

Delaware's Labor Force Participation



The labor force is defined as the civilian, noninstitutionalized population age 16 and over, either working or looking for work. The unemployed are classified as those who meet all of the following (at the time that they are surveyed on their employment status): (1) were not employed at the time surveyed, (2) were available to work when surveyed, (3) made at least one attempt to find a job in the past 4-week period before the survey reference week or were temporarily laid off and expecting to be recalled to their job. Anyone not meeting all of the numbers 1 through 3 above is classified as not in the labor force.¹ To account for those who may not be counted in the labor force and thereby, not included in the unemployment rate calculation, economists also analyze labor force participation.

The labor force participation rate represents the number of people in the labor force as a percentage of the civilian noninstitutional population.¹ In other words, anyone age 16 and over, either working or looking for work (as defined by the three criteria for unemployed) divided by the total civilian 16+ noninstitutionalized population. So, for example, teenagers may be included in the labor force until the time comes for them to attend college. As teenagers substitute school for work, they are not counted among the unemployed, as they are not seeking employment and thereby no longer participate in the labor force.

Delaware's Labor Force Participation Rate (LFP Rate), Seasonally Adjusted

The Bureau of Labor Statistics has tracked Delaware's labor force participation since 1976. Since tracking began, Delaware recorded a peak LFP rate of 70.9 percent in August 1989 and its lowest level in December 2024 at a rate of 59.1 percent. Delaware's seasonally adjusted annual average rate reached its lowest point in 2024 at 59.6 percent, lower than during both the coronavirus pandemic and the years following the 2009 recession.



Population changes impact the labor force participation rate.

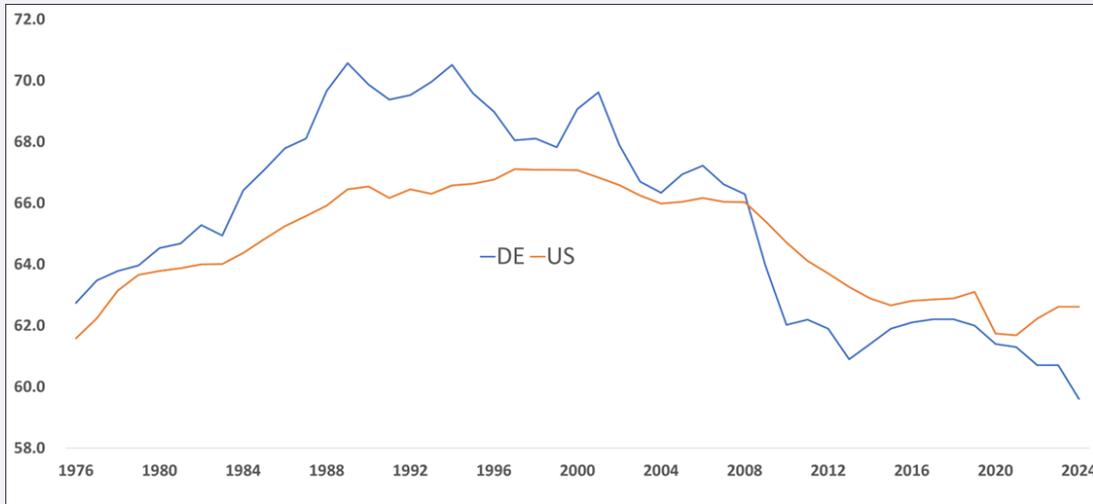
Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Annual
2019	62.1	62.2	62.2	62.1	62.1	62.1	62.0	62.0	61.9	61.8	61.7	61.5	62.0
2020	61.3	61.0	61.7	59.5	62.6	63.2	60.6	61.3	62.0	60.8	61.1	61.3	61.4
2021	61.4	61.5	61.6	61.7	61.6	61.5	61.4	61.2	61.0	61.0	61.0	61.0	61.3
2022	61.1	61.2	61.1	61.0	60.9	60.7	60.6	60.4	60.4	60.4	60.5	60.5	60.7
2023	60.6	60.7	60.7	60.8	60.8	60.8	60.8	60.8	60.7	60.5	60.4	60.2	60.7
2024	60.1	60.0	59.9	59.7	59.7	59.7	59.6	59.5	59.4	59.3	59.2	59.1	59.6

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Concepts and Definitions. <https://www.bls.gov/cps/definitions>

² Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Concepts and Definitions. <https://www.bls.gov/cps/definitions>

Before 2009, Delaware’s average annual labor force participation rate had been higher than the national rate. In 2009, the annual average US rate surpassed Delaware’s rate for the first time and has remained higher. In 2024, the annual average US LFP rate of 62.6 percent was 3.0 percentage points higher than Delaware’s rate of 59.6 percent.

Labor Force Participation Rate Seasonally Adjusted, Delaware vs. US, 1976 to 2024



Population changes impact the labor force participation rate. An increase or decrease in population combined with stable labor force participation levels will cause the labor force participation rate to decrease or increase. In 2024, Delaware’s civilian noninstitutional population grew at an annual average rate of 1.8 percent over 2023 to 850,643 Delawareans. At the same time, Delaware’s labor force grew by 0.1 percent to 507,013 workers, causing the decline of the LFP rate of 1.1 percentage points, from 60.7 percent to 59.6 percent.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
% Δ Population	1.3%	1.2%	1.1%	1.1%	1.2%	1.3%	1.4%	1.6%	1.8%	1.9%	1.8%
% Δ LFP	2.1%	2.1%	1.4%	1.4%	1.1%	0.9%	0.4%	1.5%	0.8%	1.7%	0.1%
Δ LFP Rate	0.5	0.5	0.2	0.2	0	-0.2	-0.6	-0.1	-0.6	0	-1.1

According to BLS’ Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) Preliminary Demographic Data for Delaware, in 2024, men aged 45 to 54 years old had the highest labor force participation at 91.4 percent. Delawareans aged 65 and older had the lowest rate of LFP at 17.3 percent. Working-age residents, those between the ages of 25 and 54, had an LFP rate of 85.0 percent in 2024, an increase from 84.6 percent in 2023. The labor force participation rate for working-age residents has trended upward between 2013 and 2020, declined in 2021 and 2022, but rebounded in 2023 and 2024. The percentage of Delaware’s working-age residents relative to all residents ages 16 and older remains below their pre-pandemic level at 42.5 percent in 2024.

Delaware Workers, Ages 25 to 54 (Working Age)			
	LFP Rate	% of the Total 16+ Population	% of the Total 16+ Labor Force
2013	80.8%	47.3%	63.2%
2014	82.9%	46.7%	63.1%
2015	83.9%	48.9%	65.5%
2016	85.2%	47.4%	64.5%
2017	84.3%	45.0%	60.8%
2018	84.2%	45.2%	60.6%
2019	85.6%	45.6%	62.3%
2020	85.0%	43.0%	59.7%
2021	84.7%	43.9%	60.8%
2022	84.0%	43.5%	61.0%
2023	84.6%	42.6%	59.7%
2024	85.0%	42.5%	61.0%