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RECRUITMENT AND STAFFING

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JULY 2026

Trying to read the economy right now can feel like a roller coaster, but if you look past the initial headlines, there is plenty of genuine optimism to go around. The official June jobs **report showed** a modest 57,000 jobs added, while the ADP **reported** 98,000 new private-sector payrolls. But look under the hood: the national unemployment rate actually dropped to a highly resilient 4.2%.

We are currently riding a four-month streak of job gains – a massive and welcome turnaround from the gloomy hiring slumps we saw throughout 2025. Forecasters are realizing that this isn’t a stalled labor market; it’s a stabilizing one. The three-month average for job growth is hovering around a very healthy 111,000, and workers switching jobs are still seeing solid 6.6% annual pay bumps. Furthermore, first-quarter GDP was revised upward to a 2.1% growth rate, fueled heavily by a surge in artificial intelligence investments.

Even the manufacturing sector, despite battling inflation and global supply chain headaches, is showing serious grit. The U.S. manufacturing index recently hit its highest level since May 2022. Factory orders even reached a four-year peak as businesses smartly front-loaded their purchasing to stay ahead of potential shortages.

Here in West Michigan, this resilience isn’t just a talking point – it’s the reality on the shop floor. Our local industrial economy is holding “modestly solid,” completely bucking any doom-and-gloom narratives. New orders have **stayed positive for the fourth consecutive month**, and factories are fielding surprisingly strong demand, particularly from projects tied to the ongoing tech and data center build outs.

Steady workflow is protecting local livelihoods. While unemployment ticked up in the state last month, it’s significantly lower than it was a year ago. While business owners are certainly keeping a watchful eye on the “hidden tax” of higher raw material costs, the continuous influx of new business is providing a powerful buffer. West Michigan is successfully avoiding the widespread layoffs that typically drag down a region during economic shifts. Supported by an unexpectedly durable national job market and our own manufacturing backbone, West Michigan clearly has the momentum to keep pushing forward.

DESPITE SLOWER HIRING, ECONOMIC INDICATORS HOLD STEADY

UNEMPLOYMENT	March	April	May
Kalamazoo	4.1	3.9	4.7
Grand Rapids	4.0	3.6	4.4
Muskegon	5.2	5.1	4.7
Detroit	5.3	5.4	5.5
Battle Creek	5.2	4.7	5.4
Michigan	5.0	5.0	5.1
USA	4.3	4.3	4.2

U.S. consumer sentiment rebounded in June as moderating gasoline prices and news of a ceasefire agreement lifted household spirits from recent record lows.

The University of Michigan’s final consumer sentiment index rose to 49.5 in June, a roughly 10% jump from May’s reading of 44.8. The final figure narrowly beat the 49 reading expected by economists.

Survey Director Joanne Hsu **noted** the gains spanned across all income levels, wealth brackets, and political affiliations. Furthermore, consumers’ expectations for business conditions over the next five years surged 16%, signaling that long-term anxieties surrounding the Iran conflict are beginning to ease.

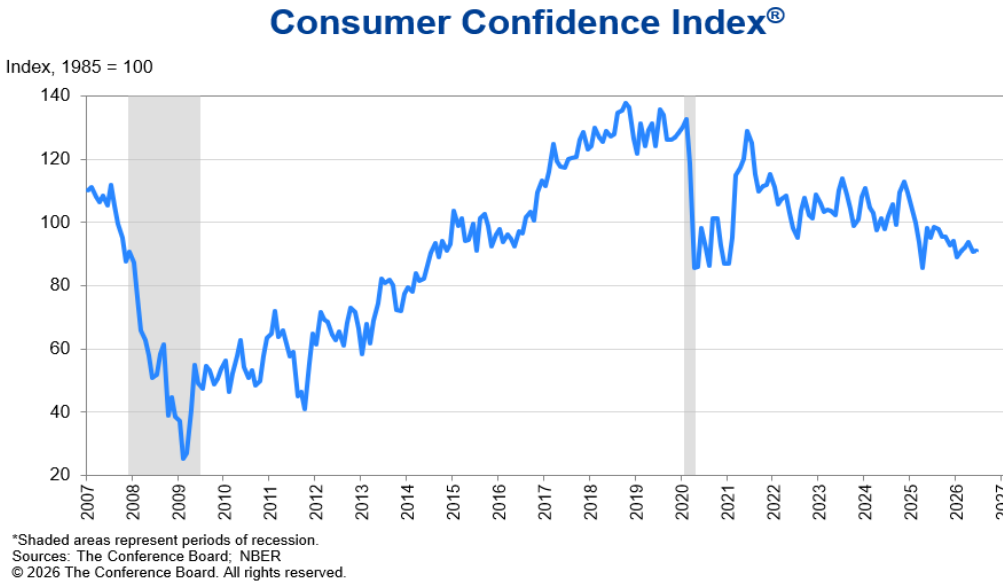
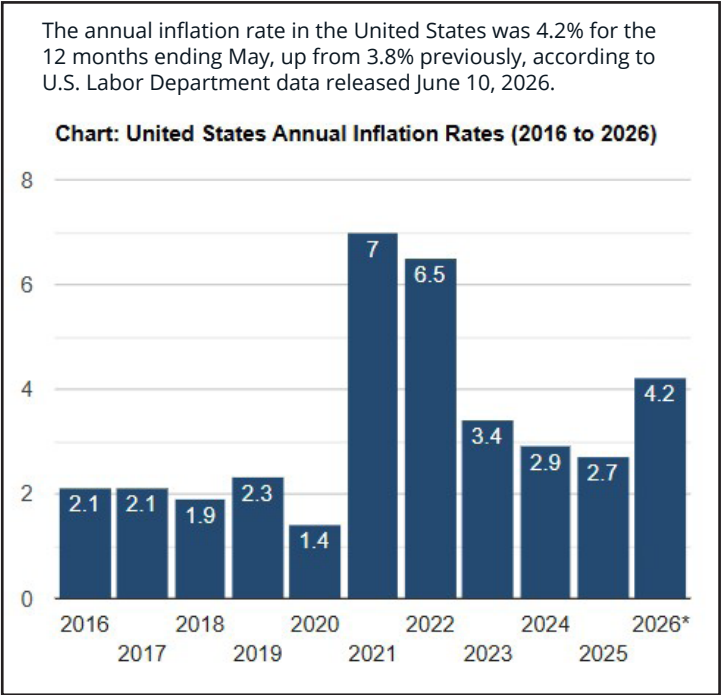
Despite the monthly bump, overall sentiment remains heavily in unfavorable territory. The June reading sits 13% below February levels – just before the Iran conflict began – and nearly 20% lower than a year ago.

Everyday high prices are acting like a heavy anchor, dragging down how families feel about their money. For three straight months now, over half of everyday people say inflation is actively hurting their wallets. While most expect things to cool down slightly over the next year and into the future, the general feeling is still incredibly tense compared to just a few months ago.

The Conference Board Consumer Confidence **Index®** inched up by 0.6 points to 91.2 (1985=100) in June, up from a downwardly revised 90.6 in May.

The Present Situation Index – based on consumers’ assessment of current business and labor market conditions – fell by 3.0 points to 116.4. The Expectations Index – based on consumers’ short-term outlook for income, business, and labor market conditions – rose by 3.0 points to 74.4. The survey period for this month’s preliminary results was June 1–23, encompassing an extension of the US-Iran ceasefire agreement.

CONSUMER SENTIMENT INDEXES SHOW IMPROVEMENTS



GHOSTS IN THE LABOR FORCE

CHECKED OUT

How we get young men back to work.

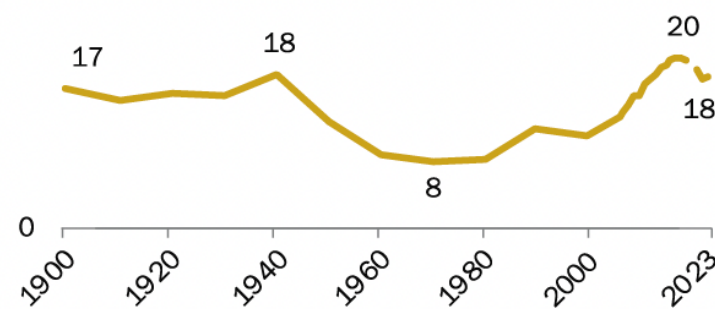
The modern American workforce is defined more and more by a quiet vanishing act. To understand the scale of it, you have to look back: male labor force participation peaked at 86.4% in 1950. It has fallen for generations, sliding to 79.7% by 1970 and to just 69.5% for men 20 and older by May 2026. Female participation climbed steadily through the same decades, and that rise was overdue, hard-won, and worth defending. For anyone worn down by old power imbalances and the manosphere's ugliest voices, there is a quiet temptation to read men's retreat as karmic, to think *good, let them step back*. That reaction is human. It is also a trap. What is happening underneath is not power changing hands. It is a structural and human collapse, and collapses do not check anyone's politics before they spread. Nobody in the room walks away from this one clean.

Michigan makes the crisis concrete. This state has been built on blue-collar male labor, which means we feel the withdrawal before anywhere else does. By June 2025, unemployment for young adults ages 16 to 24 here **surged to 12.7%**, a staggering 3.3 points above the national average of 9.5% for that same group. Prime-age unemployment, ages 25 to 54, sat at 4.2%, also above the national mark. Sons and neighbors are dropping off the map, and the whole state feels the silence.

Share of young adults living in a parent's home is below its pre-pandemic peak

% of U.S. 25- to 34-year-olds living in a parent's home

50%



Note: Values are labeled for 1900, 1940, 1970, 2017 and 2023. Data is not available for 2020. "Living in a parent's home" means residing in a household headed by a parent.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of decennial census 1900-2000 and 2006-2023 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Michigan also faces a real shortage of skilled workers, with only 51.6% of adults over 25 holding postsecondary credentials. Yet young men are disappearing from the very institutions built to close that gap. In the 2024-2025 academic year, Michigan women earned over 67,000 **degrees and certificates** against fewer than 49,000 for men, out-earning them in credentials by about 35%. A generation of guys is quietly opting out of the ladder up.

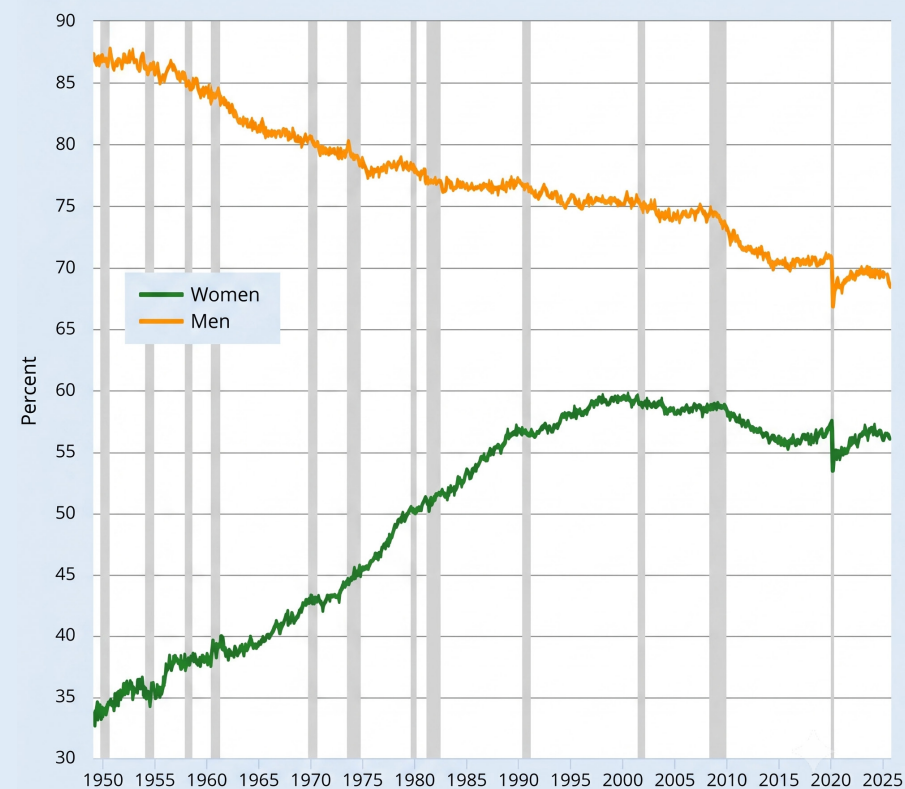
So if these men are not working or in school, where did they go? Many went somewhere quieter. Gaming among young men 15 to 24 more than doubled in fifteen years, to 10 hours a week, up 50% from 2004 to 2015 alone. The pull is real: community when the real world offers none, an escape, games built with immersive worlds to keep you there. This is not laziness. It is the path of least resistance.

The withdrawal goes further than screens. In 2023, 20% of men ages 25 to 34 lived with a parent, against 15% of women. Most say it helps their finances, and they are right. But they also admit it costs them socially, and that is the quiet part. Living at home in your late twenties narrows the odds of dating, of building something, of the ordinary milestones that give a life shape. Fewer of those, and mental health follows them down.

In a Pew Research Study from 2023, nine of the ten metros with the highest shares of young adults living at home were in California, Texas or Florida.

Interestingly, housing costs are not associated with the rates of young adults living at home. The study found that the share of 25- to 34-year-olds living with a parent in a metro did not vary based on the median rent in that area.

FRED Labor Force Participation Rate by Gender



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics via FRED®
Shaded areas indicate U.S. recessions.

fred.stlouisfed.org

MEN STEPPED BACK. WOMEN STEPPED UP.

Since 1950, male labor force participation has fallen from 86% to 67% while female participation nearly doubled from 32% to 57%. The gap has compressed by roughly 40 points. American workforce growth over the past 75 years was largely carried by women entering it.

The trend didn't stall after women entered the workforce. It plateaued. Female participation peaked around 60% in 2000 and has held relatively flat since, while male participation kept declining. The convergence isn't accelerating anymore. Both lines are drifting toward each other slowly, but neither is moving with urgency.

67,000
vs 49,000

The number of higher education degrees and certificates earned by Michigan women compared to men in the 2024–2025 academic year. Statewide, women are out-earning men in credentials by 35%.

This retreat is not laziness, and treating it that way misreads the whole thing. It is psychological, and it starts young. **Economists find** that men's expectations about work are largely set in childhood. A boy who watches the older men around him fight stagnant wages and stretches of unemployment absorbs a quiet lesson: expect the same. He learns to brace for failure before his first shift, and short-term downturns harden into a generational drop in who even bothers to try. Add the pressure to produce a paycheck fast, to prove something with it, and you get men who bounce from job to job chasing that proof until there is nothing left to give.

75%
Of suicides are men.

Across the U.S., Canada, and the UK, men account for an overwhelming majority of all deaths by suicide — roughly 100 every single day in the U.S. alone.

Here is where it turns dark. When men come loose from school, work, and community all at once, the isolation that follows can become lethal.

Across the United States, Canada, and the UK, men make up 75% to 80% of all deaths by suicide. In the U.S. alone, roughly 100 men die this way every single day, making it the second leading cause of death for men under the age of 45 (behind accidental death). As many as 60% of those who die had been living with major depression. Still, most of them died without ever once asking for help. Studies show only about 35%, and by some global counts fewer than one in five, had any contact with a mental health professional in the year before their death. Ashamed of falling short of the provider they were supposed to be, cut off from the people work and school used to put in their path, they quietly stop trying.

1 in 5

Men who had contact with a mental health professional in the year before their death.

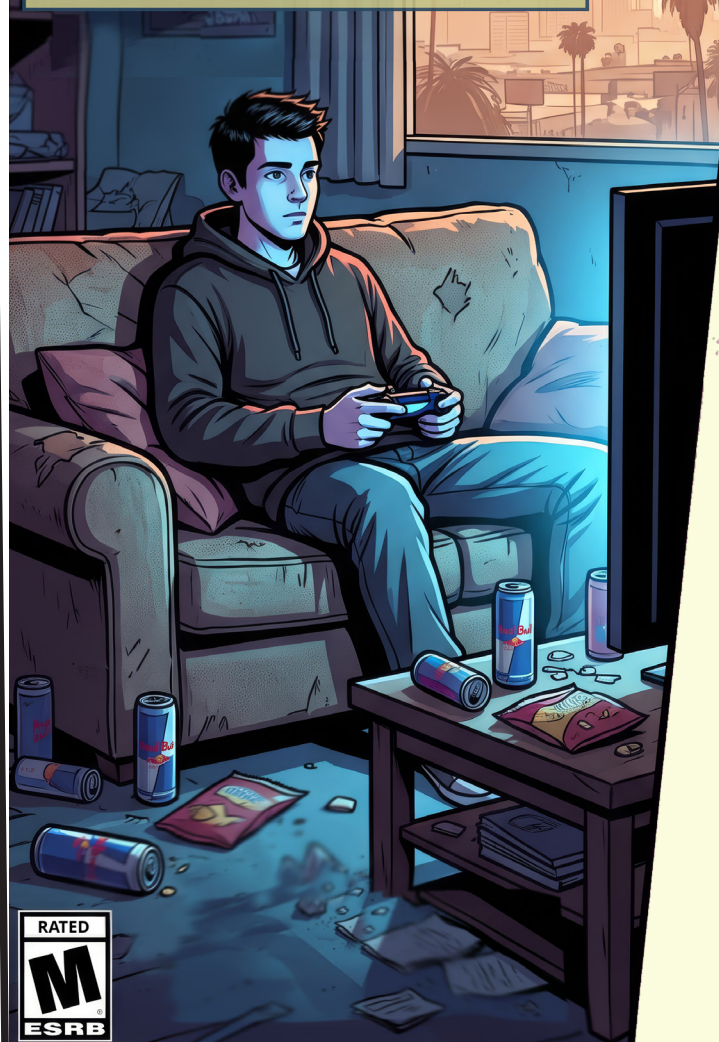


Suicide is the second leading cause of death for men under the age of forty-five.

It is easy to look at the privileges men have historically held and feel little sympathy. But when men drop out of society, the damage does not stay contained to men. It spreads. Every death by suicide leaves a shattered community behind it, directly traumatizing seven to ten friends, family members, and colleagues. And when men leave the labor force, the work of keeping households afloat, funding the tax base, and holding communities together shifts disproportionately onto women. This is not a problem one side wins. The cost is shared, whether anyone wanted to share it or not.

Bringing young men back from the digital void and the brink of despair and back into the workforce is not about restoring an antiquated patriarchy. It is about securing our collective future. A society where men are educated, employed, and mentally healthy is a society with fewer shattered families, a robust economy, and an equally shared burden of responsibility. When we help men find their way back to purpose, absolutely everyone wins.

While games can provide a crucial sense of community and belonging, modern digital models are often addictive by design, maximizing engagement through constant updates, limited-edition items, and daily rewards.



PLAN AHEAD NOW.

It's been an event more than a dozen years in the making. This fall, what will easily be the biggest video game of all time will release and is expected to create a drag on both the economy and the male attention span for the foreseeable future.

The release of **Grand Theft Auto 6** (scheduled for November 19, 2026) is projected to trigger an epic wave of mass call-ins and approved leave, with estimates pointing to over \$1 billion in lost productivity for the U.S. workforce alone on the first day.

LOCK IN, BRUH.

To stop this collapse, here are targeted strategies to bring men back into the workforce and the classroom.

Pay Them to Learn:

Classrooms lose the men who need income now, not in four years. Apprenticeships invert the deal: earn while you train, with a visible payoff. A local plumbing union starts apprentices at \$41 an hour. That is not a pitch about the value of education. It is a wage a nineteen-year-old can picture, and it competes directly with the couch.

Move the Age Line:

Disconnection hardens fast, so the catch has to come early. Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer is pushing to drop the Michigan Reconnect tuition age from 25 to 21. Reaching a man at 21 costs less and works better than trying to recover him at 30, after the drift has already set into a habit.

Change the Words:

Language decides who asks for help. "Committing suicide" borrows the grammar of crime and sin, and that shame keeps men quiet. "Death by suicide" drops the verdict. It is a small edit with a real effect: it lowers the cost of walking into a therapist's office, which is where the actual intervention happens.

Name the Job, Not the Hope:

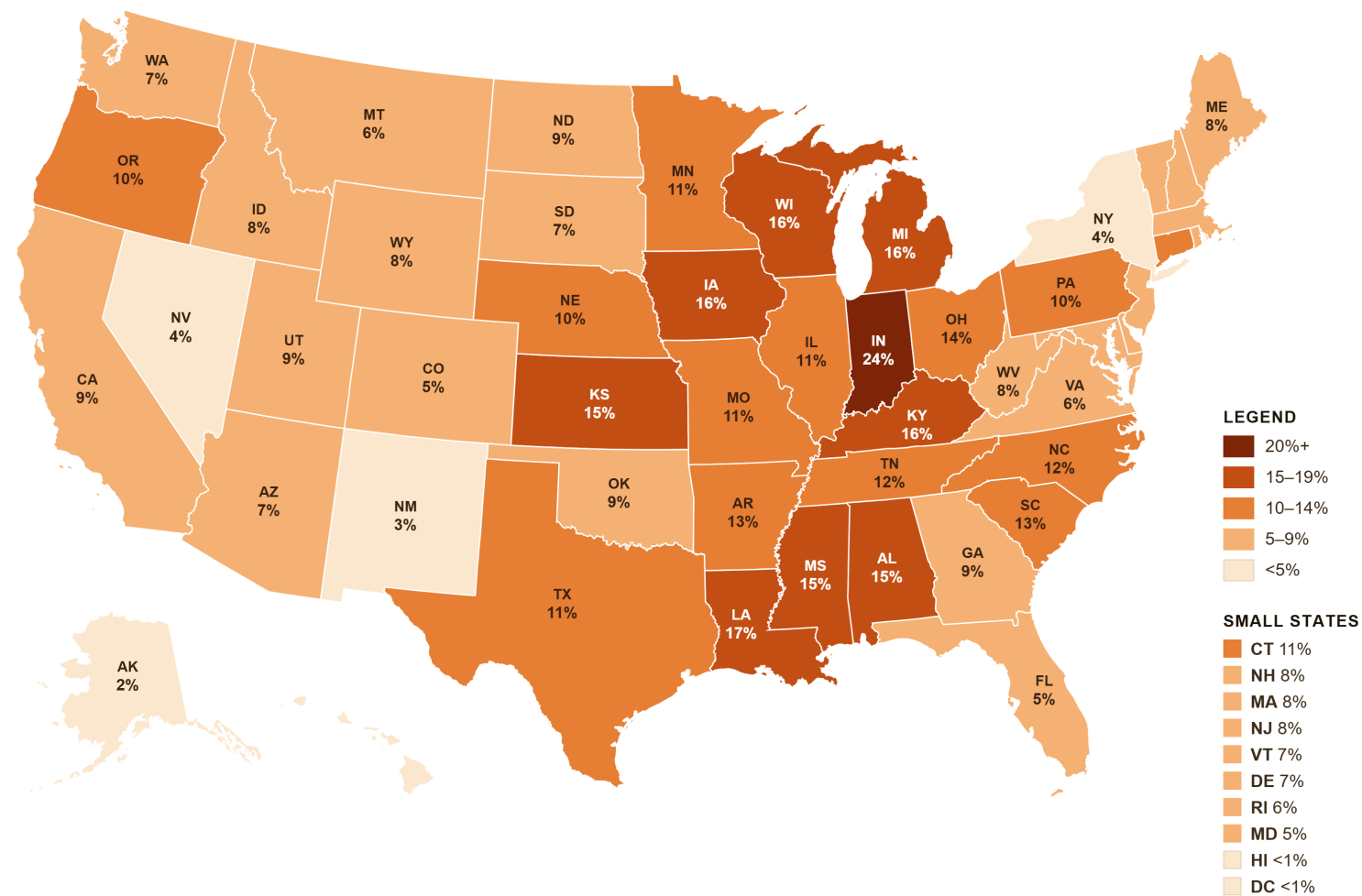
A degree with no visible role on the other side is a bet, and men opt out of bets. (Except FanDuel) When an employer sponsors the training and names the position waiting at the end, enrollment stops being a gamble. Community colleges and businesses that map the route together fill seats the open market never reaches.

Give Them Someone to Watch:

Boys form their expectations about work by watching the older men around them. When those men are checked out, the lesson sticks early and pessimism becomes inheritance. Mentorship reverses the input: a tradesman who shows up, a foreman who vouches for a kid, someone twenty years ahead who lets a man watch the path get walked instead of just hearing it exists.

Manufacturing's Share of U.S. GDP by State

% of state GDP contributed by manufacturing, 2025 · Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis



The 2025 Bureau of Economic Analysis data reveals that while the modern U.S. economy is heavily service-driven, manufacturing remains the foundational lifeblood of specific regions.

The nation’s industrial heartland – the Midwest – clearly dominates the map. Indiana leads the entire country, with manufacturing driving a staggering 24% of its total GDP. Neighboring powerhouses like Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Kentucky follow closely, each attributing 16% of their economic output to the industrial sector.

Beyond the traditional Rust Belt, a secondary manufacturing corridor thrives in the South. States like Louisiana (17%), Mississippi (15%), and Alabama (15%) heavily leverage industrial operations and chemical manufacturing to fuel their growth.

Conversely, the data highlights areas where manufacturing takes a backseat to other industries. Coastal hubs and tourism-dependent states show significantly lower reliance. For instance, New York and Nevada sit at just 4%, while New Mexico (3%) and Alaska (2%) record the lowest shares nationwide, reflecting economies dominated by finance, technology, or resource extraction.

Ultimately, this data debunks the myth of a completely post-industrial America. Manufacturing hasn’t disappeared; it has simply concentrated into a powerhouse economic pillar for the American Midwest and South.

Private capital is pouring into the re-industrialization of the American arms industry, and Michigan is aggressively positioning itself at the center of this lucrative national security shift.

Defense and manufacturing executives recently gathered in Detroit for the third annual Re-industrialize conference to discuss the urgent need to scale U.S. defense production. The push goes far beyond simply manufacturing more missiles and drones on American soil. Leaders are focused on establishing true supply chain sovereignty, distancing the U.S. from China’s grip on critical minerals, and revitalizing a domestic workforce previously gutted by offshoring. With multi million-dollar air defenses expended in the Middle East projected to take years to replenish, the urgency for a stateside “build, baby, build” culture has never been higher.

Capitalizing on this momentum, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer recently unveiled “Michigan’s Defense and Aerospace Strategic Plan”. Designed as a five-year roadmap by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation’s Office of Defense and Aerospace Innovation (ODAI), the initiative aims to reimagine the state as the 21st-century “Arsenal of Democracy”. The strategy focuses on accelerating applied research, expanding testing capabilities, and attracting innovation-driven defense enterprises to the state to create high-paying jobs.

Michigan is already converting this strategy into tangible defense investments. Earlier this year, the Department of Defense designated Michigan’s National All-Domain Warfighting Center as a national range for deep uncrewed aerial systems (drone) testing, citing the state’s permissive drone policies and proximity to tech innovators. Furthermore, the state recently secured a highly coveted new F-15EX fighter mission at Selfridge Air National Guard Base in Macomb County, ensuring the retention of expert talent alongside crucial civilian and military jobs.

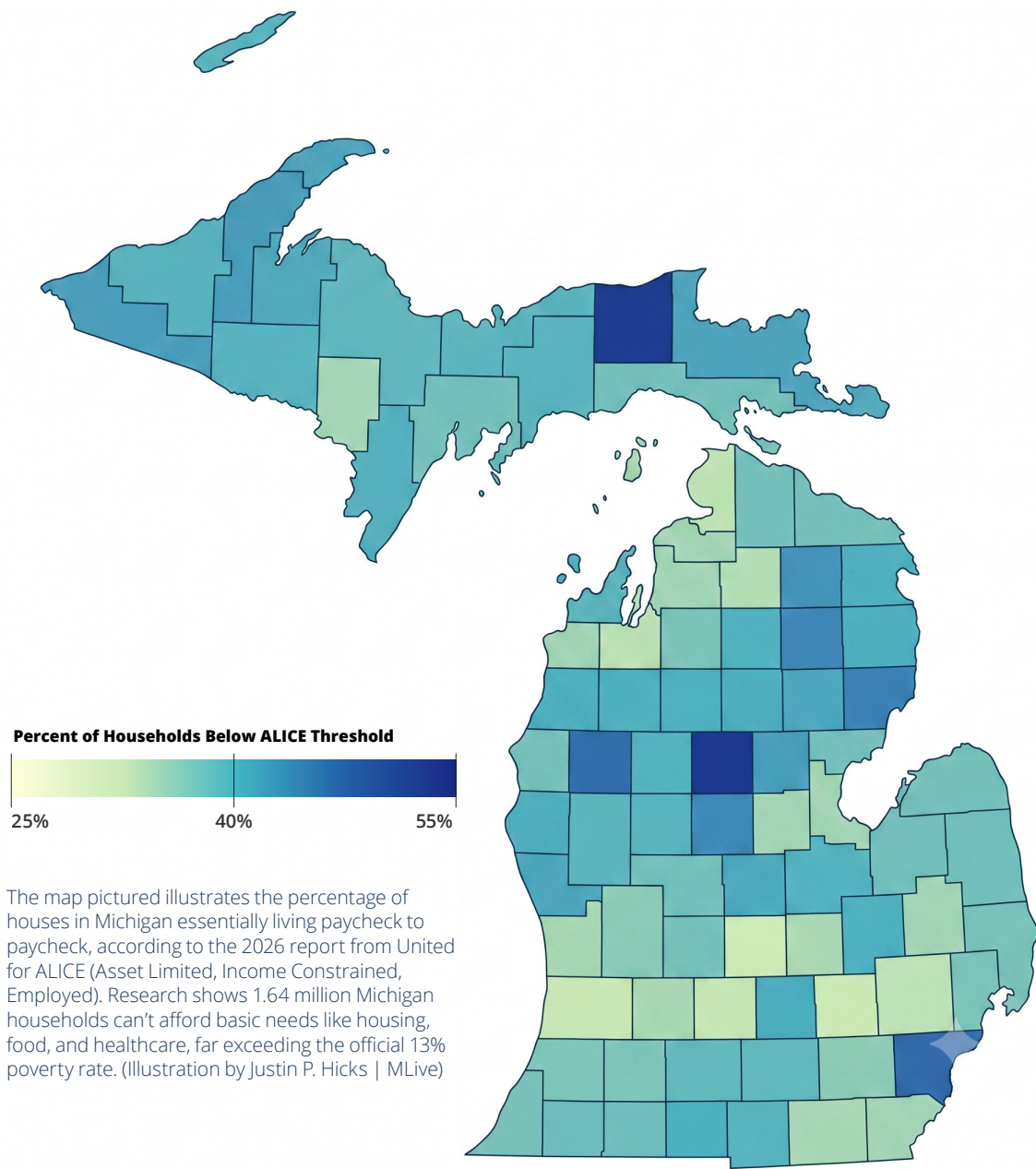
Production of defense and space equipment climbed for a sixth straight month to the highest level since December 2019.

Economists see efforts to replenish munitions used in the Iran war, as well as the potential for rising exports as part of recent trade deals, as one possible driver of growth this year.

As defense tech executives caution, true re-industrialization is not a quick fix. Rebuilding the complex infrastructure required for modern defense systems must withstand political transitions, economic shocks, and Pentagon bureaucracy. Experts at the Detroit conference warned that completely localizing the U.S. manufacturing supply chain could take up to 30 years.

However, by aligning its world-class universities, robust manufacturing base, and strategic military assets, Michigan is actively setting the conditions to win. As the nation seeks to rebuild its industrial practice, Michigan’s roadmap ensures the state will convert this massive influx of national defense capital into lasting, foundational economic growth.

ARMING MICHIGAN'S ECONOMIC FUTURE



The map pictured illustrates the percentage of houses in Michigan essentially living paycheck to paycheck, according to the 2026 report from United for ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). Research shows 1.64 million Michigan households can't afford basic needs like housing, food, and healthcare, far exceeding the official 13% poverty rate. (Illustration by Justin P. Hicks | MLive)

Despite working, 40% of Michigan households could not afford basic living expenses in 2024, tracking closely with the national average of 41%, according to the 2026 update of the State of ALICE report.

ALICE – Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed – represents families earning above the Federal Poverty Level but below the true cost of basic needs. In Michigan, 26% of households fell into the ALICE category and 13% lived in poverty, compared to the national breakdown of 29% ALICE and 13% in poverty. Overall, this placed Michigan 29th among all states and the District of Columbia for financial hardship.

The cost of survival continues to outpace wages across the country. In Michigan, the annual ALICE Household Survival Budget for a family of four was \$78,216. This aligns with median national costs, but sits far above the lowest national extreme of \$63,324 in Kansas and below the staggering \$164,376 required in Manhattan.

The Michigan ALICE Report shows 36% of full-time Michigan workers struggle to make ends meet.

ABOVE POVERTY, BELOW SURVIVAL

Wages vs. Reality: The Cost of Getting By

Full-time work does not guarantee financial stability in either the state or the nation. In Michigan, 36% of full-time workers did not earn enough to afford the survival budget for one adult and one child, slightly better than the national rate of 44%. Essential workers bear the brunt of this gap; 47% of cashiers and 43% of janitors in Michigan lived below the ALICE threshold, mirroring national hardship rates of 49% and 45% for those respective professions.

Nationally, the ALICE Essentials Index outpaced overall inflation, growing 5.6% annually from 2021 to 2024. Michigan experienced a similar squeeze, with the state's index increasing 4.9% annually during the same period. Housing remains a primary pressure point. In Michigan, 70% of renter households below the ALICE threshold were rent-burdened, paying 30% or more of their income on housing, nearly identical to the 71% rate seen nationally.

Demographic disparities also run parallel. In Michigan, 62% of Black households and 73% of single-female-headed families faced financial hardship, compared to national rates of 58% and 74%, respectively. Additionally, older populations are struggling; 48% of Michigan households headed by someone 65 or older fell below the threshold, closely trailing the 50% national average.

While both the state and the nation saw the number of ALICE households trend upward between 2010 and 2024, recent years offered a glimmer of hope. Michigan was among 22 states that saw a small reduction in the number of households below the threshold from 2021 to 2024, even as the broader national numbers continued to climb. See the [full Michigan ALICE report](#) here.

WHY FULL-TIME WORK ISN'T ENOUGH FOR THE

1 IN 3

MICHIGAN WORKERS CHASING THE ALICE SURVIVAL LINE.

\$36.80 per hour sounds like a top-tier wage in Michigan, but once all expenses are figured in for a young family, the money is gone as soon as the Direct-Deposit hits the account.

To understand the ALICE squeeze, look at the bare minimum it takes to survive. For a Michigan family of four (two adults, an infant, and a preschooler), the ALICE Household Survival Budget is 78,216 annually (or \$6,518 a month). This leaves absolutely zero room for savings, debt payments, or emergencies.

Here is where that monthly money goes:

CHILD CARE	\$1,338
FOOD	\$1050
HOUSING	\$1340
TRANSPORTATION	\$825
HEALTH CARE	\$725
TAXES	\$577
MISC.	\$540
TECHNOLOGY (PHONES/INTERNET)	\$121
MONTHLY TOTAL	\$6,516



Michigan spent the last year braced for a storm that mostly held off. June was not a blowout. Hiring came in slow and the jobs report stayed modest. But consumer sentiment climbed, wages held their ground, defense money is coming into the state, and layoffs stayed low. We are steady, and steady beats the slumps of 2025 by a wide margin.

Steady is not the same as solved. The stories in this issue sit together for a reason. Young men are drifting out of work and school with no easy way back. A third of full-time workers still fall short of the ALICE survival line, earning a check and losing ground anyway. The recovery is real, and it is uneven, and both of those things matter.

Hiring is rebounding, even in this slow-growth climate, and the workforce that meets it has to be ready before the postings go up. That readiness is our job. We find the people, we place them right, and we keep you moving when the market turns. When you are ready to build the team that carries you into the better weather, we are here.

