

# Jobless rate goes up by 22K

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The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits jumped last week but remains in the same historically low range of the past few years.



Applications for jobless aid for the week ending Jan. 31 rose by 22,000 to 231,000 from the previous week, the Labor Department reported Thursday. That's significantly more than the 211,000 new applications that analysts surveyed by the data firm FactSet had forecast.

Applications for unemployment benefits are seen as representative of U.S. layoffs and are close to a real-time indicator of the health of the job market.

A number of high-profile companies have announced job cuts in the past year, including UPS, Amazon and Dow just last week.

On Wednesday, the Washington Post laid off one-third of its staff, eliminating its sports section, several foreign bureaus and its books coverage in a widespread purge at the storied newspaper owned by billionaire Amazon founder Jeff Bezos. A private company, the Post did not disclose how many people it has on staff, making it impossible to estimate how many people were laid off.

Mounting layoff announcements in the past year, combined with the government's own sluggish labor market reports, has left Americans increasingly pessimistic about the economy.

Last month, the government reported that hiring remained subdued in December, capping a year of weak employment gains that have frustrated job seekers even though layoffs and unemployment remained historically low.

Employers added just 50,000 jobs last month, nearly unchanged from a downwardly revised figure of 56,000 in November, according to the Labor Department. The unemployment rate slipped to 4.4%, its first decline since June.

January's jobs report, which was scheduled for release Friday, has been delayed due to the partial government shutdown earlier this week.

The U.S. economy gained just 584,000 jobs in 2025, an average of around 50,000 per month. That's sharply lower than that more than 2 million added in 2024, which amounts to an average of nearly 170,000 per month.

The 2025 numbers represent the smallest annual job gains since the COVID-19 pandemic decimated the job market in 2020. Outside of recessions, it's the slimmest annual increase since 2003.

The Labor Department on Thursday also reported that U.S. job openings fell in December to the lowest level in more than five years, another sign that the American labor market remains sluggish.

Vacancies fell to 6.5 million in December from 6.9 million in November and the fewest since September 2020. Layoffs rose slightly.

The data has revealed a labor market in which hiring has clearly slowed, hobbled by uncertainty raised by President Donald Trump's tariffs and the lingering effects of the high interest rates the Fed engineered in 2022 and 2023 to tamp down a spike of pandemic-induced inflation.

The Federal Reserve, in an attempt to shore up a softening labor market, trimmed its benchmark lending rate by a quarter-point three straight times at the end of last year. However, last week the U.S. central bank left its benchmark lending rate unchanged in the midst of a broadly improving economic outlook and what officials called a stabilizing labor market.

Thursday's report from the Labor Department also showed that the fourweek moving average of jobless claims, which balances out some of the week-to-week gyrations, rose by 6,000 to 212,250.

The total number of Americans filing for jobless benefits for the previous week ending Jan. 24 grew by 25,000 to 1.84 million, the government said.