

Employment Data Digest

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

- In February 2020, total payroll employment increased by 273,000 jobs, the same number added in January. The unemployment rate edged down to 3.5 percent.
- The total labor force participation rate remained at 63.4 percent and was unchanged for the 55+ for the seventh consecutive month at 40.3 percent.
- The unemployment rate for people ages 55 and older was unchanged at 2.6 percent.
- Among jobseekers ages 55+, 19.7 percent were long-term unemployed in February, compared with 18.9 percent of jobseekers ages 16 to 54.

Total Payroll Employment

The economy added 273,000 jobs in February, the same number added in January (revised up from +225,000). The unemployment rate edged down slightly to 3.5 percent. Jobs were added in health care and social assistance, food services and drinking places, government, construction, professional and technical services, and financial activities. The number of people ages 55+ who were employed in February was 37.8 million, up slightly from January.

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 total labor force participation rate was unchanged at 63.4 percent and remained at 40.3 percent for the 55+ for the seventh consecutive month.

TABLE 1
Labor Force Participation Rate by Age

Age	Dec 2007*	Feb 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Jan 2020	Feb 2020
Total, 16 years and over	66.0%	63.1%	63.2%	63.2%	63.4%	63.4%
16 to 24 years	59.2%	55.4%	55.9%	55.9%	56.6%	56.8%
25 to 54 years	83.1%	82.5%	82.8%	82.9%	83.1%	83.0%
55 and over	38.9%	40.4%	40.3%	40.3%	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 now slightly above pre-recession levels. The rate for those ages 55+ is also above its pre-recession level and was 39.3 percent in February.

TABLE 2
Employment Rate

Age	Dec 2007*	Feb 2012	Feb 2013	Feb 2014	Feb 2015	Feb 2016	Feb 2017	Feb 2018	Feb 2019	Feb 2020
25 to 54 years	79.7%	75.5%	75.8%	76.4%	77.2%	77.8%	78.3%	79.3%	79.9%	80.5%
55 years and over	37.7%	38.0%	38.2%	38.2%	38.0%	38.6%	38.6%	38.6%	39.3%	39.3%

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 February, the overall unemployment rate edged down to 3.5 percent. The 55+ unemployment rate was unchanged at 2.6 percent and was 2.7 percent for men ages 55+ and 2.4 percent for women ages 55+.

TABLE 3
Unemployment Rate

Gender/Age	Dec 2007*	Feb 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Jan 2020	Feb 2020
Total, 16 years and over	5.0%	3.8%	3.5%	3.5%	3.6%	3.5%
Total, 55 years and over	3.2%	2.7%	2.6%	2.4%	2.6%	2.6%
Men 55+	3.2%	2.8%	2.6%	2.2%	2.6%	2.7%
Women 55+	3.3%	2.6%	2.6%	2.6%	2.4%	2.4%

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 that individuals classified as unemployed have been looking for work. The median duration of unemployment refers to the midpoint of unemployment, below and above which there is an equal number of observations. Average durations of unemployment for those ages 45 and over are usually longer than the durations experienced by younger age groups. In February, the average duration of unemployment was 24.3 weeks for those ages 45 to 54, and 25.9 weeks for those ages 55 to 64. It was 21.4 weeks for those ages 65 and over.

TABLE 4
Duration of Unemployment by Age, February 2020

Age	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	6,218	1,939	2,161	2,117	932	1,185	20.4	9.3
16 to 19 years	651	258	192	201	109	92	14.1	8.3
20 to 24 years	1,004	305	340	359	179	180	18.1	8.6
25 to 34 years	1,520	471	534	514	206	308	21.7	9.8
35 to 44 years	1,042	357	380	306	111	195	16.7	8.6
45 to 54 years	908	265	288	355	160	195	24.3	9.8
55 to 64 years	732	153	274	305	135	170	25.9	12.3
65 years and over	361	130	154	77	32	45	21.4	6.8

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

TABLE 5
Median Duration of Unemployment by Age (*weeks*)

Age	Dec 2007*	Feb 2012	Feb 2013	Feb 2014	Feb 2015	Feb 2016	Feb 2017	Feb 2018	Feb 2019	Feb 2020
20 years and over	8.6	20.1	18.4	16.8	13.6	12.2	10.8	9.9	9.9	9.3
55 to 64 years	10.8	31.4	23.0	22.8	16.3	16.7	14.4	12.6	12.2	12.3
65 years and over	7.4	28.1	23.6	20.1	14.8	11.1	11.9	10.1	7.5	6.8

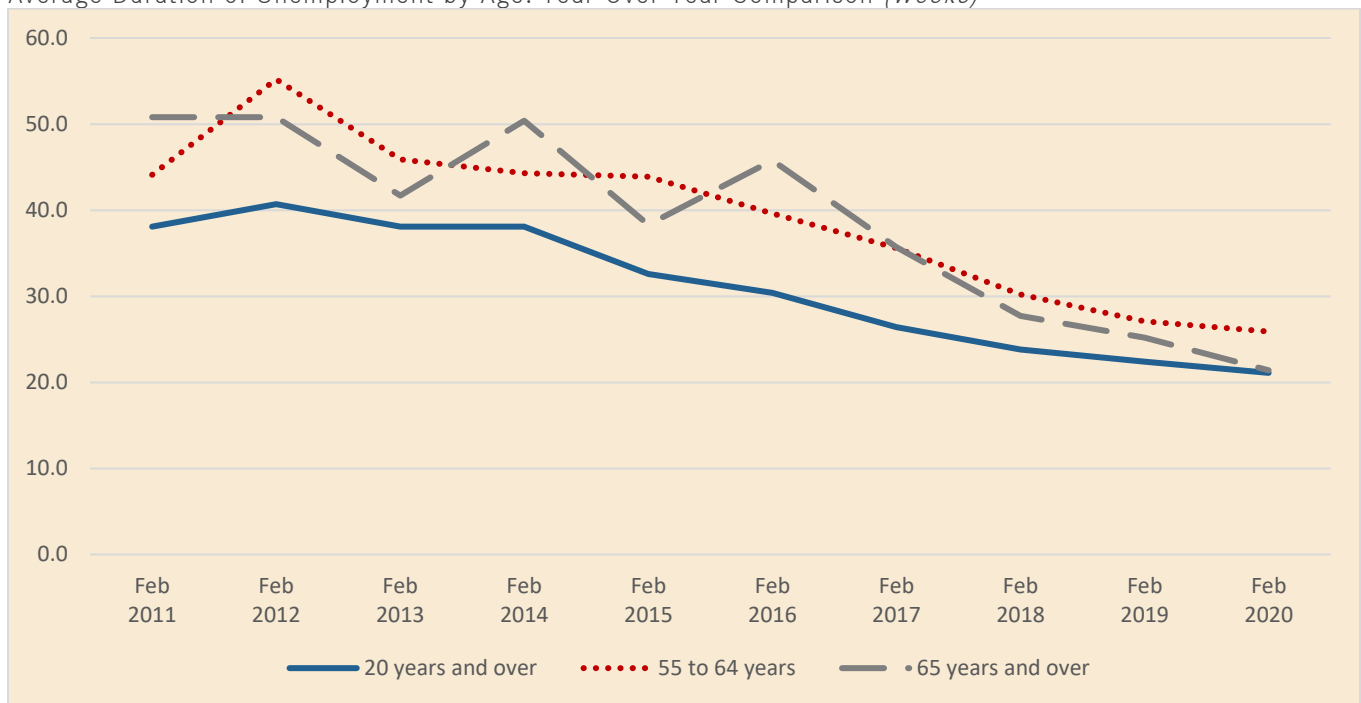
Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Not seasonally adjusted. * Beginning of recession, which officially ended in June 2009.

TABLE 6
Average Duration of Unemployment by Age (*weeks*)

Age	Feb 2012	Feb 2013	Feb 2014	Feb 2015	Feb 2016	Feb 2017	Feb 2018	Feb 2019	Feb 2020
20 years and over	40.7	38.1	38.1	32.6	30.4	26.4	23.8	22.4	21.1
55 to 64 years	55.2	45.9	44.3	43.9	39.6	35.6	30.2	27.1	25.9
65 years and over	50.8	41.7	50.4	38.3	45.8	35.7	27.7	25.2	21.4

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. Generally, jobseekers ages 55+ are more likely to experience long-term unemployment compared with younger jobseekers. In February 2020, 19.7 percent of jobseekers ages 55+ were long-term unemployed compared with 18.9 percent of jobseekers in the 16 to 54 age group.

TABLE 7
Long-term Unemployment by Age, February 2020

Age (years)	Total Unemployed (thousands)	Number Unemployed 27 Weeks and over (thousands)	Long Term Unemployed (%)
Ages 16 to 54	5,125	970	18.9%
Ages 55 and over	1,093	215	19.7%

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.

The data in this Employment Data Digest are derived from the Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly survey of households conducted by the US Bureau of Census for the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. The survey provides a comprehensive body of data on the labor force, employment, unemployment, persons not in the labor force, hours of work, earnings, and other demographic and labor force characteristics.

For more information, go to www.bls.gov/cps.

AARP/PPI Employment Data Digest
Data compiled by Jen Schramm on March 6, 2020
© AARP PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE
601 E Street, NW
Washington DC 20049

Follow us on Twitter @AARPolicy
on [facebook.com/AARPolicy](https://www.facebook.com/AARPolicy)
www.aarp.org/ppi
For more reports from the Public Policy Institute, visit
<http://www.aarp.org/ppi/>.

