

## WOMEN'S SHARE OF JOBS UP, NEARING PAY PARITY WITH MEN

The share of nonfarm payroll jobs held by women grew in the first 12 months of the recession, even as hundreds of thousands of them lost jobs, and could top 50 percent for the first time in U.S. history later this year if the trend continues, according to a BNA analysis of Department of Labor employment data.

Women's share of total nonfarm employment, which includes both full-time and part-time workers, increased to 49.3 percent in December from 48.7 percent a year earlier at the start of the recession. Despite losing 617,000 jobs in 2008, women increased their proportion of nonfarm payrolls because men lost four times as many jobs, or 2.4 million, dropping their share to 51.7 percent in December. The analysis shows that if job cuts continue at a rate of 383,000 per month for men and 135,000 per month for women, the average during the final three months of 2008, women would overtake men as the majority of nonfarm payrolls in August, at 50.1 percent.

Although mathematically possible, reaching parity in jobs for women is unlikely this year, Heidi Hartmann, president of the Institute for Women's Policy Research, says. Even if they reach numerical parity, women still have far to go to achieve equality in pay, hours of work, and work-life balance. If the recession moves "us closer to equality, that's not a bad outcome—that's good for the long term goal of trying [to] achieve more gender equity in society," Hartmann says.

Karen Nussbaum, director of the AFL-CIO's Working for America Institute, says loss of many "good-paying unionized jobs" has forced women "to become the mainstays of their families....It's no way to achieve equality."

As men have lost so many jobs so far in the recession, "American families are relying on women to make ends meet," says Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney (D-NY), who chairs the Joint Economic Committee. "When women are the breadwinners it is even more essential that they receive equal pay and benefits and that employers help them balance work and family." Congress recognized the importance of women's role by passing the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which was the first bill President Obama signed into law, and by enacting a \$787 billion economic stimulus that "contains significant efforts to save or create jobs in education and the service sector, where women dominate." Although women typically bolster families in downturns, "I'm hopeful that the equity we're achieving continues in the good times," Maloney says.

If job losses continue at recent levels and in the same ratio of men to women, about four to one, women's employment could exceed that of men by mid-2009, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics Commissioner Keith Hall. Compared with previous downturns, women's 21 percent share of job losses so far in this recession is less than their 25 percent share during the 2001 recession and subsequent two-year "jobless recovery" but greater than their share of under 10 percent in the 1990-91 downturn, Hall says.

"We've now had almost a full decade to see whether women's rates recovered to levels achieved in 1990s, and we just haven't seen that," Gary Burtless of the Brookings Institution says. Despite heavy job losses, 65 percent of men of prime working age are employed, compared with 54 percent of their female counterparts. Women's labor force participation rate, or the proportion of the female adult population holding jobs, unemployed, or entering the job market, reached a high of 60.2 percent in 1999, up from 38.4 percent in 1964, before declining to 59.3 percent in January. Men's rate has steadily fallen from 81.0 percent in 1964 to a record low 72.1 percent in January.

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