

Jobs lost in W.Va., report says

By [Paul J. Nyden](#) | November 1, 2011

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- After consistently adding jobs during the early months of 2011, non-farm jobs in West Virginia dropped by 1,100 between June and September.

Coal mining and logging jobs increased by 300 in September, while public sector jobs rose by 1,400.

But other sectors of the economy lost jobs, particularly the transportation and utilities, as well as professional and business services, according to the September issue of Jobs Count, a monthly newsletter published by the West Virginia Center on Budget & Policy.

West Virginia's "labor force participation rate" remains the lowest in the entire nation. That statistic is calculated as the percentage of residents over 16 who are working or who are seeking work. A high percentage of older residents, over 65, lowers labor force participation rates.

Between 2005 and 2009, West Virginia's participation rate was just 55.6 percent, according to the American Community Survey.

But there were dramatic differences in employment rates in counties across the state.

"In McDowell County," the newsletter reported, "fewer than one in three residents over the age of 16 was in the labor force."

And since those rates were primarily calculated for periods before the recession that began in 2008, labor force population rates today could be even lower in many counties.

Counties in the Northern and Eastern Panhandles tended to have the highest labor force participation rates, the Center of Budget & Policy reported.

Eight counties with the highest labor force participation rates, between 61 percent and 70 percent, were: Berkeley, Brooke, Grant, Jefferson, Kanawha, Pendleton and Ohio counties.

Thirteen counties had rates between 31 percent and 50 percent, including eight of the state's southernmost counties and five in the central portion of the state.

Some analysts predict labor force participation rates could drop even lower a generation from now.

West Virginia's "working age population (ages 20 to 64) is projected to shrink by 104,000 from 2010 to 2031," the newsletter stated.

"This demographic change alone could lower West Virginia's labor force participation rate by 5.4 percentage points over the next 25 years, from 54.3 percent to 49.1 percent."

While many different social and economic factors contribute to labor force participation rates in the Mountain State, Jobs Count reports, low education rates are a critical factor.

Last year, just 51 percent of West Virginia workers had any education beyond high school - the lowest rate of any state in the entire nation.

"Approximately 26 percent of the labor force had some college experience or an associate's degree, while only 25 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher."

A 2011 National Skills Coalition report found that "about 54 percent of West Virginia's jobs were in middle-skill occupations," but "only 45 percent of the state's workers likely have the appropriate training for these jobs."

Improving post-secondary education levels, especially among workers with lower skills, the newsletter concludes, could be a key to "meet the demands of future employment needs."