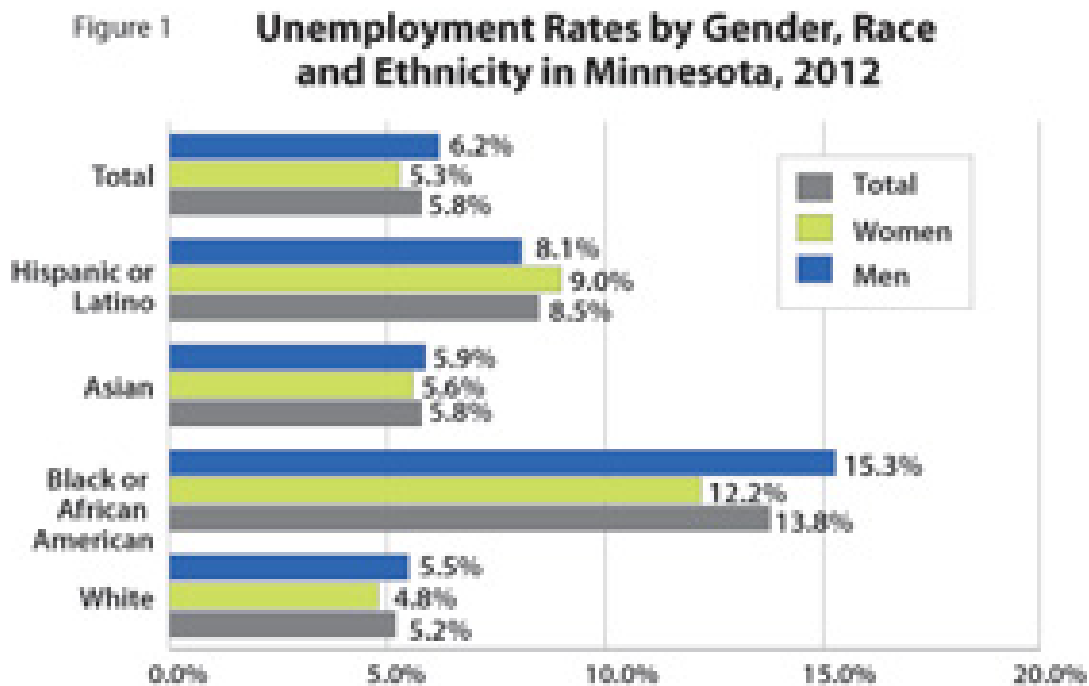


## MN employment improves, but racial gap remains

Written by John Michaelson, Minnesota News Connection  
Tuesday, 12 November 2013 13:05



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Geographic Profile of Employment and Unemployment"

While Minnesota officially has recovered jobs lost over the Great Recession and the unemployment rate continues to trend down, the state is still struggling with a major employment gap among races.

Minorities are two to three times more likely to be unemployed than whites, said Law professor Nakima Levy-Pounds. She cited multiple reasons including a lack of networking opportunities. Often, she said, when it comes to finding a job, it isn't just what you know, it's who you know.

"When people are applying for employment positions, if they know someone who can help them get their foot in the door, that's going to possibly be a factor in terms of who is hired," she said. "So, if you lack access to those networks, that's going to hinder your potential for landing a position."

During the recession, the jobless rate for whites in Minnesota topped out at slightly more than 8 percent, while it reached 16 percent for Hispanics and around 23 percent for African-Americans.

One effort that would help close the racial employment gap is doing more to support minority-owned businesses, she said, adding that those, in turn, would hire more workers.

"One of the strategies that many stakeholders have been discussing is how to increase the capacity, so that they have enough capital to accelerate the growth of their businesses, but also so that they're able to hire people from the community, and people from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds," she said.

Leveling the playing field in education is another key, and Pounds said it's vital to the future economic health of the state as the need for a skilled and well-trained workforce grows.

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"As workers begin to retire in what some call the 'silver tsunami,' we do not have enough qualified workers to take over those positions," she said.

High school graduation rates in Minnesota are at around 80 percent for whites, compared with less than 50 percent for black students.

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