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New Research from EBRI:

U.S. Job Tenure Ticks Up, But Still Short

WASHINGTON—Americans who have jobs are staying in them longer as overall job tenure in the United States ticked up in 2012, but U.S. job tenure is still shorter than many assume. The median (mid-point) length of time on the job for American workers in 2012 is just 5.4 years, according to new research from the nonpartisan Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI).

“Career-long jobs never existed for most workers,” said Craig Copeland, EBRI senior research associate and author of the report. “Historically, most workers have repeatedly changed jobs during their working careers, and all evidence suggests that they will continue to do so in the future.”

The EBRI report reveals that the historical data show that the U.S. workforce has always had relatively low median tenure: The idea of holding a full-career job and retiring with the proverbial “gold watch” is a myth for most people.

Copeland added that the overall trend of higher job tenure masks a small but significant decrease in median tenure among men (despite its increasing in recent years), which has been offset by an increase in median tenure among women. He added that the once-striking gap between long-tenure public and private sector workers is beginning to narrow.

Among the EBRI report’s findings:

- The overall median tenure of workers—the midpoint of wage and salary workers’ length of employment in their current jobs—was slightly higher in 2012, at 5.4 years, compared with 5.2 years in 2010 and 5.0 years 29 years ago, in 1983.
- While tenure has increased in recent years, over the longer term different trends emerge. The median tenure for *male* wage and salary workers was lower in 2012 at 5.5 years, compared with 5.9 years in 1983. In contrast, the median tenure for *female* wage and salary workers increased from 4.2 years in 1983 to 5.4 years in 2012. Consequently, the long-term increase in the median tenure of female workers more than offsets the decline in the median tenure of male workers, leaving the overall level slightly higher over the long-term.
- Even among older male workers (ages 55–64), who experienced the largest change in their median tenure, the median tenure fell from a level that would not normally be considered a career—14.7 years in 1963—to 10.7 years in 2012.

The EBRI report analyzes the latest data on employee tenure from the January 2012 Supplement to the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey (CPS), and is published in the December *EBRI Notes*: “Employee Tenure Trends, 1983–2012,” online at www.ebri.org

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