

## California December jobless rate flat at 12.4%

Tom Abate, Chronicle Staff Writer  
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California got coal in its stocking for the holidays as employers cut 38,800 jobs in December and the unemployment rate registered 12.4 percent, according to an Employment Development Department report that showed little sign of life in the state's labor market.

Also, the November unemployment rate - initially reported as 12.3 percent - was revised upward to 12.4 percent on Friday.

December's figure would have been even higher had not 107,000 Californians quit looking for work last month and thus fallen out of the calculations.

December's labor force dropout figure was the highest on record and marks the eight consecutive month of shrinkage in the number of Californians looking for work.

The state estimates that 2.254 million people were unemployed in December.

In addition to the jobless, state officials say 1.53 million Californians were forced to work part time in December because they couldn't find anything full time and another 903,000 people had stopped looking but wanted jobs.

These two groups are added to the unemployed to create a broader labor market measure called the underemployment rate. It registered 23.3 percent in December, up from November's 23 percent.

One of the grimmest facts of the recession that began in December 2007 has been the duration of unemployment. In December, 34.9 percent of jobless Californians had been out of work more than 27 weeks, which is longer than the six-month maximum for normal unemployment insurance coverage.

At an EDD assistance center in San Francisco - where visitors need a picture ID and Social Security card or other proof of legal work status to get help - 53-year-old Kevin Flack was looking for a job to replace the clerk position he lost last April.

"You fill out all these Internet applications and there is no response," said Flack, who feels at a disadvantage because he has no strong skills beyond a high school diploma and military service.

Flack said he has been able to take advantage of some of the extensions enacted by Congress to provide up to 99 weeks of benefits rather than the normal 26 weeks.

But the eligibility for those extensions expires soon and Congress has yet to decide whether or for how long to make longer-term payments available. That worries 58-year-old Denise Duncan of Santa Rosa, who has not been able to find work since losing her accounting job in July and may not be eligible for any of the extensions because of the timing of how they expire.

"How is that fair?" she asked.

Against the dreary statewide numbers the Bay Area does better.

The San Francisco metropolitan area, which includes San Mateo and Marin counties, continued to show the best results in California, with a December unemployment rate of 8.9 percent, down slightly from a revised 9.2 percent in November.

In the combined East Bay job market of Alameda and Contra Costa counties, the unemployment rate dipped to 10.9 percent in December from a revised 11.4 percent the prior month.

The South Bay counties of Santa Clara and San Benito had a combined December jobless rate of 11.5 percent, compared with 11.9 percent in November.

Jon Haveman with Beacon Economics said one hopeful signal in an otherwise bleak statewide report was another tiny increase in temporary hiring, the fourth in as many months. Employers generally boost temp hiring before they add full-time positions.

Overall, Friday's figures suggest the state's job market is at or near the bottom and is now bumping along until it hopefully turns up.

"We're waiting for some sort of spark," said EDD spokeswoman Patti Roberts.

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