So far, the labor market has shown little evidence that the economy is recovering. In fact, many labor market indicators have not changed discernibly since the recession began in March 2001: Labor force participation for both men and women continues to decline. The fraction of those working or looking for work has dropped 1.0 percentage point for men and about 0.5 percentage point for women. The fraction of the population that is employed has also fallen for both sexes. And the unemployment rate has crept up from roughly 4.3% in March 2001 to its current 6%.

Job losses have not been evenly distributed among occupations. Women suffered significant losses in three categories: precision production (10%), operators and laborers (9%), and farming (6%). Men also took their biggest job loss in precision production, but it was only about 4%. Men also showed losses in technical and managerial occupations. The industries that posted gains were services (men and women) and farming (about 8% for men).

In December 2002, only one category—managers—showed roughly equal shares of men and women. About 30% of employed men and 30% of employed women are in managerial occupations. However, the share of women in technical and service occupations was nearly double the share of men.