

Employment Steadily Improved in February, As Economy Added 227,000 Jobs

**Despite gains, older workers continue to grapple with severe
long-term unemployment, new NELP report finds**

Washington, DC – The economy added 227,000 jobs in February, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' monthly jobs report released today. February's growth builds upon steadily improving employment numbers since mid-2011. Despite this positive news, the unemployment rate remained unchanged at 8.3 percent, largely because people are coming back into the labor force. With 12.8 million workers still unemployed – and certain groups of workers, such as older workers, struggling disproportionately with long-term unemployment – further robust growth is needed to alleviate the hardship of unemployment and close the jobs deficit, which remains at nearly 10 million jobs.

"February's employment growth, of 227,000 jobs, is welcome news for workers and the economy," stated **Christine Owens, executive director of the National Employment Law Project**. "We've now had three consecutive months of employment gains that exceeded 200,000 jobs. While this is positive news, we also cannot ignore the fact that the unemployment rate remains unacceptably high, and that long-term unemployment continues to affect over 5.4 million people. Clearly, we're not out of the woods yet."

February's employment report by the numbers

The economy continued to add jobs in February, and growth appears to be picking up compared to the stagnant labor market of last summer. During the last half of 2011, the economy added 146,000 jobs on average each month, and February's gains reaffirm that job growth is improving. Even stronger growth is needed, however, to address the continued severity of unemployment and ensure true economic recovery for the labor force:

- **Public sector job losses.** While employment growth occurred in a number of industries, the public sector continued to cut jobs, with 6,000 jobs total lost from all levels of government in February. Since the official end of the Great Recession, in June 2009, the public sector has lost over 570,000 jobs.
- **Employment & labor force participation.** The portion of the overall population that is employed ticked up in February, to 58.6 percent, and the share of Americans in the labor force also edged up. These are both signs that the labor market is heading in a positive direction.
- **Long-term unemployment.** 12.8 million workers remained unemployed in February. The duration of unemployment remains alarming: on average, unemployed workers were without work for 40 weeks, or over 9 months. Of the unemployed, 42.6 percent are long-term unemployed, having been out of work for six months or longer.
- **Underemployment.** Underemployment continues to plague the labor force. In addition to the unemployed, 8.1 million are working part-time involuntarily, and another 2.6 million have searched for

work in the past year and are currently available for work, but have given up their job search. Together, this means that 23.5 million are either unemployed or underemployed, resulting in a “real” unemployment rate of 14.9 percent.

- **Signs of future hiring.** Signs of a pick-up in future hiring are promising. Hiring in temporary help services, typically a predictor of future hiring growth, increased by over 45,000 jobs in February. Average weekly wages also edged upward.
- **Jobs deficit.** Sustained, stronger job growth is needed in order to close the jobs deficit, which stands at about 10 million (9.95) jobs as of February. This deficit represents the 5.3 million jobs lost since the start of Great Recession and not yet recovered, in addition to the 4.7 million jobs the economy should have added in order to account for potential growth in the labor force over this period.

February’s employment report in focus: Older workers and long-term unemployment

As February’s employment report demonstrates, long-term unemployment continues to present severe hardship for millions. A [new issue brief](#) from NELP shows that such prolonged spells of joblessness have disproportionately affected older unemployed workers (those aged 50 years and older) throughout the Great Recession and its aftermath. Specifically, NELP finds that:

- Since the start of the Great Recession, the number of long-term unemployed older workers more than quintupled, to 1.8 million in 2011.
- Compared to other age groups, once older workers became unemployed, they were most likely to become long-term unemployed. During 2011, more than *half* of older jobless workers were out of work for six months or more.
- More alarmingly, four in ten older unemployed workers were jobless for at least one year during 2011. The share of workers experiencing very long-term unemployment increased most dramatically among older workers from 2007 to 2011.
- Older unemployed workers face particular difficulties in today’s weak labor market, including instances of hiring discrimination. They’re left with less time to recoup lost retirement savings, thus putting at risk their later-life financial security and general well-being.

“The severity and impact of long-term unemployment among older workers calls for clear and immediate action on policies that address barriers these workers face in the labor market,” stated **Owens**. “Congress should take note of the numerous states considering legislation that bans hiring discrimination against the unemployed, and immediately pass the federal version of such legislation, the Fair Employment Opportunity Act. Addressing long-term unemployment among older workers also requires targeted reemployment strategies, such as job training and subsidized employment programs. Without measures like these, the harsh effects of the Great Recession will continue to impact older workers for years to come.”

The National Employment Law Project is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts research and advocates on issues affecting low-wage and unemployed workers. For more about NELP, visit www.nelp.org.

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