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### Senior Center Janitor-City of West Allis, WI

Posted December 14, 2021 | Closes January 15, 2022 11:59 PM

Senior Center Janitor City of West Allis, WI Salary: \$17.56 - \$20.07 Hourly Job Type: Permanent part time Department: ...

... [Full Description](#)

Administration Assistant--Village of Hales Corners, WI

Posted January 7, 2022 | Closes February 7, 2022 11:59 PM

Administration Assistant Village of Hales Corners, WI The Village of Hales Corners (pop. 7720) Health Department seeks a full-time administration assistant. Provides... [Full Description](#)

Administrative Assistant--City of Milton, WI

Posted December 28, 2021 | Closes January 10, 2022 11:59 PM

### Fire Chief-Village and Township of Egg Harbor, WI

Posted November 8, 2021 | Closes January 30, 2022 11:59 PM

Fire Chief Village and Township of Egg Harbor, WI The combined Township & Village of Egg Harbor are currently seeking to fill the position of Fire Chief...

### Planner-City of Prescott, WI

Posted January 3, 2022 | Closes January 21, 2022 4:30 PM

Planner City of Prescott, WI Salary: \$54,995 (\$26.44/Hour) plus benefits The City of Prescott located 20 minutes from St. Paul, MN and the eastern Twin Cities...

### Engineering Technician-City of St. Francis, WI

Posted December 28, 2021 | Closes January 31, 2022 11:59 PM

Engineering Technician City of St. Francis, WI The City of St. Francis is seeking an Engineering Technician to assist the...

### Clerk/Treasurer-Village of North Prairie, WI

Posted December 10, 2021 | Closes January 21, 2022 5:00 PM

Job Posting – Village of North Prairie Clerk/Treasurer Waukesha County, WI Application Deadline January 21, 2022, by 5:00 p.m. central time...

### Clerk/Treasurer-Village of Belmont, WI

Posted January 6, 2022 | Closes January 28, 2022 4:00 PM

Village of Belmont, Lafayette County, Wisconsin Clerk/Treasurer An Equal Opportunity Employer The Village of Belmont, WI is seeking a professional to fulfill...

### Clerk-Treasurer-Village of Johnson Creek, WI

Posted December 29, 2021 | Closes January 17, 2022

Clerk-Treasurer Village of Johnson Creek, WI The Village of Johnson Creek, the fastest growing community in Jefferson County which embraces small town charm with big...

Assistant City Attorney--City of Racine, WI

Posted January 5, 2022 | Closes January 10, 2022 5:00 PM

Assistant City Attorney City of Racine, WI Salary: \$78,520.00 - \$101,004.80 Annually Job Type: Full-Time Department: ... [Full Description](#)

Assistant Transit Director--City of Janesville, WI

Posted December 17, 2021 | Closes January 31, 2022 11:59 PM

Assistant Transit Director City of Janesville, WI Department:

### City Clerk-City of Ripon, WI

Posted December 22, 2021 | Closes January 24, 2022 11:59 PM

City Clerk City of Ripon, Wisconsin City Clerk, Ripon, WI (pop. 7,833). Ripon is a delightful city in Fond du Lac County, best known as the home of renowned...

Associate Planner City of Kaukauna, WI Department: Planning & Community Development Reports To: Director of Planning & ... [Full Description](#)

Associate Planner City of Kaukauna, WI Department: Planning & Community Development Reports To: Director of Planning & ... [Full Description](#)

Associate Planner City of Kaukauna, WI Department: Planning & Community Development Reports To: Director of Planning & ... [Full Description](#)

### Parks Maintenance/Zookeeper-City of Chippewa Falls, WI

Posted December 28, 2021 | Closes January 21, 2022 11:59 PM

City of Chippewa Falls - Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department Job Opportunity Parks Maintenance/Zookeeper The City of Chippewa Falls is accepting...

### Electrician/Electrical Inspector-City of Two Rivers, WI

Posted December 29, 2021 | Closes January 28, 2022 4:00 PM

ELECTRICIAN/ELECTRICAL INSPECTOR City of Two Rivers - Two Rivers Water & Light The Electrician/Electrical Inspector performs skilled work in the installation,...

### Financial Analyst-City of New Richmond, WI

Posted December 21, 2021 | Closes January 19, 2022 11:00 AM

Financial Analyst City of New Richmond, WI The City of New Richmond is accepting applications for a Financial Analyst to join our team.

Where are Wisconsin's Workers?

Your Talent Retention Strategy in an Employee-Driven Market

The Strategic Case for Remote Work

Check Your Culture Before Recruiting

Watertown Puts It All Together

Introducing Enabling Better Places: A User's Guide to Neighborhood Affordability

Suspicionless Drug Testing Subject to Constitutional Constraints



# Where are Wisconsin's Workers?

Matt Kures, Community Economic Development Specialist, Community Development Institute, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension

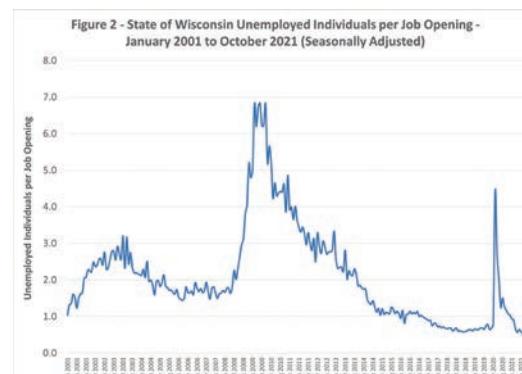
Wisconsin had an estimated 230,000 job openings in July 2021, which was by far the highest number in the last two decades (Figure 1). More recent figures suggest somewhat of a decrease from this peak, but the preliminary estimate of 210,000 openings in October 2021 remains well over the monthly average of 154,000 openings found in 2019. While it may be tempting to attribute the large number of job openings to factors stemming from the emergence of COVID-19, such as the availability of enhanced unemployment benefits, many employers expressed challenges with finding employees prior to the start of the pandemic. In fact, the number of Wisconsin job openings has been steadily increasing since the end of the Great Recession in 2009. Consequently, we must consider a breadth of factors, both related and unrelated to the pandemic, to better understand labor availability.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

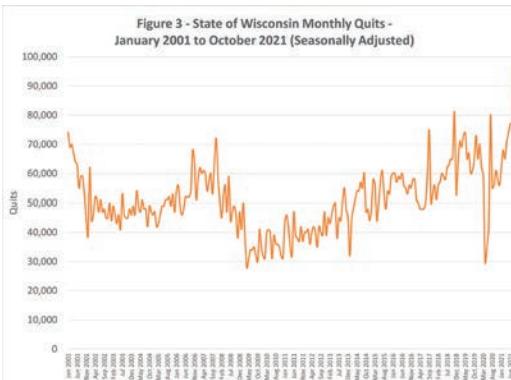
While some workers undoubtedly remained unemployed longer due to pandemic-related unemployment benefits, the number of unemployed workers per job opening has dropped below 1.0 since January 2021, suggesting there are more job openings than unemployed individuals (Figure 2). Current levels are more reflective of the ratios found throughout 2018 and 2019 prior to the start of the pandemic. Furthermore, the ratio of unemployed individuals per job opening was approximately 0.5 (i.e., two jobs for every unemployed individual) in both September and October of 2021, which were among the lowest values in decades. These figures for Wisconsin are also below the national value of 0.7.

In October 2021, Wisconsin had a preliminary estimate of 82,000 quits, or workers who leave their job voluntarily, which



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

is near the recent record high of 95,000 in August 2021 (Figure 3). Quits tend to increase as the economy grows and workers become more confident in their ability to find a new job. As with job openings, the number of quits has steadily increased since the end of the Great Recession. However, the large number of recent quits is also influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic as some workers left their jobs due to childcare demands that arose due to school and childcare disruptions. Other workers employed in high-contact occupations may have quit due to health and safety concerns. The pandemic also may have encouraged workers to quit in pursuit of a higher paying job, a new career path, or to start their own business.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

With the onset of the pandemic, Wisconsin's unemployment rate jumped to 14.8% in April 2020. Despite this rapid increase, the state's unemployment rate dropped to 4.0% by January 2021 and has since declined to a preliminary figure of

3.0% in November 2021, which matches Wisconsin's lowest rate in the last three decades. However, unemployment rates do not include individuals who have dropped out of the labor force for one reason or another. Shifts in the labor participation rate, or the share of individuals who are either employed, or unemployed and actively looking for a job, provide another perspective on how labor availability has changed.

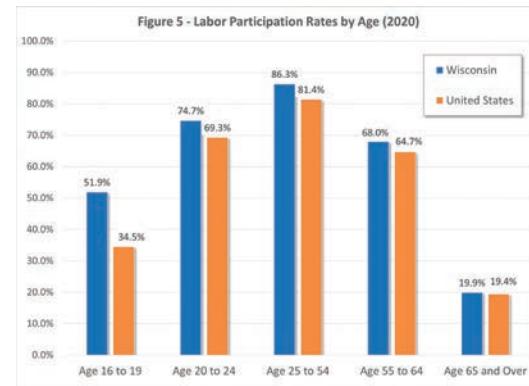
The pandemic induced many people to leave the labor force, both on a voluntary and involuntary basis. Even at the end of 2021, the nation's total labor force is almost 2.3 million participants below its pre-pandemic level. In terms of labor participation rates, the national rate dropped from 63.2% at the start of the pandemic to 61.7% in the third quarter of 2021. Participation rates among women and employees of color experienced particularly notable declines. While Wisconsin's labor participation rate also declined temporarily over the course of the pandemic, it currently sits at 66.5% which is above the 66.2% rate reported in the first quarter of 2020.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Despite the small recent gain in labor participation, Wisconsin's overall labor participation rate has been declining since late 1990s (Figure 4). This decline is attributed to a variety of factors, but an aging population is an important driver of this trend. Consider the variations in labor participation by age group (Figure 5). The highest rate is found among individuals between the ages of 25 and 54, also known as the prime working age population. In contrast, participation rates begin to decline among individuals ages 55 to 64 and drop significantly for individuals ages 65 and over. Importantly, Wisconsin exceeds the national average participation rate in all age groups.

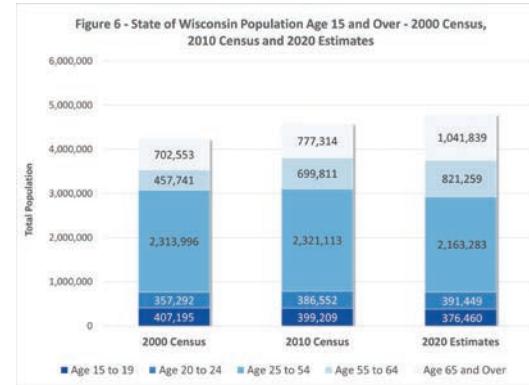
With these labor participation rates in mind, consider how Wisconsin's population has changed over the past several decades (Figure 6). Between 2010 and 2020, the number of working age individuals between the ages of 15 and 64 declined by over 50,000. Furthermore, prime working age



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

residents (age 25 to 54) declined by almost 160,000 as many individuals aged out of this labor force category. In contrast, the number of residents ages 55 to 64 jumped by more than 120,000 individuals while residents ages 65 and over increased by more than 260,000. These trends differ from the changes between 2000 and 2010 when total working age individuals increased by 270,000 and the number of prime working age residents grew by 7,000.

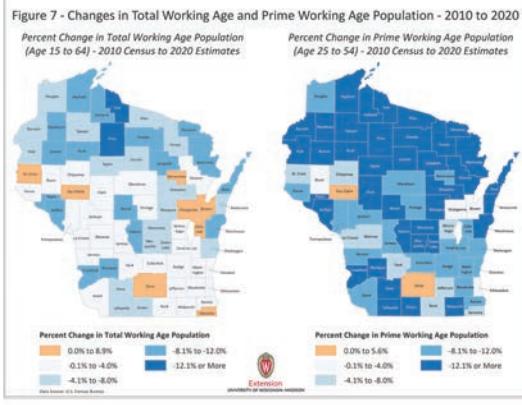
The shift of workers from prime working ages to older age groups with lower participation rates has pushed the state's overall labor participation rate downward. Unfortunately, the imbalance between younger and older workers likely will continue given the changes in ratios of people at the beginning of their careers compared to those nearing retirement. Specifically, there were 1.67 people ages 15 to 24 for every individual between the ages of 55 to 64 in the year 2000. By 2020 this ratio had declined to 0.94.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

The declines in total working age population and prime working age population have not been uniform across all Wisconsin counties, but have been widespread geographically (Figure 7 on page 6). Notable declines in total and prime working age individuals occurred throughout northern Wisconsin and in portions of central and southwestern

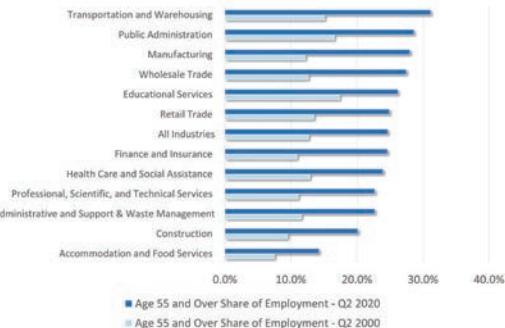
Wisconsin. Indeed, only eight Wisconsin counties had an increase in total working age population, with all the increases occurring in metro areas except for Menominee County. Furthermore, Eau Claire and Dane were the only two counties to have an increase in prime working age population.



The state's aging workforce is impacting industries at different rates. On average, Wisconsin's share of employees ages 55 and over increased from 12.7% in 2000 to 24.7% in 2020 (Figure 8). If we consider those industries with more than 100,000 employees in Wisconsin, several of the state's large industries are even more dependent on workers approaching retirement age. Over 30% of workers in transportation and warehousing are ages 55 or over, with high shares also found in public administration, wholesale trade, educational services, and retail services. Manufacturing perhaps faces the largest impact from workers ages 55 and over, as its share of workers in this age group grew from 12.1% in 2000 to 28.0% in 2020. In terms of total numbers, Wisconsin's manufacturing sector now has over 130,000 workers ages 55 and over.

Given these changes to Wisconsin's labor force, where do we go from here? Employers likely will need to consider how they can recruit and retain workers through higher pay, expanded benefits, flexible schedules, or other incentives. Some businesses will consider new or greater investments in automation. Businesses may also consider opportunities to reach potential workers who often face barriers to joining the workforce, such as veterans, individuals without transportation, and residents with justice system involvement. Furthermore, communities can assess their ability to attract and retain residents in terms of housing cost and quality, access to broadband, recreational amenities, childcare availability and affordability, and other quality of life factors.

Figure 8 - Employees Ages 55 and Over by Industry - Industries with 100,000 or More Employees in Wisconsin



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Importantly, most municipalities and employers will not have the resources and capacity to address their labor needs individually and will need to collaborate with state and regional partners. The need to cooperate is especially relevant when considering a high share of workers do not live and work in the same community or county. As a result, community and business leaders may want to better assess and evaluate their partnerships with state and federal agencies, regional economic and workforce development organizations, employers, educational institutions, local chambers of commerce, and social service organizations.

*Editor's Note:* Matt's graphs are available on the League's website here: <https://lwm-info.org/828/The-Municipality-Magazine>

## About the Author:

Matt Kures is a Distinguished Community Economic Development Specialist with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension. He carries out the Wisconsin Idea by assisting communities and organizations with economic development policy evaluation, labor force research, and regional competitiveness analysis. Matt has received the Outstanding Specialist Award from UW-Extension's Community, Natural Resource and Economic Development program, authored numerous studies on Wisconsin's economy, and has made frequent presentations to local, regional, and national audiences. Matt has a B.S. and an M.S. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Contact Matt at matthew.kures@wisc.edu