

Employment Data Digest

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

- The unemployment rate was unchanged for the third consecutive month at 3.7 percent. In November, the economy added 155,000 jobs, down from 237,000 jobs added in October.
- The total labor force participation rate remained unchanged at 62.9 percent. For people ages 55 and older it increased slightly to 40.2 percent.
- The unemployment rate for people ages 55 and older was up slightly to 2.9 percent. Among jobseekers ages 55 and older, 29 percent were long-term unemployed, compared with 19.2 percent of jobseekers ages 16 to 54.

Total Payroll Employment

In November, total nonfarm payroll employment increased by 155,000 jobs, down from 237,000 jobs added in October (revised down from 250,000). The unemployment rate was unchanged for the third consecutive month at 3.7 percent. Jobs were added in health care, manufacturing, and transportation and warehousing. The number of people ages 55+ employed in November was 36.8 million, up from October.

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). Though the labor force participation rates of those ages 16 to 24 and 25 to 54 have declined since the beginning of the Great Recession, the rate for those ages 55+ is higher than it was at that time. The labor force participation rate for those ages 55+ was 40.2 percent in November, up slightly from October.

TABLE 1
LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE BY AGE

	Dec 2007*	Nov 2017	Aug 2018	Sep 2018	Oct 2018	Nov 2018
Total, 16 years and over	66.0%	62.7%	62.7%	62.7%	62.9%	62.9%
16 to 24 years	59.2%	54.9%	53.8%	55.0%	55.0%	54.9%
25 to 54 years	83.1%	81.7%	82.0%	81.8%	82.3%	82.2%
55 and over	38.9%	39.9%	40.2%	40.1%	40.1%	40.2%

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 non-institutional population that is employed. A year-over-year comparison shows that the employment rate for individuals ages 25 to 54 is now at pre-recession levels. The rate for the 55+ age group has increased since the recession. In November the employment rate for people ages 55+ was 39 percent.

TABLE 2
EMPLOYMENT RATE

	Dec 2007*	Nov 2010	Nov 2011	Nov 2012	Nov 2013	Nov 2014	Nov 2015	Nov 2016	Nov 2017	Nov 2018
25 to 54 years	79.7%	74.8%	75.3%	75.8%	76.1%	76.9%	77.4%	78.1%	79.0%	79.7%
55 years and over	37.7%	37.3%	37.8%	38.3%	38.0%	38.3%	38.5%	38.5%	38.7%	39.0%

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 ages 16 and older who were not employed during the survey reference week, but were available for work, and had made 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. In November, the overall unemployment rate was unchanged and the unemployment rate for people ages 55+ was 2.9 percent—2.9 percent for men and 2.8 percent for women.

TABLE 3
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

	Dec 2007*	Nov 2017	Aug 2018	Sep 2018	Oct 2018	Nov 2018
Total, 16 years and over	5.0%	4.1%	3.9%	3.7%	3.7%	3.7%
Total, 55 years and over	3.2%	3.1%	3.1%	2.8%	2.8%	2.9%
Men, 55 years and over	3.2%	3.4%	3.0%	2.9%	2.7%	2.9%
Women, 55 years and over	3.3%	2.8%	3.1%	2.8%	3.0%	2.8%

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 midpoint of duration of unemployment, below and above which there is an equal number of observations. As shown in Table 4, at ages 45 and over, average durations of unemployment are longer compared with younger age groups. In November, the average time spent looking for work among the unemployed was 32.8 weeks for people ages 55 to 64 and 32.7 weeks for people ages 65 and over.

TABLE 4
DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT

	November 2018							
	Unemployed (numbers in thousands)						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	5,650	1,974	1,670	2,005	817	1,188	22.7	8.9
16 to 19 years	672	345	192	135	92	43	9.1	4.4
20 to 24 years	890	321	326	243	127	116	15.4	8.3
25 to 34 years	1,309	458	386	466	188	277	20.7	8.6
35 to 44 years	929	300	289	340	162	178	20.6	8.9
45 to 54 years	804	218	213	373	101	272	34.6	12.7
55 to 64 years	742	222	195	324	102	222	32.8	11.3
65 years and over	304	111	68	125	44	81	32.7	11.6

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

TABLE 5
MEDIAN DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE (WEEKS)

	Dec 2007*	Nov 2010	Nov 2011	Nov 2012	Nov 2013	Nov 2014	Nov 2015	Nov 2016	Nov 2017	Nov 2018
20 years and over	8.6	23.7	23.8	21.2	19.4	14.5	12.2	11.3	10.2	9.4
55 to 64 years	10.8	36.6	42.7	34.3	27.9	18.8	15.5	13.7	16.9	11.3
65 years and over	7.4	44.1	47.3	24.9	21.0	23.0	17.8	17.5	9.3	11.6

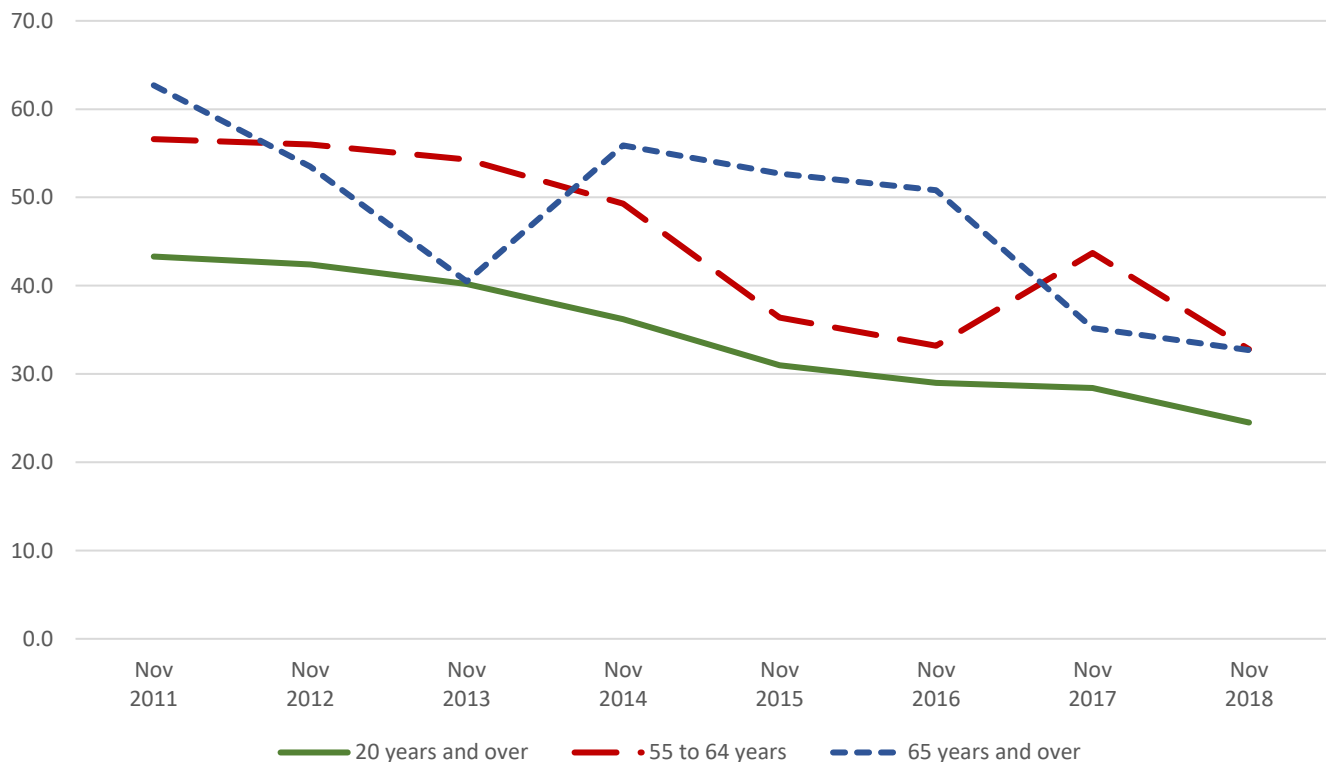
Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Not seasonally adjusted. *Beginning of recession, which officially ended in June 2009.

TABLE 6
AVERAGE DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE (WEEKS)

	Nov 2011	Nov 2012	Nov 2013	Nov 2014	Nov 2015	Nov 2016	Nov 2017	Nov 2018
20 years and over	43.3	42.4	40.2	36.2	31.0	29.0	28.4	24.5
55 to 64 years	56.6	56.0	54.3	49.3	36.4	33.2	43.7	32.8
65 years and over	62.7	53.5	40.5	55.9	52.7	50.8	35.2	32.7

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

The long-term unemployed are individuals who have been looking for work for 27 weeks or more. Jobseekers ages 55 and older are more likely to experience long-term unemployment compared with younger jobseekers. In November 2018, 29.0 percent of jobseekers ages 55 and older were long-term unemployed compared with 19.2 percent of jobseekers in the 16 to 54 age group.

TABLE 7
LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

November 2018			
Age (years)	Total unemployed (thousands)	Number unemployed 27 weeks and over (thousands)	Long-term unemployed (%)
Ages 16 to 54	4,604	886	19.2%
Ages 55 and over	1,046	303	29.0%

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Not seasonally adjusted. Note: Because the long-term unemployed are a small subset of the overall CPS data population, please use caution when using data and expect fluctuations in estimates from month-to-month.

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601 E Street NW
Washington, DC 20049

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Written by Jen Schramm, AARP Public Policy Institute.