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Unemployment Rate for
the United States

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Unemployment Rate for the United States



What is this indicator?

Early each month, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) of the U.S. Department of Labor announces the total number of employed and unemployed persons in the United States for the previous month, along with many characteristics of such persons.

Unemployment information is not used to calculate this rate. The Government conducts a monthly sample survey called the Current Population Survey (CPS) to measure the extent of unemployment in the country. The CPS has been conducted in the United States every month since 1940, when it began as a Work Projects Administration project. It has been expanded and modified several times. There are about 60,000 households in the sample for this survey. This translates into approximately 110,000 individuals, a large sample compared to public opinion surveys which usually cover fewer than 2,000 people. The CPS sample is selected so as to be representative of the entire population of the United States. In order to select the sample, all of the counties and county-equivalent cities in the country first are grouped into 2,025 geographic areas (sampling units). The Census Bureau then designs and selects a sample consisting of 824 of these geographic areas to represent each State and the District of Columbia. The sample is a State-based design and reflects urban and rural areas, different types of industrial and farming

areas, and the major geographic divisions of each State.

Each person is classified according to the activities he or she engaged in during the reference week. Then, the total numbers are "weighted," or adjusted to independent population estimates (based on updated decennial census results). The weighting takes into account the age, sex, race, Hispanic ethnicity, and State of residence of the person, so that these characteristics are reflected in the proper proportions in the final estimates.

The basic concepts involved in identifying the employed and unemployed are quite simple: People with jobs are *employed*. People who are jobless, looking for jobs, and available for work are *unemployed*. People who are neither employed nor unemployed are *not in the labor force*.

The survey is designed so that each person age 16 and over who is neither in an institution (for example, correctional facilities and residential nursing and mental health care facilities) nor on active duty in the Armed Forces is counted and classified in only one group. The sum of the employed and the unemployed constitutes the civilian labor force. Persons not in the labor force combined with those in the civilian labor force constitute the civilian noninstitutional population 16 years and over.

Table 1. Unemployment rate by month and year, 2003-2009

Year	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
2003	5.8	5.9	5.9	6.0	6.1	6.3	6.2	6.1	6.1	6.0	5.8	5.7
2004	5.7	5.6	5.8	5.6	5.6	5.6	5.5	5.4	5.4	5.5	5.4	5.4
2005	5.3	5.4	5.2	5.2	5.1	5.0	5.0	4.9	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.9
2006	4.7	4.8	4.7	4.7	4.6	4.6	4.7	4.7	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.4
2007	4.6	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.4	4.6	4.6	4.6	4.7	4.7	4.7	5.0
2008	5.0	4.8	5.1	5.0	5.4	5.5	5.8	6.1	6.2	6.6	6.9	7.4
2009	7.7	8.2	8.6	8.9	9.4	9.5	9.4	9.7	9.8	10.1	10.0	10.0

What are the key findings?

In December 2009, both the number of unemployed persons, at 15.3 million, and the unemployment rate, at 10.0 percent, were unchanged. At the start of the recession in December 2007, the number of unemployed persons was 7.7 million, and the unemployment rate was 5.0 percent.

Unemployment rates for the major worker groups--adult men (10.2 percent), adult women (8.2 percent), teenagers (27.1 percent), whites (9.0 percent), blacks (16.2 percent), and Hispanics (12.9 percent)--showed little change in December. The unemployment rate for Asians was 8.4 percent, not seasonally adjusted.

Among the unemployed, the number of long-term unemployed (those jobless for 27 weeks and over) continued to trend up, reaching 6.1 million. In December, 4 in 10 unemployed workers were jobless for 27 weeks or longer.

The civilian labor force participation rate fell to 64.6 percent in December. The employment-population ratio declined to 58.2 percent.

The number of persons employed part time for economic reasons (sometimes referred to as involuntary part-time workers) was about unchanged at 9.2 million in December and has been relatively flat since March. These individuals were working part time because their hours had been cut back or because they were unable to find a full-time job.

About 2.5 million persons were marginally attached to the labor force in December, an increase of 578,000 from a year earlier. (The data are not seasonally adjusted.) These individuals were not in the labor force, wanted and were available for work,

and had looked for a job sometime in the prior 12 months. They were not counted as unemployed because they had not searched for work in the 4 weeks preceding the survey.

Among the marginally attached, there were 929,000 discouraged workers in December, up from 642,000 a year earlier. (The data are not seasonally adjusted.) Discouraged workers are persons not currently looking for work because they believe no jobs are available for them. The remaining 1.6 million persons marginally attached to the labor force had not searched for work in the 4 weeks preceding the survey for reasons such as school attendance or family responsibilities.

Establishment Survey Data

Total nonfarm payroll employment edged down in December (-85,000). Job losses continued in construction, manufacturing, and wholesale trade, while temporary help services and health care continued to add jobs. During 2009, monthly job losses moderated substantially. Employment losses in the first quarter of 2009 averaged 691,000 per month, compared with an average loss of 69,000 per month in the fourth quarter.

Construction employment declined by 53,000 in December, with job losses throughout the industry. Employment in construction has fallen by 1.6 million since the recession began.

In December, employment in manufacturing decreased by 27,000. The average monthly decline for the last 6 months of 2009 (-41,000) was much lower than the average monthly decline for the first half of the year (-171,000). Since the recession began, manufacturing employment has fallen by 2.1 million; three-fourths of this drop occurred in

Wholesale trade employment declined by 18,000 in December, with the majority of the decline occurring among durable goods wholesalers. Employment in retail trade was little changed over the month, although general merchandise stores lost 15,000 jobs.

Temporary help services added 47,000 jobs in December. Since reaching a low point in July, temporary help services employment has risen by 166,000.

Health care employment continued to increase in December (22,000), with notable gains in offices of physicians (9,000) and home health care services (8,000). The health care industry has added 631,000 jobs since the recession began.

In December, the average workweek for production and nonsupervisory workers on private nonfarm payrolls was unchanged at 33.2 hours. The manufacturing work-week, at 40.4 hours, and factory overtime, at 3.4 hours, were unchanged over the month. Since May, the manufacturing work-week has increased by 1.0 hour.

In December, average hourly earnings of production and nonsupervisory workers on private nonfarm payrolls rose by 3 cents, or 0.2 percent, to \$18.80. Over the past 12 months, average hourly earnings have risen by 2.2 percent, while average weekly earnings have risen by 1.9 percent.

The change in total nonfarm payroll employment for October was revised from -111,000 to -127,000, and the change for November was revised from -11,000 to +4,000.

References

United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Employment situation summary December 2009. Retrieved January 13, 2010 from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empisit.nr0.htm>

Census questions?

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