Monthly Labor Review

April 2016

Unemployment rate nears prerecession level by end of 2015

Unemployment continued to trend downward and employment expanded in 2015; long-term joblessness and involuntary part-time employment both declined over the year but remained high by historical standards.

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The U.S. labor market logged another year of recovery in 2015 as the national unemployment rate continued to trend downward and employment expanded. In the fourth quarter of the year, 7.9 million people were unemployed and the unemployment rate declined to 5.0 percent, about half its peak following the 2007–09 recession. Total employment, as measured by the Current Population Survey (CPS; see accompanying box), expanded by 2.1 million in 2015, reaching 149.5 million by year's end. Employment growth, however, occurred at a slower pace than in 2014, when employment expanded by 3.1 million. The employment–population ratio was 59.4 percent in the fourth quarter of 2015, little changed from what it was the previous year. In 2015, the civilian labor force—the sum of the employed and the unemployed—rose to 157.4 million but the overall labor force participation rate declined to 62.5 percent.[1]

This article reviews changes in major labor market indicators from the CPS in 2015. The article also examines changes in labor force status flows and usual weekly earnings, and summarizes the employment situations of veterans, people with a disability, and the foreign born. Data are seasonally adjusted unless otherwise noted.

Unemployment

National unemployment declined by 1.0 million during the year, to 7.9 million in the fourth quarter of 2015. The decrease was about half that experienced the previous year. The unemployment rate declined by 0.7 percentage point over the year, to 5.0 percent in the fourth quarter of 2015. The rate reached a quarterly peak of 9.9 percent in the wake of the most recent recession and has been trending downward for the past 5 years. The rate at the start of the recent recession was 4.8 percent.[2] (See figure 1 and table 1.)

Table 1. Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population 16 years and older, by age and selected characteristics, quarterly averages, seasonally adjusted, 2014–15 (levels in thousands)

Characteristic	2014	2015				Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015
	Fourth quarter	First quarter	Second quarter	Third quarter	Fourth quarter	
Total, 16 years and older						
Civilian labor force	156,316	156,931	157,128	157,014	157,432	1,116
Participation rate	62.8	62.8	62.7	62.5	62.5	-.3
Employed	147,400	148,223	148,659	148,950	149,523	2,123
Employment–population ratio	59.2	59.3	59.4	59.3	59.4	.2
Unemployed	8,915	8,708	8,468	8,064	7,909	-1,006
Unemployment rate	5.7	5.5	5.4	5.1	5.0	-.7
Men, 20 years and older						
Civilian labor force	80,182	80,746	80,780	80,657	80,737	555
Participation rate	71.7	72.0	71.8	71.5	71.4	-.3
Employed	75,958	76,565	76,780	76,837	76,933	975
Employment–population ratio	68.0	68.2	68.2	68.1	68.0	.0

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 1. Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population 16 years and older, by age and selected characteristics, quarterly averages, seasonally adjusted, 2014–15 (levels in thousands)

Characteristic	2014	2015				Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015
	Fourth quarter	First quarter	Second quarter	Third quarter	Fourth quarter	
Unemployed	4,224	4,181	4,000	3,820	3,804	-420
Unemployment rate	5.3	5.2	5.0	4.7	4.7	-.6
Women, 20 years and older						
Civilian labor force	70,333	70,397	70,607	70,756	71,014	681
Participation rate	58.4	58.1	58.2	58.2	58.2	-.2
Employed	66,668	66,902	67,150	67,431	67,809	1,141
Employment–population ratio	55.3	55.3	55.3	55.4	55.6	.3
Unemployed	3,665	3,494	3,458	3,325	3,205	-460
Unemployment rate	5.2	5.0	4.9	4.7	4.5	-.7
Total, 16 to 19 years						
Civilian labor force	5,800	5,788	5,740	5,602	5,681	-119
Participation rate	34.9	34.8	34.5	33.7	34.2	-.7
Employed	4,775	4,756	4,730	4,682	4,781	6
Employment–population ratio	28.8	28.6	28.5	28.2	28.8	.0
Unemployed	1,026	1,032	1,010	920	900	-126
Unemployment rate	17.7	17.8	17.6	16.4	15.8	-1.9
White						
Civilian labor force	123,302	123,856	123,625	123,381	123,562	260
Participation rate	62.9	63.1	62.9	62.6	62.6	-.3
Employed	117,306	117,945	117,867	117,863	118,129	823
Employment–population ratio	59.9	60.1	59.9	59.8	59.9	.0
Unemployed	5,996	5,911	5,759	5,518	5,432	-564
Unemployment rate	4.9	4.8	4.7	4.5	4.4	-.5
Black or African American						
Civilian labor force	19,030	19,078	19,392	19,351	19,430	400
Participation rate	61.4	61.1	61.9	61.6	61.6	.2
Employed	16,992	17,133	17,499	17,559	17,690	698
Employment–population ratio	54.8	54.9	55.9	55.9	56.1	1.3
Unemployed	2,039	1,945	1,893	1,792	1,740	-299
Unemployment rate	10.7	10.2	9.8	9.3	9.0	-1.7
Asian						
Civilian labor force	8,791	8,954	9,088	9,088	9,085	294
Participation rate	63.4	62.7	63.2	62.5	62.7	-.7
Employed	8,382	8,619	8,717	8,750	8,740	358
Employment–population ratio	60.5	60.4	60.6	60.2	60.3	-.2
Unemployed	409	335	371	338	345	-64
Unemployment rate	4.7	3.7	4.1	3.7	3.8	-.9
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity						
Civilian labor force	25,689	26,040	26,137	26,097	26,231	542

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 1. Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population 16 years and older, by age and selected characteristics, quarterly averages, seasonally adjusted, 2014–15 (levels in thousands)

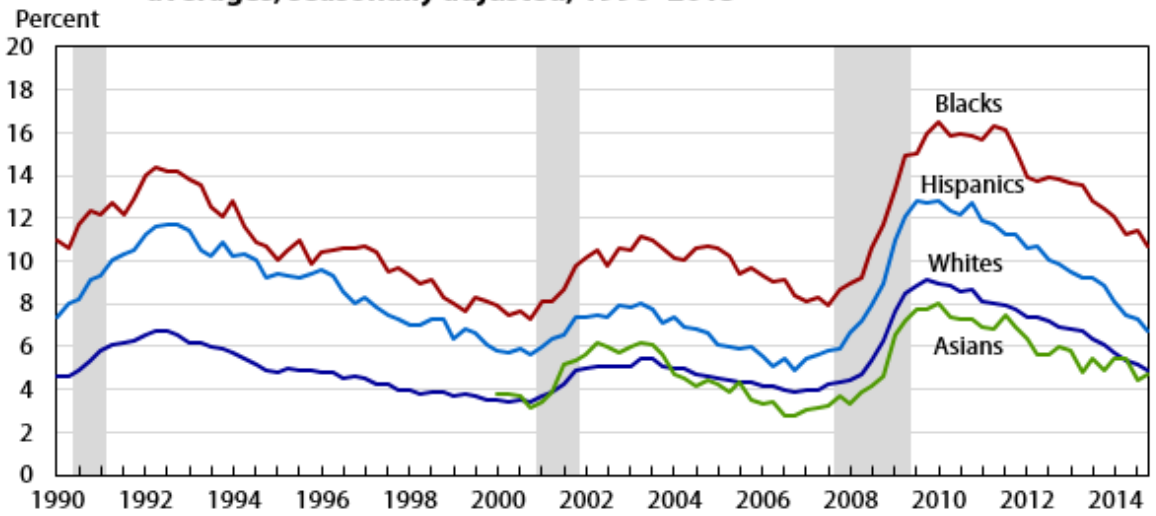
Characteristic	2014	2015				Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015
	Fourth quarter	First quarter	Second quarter	Third quarter	Fourth quarter	
Participation rate	66.3	66.4	66.2	65.7	65.6	-.7
Employed	23,976	24,286	24,373	24,376	24,564	588
Employment–population ratio	61.9	61.9	61.7	61.3	61.4	-.5
Unemployed	1,713	1,754	1,764	1,721	1,668	-45
Unemployment rate	6.7	6.7	6.7	6.6	6.4	-.3

Note: Race and Hispanic ethnicity totals do not sum to the overall total for 16 years and older because data are not presented for all races and because people of Hispanic ethnicity may be of any race and are also included in the race groups. Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

Both the number of unemployed people and the unemployment rate declined in 2015 for adult men, adult women, and teenagers (16 to 19 years of age). By the fourth quarter, the jobless rate for adult men had declined by 0.6 percentage point, to 4.7 percent, and the rate for adult women had declined by 0.7 percentage point, to 4.5 percent. The unemployment rate for teenagers decreased over the year by 1.9 percentage points, to 15.8 percent in the fourth quarter of 2015.

Figure 2. Unemployment rates, by race and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, quarterly averages, seasonally adjusted, 1990–2015



Note: Shaded regions represent recessions as designated by the National Bureau of Economic Research. Turning points are quarterly. People of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity may be of any race. Data for Asians are not available before 2000 and are not seasonally adjusted before 2010.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

Unemployment rates continued to decline for most of the major race and ethnicity groups in 2015. The jobless rate for Blacks dropped by 1.7 percentage points over the year, to 9.0 percent in the fourth quarter, but the rate for Blacks remained much higher than the rates for the other major race and ethnicity groups. Up until the second

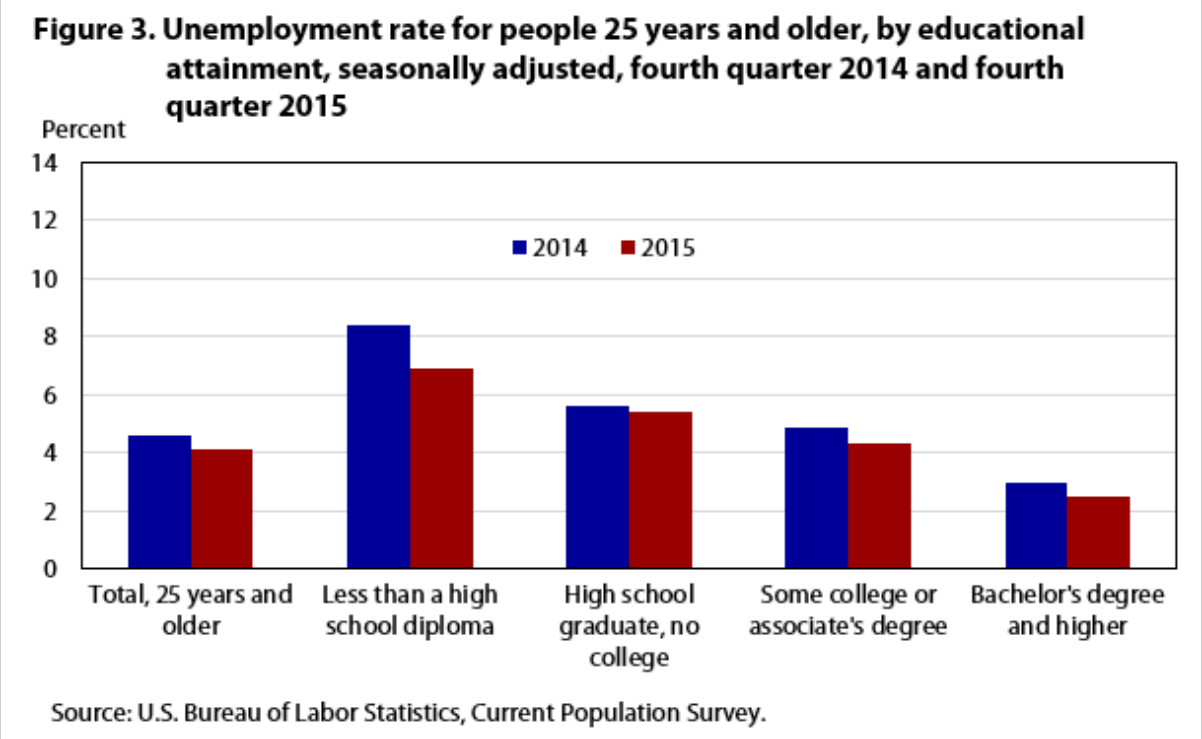
quarter of 2015, the jobless rate for Blacks had been at double-digit levels for about 7 consecutive years. (See figure 2.) The jobless rate for Whites declined by 0.5 percentage point over the year, to 4.4 percent, and the rate for Asians declined by 0.9 percentage point, to 3.8 percent. By comparison, the jobless rate for Hispanics, 6.4 percent in the fourth quarter of 2015, was little changed over the year.[3]

The CPS and the CES

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) produces two monthly employment series obtained from two different surveys: the estimate of total nonfarm jobs, derived from the Current Employment Statistics (CES) survey, also called the establishment or payroll survey; and the estimate of total civilian employment, based on the Current Population Survey (CPS), also called the household survey. The two surveys use different definitions of employment, as well as different survey and estimation methods. The CES program is a survey of employers that provides a measure of the number of payroll jobs in nonfarm industries. The CPS is a survey of households that provides a measure of employed people ages 16 and older in the civilian noninstitutional population. Employment estimates from the CPS provide information about workers in both the agricultural and nonagricultural sectors and in all types of work arrangements: workers with wage and salary jobs (including employment in a private household), those who are self-employed, and those doing unpaid work for at least 15 hours a week in a business or farm operated by a family member. CES payroll employment estimates are restricted to nonagricultural wage and salary jobs and exclude private household workers. As a result, employment estimates from the CPS are higher than those from the CES survey. In the CPS, however, those who hold multiple jobs (referred to as “multiple jobholders”) are counted only once, regardless of how many jobs they held during the survey reference period. By contrast, because the CES survey counts the number of jobs rather than the number of people, each nonfarm job is counted separately even when two or more jobs are held by the same person.

The reference periods for the surveys also differ. In the CPS, the reference period is generally the calendar week that includes the 12th day of the month. In the CES survey, employers report the number of workers on their payrolls for the pay period that includes the 12th of the month. Because pay periods vary in length among employers and may be longer than 1 week, the CES employment estimates can reflect longer reference periods.

BLS publishes a monthly report with the latest trends and comparisons of employment as measured by the CES survey and the CPS. (See “Employment from the BLS household and payroll surveys: summary of recent trends” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics), www.bls.gov/web/empsit/ces_cps_trends.htm.) This report includes a summary of possible causes of differences in the surveys’ employment trends, as well as links to additional research on the topic.



In 2015, workers with less education continued to experience a higher unemployment rate than those with more education. The jobless rate for people 25 years and older with less than a high school diploma declined by 1.5 percentage points, to 6.9 percent, in 2015, and the rate for those with some college decreased by 0.6 percentage point, to 4.3 percent. The jobless rate for those with at least a bachelor's degree declined over the year by 0.5 percentage point, to 2.5 percent in the fourth quarter—still 0.7 percentage point above the prerecession low of 1.8 percent in the fourth quarter of 2006. The rate for high school graduates, 5.4 percent, was essentially unchanged over the year. (See figure 3 and table 2.)

Table 2. Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population 25 years and older, by educational attainment, quarterly averages, seasonally adjusted, 2014–15 (levels in thousands)

Characteristic	2014	2015				Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015
	Fourth quarter	First quarter	Second quarter	Third quarter	Fourth quarter	
Less than a high school diploma						
Civilian labor force	11,021	11,193	11,130	10,715	10,845	-176
Participation rate	45.5	45.7	44.7	45.5	45.6	.1
Employed	10,093	10,238	10,198	9,873	10,093	0
Employment–population ratio	41.7	41.8	41.0	41.9	42.5	.8
Unemployed	927	956	932	843	751	-176
Unemployment rate	8.4	8.5	8.4	7.9	6.9	-1.5
High school graduate, no college						
Civilian labor force	35,535	35,564	35,310	35,291	35,107	-428
Participation rate	57.6	57.6	57.2	57.0	57.1	-.5

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 2. Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population 25 years and older, by educational attainment, quarterly averages, seasonally adjusted, 2014–15 (levels in thousands)

Characteristic	2014	2015				Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015
	Fourth quarter	First quarter	Second quarter	Third quarter	Fourth quarter	
Employed	33,557	33,649	33,358	33,379	33,206	-351
Employment–population ratio	54.4	54.5	54.0	53.9	54.0	-.4
Unemployed	1,978	1,914	1,951	1,912	1,901	-77
Unemployment rate	5.6	5.4	5.5	5.4	5.4	-.2
Some college or associate's degree						
Civilian labor force	37,339	37,442	37,565	37,314	37,647	308
Participation rate	66.9	67.1	67.0	66.0	66.5	-.4
Employed	35,510	35,570	35,903	35,689	36,033	523
Employment–population ratio	63.6	63.7	64.0	63.1	63.6	.0
Unemployed	1,830	1,872	1,662	1,624	1,615	-215
Unemployment rate	4.9	5.0	4.4	4.4	4.3	-.6
Bachelor's degree and higher						
Civilian labor force	51,121	51,481	51,684	52,533	52,836	1,715
Participation rate	74.6	74.4	74.8	74.4	74.0	-.6
Employed	49,591	50,112	50,310	51,224	51,521	1,930
Employment–population ratio	72.4	72.4	72.8	72.6	72.2	-.2
Unemployed	1,530	1,369	1,374	1,308	1,314	-216
Unemployment rate	3.0	2.7	2.7	2.5	2.5	-.5

Note: Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

Only a few of the major occupation groups exhibited noteworthy declines in unemployment in 2015. This situation contrasts with that of the previous 2 years, when unemployment rates declined for all major occupation groups. The jobless rate for sales and office occupations declined over the year, to 4.6 percent. The rate for management, professional, and related occupations also continued to decline in 2015; this occupation group continued to have the lowest unemployment rate among the major occupation groups, 2.1 percent in the fourth quarter.[4] The jobless rates were little changed over the year for natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations (6.7 percent); service occupations (6.6 percent); and production, transportation, and material moving occupations (5.8 percent). (See table 3.)

Table 3. Unemployment rates, by occupation group, quarterly averages, not seasonally adjusted, 2014–15 (in percent)

Occupation group	Total			Men			Women		
	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015
Management, professional, and related occupations	2.7	2.1	-0.6	2.8	2.0	-0.8	2.7	2.2	-0.5
Management, business, and financial operations occupations	2.6	2.1	-.5	2.3	1.8	-.5	3.1	2.4	-.7
Professional and related occupations	2.8	2.1	-.7	3.2	2.1	-1.1	2.5	2.2	-.3
Service occupations	7.0	6.6	-.4	6.8	6.7	-.1	7.1	6.5	-.6
Health care support occupations	5.8	5.4	-.4	6.4	2.5	-3.9	5.8	5.7	-.1
Protective service occupations	4.4	4.4	.0	4.3	4.2	-.1	4.6	5.1	.5
Food preparation and serving related occupations	8.2	7.3	-.9	7.4	7.5	.1	8.8	7.1	-1.7
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations	8.1	8.1	.0	7.9	8.0	.1	8.3	8.3	.0
Personal care and service occupations	5.9	5.7	-.2	6.7	6.6	-.1	5.7	5.5	-.2
Sales and office occupations	5.1	4.6	-.5	4.6	4.6	.0	5.4	4.6	-.8
Sales and related occupations	5.2	5.1	-.1	4.0	4.2	.2	6.3	5.9	-.4
Office and administrative support occupations	5.1	4.2	-.9	5.6	5.2	-.4	4.9	3.8	-1.1
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	7.2	6.7	-.5	7.1	6.4	-.7	10.4	12.6	2.2
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	13.4	13.1	-.3	12.3	11.2	-1.1	17.1	19.0	1.9
Construction and extraction occupations	8.4	7.8	-.6	8.3	7.7	-.6	9.3	13.2	3.9

See footnotes at end of table.

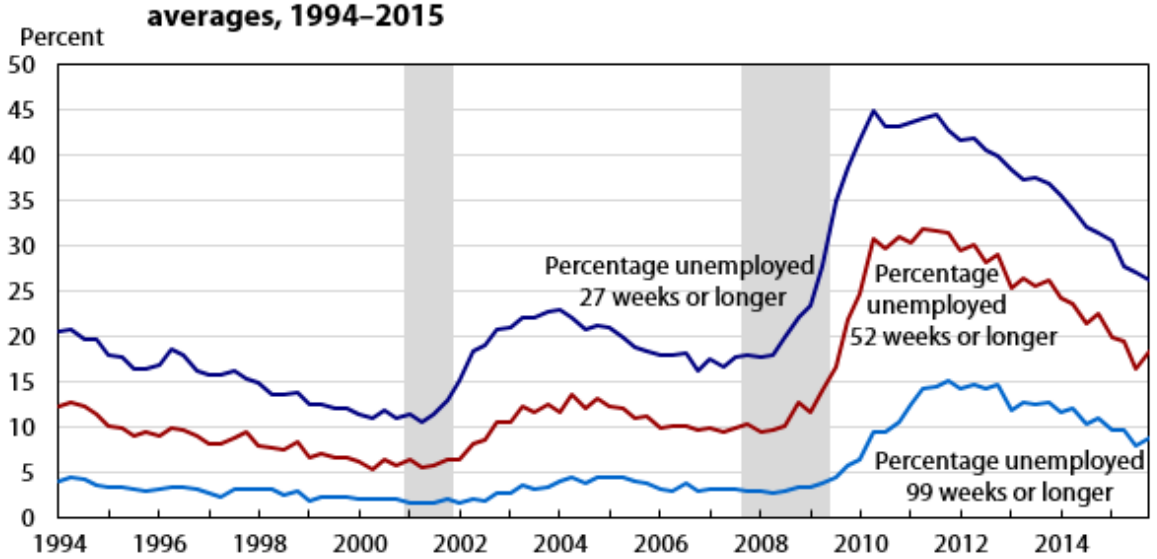
Table 3. Unemployment rates, by occupation group, quarterly averages, not seasonally adjusted, 2014–15 (in percent)

Occupation group	Total			Men			Women		
	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015
Installation, maintenance, and repair occupations	4.0	3.3	-.7	4.1	3.4	-.7	2.6	3.2	.6
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	6.2	5.8	-.4	5.6	5.5	-.1	8.1	7.1	-1.0
Production occupations	6.2	5.0	-1.2	5.2	4.6	-.6	8.7	6.0	-2.7
Transportation and material moving occupations	6.1	6.6	.5	6.0	6.2	.2	6.9	8.8	1.9

Note: Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

Figure 4. Long-term unemployed as a percentage of total unemployed, quarterly averages, 1994–2015



Note: Data for 27 weeks or longer are seasonally adjusted. Data for 52 weeks or longer and 99 weeks or longer are not seasonally adjusted. Shaded regions represent recessions as designated by the National Bureau of Economic Research. Turning points are quarterly.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

The proportion of the unemployed who had been jobless for 27 weeks or longer—a population also described as long-term unemployed—declined in 2015, although it remained high by historical standards.[5] In the fourth quarter of 2015, there were about 2.1 million individuals who were long-term unemployed—742,000 fewer than in 2014.

The long-term unemployed had reached a quarterly peak of 6.3 million in the fourth quarter of 2010, accounting for almost half of the unemployed at that time. The long-term unemployed's share of the total has been declining since then, and in the fourth quarter of 2015 they made up about one-fourth of the total unemployed, down 5.4 percentage points over the year. (See figure 4 and table 4.)

Table 4. Unemployed people, by reason and duration of unemployment, quarterly averages, seasonally adjusted, 2014–15 (levels in thousands)

Reason and duration	2014	2015				Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015
	Fourth quarter	First quarter	Second quarter	Third quarter	Fourth quarter	
Reason for unemployment						
Job losers and people who completed temporary jobs	4,380	4,205	4,151	4,004	3,871	-509
On temporary layoff	967	983	1,013	953	938	-29
Not on temporary layoff	3,414	3,222	3,138	3,052	2,934	-480
Permanent job losers	2,433	2,264	2,187	2,165	2,090	-343
People who completed temporary jobs	980	958	950	886	843	-137
Job leavers	808	867	805	803	804	-4
Reentrants	2,764	2,711	2,573	2,409	2,454	-310
New entrants	1,022	929	920	835	839	-183
Percent distribution						
Job losers and people who completed temporary jobs	48.8	48.3	49.1	49.7	48.6	-.2
On temporary layoff	10.8	11.3	12.0	11.8	11.8	1.0
Not on temporary layoff	38.0	37.0	37.1	37.9	36.8	-1.2
Job leavers	9.0	9.9	9.5	10.0	10.1	1.1
Reentrants	30.8	31.1	30.5	29.9	30.8	.0
New entrants	11.4	10.7	10.9	10.4	10.5	-.9
Duration of unemployment						
Less than 5 weeks	2,448	2,437	2,484	2,317	2,385	-63
5 to 14 weeks	2,329	2,304	2,399	2,271	2,247	-82
15 weeks or longer	4,194	3,981	3,652	3,384	3,334	-860
15 to 26 weeks	1,363	1,314	1,278	1,221	1,244	-119
27 weeks or longer	2,832	2,666	2,374	2,163	2,090	-742
Average (mean) duration in weeks	32.7	31.3	29.7	27.6	27.8	-4.9
Median duration, in weeks	12.9	12.8	11.5	11.6	10.8	-2.1
Percent distribution						
Less than 5 weeks	27.3	27.9	29.1	29.1	29.9	2.6
5 to 14 weeks	26.0	26.4	28.1	28.5	28.2	2.2
15 weeks or longer	46.8	45.6	42.8	42.4	41.9	-4.9
15 to 26 weeks	15.2	15.1	15.0	15.3	15.6	.4
27 weeks or longer	31.6	30.6	27.8	27.1	26.2	-5.4

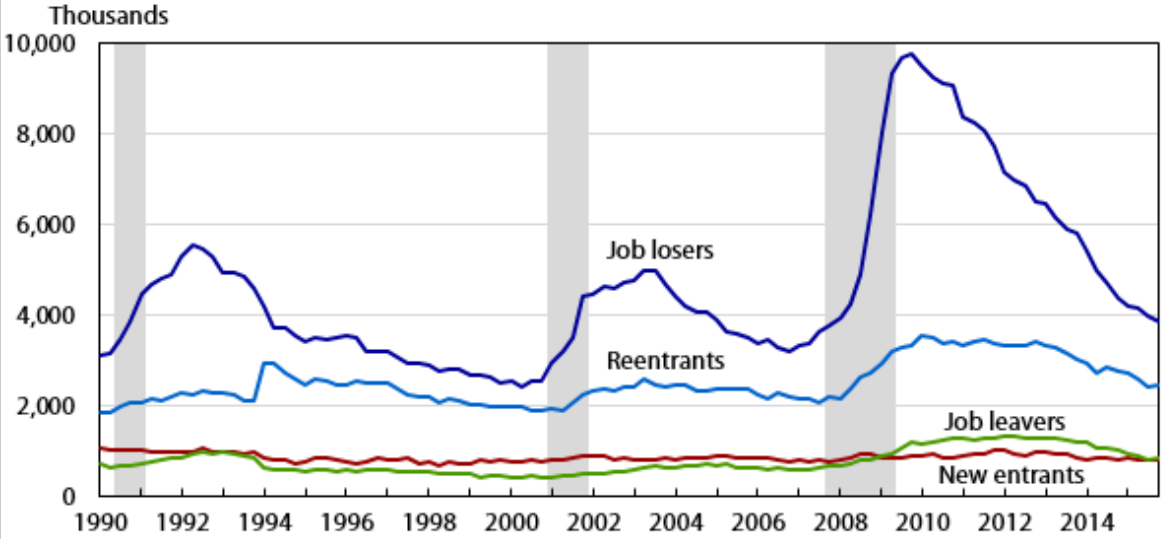
Note: Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

The number of people unemployed for a year or longer—1.4 million in the fourth quarter of 2015, not seasonally adjusted—continued to decline in 2015. These individuals made up 18.5 percent of the total unemployed in the fourth quarter of 2015.[6] The number of people who were jobless for 99 weeks or longer (about 2 years)—671,000 in the fourth quarter of 2015, not seasonally adjusted—declined by 278,000 over the year. About 9 percent of unemployed people had been jobless for about 2 years or longer at the end of 2015; in contrast, the percentage prior to the most recent recession was about 3 percent.

The number of job losers, or those unemployed as a result of losing their jobs, also continued to decline in 2015. The number fell by 509,000, to 3.9 million by year's end. Job losers are categorized into two groups: (1) people on temporary layoff who expect to be recalled to their jobs and (2) those not on temporary layoff. People in the latter group do not expect to be recalled; they are further categorized in the survey as either permanent job losers or people who have completed temporary jobs. In 2015, permanent job losers accounted for virtually all of the decline in the total number of job losers. (See table 4 and figure 5.)

Figure 5. Reasons for unemployment, quarterly averages, seasonally adjusted, 1990–2015



Note: Shaded regions represent recessions as designated by the National Bureau of Economic Research. Turning points are quarterly.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

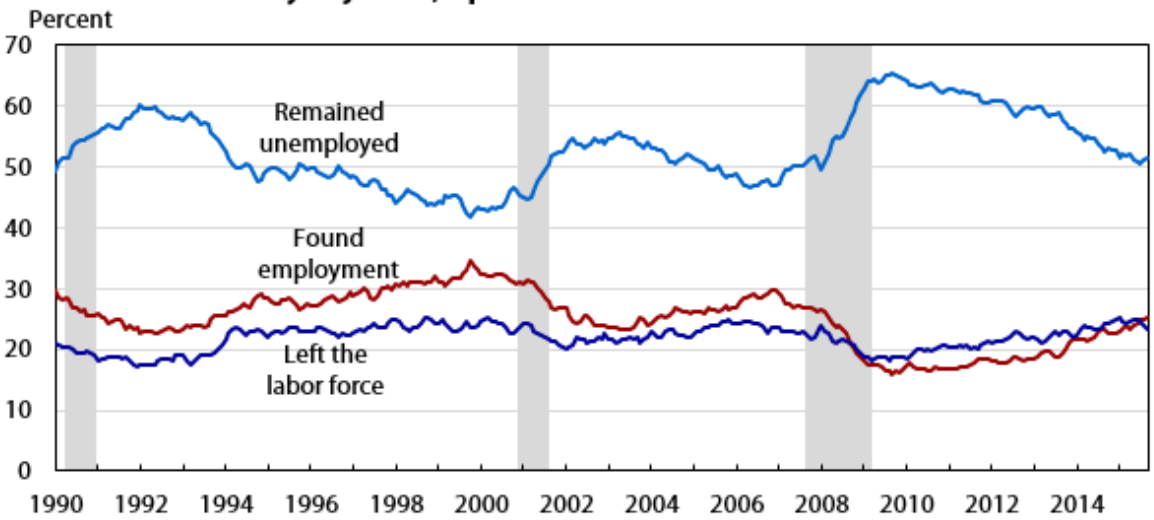
In the CPS, people who had previously worked but were not in the labor force prior to starting their current job search are classified as unemployed reentrants. There were 2.5 million unemployed reentrants in the fourth quarter of 2015, down by 310,000 over the year, the third year in a row this series showed a decline. The number of new entrants—that is, jobseekers who have never worked before—also declined in 2015 for the third consecutive year, this time by 183,000. The number of job leavers (unemployed people who voluntarily left their job), 804,000 in the fourth quarter, held fairly steady in 2015.

Labor force status flows

Labor force status flows measure the underlying movements between the monthly point-in-time numbers of people employed, unemployed, and not in the labor force. Each month, millions of people move between employment and unemployment while millions of others leave or enter the labor force.[7] In 2015, 16.8 million people, or 6.7 percent

of the population ages 16 and older, changed their labor force status in an average month; the 6.7-percent figure was the same as the percentage of the population that changed their labor force status in an average month prior to the last recession. The series peak was 7.5 percent of the population, in 2010.

Figure 6. Percentage of the unemployed who found employment, remained unemployed, or left the labor force, 3-month moving average, seasonally adjusted, April 1990–December 2015



Note: Shaded regions represent recessions as designated by the National Bureau of Economic Research. Turning points are quarterly.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

To get a better understanding of the unemployment level in 2015, one can examine flow data by the current employment status (employed, unemployed, or not in the labor force) of people who were unemployed in the previous month. Figure 6 shows the proportions of the unemployed who found employment, remained unemployed, or left the labor force over the month, all calculated as a 3-month moving average. The likelihood of an unemployed person becoming employed increased over the year, to 25.3 percent in December 2015; prior to the onset of the last recession, the rate was 26.9 percent. By the end of 2015, the rate of unemployed people becoming employed exceeded the rate of people leaving the labor force. The share of the unemployed leaving the labor force, 23.4 percent in December 2015, was close to its prerecession rate of 23.0 percent in November 2007. (See figure 6.)

In December 2015, the share of those who remained unemployed from one month to the next was 51.3 percent, down 1.0 percentage point over the year. The share of the unemployed remaining unemployed from one month to the next was close to its prerecession percentage of 50.1 percent in November 2007.

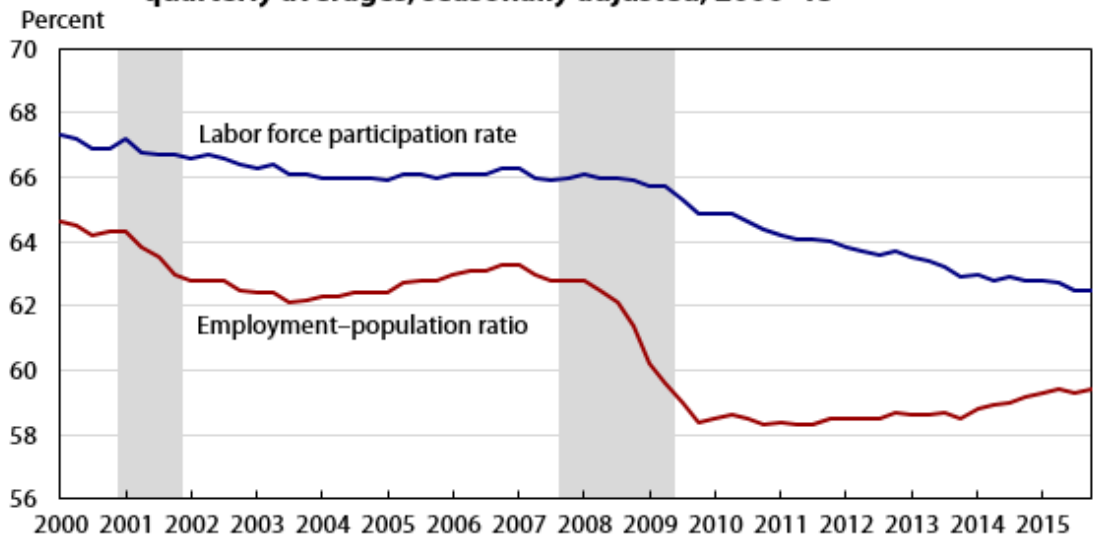
Employment

Employment grew at a slower pace in 2015 than in 2014. As measured by the CPS, the number of employed people grew by 2.1 million over the year, reaching 149.5 million in the fourth quarter of 2015. Unlike the pattern in 2014, overall employment growth was slightly more concentrated among adult women than adult men in 2015. The number of employed adult women rose by 1.1 million, to 67.8 million; the number of employed adult men rose by

975,000, to 76.9 million. The number of employed teenagers 16 to 19 years of age was 4.8 million at year's end, virtually unchanged from a year earlier. (See table 1.)

Among the major race and ethnicity groups, Blacks saw their employment rise by 698,000 over the year, to 17.7 million by year's end. The 698,000 figure accounted for about one-third of overall employment growth in 2015. This year was the second year in a row in which Blacks experienced a disproportionately large share of employment growth. The number of employed Whites increased by 823,000 during the year, to 118.1 million, and Asian employment rose by 358,000, to 8.7 million. At 24.6 million in the fourth quarter of 2015, Hispanic employment grew by 588,000 over the year; the figure posted was less than half their employment gain in 2014.

Figure 7. Labor force participation rate and employment–population ratio, quarterly averages, seasonally adjusted, 2000–15



Note: Shaded regions represent recessions as designated by the National Bureau of Economic Research. Turning points are quarterly.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

In the CPS, the employment–population ratio represents the proportion of the civilian noninstitutional population that is employed. The employment–population ratio for all people ages 16 and older stood at 59.4 percent in the fourth quarter of 2015 and was little changed over the year (up 0.2 percentage point). The ratio had increased by 0.7 percentage point in 2014. (See figure 7.) The employment–population ratios for adult men (68.0 percent), adult women (55.6 percent), and teenagers (28.8 percent) showed little or no change over the year. (See table 1.)

Whereas employment–population ratios had increased for nearly all race and ethnicity groups in 2014, only Blacks saw a noteworthy increase in their employment–population ratio in 2015 (up 1.3 percentage points, to 56.1 percent). The increase reflected a strong growth in Black employment. In 2015, the employment–population ratio for Whites, 59.9 percent, was unchanged; the ratios for Asians, 60.3 percent, and Hispanics, 61.4 percent, showed little change over the year.

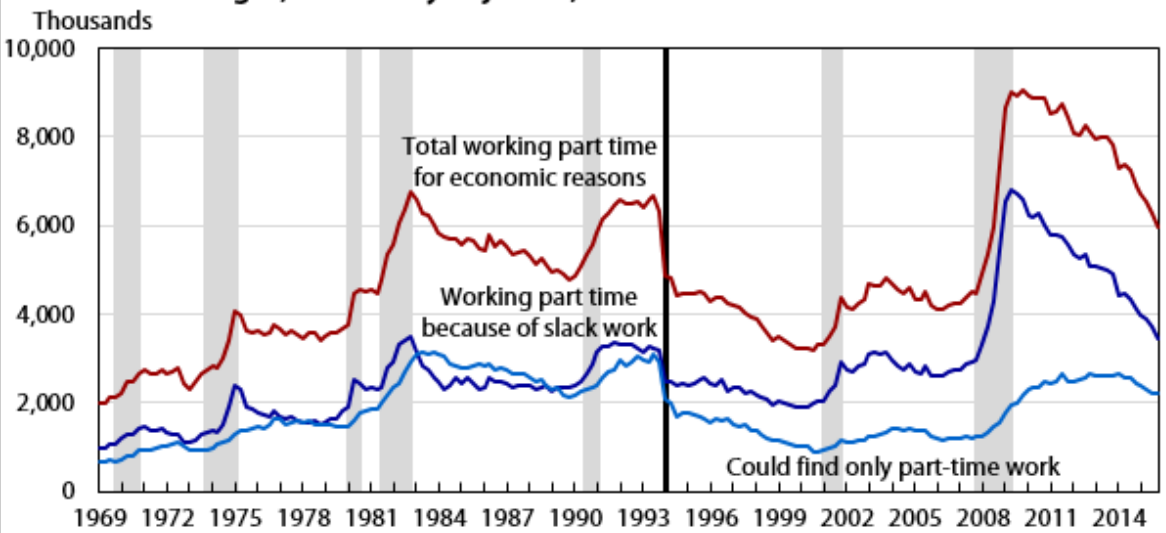
The number of workers holding more than one job edged up by 130,000 in 2015, to 7.5 million; the gain in the previous year was a more robust 555,000. In the fourth quarter of 2015, multiple jobholders accounted for 5.0 percent of the total employed, about the same as in 2014. The percentage of multiple jobholders in the labor force

has ranged between 4.7 percent and 5.1 percent in the past 4 years. Before the recession, the rate was a slightly higher 5.3 percent.

The total number of self-employed workers, including both those whose businesses were incorporated and those whose businesses were not, edged down by 164,000 in 2015. In the fourth quarter, 15.0 million workers (not seasonally adjusted) were self-employed. The self-employment rate—the proportion of total employment made up of the self-employed—edged down from the previous year, to 10.0 percent in the fourth quarter of 2015. Of all self-employed people, about two-thirds had unincorporated businesses.

The number of people employed part time for economic reasons—that is, they wanted full-time work but could find only a part-time job or they had their hours reduced to part time—continued to decline in 2015, dropping by 942,000, to 6.0 million. Also referred to as those employed part time involuntarily, these individuals saw their numbers rise sharply during the 2007–09 recession (reaching a peak of 9.1 million in 2009); since then, however, their number has been trending downward.[8] Still, even with the decline in 2015, the number of people employed part time for economic reasons remained relatively high by historical standards. Slack work or unfavorable business conditions, rather than an inability to find full-time work, remained the primary reason for involuntary part-time employment in 2015, accounting for more than half of all people employed part time for economic reasons. (See figure 8.)

Figure 8. Number of people employed part time for economic reasons, quarterly averages, seasonally adjusted, 1969–2015



Note: Shaded regions represent recessions as designated by the National Bureau of Economic Research. Turning points are quarterly. Beginning in 1994 (denoted by vertical black line), data are affected by the redesign of the Current Population Survey and are not strictly comparable with data for previous years.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

Employment rose substantially in just 1 out of 5 major occupation groups in 2015. Employment in management, professional, and related occupations grew by a total of 1.8 million, to 58.7 million, over the year, accounting for the bulk of the increase in overall CPS employment in 2015. Within this major occupation group, which accounts for nearly 40 percent of all workers, employment in management, business, and financial operations expanded by 1.1 million over the year and the number of workers in professional and related occupations grew by 709,000. Employment was little changed in the other four major occupation groups: service occupations; sales and office

occupations; natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations; and production, transportation, and material moving occupations. (See table 5.)

Table 5. Employment, by occupation group and gender, quarterly averages, not seasonally adjusted, 2014–15 (in thousands)

Occupation group	Total			Men			Women		
	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015
Total, 16 years and older	147,597	149,728	2,131	78,318	79,293	975	69,279	70,435	1,156
Management, professional, and related occupations	56,919	58,718	1,799	27,374	28,200	826	29,545	30,517	972
Management, business, and financial operations occupations	23,254	24,344	1,090	12,985	13,632	647	10,269	10,712	443
Professional and related occupations	33,665	34,374	709	14,389	14,568	179	19,276	19,806	530
Service occupations	26,007	25,849	-158	11,263	11,301	38	14,744	14,548	-196
Health care support occupations	3,395	3,464	69	449	426	-23	2,947	3,039	92
Protective service occupations	2,980	3,130	150	2,339	2,499	160	641	631	-10
Food preparation and serving related occupations	8,225	8,177	-48	3,706	3,760	54	4,519	4,417	-102
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations	5,982	5,885	-97	3,554	3,461	-93	2,427	2,424	-3
Personal care and service occupations	5,425	5,193	-232	1,215	1,155	-60	4,210	4,038	-172
Sales and office occupations	33,283	33,592	309	12,818	12,736	-82	20,466	20,856	390
Sales and related occupations	15,669	15,572	-97	7,981	7,823	-158	7,688	7,749	61
Office and administrative support occupations	17,614	18,020	406	4,836	4,913	77	12,778	13,106	328

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 5. Employment, by occupation group and gender, quarterly averages, not seasonally adjusted, 2014–15 (in thousands)

Occupation group	Total			Men			Women		
	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	13,604	13,872	268	13,014	13,189	175	591	684	93
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	988	1,055	67	781	812	31	207	242	35
Construction and extraction occupations	7,701	7,756	55	7,498	7,526	28	202	230	28
Installation, maintenance, and repair occupations	4,916	5,062	146	4,734	4,850	116	181	212	31
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	17,783	17,697	-86	13,850	13,867	17	3,934	3,830	-104
Production occupations	8,606	8,358	-248	6,162	5,966	-196	2,444	2,392	-52
Transportation and material moving occupations	9,177	9,340	163	7,688	7,901	213	1,489	1,438	-51

Note: Data may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

Labor force participation

The civilian labor force increased by 1.1 million, to 157.4 million, in 2015, and the labor force participation rate—the proportion of the civilian noninstitutional population 16 years and older that is in the labor force—declined by 0.3 percentage point, to 62.5 percent. The labor force participation rate has been trending downward and is generally projected to continue on that path for some time in the future.[9] (See table 1 and figure 7.)

By the end of 2015, the labor force participation rate had declined for two major race and ethnicity groups: the participation rate for Whites had declined by 0.3 percentage point, to 62.6 percent, and the rate for Hispanics had declined by 0.7 percentage point, to 65.6 percent. The rate for Blacks, 61.6 percent, and the participation rate for Asians, at 62.7 percent, changed little in 2015.

People not in the labor force

People who are neither employed nor unemployed are considered “not in the labor force.” In the fourth quarter of 2015, the number of people not in the labor force increased by 1.7 million, to 94.4 million (not seasonally adjusted). All of the increase occurred among people who indicated in the survey that they did not want a job. On net, the number of people not in the labor force who indicated in the survey that they *did* want a job fell by 609,000, to 5.6 million, in 2015, after increasing by 503,000 in 2014.[10] (See table 6.) The remaining share of people not in the labor force, 88.9 million (or 94.1 percent) in 2015, was made up of people who did not want a job.[11]

Table 6. Number of people not in the labor force, quarterly averages, not seasonally adjusted, 2011–15 (in thousands)

Category	Fourth quarter 2011	Fourth quarter 2012	Fourth quarter 2013	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015
Total not in the labor force	86,717	88,957	91,774	92,698	94,442	1,744
People who do not currently want a job[(1)]	80,621	82,567	86,090	86,511	88,864	2,353
People who currently want a job	6,096	6,390	5,684	6,187	5,578	-609
People marginally attached to the labor force[(2)]	2,562	2,517	2,269	2,187	1,822	-365
Discouraged workers[(3)]	1,002	953	831	736	641	-95
Other people marginally attached to the labor force[(4)]	1,559	1,564	1,438	1,451	1,181	-270

Notes:

(1) Includes some people who are not asked if they want a job.

(2) Data refer to people who want a job, have searched for work during the previous 12 months, and were available to take a job during the reference week but had not looked for work in the past 4 weeks.

(3) Includes those who did not actively look for work in the previous 4 weeks for reasons such as they thought that no work was available, they could not find work, they felt that they lacked schooling or training, they believed that their employer thought that they were too young or too old, and they thought that they might have been the recipient of other types of discrimination.

(4) Includes those who did not actively look for work in the previous 4 weeks for reasons such as school or family responsibilities, ill health, and transportation problems, as well as a number for whom the reason for their nonparticipation was not determined.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

Among people not in the labor force who currently want a job, the number defined as marginally attached to the labor force, 1.8 million in the fourth quarter of 2015 (not seasonally adjusted), fell by 365,000. This decline was more than 4 times larger than the previous year’s decline. These individuals wanted a job, had searched for work sometime in the previous year, and were available to work had a job been offered to them. Still, they are not counted as unemployed, because they had not actively searched for work in the 4 weeks preceding the survey. Among the marginally attached, individuals currently not looking for work specifically because they felt that no jobs

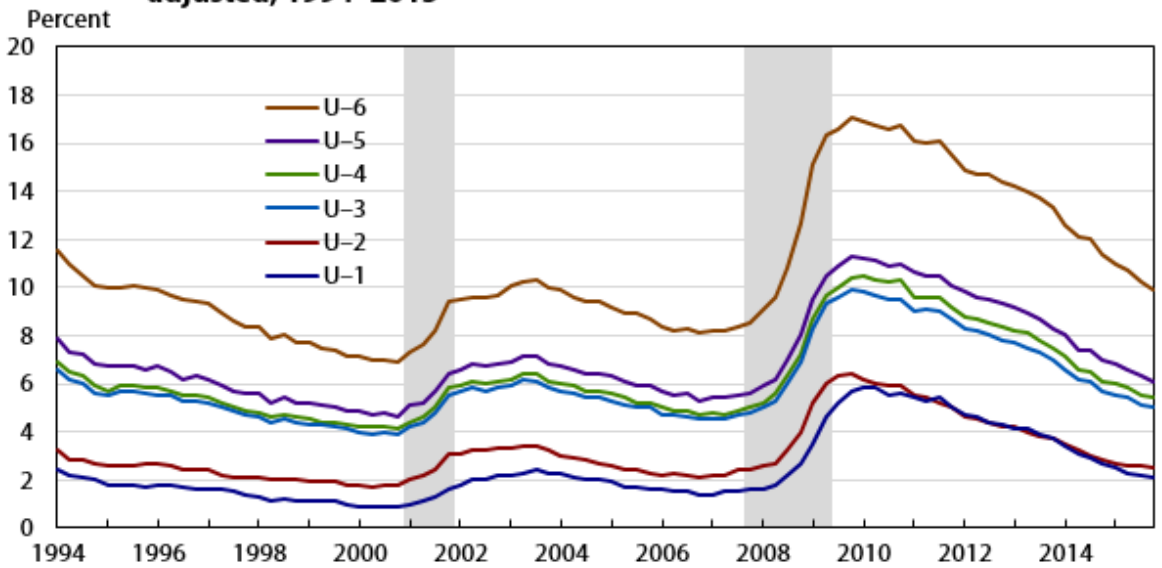
were available for them are defined as “discouraged workers.” By the fourth quarter of 2015, the number of discouraged workers had declined by 95,000, to 641,000.

The remaining 1.2 million people who were marginally attached to the labor force in 2015 had not searched for work in the 4 weeks preceding the survey for reasons such as school attendance, family responsibilities, health-related issues, and transportation problems. Those whose reason for nonparticipation was not identified in the survey also are included in the remaining 1.2 million people who are marginally attached. The number of these individuals declined by 270,000 in 2015.

Alternative measures of labor underutilization

BLS has defined several measures of labor underutilization. Known as U–1, U–2, and U–4 through U–6 (U–3 is the official unemployment rate), these metrics are used to gain insight into the degree to which labor resources are being underutilized, besides that obtained from U–3.[12] Like the official unemployment rate, the alternative measures are presented as a percentage of the labor force (adjusted as necessary). Alternative measures U–1 and U–2 are narrower than the official unemployment measure: U–1 denotes the number of individuals unemployed 15 weeks or longer as a percentage of the labor force, while U–2 designates job losers and people who completed temporary jobs as a percentage of the labor force. U–4 through U–6 are broader than the official unemployment measure: to the unemployed, U–4 adds discouraged workers; U–5 adds all people marginally attached to the labor force (including discouraged workers); and U–6 adds all people marginally attached to the labor force, plus people employed part time for economic reasons.

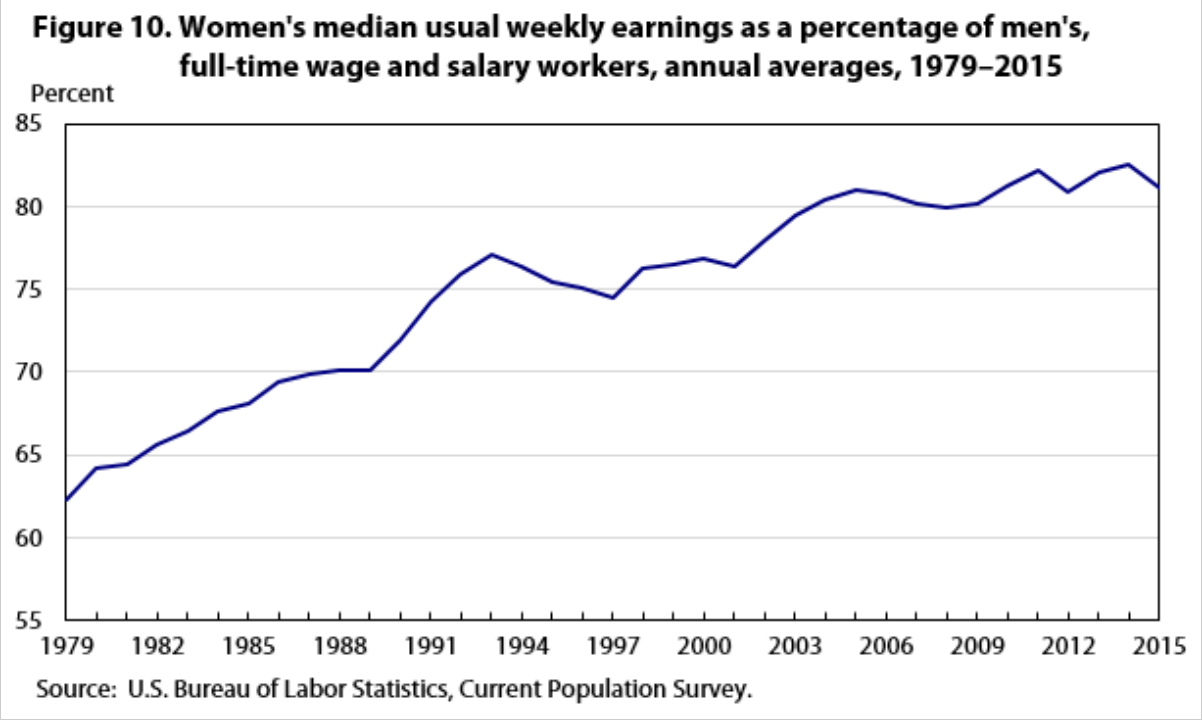
Figure 9. Measures of labor underutilization, quarterly averages, seasonally adjusted, 1994–2015



Note: Shaded regions represent recessions as designated by the National Bureau of Economic Research. Turning points are quarterly. Measures of labor underutlization are as follows: U–1 = people unemployed 15 weeks or longer, as a percentage of the civilian labor force; U–2 = job losers and people who completed temporary jobs, as a percentage of the civilian labor force; U–3 = total unemployed, as a percentage of the civilian labor force (official unemployment rate); U–4 = total unemployed plus discouraged workers, as a percentage of the civilian labor force plus discouraged workers; U–5 = total unemployed, plus discouraged workers, plus all other marginally attached workers, as a percentage of the civilian labor force plus all marginally attached workers; U–6 = total unemployed, plus all marginally attached workers, plus total employed part time for economic reasons, as a percentage of the civilian labor force plus all marginally attached workers.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

In 2015, all six alternative measures of labor underutilization declined. U–1 declined to 2.1 percent and U–2 declined to 2.5 percent. U-3 declined to 5.0 percent.[13] Among the remaining three measures, U–4 declined to 5.4 percent by the end of 2015 and U–5 to 6.1 percent. The broadest measure, U–6, declined by 1.5 percentage points, to 9.9 percent. (See figure 9.)

Earnings



In 2015, median weekly earnings for men increased by 2.8 percent over the year, to $895, and women's earnings increased by 1.0 percent, to $726.[14] The increase in earnings for both men and women outpaced the change in the Consumer Price Index for all Urban Consumers (CPI-U), which was 0.1 percent from 2014 to 2015. (The data in this section are annual averages.) Women's earnings averaged 81.1 percent of men's earnings in 2015. This proportion has been in the 80-percent to 82-percent range since 2004. (See figure 10 and table 7.)

Table 7. Median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers, by selected characteristics, annual averages, 2014–15

Characteristic	Current dollars		
	2014	2015	Percent change, 2014–15
Total, 16 years and older	$791	$809	2.3
CPI-U (1982–84 = 100)	236.74	237.02	.1
Men	$871	$895	2.8
Women	719	726	1.0
White	816	835	2.3
Men	897	920	2.6
Women	734	743	1.2
Black or African American	639	641	.3
Men	680	680	.0
Women	611	615	.7
Asian	953	993	4.2
Men	1,080	1,129	4.5
Women	841	877	4.3
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	594	604	1.7
Men	616	631	2.4
Women	548	566	3.3

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 7. Median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers, by selected characteristics, annual averages, 2014–15

Characteristic	Current dollars		
	2014	2015	Percent change, 2014–15
Total, 25 years and older	839	860	2.5
Less than a high school diploma	488	493	1.0
High school graduate, no college	668	678	1.5
Some college or associate's degree	761	762	.1
Bachelor's degree or higher	1,193	1,230	3.1

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey and Consumer Price Index.

Asians and Whites continued to have higher median usual weekly earnings ($993 and $835, respectively) in 2015 than Blacks ($641) and Hispanics ($604). The difference in median weekly earnings between Blacks and Hispanics has narrowed in recent years, reflecting relatively strong growth in earnings of Hispanic workers. (See table 7.)

In 2015, among full-time workers ages 25 and older, those with higher levels of educational attainment continued to have higher median weekly earnings than those with less education. Workers with at least a bachelor's degree reported median weekly earnings of $1,230, an increase of 3.1 percent over the previous year's figure. Workers with some college or an associate's degree had earnings that were little different from 2014 earnings ($762 per week). Earnings of workers with only a high school diploma rose 1.5 percent, to $678 per week, while workers without a high school diploma had median weekly earnings of $493, a 1.0-percent increase from 2014 earnings. (See table 7.)

Veterans

In the fourth quarter of 2015, the unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) for veterans was 4.1 percent, little changed from the rate a year earlier, while the rate for nonveterans declined to 4.7 percent. In the CPS, veterans are defined as men and women 18 years and older who previously served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces and who were civilians at the time the survey was conducted. Veterans are categorized as having served in the following periods of service:[15] (1) Gulf War era II (September 2001 to the present), (2) Gulf War era I (August 1990 to August 2001), (3) World War II (December 1941 to December 1946), (4) Korean War (July 1950 to January 1955), (5) Vietnam era (August 1964 to April 1975), and (6) other service period (all other periods). (See table 8.)

Table 8. Employment status of people 18 years and older, by veteran status, period of service, and gender, quarterly averages, not seasonally adjusted, 2014–15 (levels in thousands)

Employment status, veteran status, and period of service	Total			Men			Women		
	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015
Veterans, 18 years and older									
Civilian labor force	10,784	10,760	-24	9,462	9,517	55	1,322	1,243	-79
Participation rate (percent)	50.7	51.0	.3	49.3	49.9	.6	63.6	62.0	-1.6
Employed	10,291	10,317	26	9,049	9,128	79	1,242	1,190	-52
Employment–population ratio	48.3	48.9	.6	47.1	47.8	.7	59.8	59.4	-.4
Unemployed	493	442	-51	414	389	-25	80	53	-27
Unemployment rate (percent)	4.6	4.1	-.5	4.4	4.1	-.3	6.0	4.3	-1.7
Gulf War–era II veterans									
Civilian labor force	2,738	3,067	329	2,270	2,552	282	468	515	47
Participation rate (percent)	78.6	82.3	3.7	80.7	84.2	3.5	69.5	73.9	4.4
Employed	2,558	2,918	360	2,130	2,436	306	427	482	55
Employment–population ratio	73.4	78.3	4.9	75.8	80.4	4.6	63.4	69.2	5.8
Unemployed	180	149	-31	140	116	-24	41	33	-8
Unemployment rate (percent)	6.6	4.9	-1.7	6.1	4.5	-1.6	8.7	6.4	-2.3
Gulf War–era I veterans									
Civilian labor force	2,720	2,691	-29	2,331	2,345	14	389	346	-43
Participation rate (percent)	82.4	79.4	-3.0	84.0	80.6	-3.4	73.9	72.1	-1.8
Employed	2,645	2,588	-57	2,269	2,251	-18	376	337	-39
Employment–population ratio	80.1	76.3	-3.8	81.8	77.3	-4.5	71.3	70.2	-1.1
Unemployed	75	104	29	62	94	32	13	9	-4
Unemployment rate (percent)	2.8	3.8	1.0	2.7	4.0	1.3	3.4	2.7	-.7
World War II, Korean War, and Vietnam-era veterans									
Civilian labor force	2,508	2,261	-247	2,418	2,191	-227	90	70	-20
Participation rate (percent)	27.3	25.9	-1.4	27.3	26.0	-1.3	27.1	22.5	-4.6
Employed	2,398	2,185	-213	2,315	2,123	-192	84	62	-22
Employment–population ratio	26.1	25.0	-1.1	26.2	25.2	-1.0	25.1	20.0	-5.1
Unemployed	110	76	-34	104	68	-36	6	8	2
Unemployment rate (percent)	4.4	3.4	-1.0	4.3	3.1	-1.2	7.1	11.3	4.2

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 8. Employment status of people 18 years and older, by veteran status, period of service, and gender, quarterly averages, not seasonally adjusted, 2014–15 (levels in thousands)

Employment status, veteran status, and period of service	Total			Men			Women		
	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015
Veterans of other service periods									
Civilian labor force	2,818	2,741	-77	2,443	2,429	-14	374	312	-62
Participation rate (percent)	53.0	52.4	-.6	51.2	51.5	.3	68.7	60.5	-8.2
Employed	2,690	2,627	-63	2,335	2,318	-17	355	308	-47
Employment–population ratio	50.6	50.2	-.4	48.9	49.2	.3	65.1	59.9	-5.2
Unemployed	128	114	-14	108	111	3	19	3	-16
Unemployment rate (percent)	4.5	4.2	-.3	4.4	4.6	.2	5.2	1.1	-4.1
Nonveterans, 18 years and older									
Civilian labor force	143,383	144,683	1,300	72,447	72,978	531	70,936	71,706	770
Participation rate (percent)	65.6	65.2	-.4	75.1	74.5	-.6	58.1	57.9	-.2
Employed	135,675	137,843	2,168	68,471	69,403	932	67,204	68,439	1,235
Employment–population ratio	62.1	62.2	.1	71.0	70.9	-.1	55.0	55.3	.3
Unemployed	7,708	6,841	-867	3,977	3,574	-403	3,731	3,266	-465
Unemployment rate (percent)	5.4	4.7	-.7	5.5	4.9	-.6	5.3	4.6	-.7

Note: Veterans served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces and were not on active duty at the time of the survey. Nonveterans never served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces. Veterans could have served anywhere in the world during these periods of service: Gulf War era II (September 2001–present), Gulf War era I (August 1990–August 2001), Vietnam era (August 1964–April 1975), Korean War (July 1950–January 1955), World War II (December 1941–December 1946), and other service periods. Veterans who served in more than one wartime period are classified as being only in the most recent one. Veterans who served during one of the selected wartime periods and another period are classified only into the wartime period selected. Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

The unemployment rate for male veterans was 4.1 percent in the fourth quarter of 2015, and the rate for female veterans was 4.3 percent. These rates were little different from those of the previous year. Among male Gulf War–era II veterans (those who had served since September 2001), the unemployment rate declined 1.6 percentage points in 2015, to 4.5 percent. The unemployment rate for female veterans from this era, 6.4 percent, was little changed.

Overall, 49.9 percent of male veterans were in the labor force in the fourth quarter of 2015, as opposed to 74.5 percent of their nonveteran counterparts. This disparity is due in large part to the age distribution of male veterans compared with that of male nonveterans: the percentage of male veterans in older age brackets is greater, and older individuals tend to have low labor force participation rates. In the fourth quarter, the participation rate for

veterans of Gulf War II was 84.2 percent for men and 73.9 percent for women. Participation rates for both male and female veterans of Gulf War II rose from the rates posted a year earlier.

People with a disability

Over the year, there was little change in the employment situation for people with a disability. In the fourth quarter of 2015, the labor force participation rate for people with a disability edged down to 19.2 percent (not seasonally adjusted), and the rate for people without a disability edged down to 68.3 percent. (See table 9.) The lower participation rate among people with a disability reflects, in part, the fact that a large proportion of this group is 65 years and older, an age cohort with a low rate of labor force participation. Barriers to employment, limited assistance, and other labor-related issues also may contribute to low participation rates among people with a disability.[16] In the fourth quarter of 2015, men and women ages 16 to 64 years with a disability were also much less likely to be in the labor force than their counterparts with no disability: for men in this age group, the labor force participation rate was 31.9 percent, compared with 81.9 percent for men without a disability; for women in the same age group, the participation rate at the end of 2015 was 28.2 percent for those with a disability and 70.4 percent for those without a disability.

Table 9. Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population, by gender, age, and disability status, quarterly averages, not seasonally adjusted, 2014–15 (levels in thousands)

Employment status, gender, and age	People with a disability			People with no disability		
	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015
Total, 16 years and older						
Civilian labor force	5,935	5,715	-220	150,209	151,585	1,376
Participation rate (percent)	20.0	19.2	-.8	68.5	68.3	-.2
Employed	5,275	5,087	-188	142,322	144,642	2,320
Employment–population ratio	17.8	17.1	-.7	64.9	65.1	.2
Unemployed	660	628	-32	7,887	6,943	-944
Unemployment rate (percent)	11.1	11.0	-.1	5.3	4.6	-.7
Men, 16 to 64 years						
Civilian labor force	2,576	2,438	-138	75,679	76,081	402
Participation rate (percent)	33.0	31.9	-1.1	82.1	81.9	-.2
Employed	2,272	2,133	-139	71,611	72,424	813
Employment–population ratio	29.1	27.9	-1.2	77.7	78.0	.3
Unemployed	303	305	2	4,068	3,657	-411
Unemployment rate (percent)	11.8	12.5	.7	5.4	4.8	-.6
Women, 16 to 64 years						
Civilian labor force	2,347	2,275	-72	67,069	67,570	501

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 9. Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population, by gender, age, and disability status, quarterly averages, not seasonally adjusted, 2014–15 (levels in thousands)

Employment status, gender, and age	People with a disability			People with no disability		
	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015
Participation rate (percent)	29.1	28.2	-.9	70.4	70.4	.0
Employed	2,055	2,004	-51	63,551	64,536	985
Employment–population ratio	25.5	24.9	-.6	66.7	67.2	.5
Unemployed	292	272	-20	3,518	3,035	-483
Unemployment rate (percent)	12.4	11.9	-.5	5.2	4.5	-.7
Total, 65 years and older						
Civilian labor force	1,012	1,002	-10	7,461	7,933	472
Participation rate (percent)	7.3	7.2	-.1	23.5	23.9	.4
Employed	947	950	3	7,161	7,682	521
Employment–population ratio	6.9	6.8	-.1	22.6	23.2	.6
Unemployed	65	52	-13	301	251	-50
Unemployment rate (percent)	6.4	5.2	-1.2	4.0	3.2	-.8

Note: A person with a disability has at least one of the following conditions: is deaf or has serious difficulty hearing; is blind or has serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses; has serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition; has serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs; has difficulty dressing or bathing; has difficulty doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping, because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition. Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

The unemployment rate for people with a disability, 11.0 percent, was about unchanged over the year. The rate for people without a disability declined by 0.7 percentage point, to 4.6 percent, in 2015.

Foreign-born workers

In 2015, unemployment rates continued to decline for both foreign-born and native-born individuals. By the fourth quarter, the jobless rate for the foreign born was 4.5 percent (not seasonally adjusted), a decrease of 0.8 percentage point over the 2014 rate. The jobless rate for native-born workers was 4.9 percent, a decline of 0.6 percentage point. (See table 10.) Foreign-born workers are workers who reside in the United States but were born outside the country or one of its outlying areas (such as Puerto Rico or Guam) to parents, neither of whom was a U.S. citizen. The foreign born comprise legally admitted immigrants; refugees; temporary residents, such as students and temporary workers; and undocumented immigrants.

Table 10. Employment status of the foreign- and native-born populations, by gender, quarterly averages, not seasonally adjusted, 2014–15 (levels in thousands)

Employment status and nativity	Total			Men			Women		
	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015	Fourth quarter 2014	Fourth quarter 2015	Change, fourth quarter 2014 to fourth quarter 2015
Foreign born, 16 years and older									
Civilian labor force	26,396	26,537	141	15,446	15,426	-20	10,949	11,112	163
Participation rate (percent)	66.2	65.7	-.5	78.7	78.2	-.5	54.1	53.8	-.3
Employed	24,994	25,347	353	14,697	14,813	116	10,297	10,534	237
Employment–population ratio	62.7	62.8	.1	74.9	75.1	.2	50.9	51.0	.1
Unemployed	1,402	1,191	-211	750	613	-137	652	578	-74
Unemployment rate (percent)	5.3	4.5	-.8	4.9	4.0	-.9	6.0	5.2	-.8
Native born, 16 years and older									
Civilian labor force	129,749	130,762	1,013	67,457	67,997	540	62,292	62,765	473
Participation rate (percent)	62.1	61.9	-.2	67.1	66.8	-.3	57.5	57.3	-.2
Employed	122,603	124,382	1,779	63,622	64,480	858	58,982	59,901	919
Employment–population ratio	58.7	58.8	.1	63.3	63.3	.0	54.4	54.7	.3
Unemployed	7,146	6,380	-766	3,835	3,517	-318	3,310	2,864	-446
Unemployment rate (percent)	5.5	4.9	-.6	5.7	5.2	-.5	5.3	4.6	-.7

Note: The foreign born are those residing in the United States who were not U.S. citizens at birth. That is, they were born outside the United States or one of its outlying areas, such as Puerto Rico or Guam, and neither parent was a U.S. citizen. The native born are people who were born in the United States or one of its outlying areas, such as Puerto Rico or Guam, or who were born abroad to at least one parent who was a U.S. citizen. Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

In the fourth quarter of 2015, foreign-born workers accounted for 16.9 percent of the U.S. civilian labor force. The labor force participation rate for the foreign born changed little over the year, while the rate for the native born edged down over the year. In the fourth quarter of 2015, foreign-born men continued to have higher participation rates (78.2 percent) than native-born men (66.8 percent), while native-born women were more likely to be in the labor force (57.3 percent) than women who were foreign born (53.8 percent).

Summary

CPS data indicate that the U.S. labor market continued to grow in 2015. Both the number of unemployed and the unemployment rate declined. The unemployment rate ended the year at 5.0 percent, down 0.7 percentage point over the year, but still slightly above the cyclical low that predated the 2007–09 recession. The proportion of unemployed people who had been jobless for long periods also continued to decline but remained well above

prerecession levels. Employment, as measured by the CPS, expanded over the year, although growth was considerably slower than in 2014, and there still were a sizable number of people working part time even though they would have preferred full-time jobs. The employment–population ratio was little changed in 2015, while the labor force participation rate continued to trend downward. Of particular note, median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers rose at a faster rate than inflation in 2015.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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NOTES

1 The data in this article are based on information collected in the Current Population Survey (CPS), also called the household survey. The CPS is a monthly sample survey of about 60,000 households nationwide that the U.S. Census Bureau conducts for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Although the CPS is a monthly survey, the data analyzed in the article are seasonally adjusted quarterly averages unless otherwise noted. All over-the-year changes are comparisons of fourth-quarter data from 2014 with fourth-quarter data from 2015 unless otherwise noted. Effective with the data for January 2015, updated population estimates were used in the household survey. Each year, the Census Bureau updates its population estimates to reflect new information and assumptions about the growth of the population during the decade. In accordance with usual practice, BLS did not revise the official household survey estimates for December 2014 and earlier months. For additional information on the population adjustments and their effect on national labor force estimates, see “Adjustments to household survey population estimates in January 2015” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 2015), https://www.bls.gov/cps/cps15adj.pdf.

2 The Great Recession officially began in December 2007 and ended in June 2009, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), which determines the start and end dates of U.S. recessions on the basis of a range of economic indicators. Turning points for recessions are quarterly in this article.

3 People whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race. In the CPS, about 90 percent of people of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity are White.

4 Unemployment rates by occupation are based on the last job an individual held. Unemployed people who have no previous work experience are excluded.

5 The duration of joblessness is the length of time (through the current reference week) that people classified as unemployed have been looking for work. This measure refers to the duration of the current spell of unemployment, rather than to that of a completed spell.

6 For additional information, see Thomas Luke Spreen, “Ranks of those unemployed for a year or more up sharply,” *Issues in Labor Statistics*, Summary 10-10 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, October 2010), https://www.bls.gov/opub/ils/pdf/opbils87.pdf .

7 For additional information and analysis of data, see Randy E. Ilg and Eleni Theodossiou, “Job search of the unemployed by duration of unemployment,” *Monthly Labor Review*, March 2012, pp. 41–49, https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2012/03/art3full.pdf; Randy E. Ilg, “How long before the unemployed find jobs or quit looking?” *Issues in Labor Statistics*, Summary 11-1 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2011), https://www.bls.gov/opub/ils/pdf/opbils89.pdf; “Labor force flows in the most recent recession,” *Issues in Labor Statistics*, Summary 10-08 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, July 2010), https://www.bls.gov/opub/ils/pdf/opbils85.pdf; and Harley J. Frazis and Randy E. Ilg, “Trends in labor force flows during recent recessions,” *Monthly Labor Review*, April 2009, pp. 3–18, https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2009/04/art1full.pdf.

8 For additional information, see Emy Sok, “Involuntary part-time work on the rise,” *Issues in Labor Statistics*, Summary 08-08 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 2008), https://www.bls.gov/opub/ils/pdf/opbils71.pdf.

9 For additional information, see Mitra Toossi, "Labor force projections to 2024: the labor force is growing, but slowly," *Monthly Labor Review*, December 2015, https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2015/article/labor-force-projections-to-2024.htm.

10 The number of people not in the labor force who want a job is a measure of those who reported wanting a job without necessarily having looked for one; conceptually, this group includes all people who are not in the labor force and who reported that they currently want a job.

11 For additional information, see Steven Hipple, "People who are not in the labor force: why aren't they working?" *Beyond the Numbers*, December 2015, https://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/volume-4/people-who-are-not-in-the-labor-force-why-arent-they-working.htm.

12 For further information on the underutilization of labor, see Vernon Brundage, "Trends in unemployment and other labor market difficulties," *Beyond the Numbers*, November 2014, https://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/volume-3/trends-in-unemployment-and-other-labor-market-difficulties.htm; and Steven E. Haugen, "Measures of labor underutilization from the Current Population Survey," Working Paper 424 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, March 2009), https://www.bls.gov/osmr/research-papers/2009/pdf/ec090020.pdf.

13 Also known as the "national unemployment rate," U–3 measures the total number of unemployed people as a percentage of the civilian labor force. In 2015, U–2 once again exceeded U–1, resuming the pattern that existed for most of the history of the six measures. For a number of years following the 2007–09 recession, U–1 exceeded U–2. (For more information, see Eleni Theodossiou Sherman and Janie-Lynn Kang, "Continued improvement in U.S. labor market in 2014," *Monthly Labor Review*, April 2015, https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2015/article/continued-improvement-in-u-s-labor-market-in-2014.htm.)

14 Comparisons of earnings in this article are on a broad level and do not control for many factors—such as occupation, education, geographic location, and firm size—that can be important in explaining earnings differences.

15 Veterans who served in more than one wartime period are classified into only the most recent one.

16 For more information on these issues, see "Persons with a disability: barriers to employment, types of assistance, and other labor-related issues," USDL-13-0729 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, April 24, 2013), https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/dissup.pdf; and John Robertson and Ellyn Terry, "Shrinking labor market opportunities for the disabled?" (Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, January 29, 2016), http://macroblog.typepad.com/macroblog/2016/01/shrinking-labor-market-opportunities-for-the-disabled.html.

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