



Labor Force Participation Among Utah Women: A 2023 Update

Setting the Stage

Since 1950, women ages 16 and older in Utah have increased their labor force participation from 24.5%¹ to 60.7%.² This is higher than the overall labor force participation rate of US women, which is 56.1%.³ According to the most recent US Census Bureau estimates from 2021, women in Utah now make up 44.2%⁴ (slightly higher than 43.9% in 2015)⁵ of the state workforce, which is lower than the US women's share of the national workforce, 47.4%⁶ (which remains the same from 2015).⁷

New to this update is the unique impact the global COVID-19 pandemic had on female employment nationally and in Utah. There was sharp decline in labor force participation for both US and Utah women in the first few months of 2020, but Utah women's participation rate rapidly recovered as a whole. Interestingly, Utah women in older age groups (ages 35+), actually increased their labor force participation from January 2020 to December 2022, whereas women ages 16–34 decreased their rates of participation.⁸ National data suggest women have also increased their engagement in the post-pandemic workforce, with a newly released Penn Wharton brief reporting that the post-pandemic employment rate for women (ages 25–54) recovered faster than the rate for men, with women's employment rates reaching a historical high of 75.3% in September 2023.⁹

Numerous factors influence Utah women's participation in the labor force, such as access to affordable, quality childcare (see [UWLP 2023 Childcare Snapshot](#)), social/cultural factors, and occupational segregation in lower-paying industries.

This research snapshot focuses on three key areas:

- 1) An overview of Utah women's labor force participation and demographics,
- 2) An exploration of the industries and occupations where Utah women are most likely to work, and
- 3) A discussion of ways to increase Utah women's success in the labor force.

Demographics

The most recent American Community Survey estimates that among adults ages 20–64, 71.6% of Utah women had worked at some time during the previous 12 months, on par with rates for US women (71.5%).¹⁰ For women ages 16

and over, the percentage of women “in the labor force” (which includes those who are unemployed but looking for work) in Utah is 62.5% compared to 58.8% in the US, a difference that is attributable to the state's younger population.¹¹ However, Utah women are far more likely to work part-time compared to their US counterparts: 36.4% compared to 28.7%. In fact, Utah continues to have the highest percentage of women who work part-time in the nation.¹² Utah women remain less likely than US women to work full-time, year-round: 38.5% vs. 44.1% (both up from 2015, when rates were at 35.7% and 41.8% for Utah and US women, respectively.)¹³ Utah women also continue to be considerably less likely to work than Utah men: 75.0% of Utah women worked in the previous 12 months compared to 87.5% of Utah men (ages 16 to 64). Utah men are also more likely to work full-time, year-round at 61.5%.¹⁴

Numerous factors play a role in determining Utah women's likelihood to participate in the labor force, including age, parental and marital status, ethnicity, and location.

By the 2022 US Census Bureau estimates, Utah women continue to participate in the labor force at a higher rate than their US counterparts during their late teens and early twenties (see Table 1 for full details on labor force participation by age). However, beginning at age 25, when many Utah women are having children, their participation rate dips below the national average, and this lower rate of participation continues through age 54.

Table 1: Percentage of Women in the Labor Force by Age

Age	Utah Women	US Women
16–19	59.9%	42.2%
20–21	80.2%	69.4%
22–24	81.9%	79.1%
25–29	78.5%	81.1%
30–34	70.4%	79.7%
35–44	73.0%	78.5%
45–54	77.2%	77.6%
55–59	70.7%	69.5%
60–61	61.9%	60.7%
62–64	48.5%	49.6%
65–69	26.2%	29.5%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2022, American Community Survey.

Compared to 2015, labor force participation rates among women aged 54 to 61 have changed for Utah and US women, with more Utah women participating in the labor force than the national average during these ages. From ages 62 to 69, the national average of women participating in the labor force exceeded that of Utah women.¹⁵

Although most Utah mothers do participate in the labor force, Utah mothers of young children are less likely to be employed than US mothers. In Utah, 67.7% of mothers with children under 18 years participate in the labor force, compared to 75.5% of US mothers.¹⁶ The most recent US Census Bureau estimates show that the percentage of working mothers in Utah and the US has increased over the past five years (see Table 2 for more detail). In 2022, 64.1% of Utah mothers with children under age 6 work (vs. 73.4% US), 52.4% of Utah mothers with children under age 6 and children ages 6–17 work (vs. 67.0% US), and 75.8% of Utah mothers whose children are all between the ages of 6–17 work (vs. 79.2% US).¹⁷ Utah continues to rank last in the nation for children under age 6 with both parents in the labor force at 54.0%, well below the national average of 67.0%.¹⁸

Table 2: Percentage of Mothers in the Labor Force by Age of Child(ren) from 2017 to 2022

Age	Utah Women 2017	US Women 2017	Utah Women 2022	US Women 2022
Under 18	64.9%	73.7%	67.7%	75.5%
Only Under 6	61.5%	71.4%	64.1%	73.4%
Under 6 & 6–17	51.1%	65.6%	52.4%	67.0%
Only 6 to 17	73.9%	77.5%	75.8%	79.2%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2022, American Community Survey.

Marital status also impacts Utah women’s employment. Married women in the state are less likely to be in the labor force than the national average, but Utah women who are not currently married are more likely to be in the labor force than the average US woman, as has been the trend. Additionally, Utah women who are separated, divorced, or widowed are also more likely to be in the labor force than US women with these same marital statuses. Specific labor force participation rates are as follows: 59.5% of Utah married women (vs. 68.5% US), 74.6% of Utah women who have never been married (vs. 68.6% US), 74.6% of Utah women who are separated (vs. 66.6% US), 67.2% of Utah women who are divorced (vs. 59.8% US), and 21.8% of Utah women who are widowed (vs. 18.7% US).¹⁹

64.1% of Utah mothers with children under age 6 participate in the labor force.

Utah women’s labor force participation also varies by race/ethnicity. Recent estimates calculated from the US Census Bureau show the labor force participation rate of women in the state by ethnicity: 66.2% of Asian women, 65.9% of Hispanic/Latin women, 65.3% of Black or African American women, 62.7% of Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander women, 61.0% of White women, and 57.2% of American Indian women participate in the labor force.²⁰

Where women live in Utah also impacts women’s labor force participation rates. The counties with the highest female labor force participation are Grand (67.0%), Summit (66.0%), Tooele (64.0%), and Wasatch (64.0%). The counties with the lowest rates are Piute (42.0%), Rich (46.0%), Duchesne (49.0%), and Emery (49.0%).²¹

Occupational Segregation

Occupational segregation in Utah (the phenomenon of women holding a high percentage of jobs in certain industries as well as specific positions within those industries) is important in understanding women’s labor force participation. In some ways, occupational segregation has been decreasing over time; for example, in 1980, around one quarter of Utah women worked in jobs in which approximately 90% of the workers in that field were women. By 2000, only 10% of Utah women worked in such occupations. Conversely, some positions, such as elementary school teachers and cosmetologists, became even more female dominated during those same years.²²

A growing number of Utah women are employed in professional or managerial positions (39.6%), which often require four-year degrees and have higher wages and better benefits.²³ However, Utah women continue to make up a high percentage of all workers in certain occupations, many of which require relatively lower skills and receive lower pay.

According to 2022 US Census Bureau estimates, the three areas where Utah women are most highly segregated are healthcare support occupations (81.9% of workers are women, down from 83.4% in 2015), health technologists and technicians (78.1% female, up from 73.7% in 2015), and personal care and service occupations (75.4% female, down from 79.2% in 2015).²⁴ In Utah, the median income for all workers in these three occupational areas are, \$24,065, \$36,481, and \$19,463, respectively. The median income for each of these three female-dominated professions is below average for all professions in the state (\$43,138).²⁵ In contrast, the occupations in which the lowest percentage of jobs are held by women are construction and extraction occupations (3.3% female, up from 2.1% in 2015), installation, maintenance, and repair occupations (5.6%, up from

3.2% in 2015), and architecture and engineering occupations (13.7%, up from 10.4% in 2015).²⁶ The median earnings for all workers in these three male-dominated occupational areas are, respectively, \$46,708, \$53,718, and \$88,389, all above the median income for all professions in the state.²⁷

Increasing Utah Women's Employment Success

As more Utah women are entering the workforce, whether because they want to or out of necessity, public entities, organizations, corporations, and schools can work together to support the advancement of women in Utah's labor force. Utah women's success can be increased by addressing the challenges they face (such as childcare and the gender wage gap) and supporting women-owned businesses.

First, increasing access to quality, affordable childcare will allow women the option of increasing their labor force participation. It is estimated that 11,540 more Utah parents could work if childcare costs were capped at 7.0% of income.²⁸ Utah continues to be ranked 48th on the Childcare Index and 50th (an "F" grade) in the Work and Family category, according to a recent Status of Women in the States report.²⁹ Increasing the availability of the number of childcare spots at institutions of higher learning, places of work, and in communities, as well as increasing affordability through policies and subsidies that support childcare providers and caregivers would allow parents to have access to the childcare they need (see [UWLP 2023 Childcare Snapshot](#) for a more in-depth look at how Utahns can address the childcare crisis).

Second, addressing the complex issue of the gender wage gap (the median female wage compared to the median male wage) is critical. Utah ranks worst in the nation.³⁰ Data indicate that from 2017-2021, Utah women who worked full-time and year-round earned 70.8% what their male counterparts made.³¹

Third, Utah would also benefit by increasing support for women entrepreneurs. Since 2014, the number of businesses started by Utah women has increased by 21.0%. Women currently own 16.0% of businesses in Utah, and Utah is ranked second for percentage increase in women-

owned businesses (77.0% increase).³² Over 89,000 businesses are women-owned, generating \$15.7 billion a year in Utah.³³ However, it is estimated that if women controlled half of all businesses in the state, Utah's economy would grow by \$27 billion in additional revenue (69.0% growth), add 25,000 new businesses (8.0% growth) and create 162,000 new jobs (10.5% growth).³⁴ For additional information, see the UWLP's white paper on [Women-Owned Businesses in Utah: Status, Challenges, and Opportunities](#).

Fourth, Utah employers can increase offerings of high quality, professional part-time employment opportunities and returnships. This aligns with Utah workforce development goals and, more importantly, capitalizes on the skillsets of women who would like to work or who need to work but require flexibility in order to do so.

Finally, Utah decision makers and residents can work to increase educational participation and completion for all Utahns, with particular focus on disadvantaged populations. Increasing support, particularly for women of color and mothers, will expand opportunities for those who have been underserved. Utah women are less likely than US women to work in jobs that require higher levels of education. As more women in Utah earn at least bachelor's degrees, specifically in high-paying growth industries, they will have more choices and opportunities for successful employment.³⁵ Additionally, some women may benefit from exploring training and certification in fields that are traditionally male dominated yet lead to careers that are relatively high paying and flexible. Utah can support women in the workforce by increasing access to scholarships and by encouraging women to pursue careers in STEM fields.

Conclusion

Women make up a significant proportion of the overall labor force in Utah, but many are employed in low-paying jobs with limited room for advancement. As women in Utah increase their labor force participation, as has been the ongoing trend, unique challenges such as occupational segregation, childcare inaccessibility, and the gender wage gap must be addressed. Finding ways to improve various factors for Utah women in the labor force will not only better their lives but will also strengthen the positive impact of women in communities and the state as a whole.

¹ United States Census Bureau. (1950). General characteristics: Utah. *United States Census*. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1950/population-volume-2/37784400v2p44ch3.pdf>

² United States Census Bureau. (2022). Selected population profile in the United States. Utah and US (S0201). *American Community Survey*. https://data.census.gov/table?q=s0201&g=010XX00US_040XX00US49

³ United States Census Bureau. (2022).

⁴ United States Census Bureau. (2021). Occupation by sex for the civilian employed population 16 years and over (S2401). https://data.census.gov/table?q=S2401&g=010XX00US_040XX00US49&y=2021

⁵ United States Census Bureau. (2015a). Occupation by sex for the civilian employed population 16 years and over (S2401). Utah. https://data.census.gov/table?q=S2401&g=010XX00US_040XX00US49&y=2015

⁶ United States Census Bureau. (2021).

⁷ United States Census Bureau. (2015a).

⁸ Department of Workforce Services. (2023, April 19). Labor force participation in the State of Utah. <https://jobs.utah.gov/blog/post/2023/04/19/labor-force-participation-in-the-state-of-utah>

⁹ Arnon, A., O’Connell, A., Billero, J., Wu, Y., & Paulson, M. (2023 November 27). *Explaining the rise in prime age women’s employment*. Penn Wharton Budget Model. <https://budgetmodel.wharton.upenn.edu/issues/2023/11/27/explaining-prime-age-womens-employment>

¹⁰ United States Census Bureau. (2022). Employment status (S2301). *American Community Survey*. <https://data.census.gov/table?q=s2301&y=2022>

¹¹ United States Census Bureau. (2022). Selected population profile in the United States. Utah and US (S0201). *American Community Survey*. https://data.census.gov/table?q=s0201&g=010XX00US_040XX00US49

¹² Kervin, G. (2022, November 28). *Utah’s gender wage gap*. Utah Department of Workforce Services. <https://jobs.utah.gov/blog/post/2022/11/28/utah-s-gender-wage-gap>

¹³ United States Census Bureau. (2015, 2021). Sex by full-time work status in the past 12 months for the population 16 to 64 years. Utah and US (K202301). https://data.census.gov/table?q=K202302&g=010XX00US_040XX00US49&y=2015 and https://data.census.gov/table/ACSS2021.K202302?q=K202302&g=010XX%0B00US_040XX00US49&y=2021

¹⁴ United States Census Bureau. (2021). Sex by full-time work status in the past 12 months for the population 16 to 64 years. Utah and US (K202302). *American Community Survey*. https://data.census.gov/table?q=K202302&g=010XX00US_040XX00US49

¹⁵ United States Census Bureau. (2022). Sex by age by employment status for the population 16 years and over (B23002). *American Community Survey*. US and Utah. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACS2021.Y2022.B23001?q=B23001:+sex+by+age+by+employment+status+for+the+population+16+years+and+over&g=010XX00US>

¹⁶ United State Census Bureau. (2022). Employment status in US and Utah (S2301). *American Community Survey*. https://data.census.gov/table?q=s2301&g=010XX00US_040XX00US49

¹⁷ United State Census Bureau. (2022).

¹⁸ The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2021). Children under age 6 with all available parents in the labor force. *Kids Count Data Center*. <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/5057-children-under-age-6-with-all-available-parents-in-the-labor-force?loc=46&loc=2#detailed/2/2-53/true/2048/any/11472.11473>

¹⁹ United State Census Bureau. (2022). Marital status by sex by labor force in US and Utah. https://data.census.gov/table?q=B12006:+Marital+Status+by+Sex+by+Labor+Force+Participation&g=010XX00US_040XX00US49

²⁰ The previous snapshot contained statistics on ethnicity from IWRP’s “The Status of Women in Utah, 2015” Utah fact sheet. This has not been updated since, so these statistics were calculated using the US census microdata tool in order to calculate the labor force participation rate for those 16 and over who were either working or looking for work by ethnicity.

²¹ Department of Workforce Services. (2023). 2017–2021 Labor force status by age and gender. *Women in the Workforce*. <https://jobs.utah.gov/wi/data/library/laborforce/womeninwf.html>

²² Langston, L. P. (2010, July/August). What’s the truth about Utah women in the labor force? *Trendlines*. Department of Workforce Services. <http://jobs.utah.gov/wi/pubs/trendlines/julaug10/whats happening.pdf>

²³ United States Census Bureau. (2022). Occupation by sex for the civilian employed population 16 years and over. Utah (S2401). *American Community Survey*. <https://data.census.gov/table?q=S2401:+Occupation+by+Sex+for+the+Civilian+Employed+Population+16+Years+and+Over&g=040XX00US49&y=2022>

²⁴ United States Census Bureau. (2015). Occupation by sex for the civilian employed population 16 years and over (S2401). Utah. *American Community Survey*. <https://data.census.gov/table?q=S2401:+Occupation+by+Sex+for+the+Civilian+Employed+Population+16+Years+and>

<https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S2301?q=s2301&g=040XX00US49>; United States Census Bureau. (2022). Occupation by sex for the civilian employed population 16 years and over (S2401). Utah. *American Community Survey*. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S2301?q=s2301&g=040XX00US49>

²⁵ United States Census Bureau. (2022). Occupation by sex and median earnings in the past 12 months (in 2022 inflation-adjusted dollars) for the civilian employed population 16 years and over. Utah (S2411). *American Community Survey*. [https://data.census.gov/table?q=S2411:+Occupation+by+Sex+and+Median+Earnings+in+the+Past+12+Months+\(in+2022+Inflation-Adjusted+Dollars\)+for+the+Civilian+Employed+Population+16+Years+and+Over&g=040XX00US49](https://data.census.gov/table?q=S2411:+Occupation+by+Sex+and+Median+Earnings+in+the+Past+12+Months+(in+2022+Inflation-Adjusted+Dollars)+for+the+Civilian+Employed+Population+16+Years+and+Over&g=040XX00US49)

²⁶ United States Census Bureau. (2022). Occupation by sex for the civilian employed population 16 years and over. Utah (S2401). *American Community Survey*. <https://data.census.gov/table?q=S2401:+Occupation+by+Sex+for+the+Civilian+Employed+Population+16+Years+and+Over&g=040XX00US49&y=2022>; United States Census Bureau. (2015). Occupation by sex for the civilian employed population 16 years and over. Utah (S2401). *American Community Survey*. <https://data.census.gov/table?q=S2401:+Occupation+by+Sex+for+the+Civilian+Employed+Population+16+Years+and+Over&g=040XX00US49&y=2015>

²⁷ United States Census Bureau. (2015).

²⁸ Economic Policy Institute. (2020, October). *Child care costs in the United States: The cost of child care in Utah*. <https://www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/#/UT>

²⁹ Institute for Women’s Policy Research. (2023). *Utah: Work & family*. Status of women in the states. <https://statusofwomensdata.org/explore-the-data/state-data/utah/#work-family>

³⁰ McCann, Ad. (2023). Best & worst states for women’s equality (2023). *WalletHub*. <https://wallethub.com/edu/best-and-worst-states-for-women-equality/5835>

³¹ Department of Workforce Services. (2023, April). *Women in the workforce*. <https://jobs.utah.gov/wi/data/library/laborforce/women-inwf.html>

³² Madsen, S. R., & Townsend, A. (2022, October 5). Women-owned businesses in Utah: Status, challenges and opportunities. *Utah State University*. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/blog/2022/white-paper-women-owned-businesses-in-utah-status-challenges-opportunities>

³³ Utah women-owned business directory. (2020). *Did you know?* <https://utahwomenowned.com/#:~:text=In%20Utah%2C%20women%20own%2089%2C000,businesses%2C%20revenue%2C%20and%20employees>.

³⁴ Utah women-owned business directory. (2020).

³⁵ Department of Workforce Services. (2014, February). Hard at work—women in the Utah labor force.

Acknowledgements: We appreciate our expert reviewers, Gwendolyn Kervin, Marilyn Cannon, and Kathryn Thomas, for their insights and thoughtful feedback. We also thank Kolene Anderson for her feedback and editing, Gwendolyn Kervin for pulling data on race and ethnicity from the Census Bureau Microdata tool, and Robbyn Scribner for her authorship on a previous version of this report. Finally, we thank the Greg & Jacki Zehner Foundation for their generous donation that made this, and similar research, possible.

Copyright © 2023 Utah Women & Leadership Project