

# Employment Data Digest

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

- The economy added 148,000 jobs in December 2017, a decrease from 252,000 jobs added in November. The unemployment rate was unchanged at 4.1 percent.
- At 39.9 percent, the December 2017 labor force participation rate for people ages 55 and older was unchanged from November.
- The unemployment rate for those ages 55+ was 3.3 percent in December, up from 3.1 percent in November. Average duration of unemployment in December was 32 weeks for jobseekers ages 55 to 64 and 39.9 weeks for jobseekers ages 65+.

## Total Payroll Employment

In December total nonfarm payroll employment increased by 148,000 jobs, lower than the 252,000 jobs (revised up from 228,000) added in November. The unemployment rate remained unchanged at 4.1 percent. Jobs were added in the health care, construction, and manufacturing industries. Approximately 35.5 million people ages 55+ were employed in December.

## 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). The labor force participation rates of those ages 16 to 24 and 25 to 54 are below the rates of December 2007, the beginning of the Great Recession. The rate for those ages 55+ increased slightly since the recession. In December the rate for those ages 55+ was 39.9 percent, unchanged from November.

TABLE 1  
LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE BY AGE

	Dec 2007*	Dec 2016	Sep 2017	Oct 2017	Nov 2017	Dec 2017
Total, 16 years and over	66.0%	62.7%	63.0%	62.7%	62.7%	62.7%
16 to 24 years	59.2%	55.3%	56.2%	55.4%	54.9%	54.6%
25 to 54 years	83.1%	81.4%	81.8%	81.6%	81.7%	81.9%
55 and over	38.9%	39.7%	40.1%	39.9%	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 non-institutional population that is employed. A year-over-year comparison shows that the employment rate for individuals ages 25 to 54 went down during and after the Great Recession but began to rise in the last few years. Meanwhile, the rate for the 55+ age group remained steady. In December 2017 the employment rate for people ages 55+ was 38.6 percent.

TABLE 2  
EMPLOYMENT RATE

	Dec 2007*	Dec 2009	Dec 2010	Dec 2011	Dec 2012	Dec 2013	Dec 2014	Dec 2015	Dec 2016	Dec 2017
25 to 54 years	79.7%	74.8%	75.0%	75.4%	76.0%	76.1%	77.1%	77.4%	78.1%	79.1%
55 years and over	37.7%	37.0%	37.4%	37.8%	38.3%	37.9%	38.4%	38.6%	38.3%	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 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. The unemployment rate for people ages 55+ increased to 3.3 percent in December, up from 3.1 percent in November. In December the unemployment rate for people 55+ was 3.4 percent for men and 3.2 percent for women.

**TABLE 3**  
**UNEMPLOYMENT RATE**

	Dec 2007*	Dec 2016	Sep 2017	Oct 2017	Nov 2017	Dec 2017
Total, 16 years and over	5.0%	4.7%	4.2%	4.1%	4.1%	4.1%
Total, 55 years and over	3.2%	3.5%	3.2%	3.1%	3.1%	3.3%
Men, 55 years and over	3.2%	3.6%	3.1%	3.3%	3.4%	3.4%
Women, 55 years and over	3.3%	3.5%	3.4%	2.9%	2.8%	3.2%

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, jobseekers tend to have longer average durations of unemployment compared with individuals in younger age groups. In December 2017, the average time spent looking for work among the unemployed was 32 weeks for people ages 55 to 64 and nearly 40 weeks (39.9) for people ages 65 and older.

**TABLE 4**  
**UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE**

	December 2017							
	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	6,278	2,144	1,848	2,287	867	1,420	23.5	8.8
16 to 19 years	648	257	218	174	119	55	11.5	6.4
20 to 24 years	992	381	284	328	120	207	19.3	7.3
25 to 34 years	1,556	565	464	527	215	312	21.3	8.2
35 to 44 years	1,002	337	329	336	125	211	21.2	8.8
45 to 54 years	912	257	238	417	140	278	29.4	11.9
55 to 64 years	842	247	204	390	131	259	32.0	12.4
65 years and over	325	99	111	115	17	98	39.9	9.0

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

**TABLE 5**  
**MEDIAN DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE (WEEKS)**

	Dec 2007*	Dec 2009	Dec 2010	Dec 2011	Dec 2012	Dec 2013	Dec 2014	Dec 2015	Dec 2016	Dec 2017
20 years and over	8.6	21.3	23.8	22.5	19.5	19.2	13.6	11.3	10.9	9.1
55 to 64 years	10.8	28.3	33.2	31.4	28.4	25.9	20.5	16.7	15.6	12.4
65 years and over	7.4	21.8	39.3	39.8	17.1	19.0	22.0	16.7	13.1	9.0

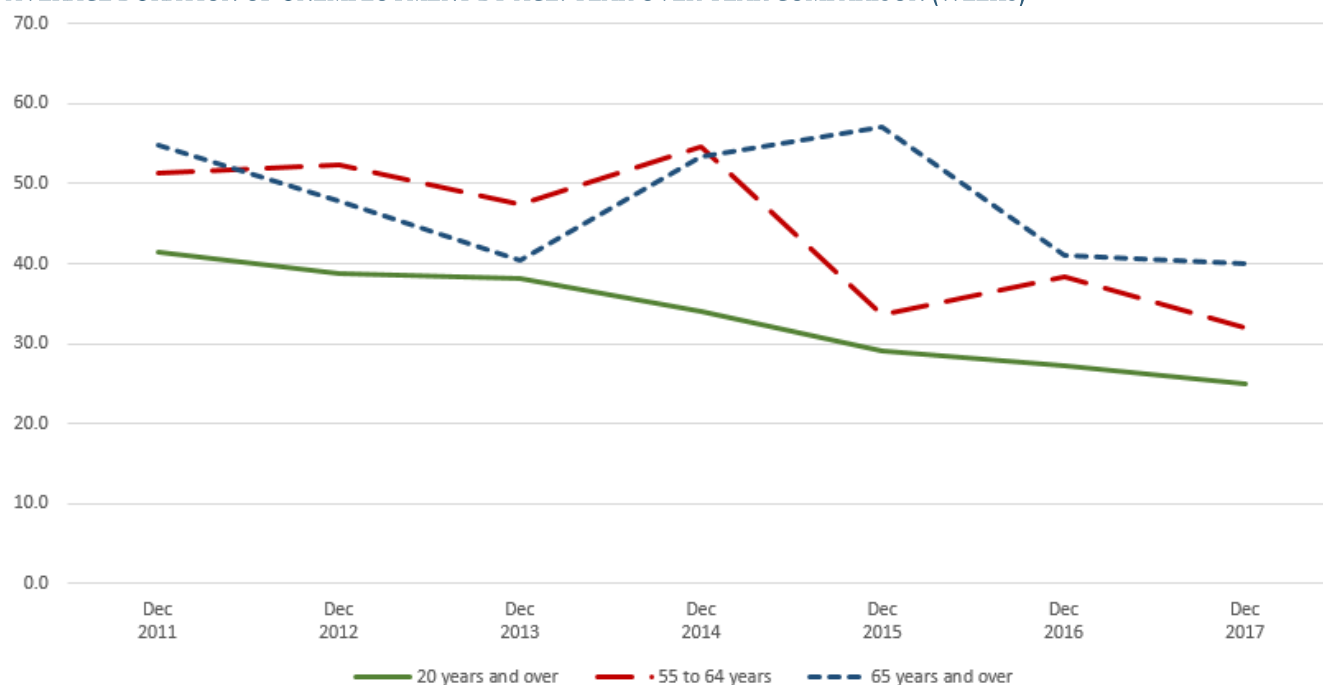
Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Not seasonally adjusted. \*Beginning of recession, which officially ended in June 2009.

**TABLE 6**  
**AVERAGE DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE (WEEKS)**

	Dec 2011	Dec 2012	Dec 2013	Dec 2014	Dec 2015	Dec 2016	Dec 2017
20 years and over	41.4	38.8	38.2	34.0	29.0	27.2	24.9
55 to 64 years	51.3	52.4	47.5	54.6	33.6	38.3	32.0
65 years and over	54.8	47.9	40.5	53.4	57.1	41.0	39.9

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 over are more likely to experience long-term unemployment compared with younger jobseekers. In December 2017, 30.6 percent of jobseekers ages 55 and older were long-term unemployed compared with 20.8 percent of jobseekers in the 16 to 54 age group.

TABLE 7  
LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

December 2017			
Age (years)	Total unemployed (thousands)	Number unemployed 27 weeks and over (thousands)	Long-term unemployed (%)
Ages 16 to 54	5,110	1,063	20.8%
Ages 55 and over	1,167	357	30.6%

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

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