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Trends in DC's Unemployment Rate

Unemployment in the District rose sharply in the Great Recession that started in 2008, and then started to fall in 2010. Despite recent progress, the current unemployment rate — 7.4 percent in February 2014 — remains far higher than the 5.5 percent rate in 2007 before the recession hit (see Figure 1, Table 1).

Moreover, there are tremendous disparities in how unemployment has fallen. As a result of the District's uneven economic recovery, many groups — including minorities, young residents, and residents without college degrees — continue to face unemployment rates that are far higher than before the recession started, while unemployment levels have returned to pre-recession levels for some groups of residents.

The unemployment rate is calculated by dividing the number of people who are unemployed and looking for work into the total labor force. It is important to note that the unemployment rate does not reflect people who are not looking for work, including discouraged workers, and it also does not include those employed part-time who are seeking full-time work. This means that the unemployment rate may understate the challenges residents face in looking for appropriate work.

Month	Total Unemployed	Unemployment Rate (%)
Jan-10	35,548	10.4
May-10	34,961	10.1
Sep-10	35,008	10.1
Jan-11	35,006	10.0
May-11	35,359	10.2
Sep-11	35,783	10.2
Jan-12	33,865	9.6
May-12	33,478	9.2
Sep-12	32,904	8.9
Jan-13	32,240	8.6
May-13	31,437	8.5
Sep-13	30,016	8.2
Oct-13	29,285	8.0
Nov-13	28,572	7.8
Dec-13	27,936	7.6
Jan-14	27,227	7.4
Feb-14	27,391	7.4

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (seasonally adjusted)

African-American and Hispanic DC residents face considerably higher unemployment than White, non-Hispanic residents, with rates at 17 percent, 8 percent, and 3 percent respectively in 2012 (see Figure 1). Unemployment for African-American and Hispanic residents remains two-thirds higher than at the start of the recession.

Residents without college degrees also face much higher unemployment — nearly 1 in 5 cannot find a job (see Figure 3). While unemployment among college educated residents is low and has largely covered from the recession — just 3 percent — unemployment among all other groups of DC residents remains far higher than in 2008

Young workers have the highest unemployment rate, approximately 16 percent, of all age groups. (See Figure 2.) Workers ages 25-54 have an 8 percent unemployment while those 55 and older face a roughly 7 percent unemployment rate.

Unemployment Resources

Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Local Area Unemployment Statistics,” <http://www.bls.gov/lau/>

DC Networks Analyzer, “Labor Force Information,” <https://analyzer.dcnetworks.org/>

DC Fiscal Policy Institute, “Falling Short: The District’s Economic Recovery is Leaving Several Groups Behind,” <http://www.dcfpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/3-4-14-State-of-Working-DC-FINAL.pdf>

