

U.S. News: Women's Pay Gains Now Outpace Men's

Sarah Chaney Cambon; Rivas, Ana . Wall Street Journal , Eastern edition; New York, N.Y. [New York, N.Y]. 22 Mar 2022: A.2.

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FULL TEXT

Wage growth for American women is increasing at a faster rate than for men, a stark shift from earlier in the Covid-19 pandemic.

Female wages were up 4.4% in February from a year earlier, compared with a 4.1% rise in male wages, according to the Atlanta Federal Reserve's wage tracker. That marks the sixth straight month that women's wage growth outpaced men's.

Female wage gains exceeded male gains by 0.5 percentage point in December, matching the widest margin for records tracing back to 1997.

These pay gains are helping women regain ground in the labor market after they endured big setbacks at the start of the pandemic. Women account for a disproportionate share of lower-wage service-sector jobs in personal care, food preparation and healthcare support, which saw steep cuts when the pandemic struck. Businesses in these industries widely reopened last year. Since then, many have struggled to find employees, lifting pay for workers who typically face greater barriers to employment.

"This group of workers who experienced the worst disruption during the pandemic is now also experiencing the fastest recovery in earnings and employment," said Julia Pollak, chief economist at jobs site ZipRecruiter. "It's sort of sad that we only see these reversals and any kind of narrowing in the gaps when the labor market is extraordinarily, unusually tight. But that is typically the pattern."

Women who switch jobs are also reaping big pay increases. About 31% of women who changed jobs during the pandemic got a compensation package – including salary and bonus – that was more than 30% higher than in their previous role. That slightly exceeds the 28% of men who reported such a pay increase, according to the Conference Board, a private-research group.

The gender pay gap has shrunk slightly over the past two decades as more women have entered higher-paying white-collar professions. But there remains a wide pay gap between men and women. Last year, median weekly earnings for full-time female workers amounted to 83.1% of men's earnings.

One factor behind the gender pay gap: Women tend to occupy jobs that pay less, on average. Women account for more than 75% of workers in eight of the 20 occupations with the lowest median weekly earnings, according to a March Labor Department report. That includes occupations such as hostess, housekeeper and hairdresser.

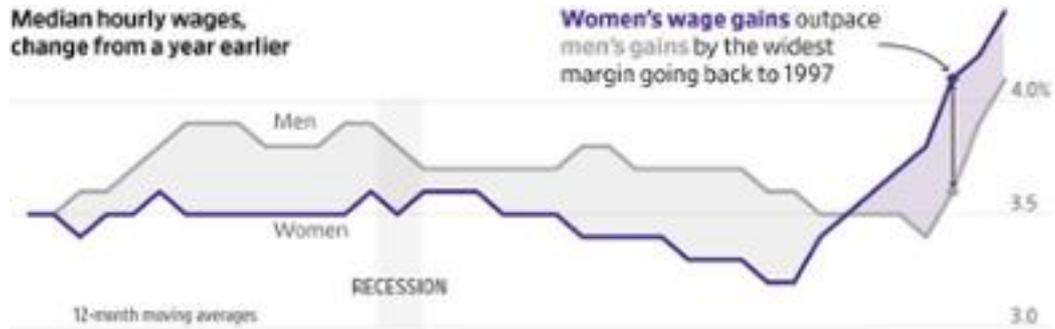
Women are more likely than men to work part-time, making up 62% of part-time workers in February, the Labor Department said. Those jobs are also often lower-paying roles in sectors such as retail, a report from Labor Department researchers showed.

Mothers often take time out of the workforce, which can also lead to pay setbacks. Many women left the labor force when the pandemic hit to care for children as schools and day-care centers shut down.

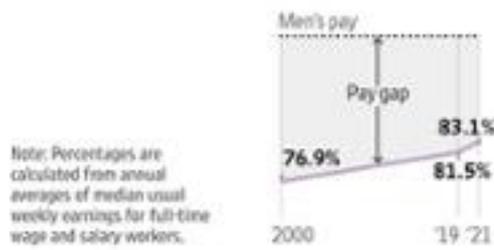
Several factors are converging to draw women back, including higher wages, an easing pandemic and fewer child-care disruptions. The labor-force participation rate for prime-age women – or the share of women ages 25 to 54 working or seeking a job – climbed to 75.8% in February, up from 74.9% a year earlier.

Despite steady gains in female workforce participation, there are still fewer women ages 16 and up in the labor force than before the pandemic. Meanwhile, male labor-force participation levels have fully recovered. The majority of women who are considering a return to the workforce say they strongly desire good pay, health insurance and job security, according to a survey from the Institute for Women's Policy Research. However, many female employees say they lack these types of benefits. In other words, there is a big gap between what women say they need and what employers provide, said Nicole Mason, president of IWPR. "Being able to close that gap, I think, is going to be critical in terms of women's labor-force participation," she said.

Median hourly wages, change from a year earlier

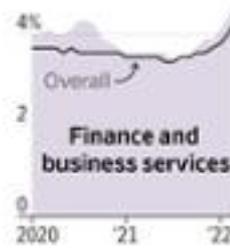


Women's annual average weekly pay as percentage of men's



Note: Percentages are calculated from annual averages of median usual weekly earnings for full-time wage and salary workers.

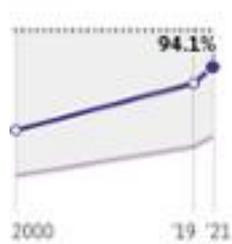
Median hourly wages, change from a year earlier



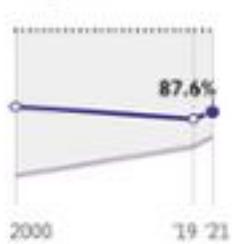
Cumulative change in jobs since Dec. 2019



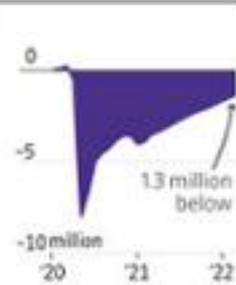
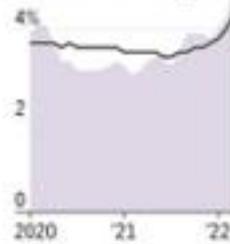
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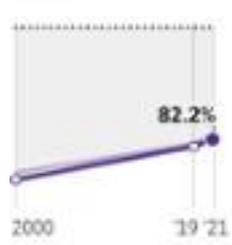
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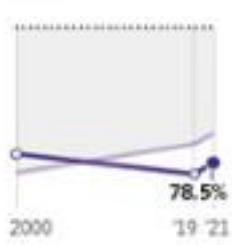
Leisure and hospitality



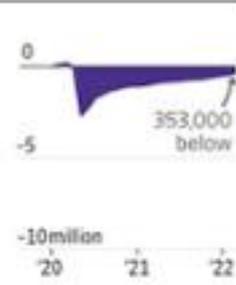
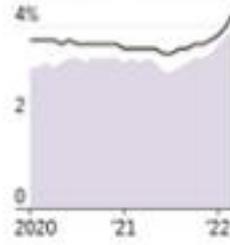
White



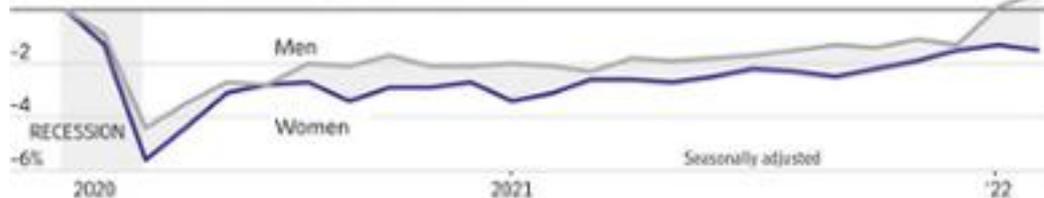
Asian



Education and health



Civilian labor force level, change from Feb. 2020



*Includes jobs in legal services, accounting and management
 Sources: Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta calculations of Current Population Survey; Bureau of Labor Statistics data (median hourly wages); Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (demographics); Atlanta Fed's Wage Growth Tracker (12-month moving average change in wages); Current Employment Statistics (payroll, seasonally adjusted); Bureau of Labor Statistics data via Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (civilian labor)

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Credit: By Sarah Chaney Cambon and Ana Rivas

DETAILS

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