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How many American workers participate in workplace retirement plans? - Pension Rights Center



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# Information Center

## How many American workers participate in workplace retirement plans?

10/23/23  
Pension Rights Center

Annual figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics help paint a picture of the number of Americans who participate in a retirement plan at work. Typically in any year only half of workers participate in a retirement plan at work. In 2023 participation by all civilian workers, full and part-time, was 56 percent. The information below comes from the **Bureau of Labor Statistics’ National Compensation Survey for 2023** (<https://www.bls.gov/ebs/publications/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2023.htm>).

**All workers: private-sector, state and local government workers. (145 million full and part-time workers):**

Percentage of workers participating in a workplace retirement plan:	56
Percentage of workers participating in a pension plan:	19
Percentage of workers participating in a retirement savings plan:	45

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Percentage of all workers participating in a retirement plan who are in a pension plan:	34*
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\*(27.5 million workers. Pension Rights Center calculations based on NCS data.)

### **Private-sector workers. (126 million full and part-time workers):**

Percentage of private-sector workers participating in a workplace retirement plan:	53
Percentage of private-sector workers participating in a pension plan:	11
Percentage of private-sector workers participating in a retirement savings plan:	49
Percentage of private-sector workers participating in a retirement plan who are in a pension plan:	21*

\*(13.8 million workers. Pension Rights Center calculations based on NCS data.)

### **State and local government workers. (19 million full and part-time workers):**

Percentage of workers participating in a workplace retirement plan:	81
Percentage of workers participating in a pension plan:	75
Percentage of workers participating in a retirement savings plan:	18
Percentage of state and local government workers participating in a retirement plan who are in a pension plan:	93*

\*(14.2 million workers. Pension Rights Center calculations based on NCS data.)

### **Sources**

U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2023,” **Private Industry Tables, Civilian Workers, and State and local government workers.**  
**(<https://www.bls.gov/ebs/publications/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2023.htm>)**

Note: The NCS survey excludes agricultural workers, private household workers, the self-employed, military and federal government workers. The NCS is a survey of businesses and survey responses are provided by employers.

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A pension plan is a traditional or hybrid defined benefit plan. In 2022 forty one percent of workers in private-sector pension plans were in plans that were closed to new entrants. All but twenty three percent of those workers are still earning benefits under their “frozen” plans.

A retirement savings plan is an employer-sponsored plan where plan participants have individual accounts. These include 401(k), 403(b), 457, and SIMPLE savings plans where employees typically are required to contribute in order to receive benefits, as well as profit-sharing, money purchase, Simplified Employee Plans (SEP), ESOPs, and other individual account plans. Nearly 80 percent of private industry workers participating in individual account plans are in 401(k)-type plans.

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