

MORE THAN A PAYCHECK

WORK & HUMAN FLOURISHING



- Labor Force Participation: What is it, and why does it matter?
- Mental Health as a Measure of Productivity, Flourishing
- Brain Drain: Migration Trends
- Healthcare Industry: Growth & Opportunities



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- Free State of Jones
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**Presenting today as a Fellow on Work –
Empower Mississippi**



EMPOWER MISSISSIPPI



- Nonprofit organization founded 10 years ago
- Focus on three issue areas: *education, justice, & work.*
- Labor force participation impacted by each pillar.

TWO REPORTS TO DATE

EMPOWER
MISSISSIPPI
★



**WHY AREN'T MORE
MISSISSIPPIANS WORKING?**

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MOVING THE NEEDLE

Select Recommendations for Improving
Mississippi's Labor Force Participation Rate

JANUARY 2025

The Approach

Let the data lead.
No preconceived notions.
Context matters.

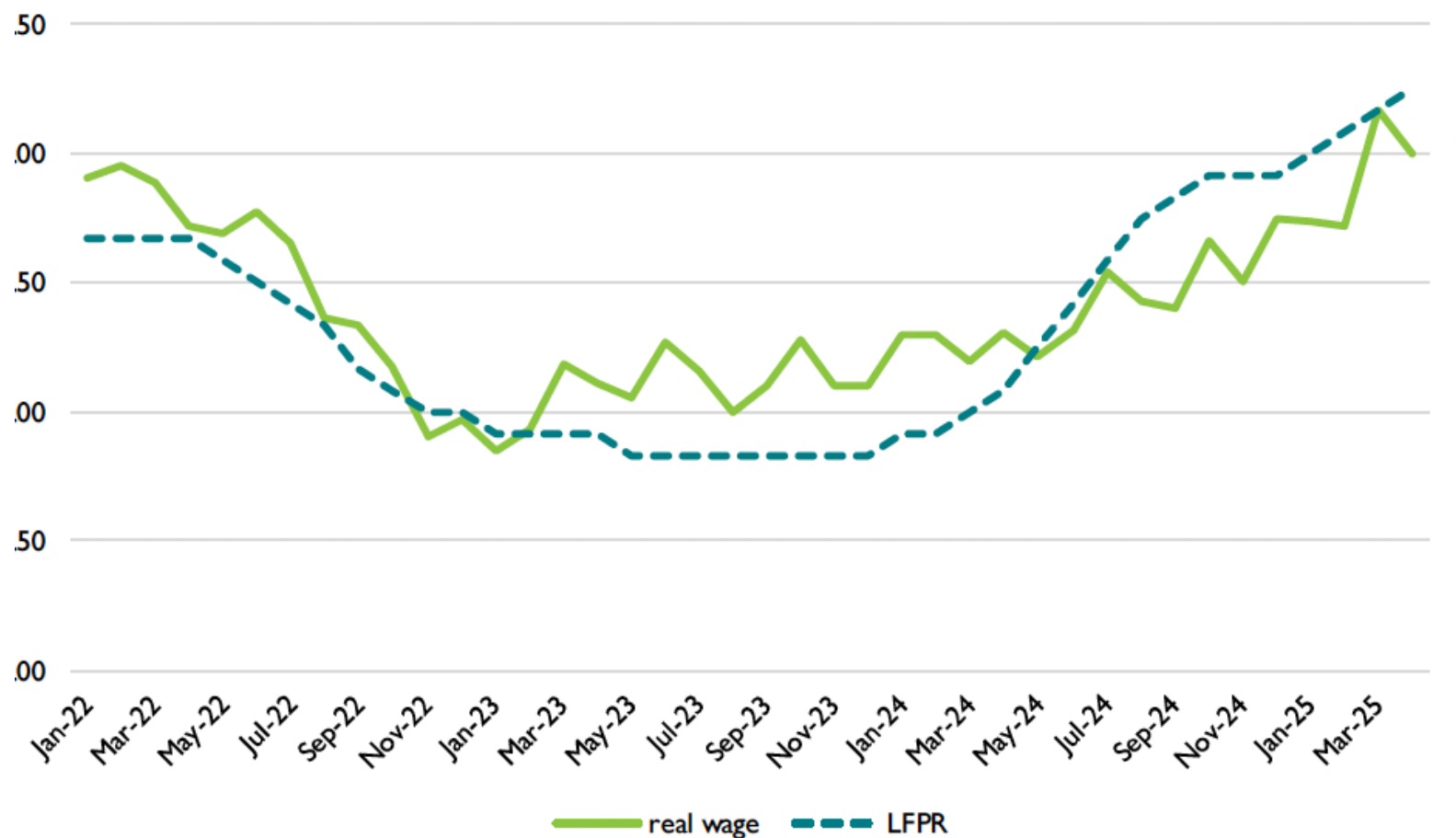


The Labor Force Challenge

- The number of people working and/or looking for employment in Mississippi consistently lags the region and nation.
- Termed the “**labor force participation rate**” (LFPR) by the federal government, Mississippi’s LFPR has been among the nation’s lowest for many years, generally never rising above 43rd.
- 2024 rates:
 - 55.3% (Mississippi)
 - 62.6% (USA)



Figure 26. Real wage (lagged 6 months) vs. LFPR, Mississippi



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Positive news:

- Mississippi's rate, while lagging the U.S. rate, is showing significant growth.
- 2nd fastest increase from 2023-2024, and the highest rate since 2019.

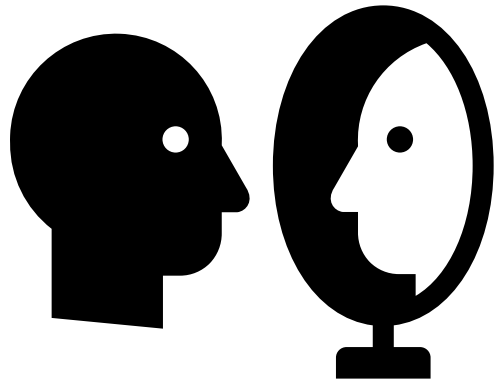
Why?

- Further study needed, but could be related to wage growth

Why does LFPR matter?

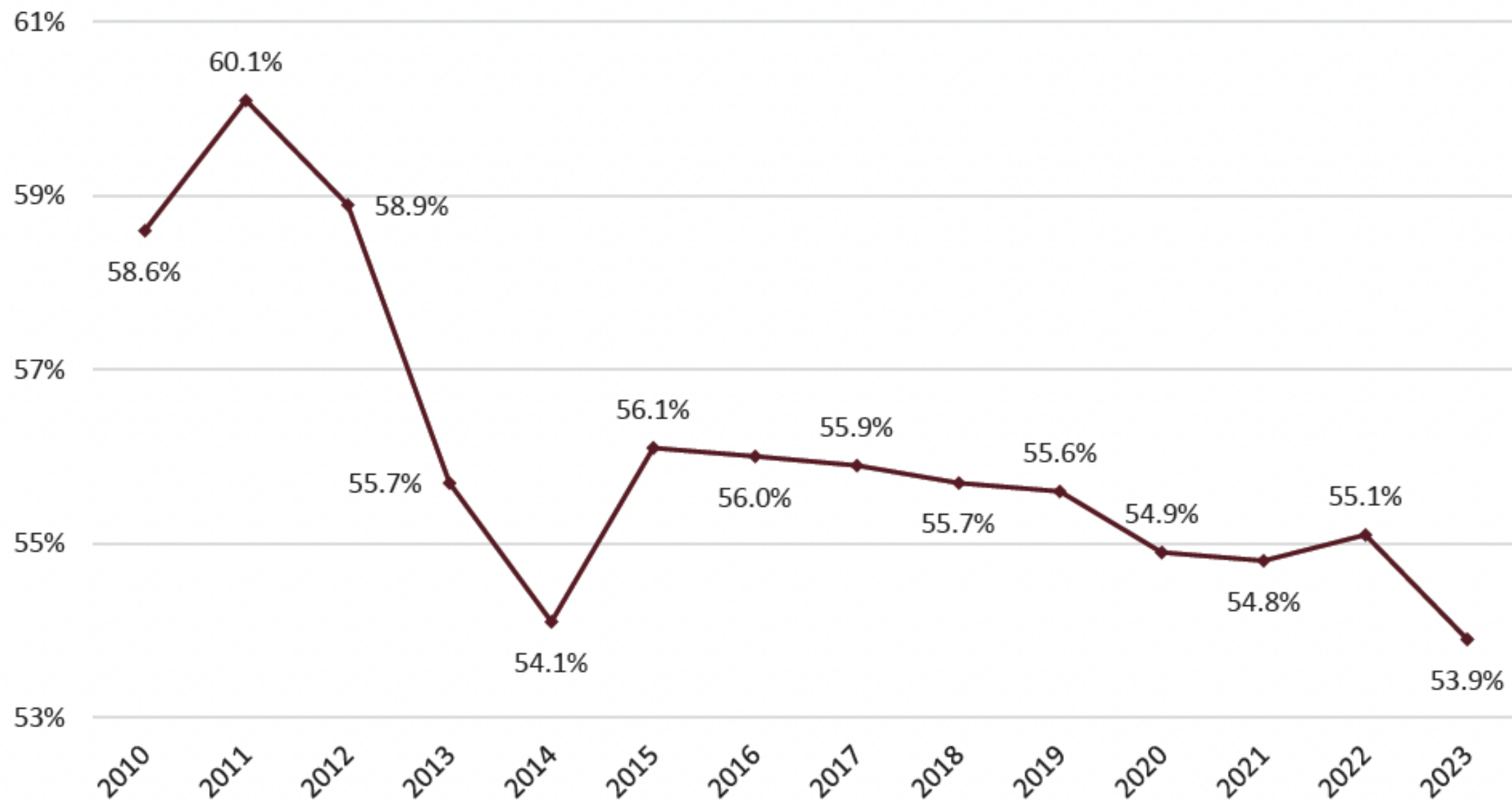
- LFPR is a measure of labor market health and signifies the relative amount of labor available for the production of goods and services. **A falling participation rate means more people are unwilling or unable to work.**
- Data shows low labor force participation tends to create more government dependency, higher tax rates, and reduced GDP. (Federal Reserve, Congressional Budget Office, etc.)
- **Dr. Corey Miller, state economist:** If Mississippi's rate mirrored the US rate (2022), inflation-adjusted GDP would have been 10% larger and the state's labor force would have been 13% larger.
- **President Trump's Tax Cut & Jobs Act:** Analysis shows it stimulated economic growth in GDP and jobs due to its impact on raising the labor force participation rate by 1.5%.

BIG PICTURE: WHY DOES WORK MATTER?



- ✓ Working people tend to be **happier** people.
- ✓ Work generates “earned success,” leading to self-worth, deserved recognition, and often **purpose**.
- ✓ Purpose and achievement: **medicine** for woes like depression, isolation, loneliness, substance abuse?

FIGURE 1: MISSISSIPPI LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE AGED 16 AND OVER



Summary Results: AGE



The population most likely to be in the labor force are in the 25-44 (78.9%) and 45-64 (61.7%) age groups, with the lowest being in the 65+ group (13.5%). All age groups have seen a decline in labor force participation since 2010, with the greatest decline among those aged 16-24 (-5.9%).

Summary Results: EDUCATION



The more education you have, the more likely you are to be in the labor force. Most participation seen among those with an associate's degree (68.3%) followed by bachelor's degree (66.7%).

SUMMARY RESULTS: GENDER



Despite a higher population of females in the state, males participated in the labor force at higher rates (59.8% compared to 48.5%) but experienced similar levels of decline.

HEALTHCARE IN MISSISSIPPI

Northeast MS

- Medical assistant, sonographer, RN, phlebotomist

NWMS

- LPN, physical therapy assistant, phlebotomist, RN, nurse assistant/healthcare assistant

Southeast MS

- EMT-Paramedic, paramedic, LPN, medical billing and coding clerk, nurse assistant/healthcare assistant, physical therapy assistant, radiology technician, respiratory therapist, surgical technologist

SWMS

- Medical assistant, sonographer, phlebotomist, medical billing & coding clerk

PRIORITY OCCUPATIONS



Example: Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) and Vocational Nurses

- Development Timeframe:
1-2 years (LPN certification or vocational nursing program).
- Jobs are: Hospitals, clinics, and long-term care facilities.

Example: Radiologic Technologists

- Education: Completion of an accredited Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in Radiologic Technology.
- Certification: Graduates must pass the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists (ARRT) certification exam to become licensed practitioners
- Jobs are: Hospitals, Diagnostic imaging centers, Outpatient care centers, Physicians' offices. Major employment hubs include Jackson, Gulfport, Hattiesburg, and Meridian.

“BRAIN DRAIN”



- Mississippi's population: In dispute, but one of 3 states showing no or declining growth
- Estimated loss of 60,000+ “millennials” (particularly college-educated or skilled workers)
- Consider – about half of college-educated students leave the state within 3 years of graduation
- Value proposition: Mississippi invests in these young people – without reaping the benefits of their future contributions

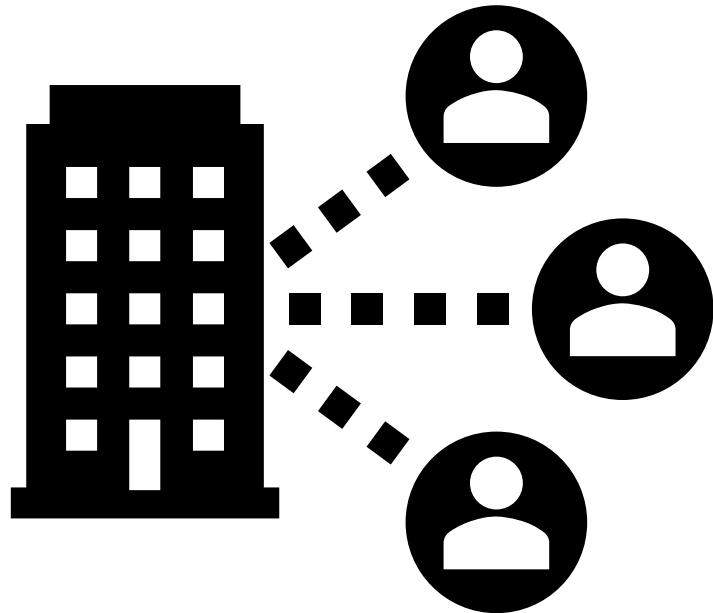
Migration Trends: An Opportunity

Current working from home: All wage and salary employees

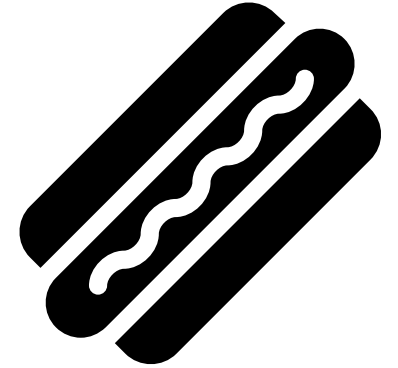
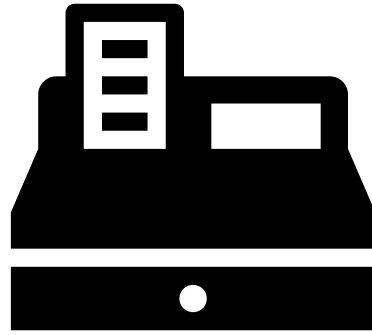
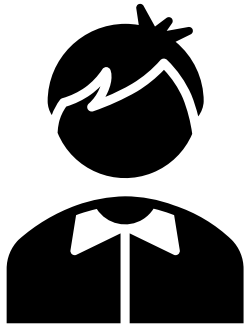


- Since 2020, rural counties have grown, reversing years of decline. This is a trend on which Mississippi could capitalize. (USDA: [Rural America at a Glance](#))
- Work from home dynamics & increased economic mobility post-COVID 19
- Attract remote workers, help curb brain drain, create new generations of Mississippians
- Industries with the most remote work include finance, technology, arts and entertainment, and professional and business services.

RECRUITMENT: CALLING ALL REMOTE WORKERS



- From working patterns to migration shifts, American culture looks different after the global pandemic. Many rural areas saw a slowing of outmigration and a reverse in population declines, due in part to the rise of remote work. A national survey recently found that nearly 1/3 of paid full days were “work from home,” with the most remote work reported in finance, technology, arts and entertainment, and professional services industries. Empower recommends Mississippi and its communities capitalize on our attributes (like rurality, low cost of living, broadband, and low income taxes) to develop statewide, regional, and/or local remote work programs.
- **SPOTLIGHT:** The City of Natchez’s successful remote work program, Shift South, provided a \$6,000 stipend to individuals relocating to the city, ultimately attracting about 70 new families and generating some \$16M in free publicity due to national media attention. Mississippi communities take note!



EARLY WORK EXPERIENCES FOR YOUTH

- Empower research finds that age is the second most important predictor of labor force participation, with Mississippians aged 16-24 seeing the largest decline in workforce participation from 2010 to 2023 among all age groups.
- Research is clear: Early work experiences matter, with those who worked as teenagers seeing better outcomes like higher hourly wages, increased annual earnings, and less time spent out of work.

Harvard Business Review

- Work can help with purpose
- Meaningful work leads to better engagement, well-being, commitment
- Lack of purpose/meaning? Higher turnover rates, dissatisfaction, especially among youth
- ...does that matter? Research says, YES.

National Bureau of Economic Research

- “Skill development is a dynamic process, in which the early years lay the foundation for successful investment in later years.”
- Character is “a skill, not a trait...character is shaped by families, schools, and social environments,” like workplaces, where youth develop personal autonomy, motivation, optimism, a professional work ethic, and self-esteem based on accomplishment.

Employment Policies Institute

- Youth employment is “clear evidence” of future career success (higher hourly wages, increased annual earnings, and less time spent out of work) – results seen decades after high school.
- These benefits are occurring “specifically as a result of the career experience that’s gained in early work experience...this study suggest[s] entry level work – at restaurants, at grocery stores, at a local retailer – plays a significant role in career development.”

**EARLY
EXPERIENCE,
LIFETIME
IMPACT**

WHAT'S NEXT?



This is an ongoing project – give us your feedback!



Keep studying the issue with the goal of providing policymakers with helpful resource and policy ideas



Comments, questions, other feedback?
Email: research@empowerms.org