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New Jobless Claims Inch Up

U.S. jobless claims edged slightly higher last week to start 2026, but remained near the low end of levels seen over the past year.

About 208,000 people filed new claims for unemployment benefits in the week through Jan. 3, versus 200,000 a week earlier, according to figures released by the Labor Department on Thursday. Economists polled by The Wall Street Journal were expecting to see 210,000 claims this past week.

Continuing claims, a gauge of the size of the total unemployed population, ticked higher to 1.91 million in the week through Dec. 27, from 1.86 million the week before. The continuing- claims data lag the initial- claims numbers by a week.

The weekly jobless-claims data has provided some of the strongest evidence that layoffs have remained limited. Yet since recruiting has slowed markedly, many workers are caught in an uncomfortable low-hire, low-fire stalemate, where jobs aren't disappearing but new opportunities are challenging to find.

A more complete update on the labor market is due Friday when the Labor Department publishes the December jobs report. Economists polled by the Journal expect to see that employers added a net 73,000 jobs last month, with the unemployment rate falling by one-tenth of a percentage point to 4.5%. Note

—Matt Grossman

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