



Missouri Economy Indicators

Labor Force Trends

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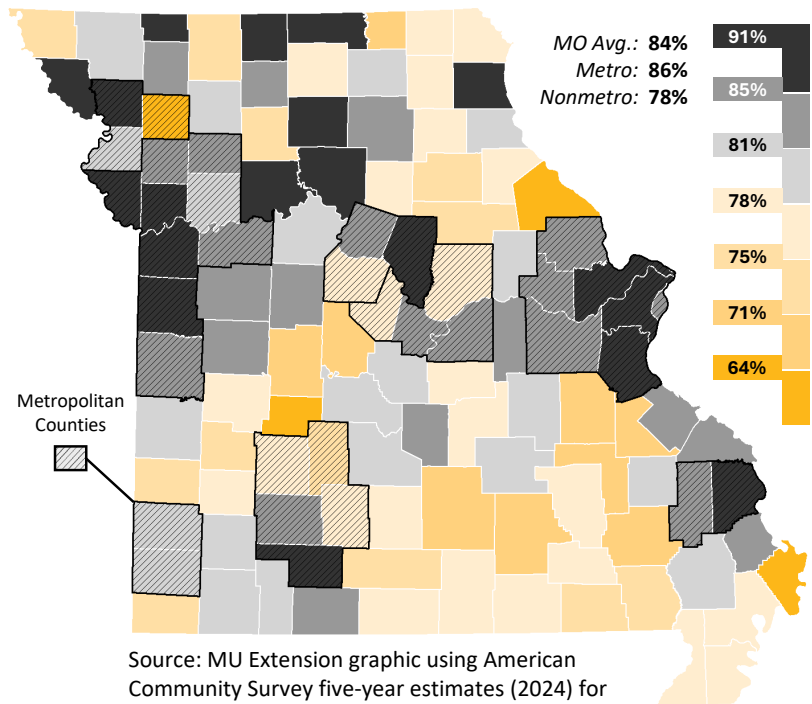
Missouri is facing the impact of the baby boomer generation entering retirement. One way to track this trend is to look at the *labor force participation rate* among prime-age workers, ages 25 to 54, which measures the share of this population that is either working or actively seeking work. Labor force participation is typically highest for the prime-age workforce, which makes up roughly two-thirds of all Missouri workers. Those younger than 25 and older than 54 often participate at lower rates due to factors such as schooling, health, or retirement. The statewide average participation rate is 84%, but that does not mean 16% of this population is unemployed. This prime-age population includes stay-at-home parents, caregivers for aging parents, people with disabilities, older adults in training, and people who choose not to look for work or have given up looking.

Labor Force Participation Rates Highest in Missouri Metros

On average, labor force participation is higher in metropolitan counties (86%) than in nonmetropolitan counties (78%). Counties in the western half of Missouri and along the Missouri and Mississippi River corridors generally see the highest participation rates.

The counties seeing growth in their prime-age workforce are primarily located within the state's metropolitan regions: Kansas City, the northeastern St. Louis metro counties, Boone County (Columbia), and southwestern Missouri counties near Springfield and the I-44 corridor.

Missouri Prime Age Labor Force Participation Rates by County



Source: MU Extension graphic using American Community Survey five-year estimates (2024) for prime-aged (25-54) adults.

Between 2015 and 2024, Missouri's prime-age workforce decreased by over 38,000 workers, a roughly 2% decline. Nonmetropolitan counties contributed the most to this decline with a loss of over 41,000 workers, a 7% decrease. Metro counties' prime-age workforce remained steady, gaining nearly 3,000 workers over this time. Conversely, the late-career workforce, ages 55 and older, has grown. Late-career workers represented 38% of Missouri's workforce in 2024, up from 29% in 2015.

Impacts Vary by Industry

Some industries are more impacted by this trend than others. The lowest share of late-career workers is found in accommodation and food services, which typically employ younger people entering the workforce.

Agriculture, however, stands out with more than one-third of workers in the late-career stage. Several other industries have more than a quarter of workers in the late stage, including wholesale trade; manufacturing; transportation and warehousing; finance and insurance; and professional, scientific and technical services. A high share of late-career workers is also found in real estate, often a second career for those seeking an alternative to retirement.

Implications for Businesses and Communities

A shrinking prime-age workforce poses challenges for communities and businesses. This segment of the population drives the local economy, as their expenditures support themselves, child dependents, and the local economy. A growing prime-age population helps sustain youth populations, with implications impacting the vitality and funding of local schools. As these youth age, many will become business owners, workers, consumers, and taxpayers. A declining prime-age population also means fewer local workers, making it more difficult to maintain productivity. Other implications include fewer consumers and taxpayers, resulting in lower revenue for businesses and governments, making it challenging to sustain local services and businesses.

Additional Resources and Notes

- [MU Extension offers resources for businesses and communities](#) navigating workforce challenges.
- The U.S. Census Bureau [released research on how different industries](#) are impacted by this trend.

[All Missouri Economy Indicators briefs in this series are available online.](#)

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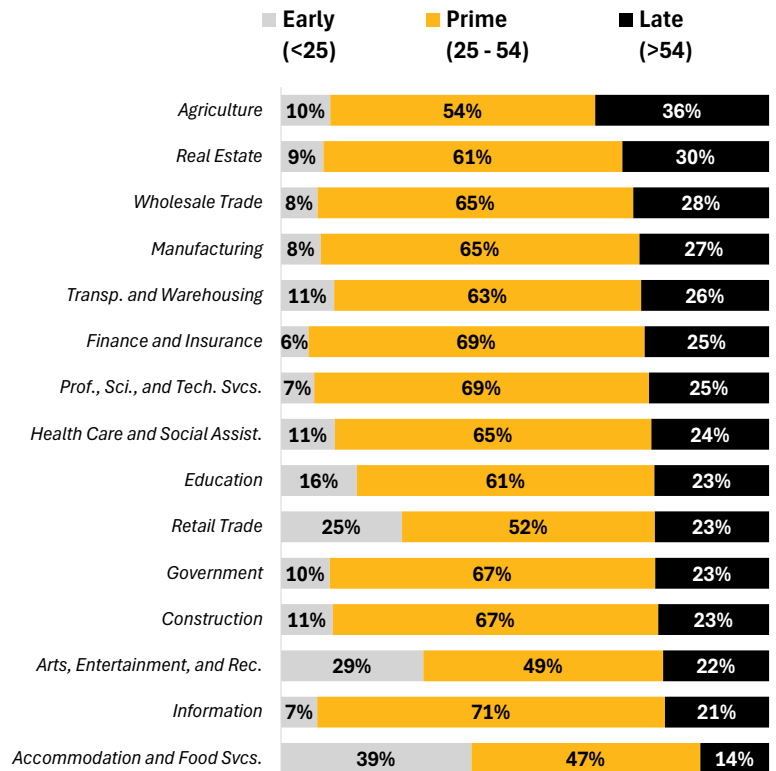
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Missouri Workforce Growth by Age (2015-24)

	Early Career (<25)		Prime Career (25 - 54)		Late Career (55+)		Total Labor Force	
	Change	% Change	Change	% Change	Change	% Change	Change	% Change
Missouri	-19,265	-3%	-38,476	-2%	229,299	14%	171,558	4%
Metro	-9,065	-2%	2,931	0%	200,043	17%	193,909	5%
NonMetro	-10,200	-5%	-41,407	-7%	29,256	6%	-22,351	-2%

Missouri's Workforce by Selected Industries (2024)



MU Extension graphics using American Community Survey five-year estimates (2024) and Lightcast data.