Sara Estep, and Winnie Yee. "Time Waited for No Mom in 2020." Brookings (2021). <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2021/07/22/time-waited-for-no-mom-in-2020/#:~:text=In%202020%2C%20mothers%20of%20younger,of%20the%20COVID%2D19%20pandemic.>

² "Bearing the Cost: How Overrepresentation in Undervalued Roles Hurt Women During the Pandemic." U.S. Department of Labor (2022). <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/media/BearingTheCostReportFactSheet.pdf>; "Earnings and Earning Ratios by Sex, Race, and Occupation Group." Women's Bureau (2022). <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/data/earnings/wage-gap-race-occupation>; Wolfe, Rebecca, Kristen Harknett, and Daniel Schneider. "Inequalities at Work and the Toll of COVID-19." Health Affairs Health Policy Brief (2021). <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hpb20210428.863621/full/>; Pirtle, Whitney N. Laster and Tashelle

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³ Lee, Emma K. and Zachary Parolin. "The Care Burden during COVID-19: A National Database of Child Care Closures in the United States." *Socius* (2021).

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⁴ Dey, Matthew, Harley Frazis, David S. Piccone, Jr., and Mark A. Loewenstein. "Teleworking and Lost Work During the Pandemic: New Evidence from the CPS." *Monthly Labor Review* (2021).
<https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2021/article/teleworking-and-lost-work-during-the-pandemic-new-evidence-from-the-cps.htm>.

⁵ Landivar, Liana Christin, Rose A. Woods, and Gretchen M. Livingston. "Does Part-Time Work Offer Flexibility to Employed Mothers?" *Monthly Labor Review* (2022). <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2022/article/pdf/does-part-time-work-offer-flexibility-to-employed-mothers.pdf>.

⁶ "Demanding Change: Repairing our Child Care System." *Child Care Aware of America* (2022).
<https://www.childcareaware.org/demanding-change-repairing-our-child-care-system/>.