

The February Review

This very full issue of the *Monthly Labor Review* publishes research and findings on quite disparate labor market topics. Work schedules, productivity trends, wage variation, and employment patterns among young people are among the topics covered. The articles published this month reflect the depth and breadth of labor market data and analyses currently being produced.

Such depth and breadth are suggested in this month's cover illustration, itself prompted by our initial article, authored by four Bureau economists. Commonly known data on net labor market outcomes—unemployment rates being a familiar example—are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of understanding the full extent of labor market dynamism. BLS now regularly issues a number of data series that depict the remarkably fluid nature of actions taken by employers and employees on a continual basis: businesses opening and closing, expanding and contracting; employees being hired, quitting, or being laid off; workers shifting between employment, unemployment, and being in and out of the overall labor force. Potential analyses of these data series, succinctly described in the article, allow for a much richer understanding of current economic conditions. What lies beneath merits close attention, indeed.

Sometimes aggregate measures such as overall pay trends may mask substantial variety beneath the surface. As reflected in the title of their article, Krista Sunday and Jordan Pfunter ask probing questions about how wages vary among workers in the same job within the same business establishment. They review

previous studies on this subject and suggest a number of factors that contribute to wage spreads, including pay compression, tenure-based pay scales and how narrowly job systems are defined within a business. They primarily use occupational pay data from the Bureau's National Compensation Survey, and in innovative ways.

Trends in education among young people and how such trends relate to workforce preparation, career choice, skills development, and other socioeconomic phenomena are always of interest to guidance counselors, educators, parents, and employers. The article by Teresa L. Morisi, which examines over two decades worth of data from the Current Population Survey, highlights shifts in school enrollment and work patterns among teenagers since the mid-1980s. Is it too pithy to say that school is in, work is out?

Trends in labor productivity—often thought of as being among the key determinants of societal living standards—are closely watched by researchers and policymakers. The marked growth in output per hour in the latter half of the 1990s was one of the most widely noted and reflected-upon developments of the long economic expansion in that decade. Three BLS economists update us on trends since the beginning of the new century, and find that productivity gains are continuing in many industries, but—again looking below the surface—what accounts for that growth differs in some pivotal ways from what came before.

Our fifth and final article this month, by Harriet B. Presser, Janet C. Gornick, and Sangeeta Parashar examines the extent of nonstandard work hours in several European countries. They provide substantial context

and discussion for the consequences of workweek reduction measures adopted in those countries, specifically in regard to when employees' hours are worked and gender differences thereof.

Skiing employment: East and West

While for some people the winter months are best spent indoors in front of the fireplace with something warm to drink, for others it's the time of year to hit the slopes. Data from BLS' Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages show that trends in skiing employment between the eastern and western halves of the Nation have "sloped" differently in recent years. Jobs in Colorado, California, and other western States have edged their way up, while those in eastern States, such as Pennsylvania and New Hampshire, have slid down. One of the biggest determinants of employment each season in the ski industry, not surprisingly, is the weather and concurrent amount of snowfall.

An online version of a report in PDF format describing these findings can be found at www.bls.gov/opub/ils/pdf/opbils64.pdf. □

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