

Employment Data Digest

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

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics revised the methodology for calculating employment statistics. Underlying survey data have been revised as part of the annual benchmarking process, updating of seasonal adjustment factors, and updated population estimates. For more information, see the [Employment Situation](#) summary.
- The economy added 304,000 jobs in January, up from 222,000 jobs added in December (revised down from +312,000). The unemployment rate increased from 3.9 percent to 4.0 percent.
- The unemployment rate for people ages 55 and older increased from 2.9 percent in December to 3.2 percent in January. Among jobseekers ages 55 and older, 25.3 percent were long-term unemployed, compared with 16.9 percent of jobseekers ages 16 to 54.
- The total labor force participation rate was 63.2 percent, up slightly from December. For people ages 55 and older it remained unchanged at 40.3 percent.

Total Payroll Employment

In January, the economy added 304,000 jobs, up from 222,000 jobs added in December (revised down from +312,000). The unemployment rate edged up to 4.0 percent. Jobs were added in leisure and hospitality, construction, health care, and transportation and warehousing. The number of people ages 55+ employed in January declined to 36.8 million, down from 37 million 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 rate for those ages 55+ was 40.3 percent in January, unchanged from December. Unlike the labor force participation rates of those ages 16 to 24 and 25 to 54, which have declined since the beginning of the Great Recession, the rate for those ages 55+ is higher than it was at that time.

TABLE 1
LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE BY AGE

	Dec 2007*	Jan 2018	Oct 2018	Nov 2018	Dec 2018	Jan 2019
Total, 16 years and over	66.0%	62.7%	62.9%	62.9%	63.1%	63.2%
16 to 24 years	59.2%	55.8%	55.0%	55.0%	55.2%	55.5%
25 to 54 years	83.1%	81.8%	82.3%	82.2%	82.3%	82.6%
55 and over	38.9%	39.6%	40.1%	40.2%	40.3%	40.3%

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 slightly above pre-recession levels. The rate for the 55+ age group has increased since the recession. In January the employment rate for people ages 55+ was 39.1 percent.

TABLE 2
EMPLOYMENT RATE

	Dec 2007*	Jan 2011	Jan 2012	Jan 2013	Jan 2014	Jan 2015	Jan 2016	Jan 2017	Jan 2018	Jan 2019
25 to 54 years	79.7%	75.2%	75.5%	75.6%	76.4%	77.1%	77.7%	78.2%	79.0%	79.9%
55 years and over	37.7%	37.2%	37.7%	38.3%	38.0%	38.4%	38.6%	38.6%	38.4%	39.1%

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 overall unemployment rate increased in January. The unemployment rate for people ages 55+ increased from 2.9 percent in December to 3.2 percent in January—3.3 percent for men and 2.9 percent for women.

TABLE 3
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

	Dec 2007*	Jan 2018	Oct 2018	Nov 2018	Dec 2018	Jan 2019
Total, 16 years and over	5.0%	4.1%	3.8%	3.7%	3.9%	4.0%
Total, 55 years and over	3.2%	3.0%	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%	3.2%
Men, 55 years and over	3.2%	3.3%	2.6%	2.9%	3.0%	3.3%
Women, 55 years and over	3.3%	2.5%	3.0%	2.8%	2.8%	2.9%

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 January, the average time spent looking for work among the unemployed was 23.7 weeks for people ages 55 to 64 and 24.0 weeks for people ages 65 and over.

TABLE 4
DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT

	January 2019							
	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	7,140	2,751	2,169	2,221	905	1,316	19.2	8.3
16 to 19 years	751	295	299	157	74	82	11.9	7.5
20 to 24 years	1,275	527	354	395	205	190	16.7	7.8
25 to 34 years	1,615	640	511	465	207	257	18.2	7.8
35 to 44 years	1,106	421	339	346	131	215	19.6	8.5
45 to 54 years	1,078	403	332	344	104	239	22.9	9.0
55 to 64 years	887	301	235	351	122	229	23.7	10.5
65 years and over	428	164	100	164	60	104	24.0	8.5

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

TABLE 5
MEDIAN DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE (WEEKS)

	Dec 2007*	Jan 2011	Jan 2012	Jan 2013	Jan 2014	Jan 2015	Jan 2016	Jan 2017	Jan 2018	Jan 2019
20 years and over	8.6	21.1	20.2	16.1	15.2	12.9	11.0	9.9	9.1	8.4
55 to 64 years	10.8	26.8	35.5	22.0	21.2	16.1	13.9	14.6	11.9	10.5
65 years and over	7.4	31.8	30.3	16.2	16.3	16.8	10.0	12.6	8.9	8.5

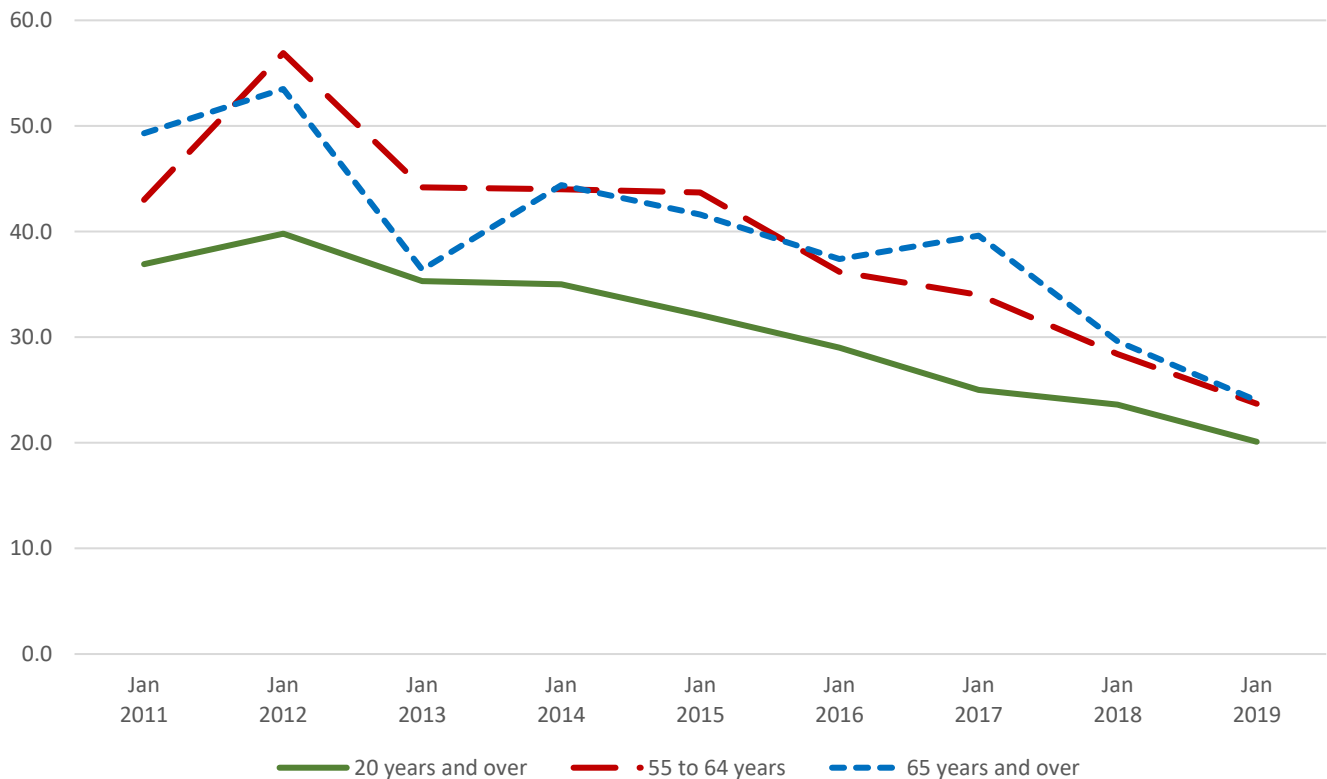
Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Not seasonally adjusted. *Beginning of recession, which officially ended in June 2009.

TABLE 6
AVERAGE DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE (WEEKS)

	Jan 2011	Jan 2012	Jan 2013	Jan 2014	Jan 2015	Jan 2016	Jan 2017	Jan 2018	Jan 2019
20 years and over	36.9	39.8	35.3	35.0	32.1	29.0	25.0	23.6	20.1
55 to 64 years	43.0	56.9	44.2	44.0	43.7	36.2	34.0	28.4	23.7
65 years and over	49.3	53.5	36.4	44.4	41.6	37.4	39.6	29.6	24.0

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 January 2019, 25.3 percent of jobseekers ages 55 and older were long-term unemployed compared with 16.9 percent of jobseekers in the 16 to 54 age group.

TABLE 7
LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

January 2019			
Age (years)	Total unemployed (thousands)	Number unemployed 27 weeks and over (thousands)	Long-term unemployed (%)
Ages 16 to 54	5,825	983	16.9%
Ages 55 and over	1,315	333	25.3%

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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