



Missouri Economy Indicators

The Aging Workforce: Trends and Challenges

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Between 2013 and 2023, Missouri saw a significant increase in its workforce aged 55 and over, growing by nearly 126,000—a 29% increase. In 2023, the 55+ working population accounted for 23% of the state’s workforce, up from 20% in 2013. This shift underscores challenges across various industries, as the need to replace aging workers is intensified by factors like declining birth rates, which have strained the pipeline of incoming workers. Some industries, like agriculture, are especially vulnerable due to a higher concentration of older workers—25% are over 55 in Missouri; 32% across the U.S. Across the country, industries with the highest percentages of workers over 55 include manufacturing (28%), wholesale trade (28%), real estate, rentals and leasing (29%), and utilities (25%). Missouri largely mirrors these national trends.

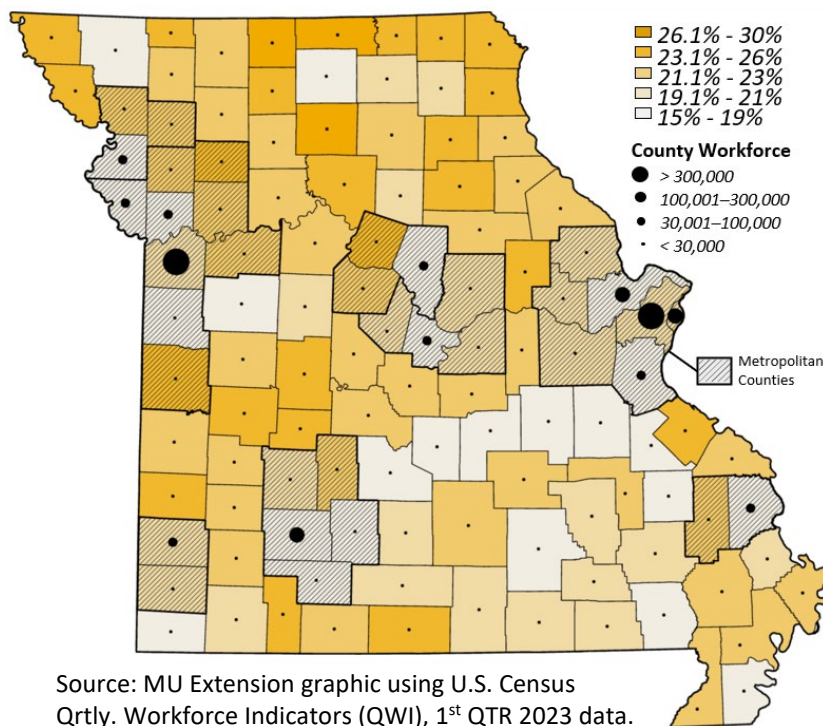
Missouri’s Aging Workforce

Roughly seven of every 100 Missouri private-sector workers are over the age of 65, past the traditional retirement age. When combined with workers aged 55-64, nearly a quarter of Missouri’s workforce is over 55.

Mercer (30%) and Putnam (28%) counties had the largest 55+ workforces. Boone (17%); Sullivan, Washington and Shannon counties (18%) had the smallest proportion of 55+ workers.

There was no significant difference between metro (22.9%) and nonmetro (24.4%) counties. Workforces tend to be oldest in the northernmost agriculture-based counties.

Percent of Missouri Workforce Aged 55 or Older



Retirement Risk Varies by Industry

In 2023, Missouri’s real estate, rental, and leasing sector had the highest proportion of older workers among all private-sector industries, with 27% of workers aged 55 and over. Close behind in terms of aging workforces were the wholesale trade (26.8%) and transportation and warehousing (26.7%) sectors. Conversely, the industries with the fewest workers aged 55 and over included accommodation and food services (13.6%), information (20.8%) and construction (20.9%). In addition to workforce risks in some industries, retiring business owners can have difficulties finding buyers for their firms, especially in rural areas. This difficulty can result in lost income and job opportunities if businesses are forced to cease operations.

Transferability of Skills

As industries face the challenge of upcoming retirements, the importance of cross-industry transferable skills of workers becomes crucial. Identifying and leveraging skills developed in one sector to mitigate potential labor shortages in another is critical for fostering a more dynamic and adaptable workforce.

Consumer-facing industries, such as food services and retail, typically employ younger workers in entry-level roles with rich learning opportunities—skills like customer service, problem-solving and teamwork are developed and have cross-sector applicability. Furthermore, workers who progress to leadership or sales roles develop additional relationship-building skills that are highly valued in any industry. These soft skills, when combined with technical or industry-focused training, enable workers to pivot into different industries smoothly.

On the technical front, skills in computer programming and data or finance analytics are growing in demand; our increasingly digital world requires these skills in almost any business. Trade skills, often found in construction or maintenance industries, are also valuable in sectors like manufacturing and technical services, which pay well for such expertise. While some technical and trade skills can be gained through job experience, formal training or apprenticeship pathways can accelerate the learning process.

Ultimately, the successful transfer of skills across industries hinges on individuals' willingness to adapt and re-skill and the readiness of industries to invest in training and integrating workers from diverse backgrounds. Through strategic planning and investment in human capital, the transition of workers across industries can mitigate potential labor shortages and build a workforce that is more resilient and flexible.

Additional Resources

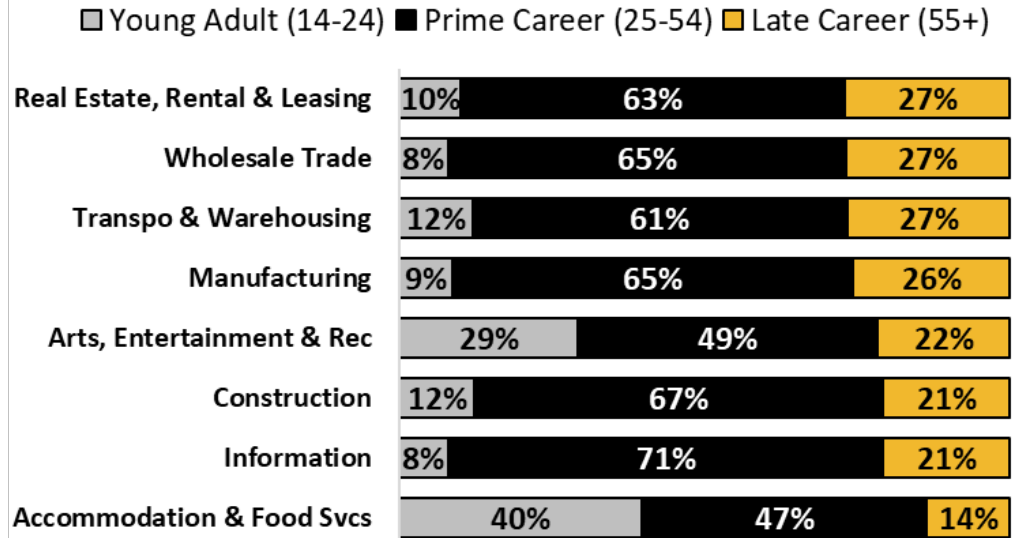
- **The MU Career Accelerator** offers training courses and certificates for individuals looking to upskill and employers looking to strengthen their workforce at <https://extension.missouri.edu/programs/mu-career-accelerator>.
- [Missouri Small Business Development Centers \(SBDC\)](#) offer free counseling to business owners interested in succession planning.
- MU Extension provides several succession planning resources for agricultural producers at <http://muext.us/FarmSuccessionPlanning>.

All Missouri Economy Indicators briefs in this series are available at <http://muext.us/MissouriEconomyIndicators>

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Missouri Workforce by Age & Select Industries



Source: MU Extension graphic using U.S. Census QWI, 1st QTR 2023 data.