

Employment Data Digest

AARP Public Policy Institute's monthly look at the latest employment numbers for people ages 55+

- In February 2017 the labor force participation rate for persons ages 55 and over was 39.9 percent, unchanged from the prior month.
- With many members of the baby boomer generation now retired, there has been a corresponding increase in the number of Americans not in the labor force. The labor force participation rate of younger age groups has decreased; the total labor force participation rate in February was 63 percent compared with 66 percent at the beginning of the recession in December 2007.
- Although less likely to be unemployed compared with other age groups, jobseekers ages 55+ continued to experience longer average durations of unemployment in February.

Total Payroll Employment

In February total nonfarm payroll employment rose by 235,000 jobs, and approximately 34.9 million people ages 55+ were employed. Leading industries for job gains were construction, private educational services, manufacturing, health care, and mining.

Labor Force Participation

The labor force participation rate is the percentage of the population that is either employed or unemployed (i.e., either working or actively seeking work). While the labor force participation rate of those in the 16-to-24 and 25-to-54 age groups has decreased slightly since the beginning of the recession, the rate for those ages 55+ has gone up slightly and was 39.9 percent in February 2017.

TABLE 1
LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE BY AGE

	DEC 2007*	FEB 2016	NOV 2016	DEC 2016	JAN 2017	FEB 2017
TOTAL 16 AND OVER	66.0%	62.9%	62.6%	62.7%	62.9%	63.0%
16 TO 24	59.2%	55.5%	55.1%	55.2%	55.6%	55.8%
25 TO 54	83.1%	81.2%	81.4%	81.5%	81.5%	81.7%
55 AND OVER	38.9%	40.1%	39.9%	39.7%	39.9%	39.9%

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Labor force statistics from the Current Population Survey. Seasonally adjusted. *Beginning of recession, which officially ended in June 2009.

Employment Rate

The employment rate (sometimes called the employment-to-population ratio) refers to the proportion of the civilian noninstitutional population that is employed. A year-over-year comparison shows that, while the employment rate for individuals ages 20 and over trended down since the beginning of the recession (though slightly rising in the last few years), the rate of individuals ages 55 and over trended up slightly. In February 2017 the employment rate for people ages 55 and older was the same as in February 2016.

TABLE 2
EMPLOYMENT RATE

	DEC 2007*	FEB 2009	FEB 2010	FEB 2011	FEB 2012	FEB 2013	FEB 2014	FEB 2015	FEB 2016	FEB 2017
20 YEARS AND OVER	65.0%	62.6%	61.0%	60.8%	61.0%	61.0%	61.1%	61.4%	61.9%	62.1%
55 YEARS AND OVER	37.7%	37.6%	37.2%	37.4%	38.0%	38.2%	38.2%	38.0%	38.6%	38.6%

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Seasonally adjusted. *Beginning of recession, which officially ended in June 2009.

Unemployment Rate

The unemployed are individuals 16 years and older who were not employed during the survey reference week, were available for work, and had made specific efforts to find employment sometime during the four-week period ending with the reference week. The unemployment rate is the number of people unemployed as a percentage of the labor force. Table 3 shows that those ages 55 and older have a slightly lower unemployment rate compared with the total workforce. The rate was 3.4 percent for men ages 55 and above compared with 3.5 percent for women ages 55 and over in February 2017.

TABLE 3
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE 55+

	DEC 2007*	FEB 2016	NOV 2016	DEC 2016	JAN 2017	FEB 2017
TOTAL, 16 YEARS AND OVER	5.0%	4.9%	4.6%	4.7%	4.8%	4.7%
TOTAL AGES 55 AND OVER	3.2%	3.8%	3.5%	3.6%	3.5%	3.4%
MEN, 55 YEARS AND OVER	3.2%	4.0%	3.6%	3.7%	3.3%	3.4%
WOMEN, 55 YEARS AND OVER	3.3%	3.4%	3.4%	3.6%	3.6%	3.5%

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Current Population Survey data. Seasonally adjusted. *Beginning of recession, which officially ended in June 2009.

Duration of Unemployment

The duration of unemployment refers to the length of time in weeks that individuals classified as unemployed have been looking for work. The median duration of unemployment refers to the duration of unemployment below and above which there is an equal number. As shown in table 4, jobseekers ages 45 and over have longer average and median durations of unemployment compared with individuals in other age categories. Jobseekers ages 55 and over have the longest average durations of unemployment – nearly 36 weeks – compared with other age groups.

TABLE 4
DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE (NUMBERS IN THOUSANDS)

	FEBRUARY 2017							
	UNEMPLOYED						WEEKS OF UNEMPLOYMENT	
	TOTAL	LESS THAN 5 WEEKS	5 TO 14 WEEKS	15 WEEKS AND OVER			AVERAGE (MEAN) DURATION	MEDIAN DURATION
				TOTAL	15 TO 26 WEEKS	27 WEEKS AND OVER		
TOTAL, 16 YEARS AND OVER	7,887	2,327	2,522	3,038	1,160	1,878	25.1	10.3
16 TO 19 YEARS	813	309	275	228	119	109	14.2	7.3
20 TO 24 YEARS	1,280	391	469	420	203	218	18.3	8.9
25 TO 34 YEARS	1,834	587	561	686	279	407	22.3	9.8
35 TO 44 YEARS	1,467	420	493	553	211	342	25.4	10.4
45 TO 54 YEARS	1,165	296	351	518	167	351	32.6	12.7
55 TO 64 YEARS	899	206	246	447	127	320	35.6	14.4
65 YEARS AND OVER	429	116	127	186	55	131	35.7	11.9

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Not seasonally adjusted.

TABLE 5
MEDIAN DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE (WEEKS)

	DEC 2007*	FEB 2009	FEB 2010	FEB 2011	FEB 2012	FEB 2013	FEB 2014	FEB 2015	FEB 2016	FEB 2017
20 YEARS AND OVER	8.6	11.8	20.3	21.7	20.1	18.4	16.8	13.6	12.2	10.8
55 TO 64 YEARS	10.8	13.6	28.2	27.7	31.4	23.0	22.8	16.3	16.7	14.4
65 YEARS AND OVER	7.4	12.3	20.2	29.8	28.1	23.6	20.1	14.8	11.1	11.9

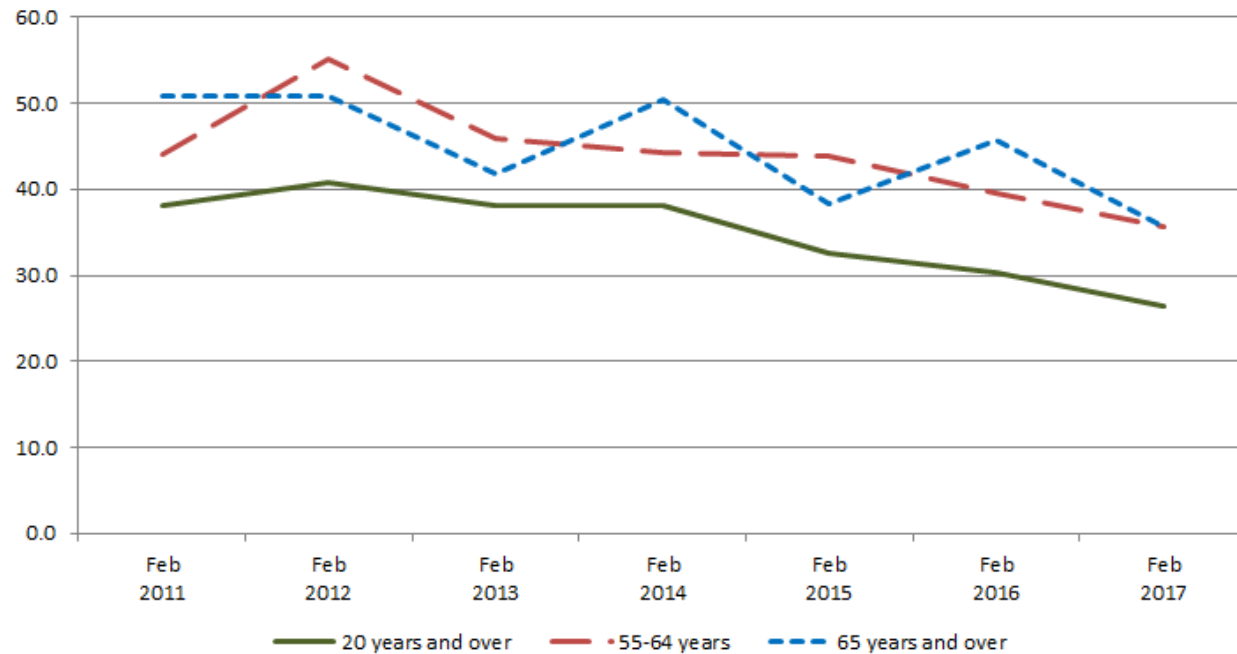
Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Not seasonally adjusted. *Beginning of recession, which officially ended in June 2009.

TABLE 6
AVERAGE DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE (WEEKS)

	FEB 2011	FEB 2012	FEB 2013	FEB 2014	FEB 2015	FEB 2016	FEB 2017
20 YEARS AND OVER	38.1	40.7	38.1	38.1	32.6	30.4	26.4
55 TO 64 YEARS	44.1	55.2	45.9	44.3	43.9	39.6	35.6
65 YEARS AND OVER	50.8	50.8	41.7	50.4	38.3	45.8	35.7

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Not seasonally adjusted.

FIGURE 1
AVERAGE DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE: YEAR-OVER-YEAR COMPARISON (WEEKS)



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Not seasonally adjusted.

Long-Term Unemployment

Long-term unemployment refers to individuals who have been looking for work for 27 weeks or more. Jobseekers ages 55 and over are more likely to experience long-term unemployment compared with younger jobseekers. In February, 34 percent of jobseekers 55 and over were long-term unemployed compared with 21.8 percent of jobseekers in the 16-to-54 age group.

TABLE 7
LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT, FEBRUARY 2017

AGE (YEARS)	TOTAL UNEMPLOYED (THOUSANDS)	NUMBER UNEMPLOYED 27 WEEKS AND OVER (THOUSANDS)	LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED (%)
AGES 16-54	6,559	1,427	21.8%
AGES 55 AND OVER	1,328	451	34.0%

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Not seasonally adjusted.

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