



SUPPLEMENTAL STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

A Supplement to Empower Mississippi's Interim Report on Labor Force Participation in Mississippi

The NSPARC findings were shared with various stakeholders for feedback and additional insights, leading to further discussions about future research that may inform future policymaking.

Data Collection & Reporting Methodology Feedback

Many stakeholders believe additional review of the methods and surveys used to collect data is warranted to ensure data integrity and accuracy. For example, BLS employment data is captured through a voluntary monthly survey; in 2023, this survey had an average monthly response rate of 68.3%.

In addition to data collection issues, there are also data reporting issues. As suggested earlier in this report, two of the categories used to report why people aren't working ("other reasons" and/or "unable to work") are not helpful in evaluating the true reasons people aren't working. Stakeholders believe additional review of this survey question by BLS, with an effort to identify specific reasons, is worthwhile.

Unbanked Data

Unbanked data has been suggested as a possible proxy for measuring the extent of the cash economy, where people work for cash and not for a paycheck and



thus might not be represented in employment data. Stakeholders find the unbanked data interesting but in need of additional study. Stakeholders generally want to understand how Mississippi aligns with other states and the nation in terms of unbanked populations as well as what this means for labor force participation. At least one stakeholder noted the increase in banking status among those aged 15-24 and believes further study is warranted, particularly with an overlay against education data (such as associate degree attainment and implementation of personal finance curriculum in schools) to help determine the reasons for this increase among younger people.

Further Study by Sex and Race

Stakeholders are interested in learning more about female and male labor force participation, particularly compared to other states and the nation. Stakeholders also want to see a more detailed analysis, as labor market trends have shifted post-COVID and demand further attention. Stakeholders also showed interest in seeing this information by racial category.

Public Sector Employment and Early Retirement

Given the impact of retirement on labor force participation, stakeholders feel additional study is needed to assess the impact of government jobs on labor force

participation. Stakeholders believe comparing the state employees' benefit structure (including retirement age) to other states may shed additional insight.

One stakeholder noted that the large percentage of the workforce retiring age 45-64 may be driven by individuals leaving work as soon as possible to take Social Security. On the other hand, from age 62 to 65, individuals may have income but lack Medicare due to age requirements. Some stakeholders see healthcare and insured status as related to labor force participation rates.

Educational Attainment

At least one stakeholder suggested the educational attainment data, where more education seems to result in a higher likelihood of labor force participation, may serve as reasons to push against the narrative of individuals not needing a college degree for successful employment. This stakeholder believes the data shows that growth is driven by attracting college educated workers into communities and that labor force participation is slowed by those with some college but no degree.

Another stakeholder, however, suggested that the education attainment categories might miss the comparative value of employment and skills certifications versus an actual degree. "Some college but no degree" can be quite different for someone who obtains a certification than for someone who drops out for other reasons.

Hispanic Labor Force Participation Rates

Multiple stakeholders noted the strong participation rates among the Hispanic population, and some believe this may be an opportunity to create a more culturally welcoming environment for immigrants (presumably legal) as part of a solution to improving the labor force participation rate.

Wage/Income Analysis

Multiple stakeholders suggested adding wage/income analyses to this study to offer additional perspective, particularly given Mississippi's historically low wages and rurality. Some stakeholders believe this is a factor in the number of people leaving the state after graduation, which impacts population trends and labor force rates.

Comparison to Other States

Multiple stakeholders suggested a comparison of Mississippi's rates to those of other southeastern states and the U.S. as a whole.

Military & Veterans

Many stakeholders mentioned the impact of military populations. One stakeholder suggested a closer look at South Carolina, close in demography to Mississippi, as a case study for attracting military personnel near retirement age to bases within the state. Further research on veteran labor force trends within Mississippi was also of interest to multiple stakeholders.

Regulatory Burdens

One stakeholder recommended identifying state and federal regulations that hinder workforce participation. This may provide a baseline of existing policies that need to be changed or eliminated in addition to new policies and protections that may need to be enacted to promote improvement in the rate.

Focus Groups

Several stakeholders suggested focus groups or roundtables in addition to the quantitative analysis to supplement why individuals are not in the labor force and learn from the experiences of Mississippians.