

Labor force



The labor force is the number of people aged 16 or older who are either working or looking for work. The labor force does not include members of the active-duty military or institutionalized workers, such as prison inmates.

The size of the labor force depends on the population—determined by birth rates, immigration rates, and

death rates—and on the proportion of the population working or actively seeking employment, which is known as the labor force participation rate.

These measures vary significantly by age group, sex, racial group, and ethnic group. Separate labor-force projections are developed for each of these demographic categories.

The charts on labor force show change in the following age groups:

- ◆ 65-year-olds and older
- ◆ 55- to 64-year-olds
- ◆ 45- to 54-year-olds
- ◆ 35- to 44-year-olds
- ◆ 25- to 34-year-olds
- ◆ 16- to 24-year-olds.

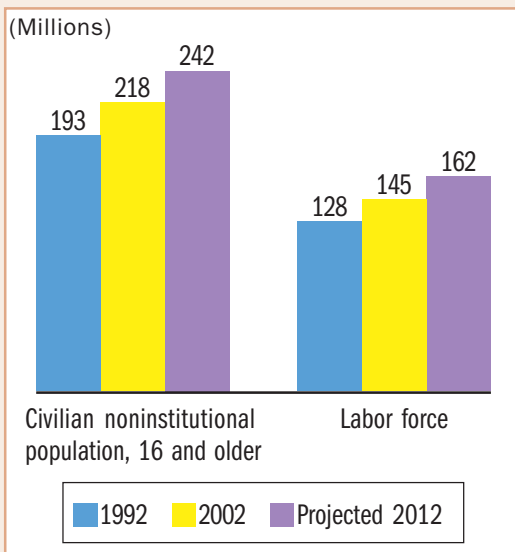
The charts also show labor force change among men and women, among racial groups, and among Hispanics

and Latinos of any race. Because these are new categories from the U.S. Census Bureau, they differ from ones used in the past.

The composition of the labor force changes because women, men, and racial and ethnic groups have different age distributions, birth and immigration rates, and labor force participation rates.

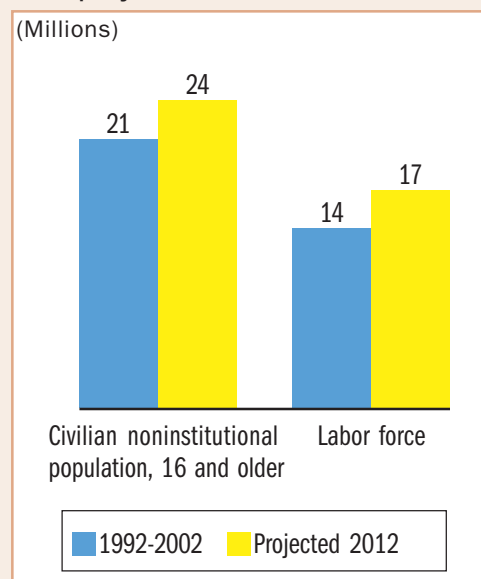
As in previous years, the size of the labor force is projected to be smaller than the number of jobs, in part because some workers have more than one job.

Population and labor force, 1992, 2002, and projected 2012



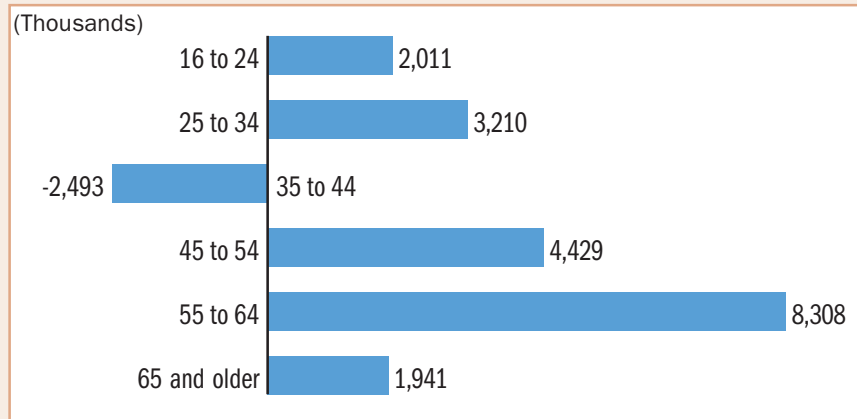
Both the population and the labor force are projected to continue growing steadily. By 2012, the number of people working or looking for work is expected to reach 162 million. That number excludes those who are full-time members of the U.S. Armed Forces, are institutionalized, or are under 16 years of age.

Numeric growth in population and labor force, 1992-2002 and projected 2002-12



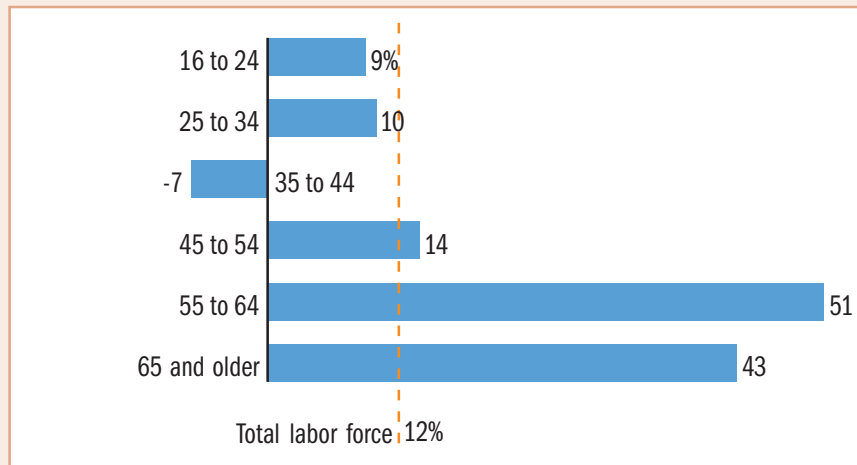
Both the labor force and population are expected to continue to grow.

Numeric change in labor force by age, projected 2002-12



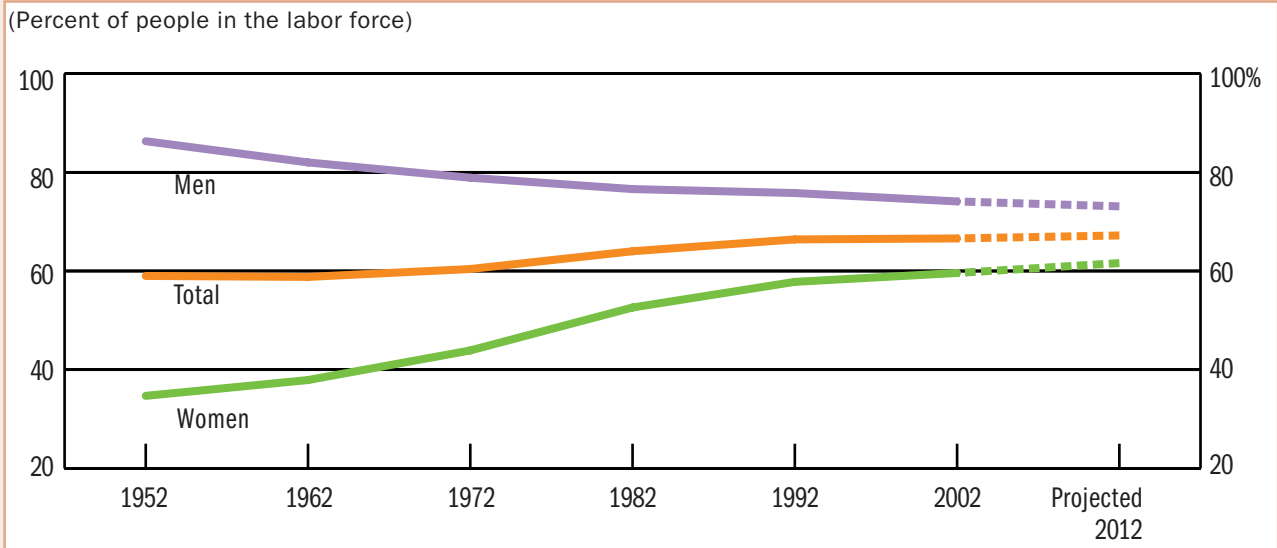
As the population ages, the number of people in the labor force aged 55 to 64 is expected to have the most growth. The number of 35- to 44-year-olds is expected to shrink as the baby boomers shift to older groups.

Percent change in labor force by age, projected 2002-12



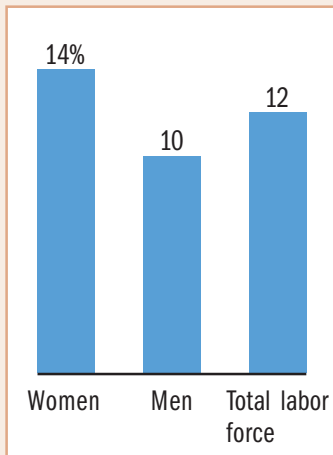
The number of people in the labor force aged 65 and older is expected to increase more than 3 times as fast as the total labor force, due, in part, to workers postponing retirement. Compared with the total labor force, the number of workers younger than age 45 is expected to grow more slowly or to decline.

Labor force participation rate of men and women, 1952-2002 and projected 2012



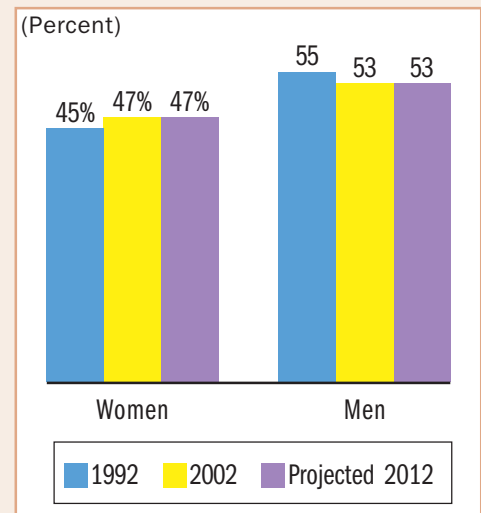
The labor force participation rate for women is expected to continue to edge upward as the men's rate declines. By 2012, the gap in labor force participation between the sexes will be even smaller.

Percent growth in labor force of men and women, projected 2002-12



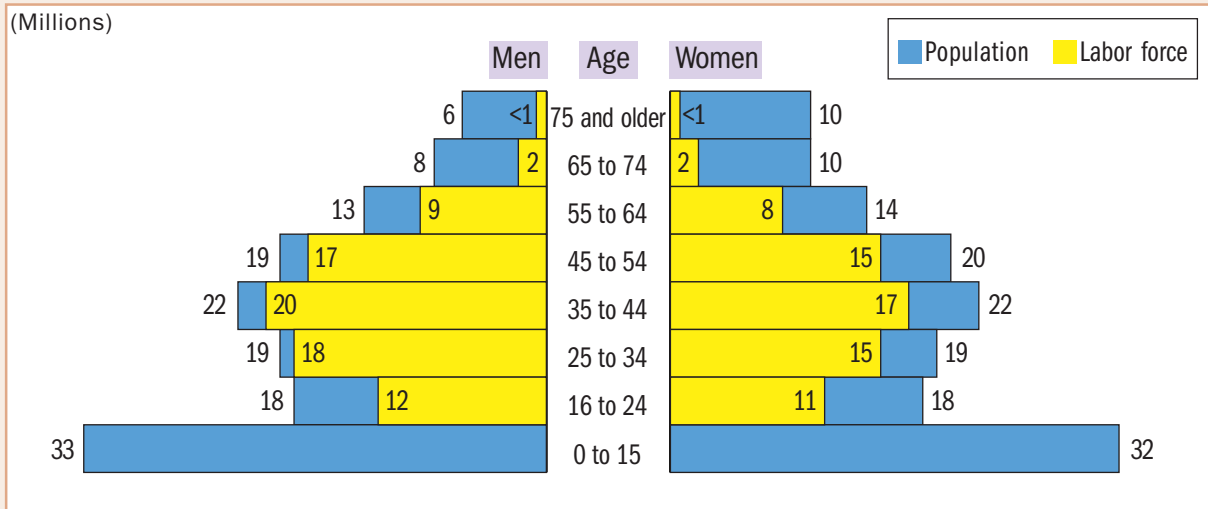
The number of women in the labor force is expected to grow faster than the number of men...

Labor force share of men and women, 1992, 2002, and projected 2012



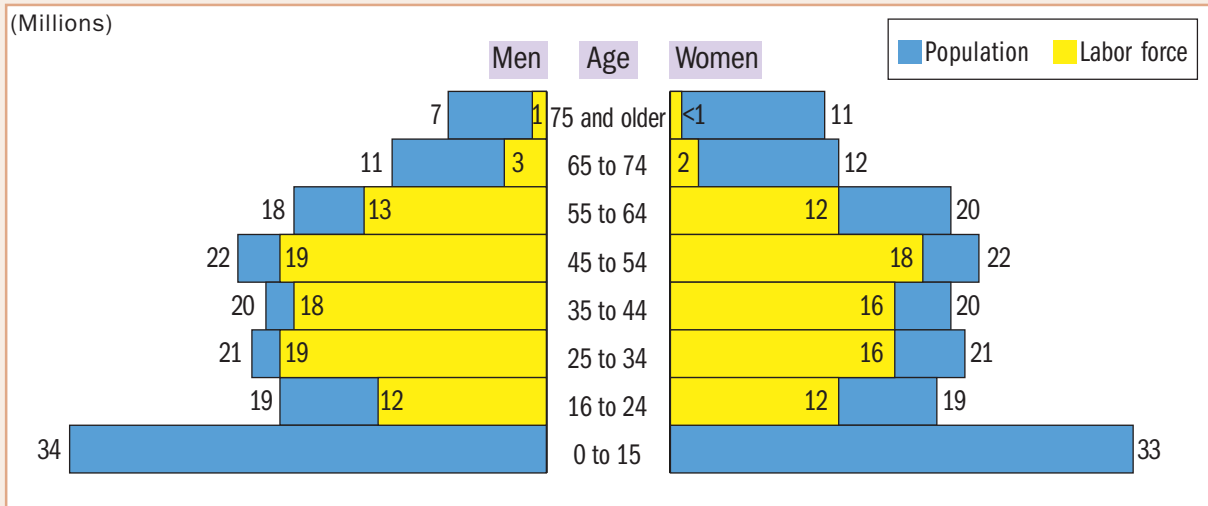
...but both men's and women's shares of the labor force are projected to stay about the same.

Population and labor force, 2002



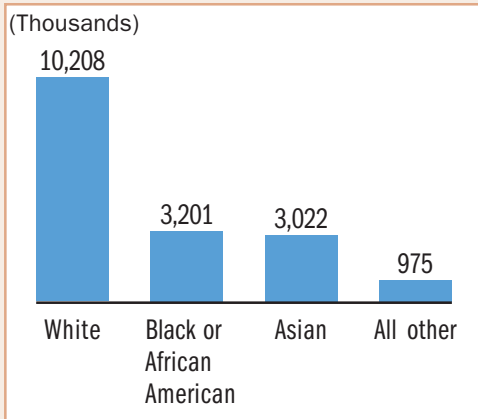
In every age group, there were more men than women in the labor force in 2002—even in age groups that had fewer men than women in the population. The difference was most striking in both the 25- to 34-year-old and 35- to 44-year-old groups.

Population and labor force, projected 2012



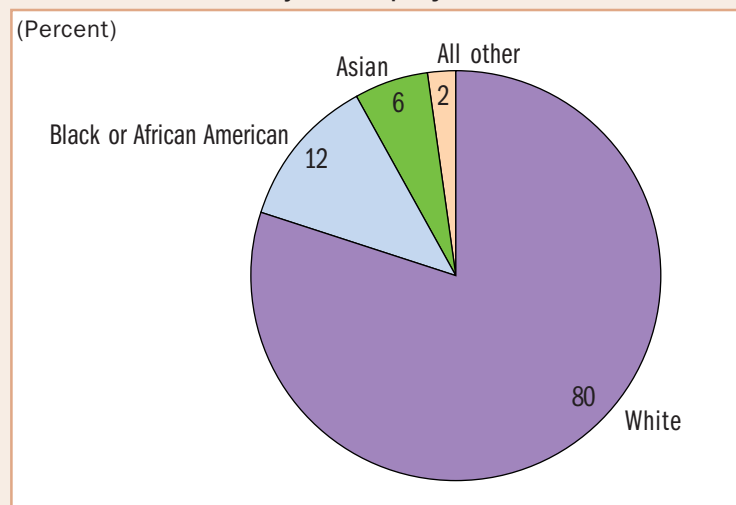
By 2012, both the population and the labor force will be older. Men are expected to continue to have higher labor force participation than women. Among women, those aged 35 to 44 are projected to have the highest labor force participation rate.

Numeric growth in labor force by race, projected 2002-12



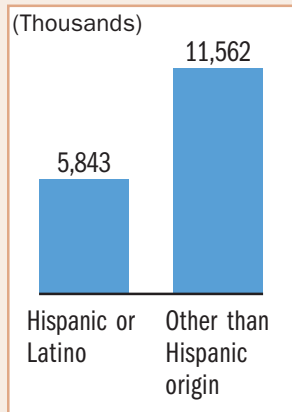
Whites are projected to account for more than half of all labor force growth over the 2002-12 decade. The “all other races” category includes people of American Indian and Alaska Native descent, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, multiracial individuals, and any other people who do not identify themselves as white, black, or Asian.

Labor force share by race, projected 2012



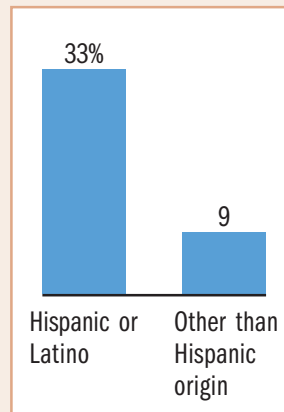
Although whites will continue to be the largest racial category in the labor force, Asian workers’ projected 6-percent share represents a 51-percent increase over the 2002-12 decade.

Numeric growth in labor force by ethnic origin, projected 2002-12



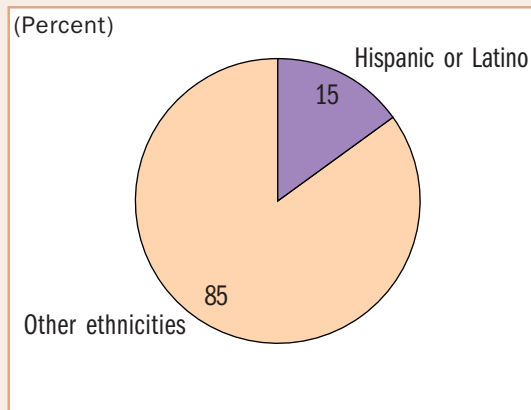
The number of Hispanic or Latino workers is projected to increase by nearly 6 million between 2002 and 2012, accounting for more than one-third of total labor force growth.

Percent growth in labor force by ethnic origin, projected 2002-12



The growth of the Hispanic and Latino labor force amounts to an increase of 33 percent—a growth rate more than 3 times as fast as that of non-Hispanic workers over the projections decade...

Labor force share by ethnic origin, projected 2012



...increasing the Hispanic and Latino share of the labor force to 15 percent in 2012.