

Employment Data Digest

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

- In March 2018, the economy added 103,000 jobs, down from the 326,000 jobs added in February 2018. The unemployment rate remained unchanged for the sixth consecutive month at 4.1 percent.
- The labor force participation rate for people ages 55 and older was 39.8 percent, down slightly from 39.9 percent in February 2018.
- The unemployment rate for those ages 55+ remained unchanged at 3.2 percent. The average time the unemployed spent looking for work was 36.2 weeks for people ages 55 to 64 and 32.9 weeks for people ages 65 and over.

Total Payroll Employment

In March, total nonfarm payroll employment grew by 103,000 jobs, a smaller increase than the 326,000 jobs (revised up from 313,000) added in February. The unemployment rate remained unchanged for the sixth consecutive month at 4.1 percent. The manufacturing, health care, and mining industries added jobs. The number of employed people ages 55+ in March was virtually unchanged at 35.7 million.

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. Meanwhile, the rate for those ages 55+ remained around 39 percent. In March, the rate for those ages 55+ was 39.8 percent, down slightly from 39.9 percent in February.

TABLE 1
LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE BY AGE

	Dec 2007*	Mar 2017	Dec 2017	Jan 2018	Feb 2018	Mar 2018
Total, 16 years and over	66.0%	63.0%	62.7%	62.7%	63.0%	62.9%
16 to 24 years	59.2%	55.8%	54.6%	55.8%	56.0%	56.0%
25 to 54 years	83.1%	81.7%	81.9%	81.8%	82.2%	82.1%
55 and over	38.9%	40.1%	39.9%	39.5%	39.9%	39.8%

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 nearing pre-recession levels. The rate for the 55+ age group has increased since the recession. In March the employment rate for people ages 55+ was 38.5 percent.

TABLE 2
EMPLOYMENT RATE

	Dec 2007*	Mar 2010	Mar 2011	Mar 2012	Mar 2013	Mar 2014	Mar 2015	Mar 2016	Mar 2017	Mar 2018
25 to 54 years	79.7%	75.1%	75.3%	75.7%	75.8%	76.6%	77.2%	78.0%	78.5%	79.2%
55 years and over	37.7%	37.4%	37.4%	37.9%	38.2%	38.0%	38.4%	38.6%	38.7%	38.5%

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+ was unchanged in March at 3.2 percent. The unemployment rate for people ages 55 and older was 3.2 percent for both men and women.

TABLE 3
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

	Dec 2007*	Mar 2017	Dec 2017	Jan 2018	Feb 2018	Mar 2018
Total, 16 years and over	5.0%	4.5%	4.1%	4.1%	4.1%	4.1%
Total, 55 years and over	3.2%	3.3%	3.3%	3.0%	3.2%	3.2%
Men, 55 years and over	3.2%	3.3%	3.4%	3.3%	3.5%	3.2%
Women, 55 years and over	3.3%	3.3%	3.2%	2.5%	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 March, the average time spent looking for work among the unemployed was 36.2 weeks for people ages 55 to 64 and 32.9 weeks for people ages 65 and over.

TABLE 4
UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE

	March 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	6,671	1,994	2,203	2,475	1,059	1,416	24.8	10.2
16 to 19 years	717	309	263	145	67	78	12.9	6.3
20 to 24 years	988	336	326	327	143	184	17.7	9.3
25 to 34 years	1,558	434	493	631	310	321	23.4	11.2
35 to 44 years	1,142	352	408	381	150	231	23.0	9.6
45 to 54 years	1,030	264	362	404	161	243	31.5	11.1
55 to 64 years	898	197	250	451	178	273	36.2	14.6
65 years and over	338	102	101	135	49	86	32.9	11.3

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

TABLE 5
MEDIAN DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE (WEEKS)

	Dec 2007*	Mar 2010	Mar 2011	Mar 2012	Mar 2013	Mar 2014	Mar 2015	Mar 2016	Mar 2017	Mar 2018
20 years and over	8.6	22.3	24.1	21.6	20.3	18.3	14.0	13.2	12.1	10.8
55 to 64 years	10.8	27.9	35.0	32.7	27.9	25.0	16.4	17.6	14.3	14.6
65 years and over	7.4	29.0	29.5	23.6	26.5	19.3	16.3	10.5	12.4	11.3

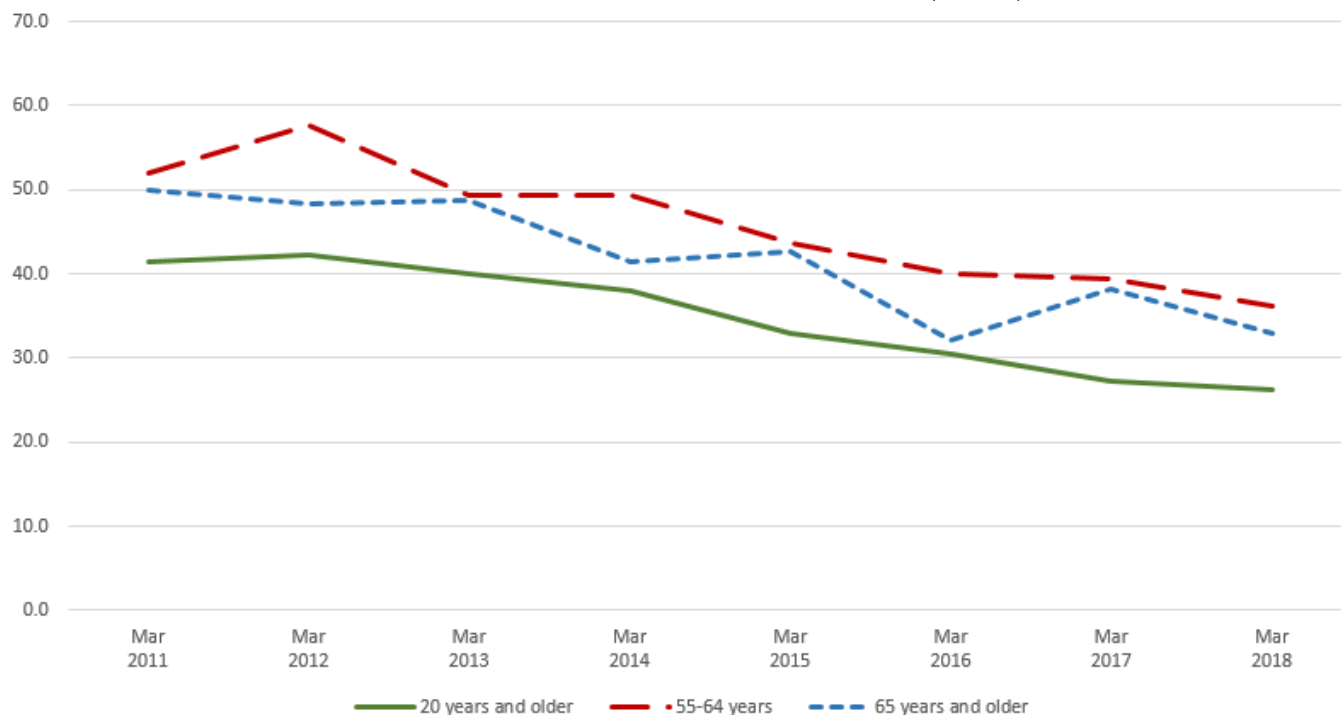
Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Not seasonally adjusted. *Beginning of recession, which officially ended in June 2009.

TABLE 6
AVERAGE DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE (WEEKS)

	Mar 2011	Mar 2012	Mar 2013	Mar 2014	Mar 2015	Mar 2016	Mar 2017	Mar 2018
20 years and over	41.5	42.3	40.0	38.1	33.0	30.5	27.2	26.2
55 to 64 years	51.9	57.7	49.3	49.4	43.7	40.0	39.5	36.2
65 years and over	49.9	48.3	48.8	41.4	42.6	32.2	38.3	32.9

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 older are more likely to experience long-term unemployment compared with younger jobseekers. In March 2018, 29 percent of jobseekers ages 55 and older were long-term unemployed compared with 19.4 percent of jobseekers in the 16 to 54 age group.

TABLE 7
LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

March 2018			
Age (years)	Total unemployed (thousands)	Number unemployed 27 weeks and over (thousands)	Long-term unemployed (%)
Ages 16 to 54	5,435	1,057	19.4%
Ages 55 and over	1,236	359	29.0%

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

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