

Duration of unemployment in States, 2007–09

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The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) publishes statistics on the duration of unemployment at the national level, derived from the Current Population Survey (CPS), on a monthly basis. Unemployed persons at the State level also can be classified by duration. In this article, which utilizes CPS data at the State level, those jobless for a period of less than 5 weeks are referred to as short-term unemployed, while those jobless for 15 weeks or more are referred to as long-term unemployed.¹

Duration of unemployment measures are affected by economic cycles. In a strong economy, the largest share of the unemployed is generally found in the short-term category. The unemployed then would consist largely of the frictionally unemployed—those who are jobless for short periods as they are changing jobs. Increases in the number of short-term unemployed can indicate a weakening economy. If the economy continues to deteriorate over an extended period of time, and people continue to struggle to find jobs, the distribution of unemployment by duration will begin to shift from short term to medium term and then finally to the long-term category.²

Recently, CPS annual average estimates for 2007–09 were tabulated for all States and the District of Columbia for the same unemployment duration categories that are published at the national level. The estimation procedure used for the subnational sample-based

CPS data allows for the development of statistics on economic characteristics of the labor force, such as duration of unemployment, based on specific responses to the survey questionnaire.³ In contrast, the official statewide unemployment estimates from the Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) program are model-based measures and are designed to produce reliable *total* employment and unemployment estimates. Further breakdowns of LAUS data by economic or demographic characteristics are not available.

When comparing duration across States, it is more revealing to look at the percent distributions within the different unemployment duration categories than the actual levels. This is due to the substantial differences across States in the size of their population, labor force, and unemployed. This article focuses on percent distributions.

Duration in 2007

In 2007, the greatest proportion of unemployed, 35.9 percent of the total at the national level, was in the less-than-5-weeks range. Thirty-six States also recorded the largest percentages of their unemployed in the short-term category. Wyoming reported the highest share, 53.0 percent, followed closely by Utah, 52.2 percent. These two States were among those with the lowest unemployment rates for 2007. New Jersey and the District of Columbia registered the lowest proportions of their unemployment in the short-term category, 29.3 percent each.

Individuals unemployed for 15 weeks or longer accounted for 32.5 percent of unemployed persons in the United States in 2007. Nine States and the District of Columbia registered the largest percentages of their unemployed in the long-term category. Michigan, which recorded the highest unemployment rate for 2007, also had the highest share of its unemployment in the 15-weeks-or-longer category, 42.0 percent, followed by New York and the District of Columbia, 39.3 percent each. Wyoming, at 16.1 percent, reported the lowest proportion of long-term unemployment. Two other Mountain division States also had shares below 20 percent—Idaho, 18.8 percent, and Utah, 18.9 percent.⁴

The BLS also produces estimates on the mean and median length of unemployment at both the national and State levels. The national mean duration of unemployment was 16.8 weeks in 2007. Among the States, Michigan recorded the highest mean, 20.7 weeks. Three other States had average unemployment durations above 20 weeks: New York, 20.5 weeks, and Louisiana and Wisconsin, 20.1 weeks each. Wyoming recorded the lowest mean, 8.7 weeks.

The median unemployment duration, which is the middle value within a distribution, can be a more representative measure that is not influenced by a relatively small number of the very long-term unemployed (as the mean can be). The median length of time that a person was unemployed in the United States in 2007 was 8.5 weeks. Michigan and the District of Columbia recorded the highest me-

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Table 1. Unemployed persons by duration of unemployment, 2007–09 annual averages

State	Percentage distribution of unemployment									Weeks					
	Less than 5 weeks			5 to 14 weeks			15 weeks and over			Mean			Median		
	2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009
United States	35.9	32.8	22.2	31.5	31.4	26.8	32.5	35.7	51.0	16.8	17.9	24.4	8.5	9.4	15.1
Alabama	34.5	32.2	20.9	30.3	26.3	26.6	35.2	41.5	52.5	17.1	18.8	23.8	9.2	10.3	15.9
Alaska.....	45.5	41.9	33.5	32.8	31.7	29.9	21.5	26.5	36.5	11.5	14.0	17.2	5.4	6.6	9.4
Arizona.....	48.8	40.7	21.0	26.2	32.1	28.0	25.1	27.2	51.0	13.0	13.6	23.3	4.9	7.1	15.0
Arkansas.....	39.2	35.9	28.5	35.7	35.3	30.5	25.1	28.7	41.1	13.6	13.8	20.0	7.0	8.2	11.1
California	36.3	31.5	20.8	32.0	29.6	25.1	31.6	39.0	54.1	16.4	18.8	26.5	8.3	10.3	17.1
Colorado	41.5	34.7	26.4	32.8	34.4	28.2	25.6	31.0	45.4	14.0	15.7	22.0	7.2	9.0	12.8
Connecticut	34.4	30.1	21.9	31.8	32.0	24.7	33.8	37.9	53.3	18.0	19.1	26.0	8.8	10.0	16.9
Delaware.....	36.8	28.9	23.4	31.0	33.4	26.7	32.3	37.5	49.9	16.2	18.3	24.4	8.2	10.0	14.5
District of Columbia	29.3	25.6	18.9	31.1	31.1	26.1	39.3	43.3	54.8	18.1	20.7	26.2	10.9	12.2	17.1
Florida.....	36.7	28.7	18.1	32.7	32.0	24.4	30.5	39.3	57.5	15.5	19.3	27.5	8.5	10.8	18.8
Georgia	35.9	28.5	20.3	30.8	33.5	24.5	33.3	38.1	55.3	16.7	17.9	26.0	8.6	10.5	17.7
Hawaii.....	43.3	36.0	22.2	29.0	37.0	30.4	27.7	27.1	47.4	15.4	13.6	23.0	6.4	8.3	13.5
Idaho	47.6	44.5	29.7	33.5	29.1	26.6	18.8	26.6	43.7	11.5	12.1	20.9	5.2	6.4	11.7
Illinois	32.4	27.6	20.2	30.6	33.3	26.2	37.0	39.0	53.6	19.3	20.4	25.8	9.7	10.5	16.7
Indiana	32.0	30.5	22.9	34.8	33.5	27.7	33.2	36.0	49.3	17.5	17.7	22.7	9.0	9.6	14.2
Iowa	36.0	42.6	30.3	34.3	32.5	31.0	29.7	25.0	38.8	13.9	12.6	17.0	8.0	6.1	10.2
Kansas	40.8	41.6	28.3	31.9	33.3	28.6	27.3	25.1	43.1	14.6	13.6	19.0	6.9	6.5	11.9
Kentucky	35.3	34.2	23.0	35.5	32.6	28.6	29.3	33.2	48.4	13.9	18.1	22.8	8.6	8.6	13.9
Louisiana.....	38.0	35.2	28.1	27.2	28.6	34.4	34.9	36.2	37.4	20.1	19.1	18.1	8.7	9.6	11.0
Maine	38.5	36.0	23.3	32.4	33.4	27.8	29.0	30.7	48.9	15.1	14.7	22.3	8.0	8.3	14.1
Maryland	36.0	32.5	20.4	31.1	34.7	28.3	32.9	32.8	51.3	17.1	16.6	22.7	8.5	9.2	15.2
Massachusetts	31.3	29.9	22.2	33.7	30.6	28.2	34.9	39.5	49.6	17.8	18.3	23.9	9.4	10.5	14.4
Michigan	31.3	28.8	19.6	26.7	28.3	23.1	42.0	42.9	57.3	20.7	22.9	30.2	10.9	11.1	19.7
Minnesota	36.4	31.6	24.0	33.8	30.1	30.8	29.7	38.2	45.1	13.8	19.1	21.3	7.9	9.9	12.9
Mississippi	37.1	35.5	22.3	31.1	30.1	28.0	31.9	34.4	49.6	18.4	19.5	24.3	8.3	8.8	14.3
Missouri	33.9	32.4	24.5	29.2	33.3	27.9	36.8	34.3	47.6	19.5	19.7	22.3	9.5	9.3	13.6
Montana	46.2	46.1	27.3	28.6	30.1	31.9	25.0	23.6	40.9	12.8	12.5	17.7	5.4	5.5	11.3
Nebraska.....	41.9	40.8	28.8	31.9	33.4	29.9	26.1	25.8	41.3	13.0	13.4	20.0	6.9	6.7	10.6
Nevada	37.0	28.2	20.9	34.1	34.7	26.9	29.0	37.1	52.2	14.2	16.6	23.9	8.5	10.7	15.8
New Hampshire	41.2	35.1	21.7	34.1	33.1	28.6	24.6	31.9	49.7	12.9	15.4	23.9	6.9	8.6	14.4
New Jersey	29.3	29.0	18.5	32.6	30.8	26.2	38.2	40.3	55.3	19.1	19.4	28.1	9.9	10.6	17.8
New Mexico	43.5	43.8	29.2	28.5	34.0	27.4	28.0	22.2	43.4	14.7	13.5	19.2	6.7	5.9	11.8
New York	31.8	30.7	19.8	28.9	31.1	26.4	39.3	38.2	53.9	20.5	20.1	26.5	10.0	10.2	16.8
North Carolina	34.3	29.7	18.6	30.3	29.8	24.2	35.4	40.5	57.2	16.3	19.2	26.3	9.2	10.3	18.5
North Dakota	43.3	43.9	39.9	32.8	32.7	31.0	23.5	23.6	29.1	12.2	12.6	14.1	6.2	5.9	7.8
Ohio.....	33.7	33.1	21.6	33.1	33.3	28.3	33.1	33.6	50.1	18.3	16.8	24.2	8.8	9.2	14.5
Oklahoma	39.0	34.9	29.7	32.4	29.9	28.2	28.6	35.3	42.2	15.7	19.0	19.7	7.4	8.7	11.2
Oregon	39.4	37.3	23.9	34.4	33.9	29.0	26.1	28.8	47.0	12.9	15.2	21.1	7.2	8.2	13.2
Pennsylvania	32.8	34.0	23.6	33.8	32.1	30.1	33.4	33.8	46.3	16.1	15.5	22.8	9.0	8.8	13.1
Rhode Island	30.4	27.2	19.5	35.8	31.5	25.1	34.0	41.2	55.4	16.6	19.4	26.1	9.7	11.6	18.1
South Carolina	31.3	25.7	18.4	34.4	31.3	24.2	34.4	43.0	57.4	17.5	19.2	27.1	9.4	11.8	19.6
South Dakota	44.4	49.3	32.4	32.7	31.3	32.9	23.1	19.6	34.7	16.0	11.6	15.3	5.9	4.7	9.5
Tennessee	35.6	33.5	21.3	33.2	32.7	25.5	31.2	33.8	53.2	18.0	17.3	25.1	8.6	9.0	16.2

Table 1. Continued—Unemployed persons by duration of unemployment, 2007–09 annual averages

State	Percentage distribution of unemployment									Weeks					
	Less than 5 weeks			5 to 14 weeks			15 weeks and over			Mean			Median		
	2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009
Texas.....	41.4	40.8	28.6	30.0	31.4	29.0	28.6	27.8	42.4	15.0	14.3	19.9	7.2	7.3	11.8
Utah	52.2	47.4	32.3	28.8	30.6	27.9	18.9	22.1	39.7	11.5	11.2	16.3	4.3	5.3	10.5
Vermont.....	38.9	36.0	28.1	30.3	34.4	27.7	31.0	29.5	44.2	15.9	15.9	21.7	7.4	8.1	12.0
Virginia	38.2	38.4	22.9	34.7	32.0	30.5	27.1	29.6	46.6	14.7	16.3	22.2	7.8	7.9	13.2
Washington	42.9	42.2	25.3	32.5	29.7	29.4	24.6	28.1	45.3	13.3	13.6	21.2	6.3	6.8	12.7
West Virginia.....	37.5	31.0	26.1	33.2	34.8	27.2	29.3	34.1	46.7	14.6	17.4	22.7	7.6	9.4	13.2
Wisconsin	34.3	36.2	25.0	29.3	30.3	26.1	36.3	33.5	48.9	20.1	18.3	21.7	9.7	8.2	14.0
Wyoming.....	53.0	57.6	33.0	31.3	27.4	32.6	16.1	15.3	34.1	8.7	9.0	15.6	4.2	3.8	9.2

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

dians, 10.9 weeks, followed by New York, 10.0 weeks. Wyoming had the lowest median, 4.2 weeks.

Duration in 2008

In 2008, as the national labor market experienced a 1.8-million person increase in the annual average unemployment level and an unemployment rate increase of 1.2 percentage points, the distribution between short-term and long-term unemployment shifted. Those who were unemployed for 15 weeks or longer made up the largest share of the total, 35.7 percent, while the short-term category decreased by 3.1 percentage points to 32.8 percent.

Exactly half the States had the largest percentages of their unemployed in the short-term range in 2008, a decline from 36 States a year earlier. As in 2007, Wyoming had the largest share, 57.6 percent. South Dakota had the next highest proportion in 2008, 49.3 percent, followed by Utah, 47.4 percent. These three States were among the six States with the lowest overall jobless rates in 2008.

Long-term unemployment among States increased between 2007 and 2008. Twenty-two States and the

District of Columbia reported the largest percentages of their unemployment in the 15-weeks-or-longer category, up from nine States and the District of Columbia in the previous year. The District of Columbia had the highest share, 43.3 percent, followed by South Carolina, 43.0 percent, and Michigan, 42.9 percent. Michigan again had the highest State unemployment rate in 2008. Both South Carolina and the District of Columbia had among the highest unemployment rates in the Nation.

Between 2007 and 2008, the national mean duration of unemployment increased by 1.1 weeks to 17.9 weeks. Thirty-three States and the District of Columbia recorded over-the-year increases in their mean durations of unemployment, 16 States registered decreases, and 1 State had no change. Minnesota had the largest increase, +5.3 weeks, while South Dakota reported the largest decrease, -4.4 weeks. Michigan continued to record the highest mean, 22.9 weeks in 2008, followed by the District of Columbia, 20.7 weeks, Illinois, 20.4 weeks, and New York, 20.1 weeks. Wyoming again registered the lowest average unemployment duration, 9.0 weeks.

The median duration of unemployment increased by 0.9 weeks to 9.4 weeks in 2008 for the United States as a whole. Thirty-nine States and the District of Columbia had increases in their median durations of unemployment between 2007 and 2008, while 10 States had decreases, and 1 State recorded no change. South Carolina and Florida, with over-the-year increases of 2.4 and 2.3 weeks, respectively, experienced the largest increases in their median durations. Florida's increase in median duration coincided with a large increase in its jobless rate. Iowa showed the greatest decline in median duration, -1.9 weeks. The District of Columbia continued to record the highest median, 12.2 weeks, followed by South Carolina, 11.8 weeks. Wyoming again posted the lowest median, 3.8 weeks.

Duration in 2009

In 2009, the national labor market deteriorated at a faster pace, resulting in an annual average unemployment level increase of 5.3 million persons and an unemployment rate increase of 3.5 percentage points. As the number of unemployed increased throughout 2009, the share of those who were

without a job for 15 weeks or longer jumped 15.3 percentage points from 2008. Those considered long-term unemployed constituted 51.0 percent of the total, while the short-term category decreased by 10.6 percentage points to 22.2 percent.

Only one State, North Dakota, had the largest proportion of its unemployed in the short-term range in 2009, a drastic decline from 25 States a year earlier. In North Dakota, 39.9 percent of the unemployed were jobless for 5 weeks or less. This State also posted the lowest 2009 annual average unemployment rate in the Nation, 4.3 percent.

Forty-nine States and the District of Columbia reported the largest shares of their unemployed in the 15-weeks-or-longer category in 2009. Fifteen of those States and the District of Columbia recorded higher proportions than that of the Nation, 51.0 percent. Florida recorded the highest share among the States, 57.5 percent, followed closely by South Carolina, 57.4 percent, Michigan, 57.3 percent, and North Carolina, 57.2 percent. These States experienced some of the highest annual average unemployment rates in 2009, with Michigan recording the highest rate, 13.6 percent.

In 2009, the United States experienced a substantial increase in the

national mean duration of joblessness, which rose 6.5 weeks over the year to 24.4 weeks. Forty-nine States and the District of Columbia experienced over-the-year increases in their mean durations of unemployment, with Arizona recording the largest increase, +9.7 weeks, followed closely by Hawaii, +9.4 weeks. Only one State, Louisiana, had a small decline, -1.0 week. As nearly all States registered increases in their average durations of joblessness, 39 States and the District of Columbia posted increases of 5.0 weeks or more between 2008 and 2009. Michigan, once again, recorded the highest mean, 30.2 weeks, while North Dakota recorded the lowest, 14.1 weeks.

The median length of time a person was jobless at the national level in 2009 was 15.1 weeks, up from 9.4 weeks a year earlier. All 50 States and the District of Columbia had increases in their median durations of unemployment between 2008 and 2009 of at least 1.4 weeks. Michigan had the largest increase, +8.6 weeks, followed by two other States with increases of at least 8.0 weeks: North Carolina, +8.2 weeks, and Florida, +8.0 weeks. Michigan and Florida also recorded the highest and the third highest medians in the Nation, 19.7 weeks and 18.8 weeks, respectively. Three other States reported median dura-

tions above 18.0 weeks: South Carolina, 19.6 weeks, North Carolina, 18.5 weeks, and Rhode Island, 18.1 weeks. In contrast, North Dakota, at 7.8 weeks, was the only State to post a median duration of joblessness below 9.2 weeks in 2009. □

Notes

¹ Many data users consider long-term unemployment to be 27 weeks or more, while some data users consider 15 weeks or more to be long term. For the purposes of this article, short-term unemployment is defined as less than 5 weeks, medium term as 5 to 14 weeks, and long-term joblessness as 15 weeks or more. This article focuses on short-term and long-term unemployment.

² The duration of unemployment represents the length of time (through the current reference week) that individuals classified as unemployed have been looking for work and refers to job searches in continuous progress rather than the duration of a completed spell.

³ Statewide estimates on the economic characteristics of the unemployed (e.g., duration of unemployment) are based on annual averages of monthly data obtained from the CPS and are, therefore, subject to sampling error. For more information on using and interpreting CPS subnational data, see "Notes on Using Current Population Survey (CPS) Subnational Data," on the Internet at www.bls.gov/gps/notescps.htm. For additional information and sampling error tables, see the appendices of the *Geographic Profile of Employment and Unemployment* publications, on the Internet at www.bls.gov/opub/gp/laugp.htm.

⁴ The Mountain division, located in the West region, is composed of eight States: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming.