

The December Review

Our initial article for the December 2010 *Monthly Labor Review* is a complex and detailed examination of the impacts on employment of the bursting of the housing bubble in the United States a few years ago. One of the primary culprits of the boom-and-bust cycle was the growth in nontraditional mortgage products, which may have allowed the dynamic growth of housing sales and prices in the first half of the 2000s to advance in a less restrained manner than would have been the case otherwise. BLS economist Kathryn J. Byun uses input-output data published by the BLS Employment Projections Program to estimate the number of residential-construction-related jobs that were attributable to “bubble-related demand” and to estimate the growth in the number of residential-construction-related jobs over the 1996–2005 decade. She tells the story of how that demand subsequently fell and provides various estimates of the deleterious effects on jobs and the economy that ensued.

Advances in information technology have created new opportunities for workers to perform their jobs away from their traditional places of work. The second article this month is by Bureau economists Lucy P. Eldridge and Sabrina Wulff Pabilonia, who examine the implications that the phenomenon of workers bringing work home may have for BLS productivity measures. They find that about 8 percent of nonfarm business employees bring some work home, mostly to finish or catch up on their work. Those who bring work home work more hours per week, on aver-

age, than those who work only at the workplace. They do not find evidence, however, that this difference leads to an overstatement in measures of productivity growth.

Our Regional Trends department this month contains a report by Sally L. Anderson examining the duration of unemployment among the U.S. States during the years 2007, 2008, and 2009. As the recession that began at the end of 2007 deepened across the country, it is not surprising—but is nonetheless disconcerting—to see the average duration of unemployment on a State-by-State basis shift so dramatically from shorter to longer spells. This trend is more stark testimony about the rapid deterioration in labor market conditions brought on by this steep downturn.

Women in the labor force

A report recently released by BLS underscores just how remarkable the changes in women’s labor force activities have been in the past several decades. *Women in the Labor Force: A Databook* contains myriad facts and figures illustrating trends towards greater attachment to the labor force. The subjects covered vary widely and include workforce participation, unemployment, educational attainment, job displacement, earnings, and other topics.

The 2010 edition, containing data through 2009, introduces three additional tables providing information on women by employee tenure, by employment status of veterans, and on persons with a disability.

The report can be found at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-databook2010.htm>.

More about the 2007–09 recession

The unemployment rate and employment-population ratio are two of the most important measures of labor market health. BLS has released a report in its *Issues in Labor Statistics* series that compares changes in these measures during the recent recession with those in past downturns. The comparison is illuminating and sobering. As the report states, “The jobless rate increased more sharply and the employment-population ratio decreased more precipitously during the 2007–09 recession than in any of the other post-WWII recessions.” Using a series of charts and tables to illustrate his findings, Bureau economist James M. Borbely provides a succinct and readable analysis of the behavior of these crucial indicators during the last five recessions.

In coming months, watch the *Monthly Labor Review* for a number of articles regarding the labor market effects of what is commonly being referred to as the “Great Recession.”

The *Issues in Labor Statistics* report discussed here can be found online at <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ils/pdf/opbils88.pdf>. □

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