

### The July Review

Summertime is generally the peak period of labor market activity for young workers in the United States. July, in fact, is the traditional peak of employment for workers age 16–24. The number of people from this age group who are in the labor force grows sharply each summer, as large volumes of high school and college students take or search for summer jobs and many recent graduates enter the job market to search for more permanent forms of employment.

The lead article this month, by Gary Martin, provides a portrait of the youth labor market in 13 countries from 1980 to 2007. Examining data primarily compiled by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development for industrialized nations ranging from the United States and Canada to Japan and Korea, Martin examines trends for youth in terms of population, participation in the labor force, unemployment, schooling, and work experience. He places emphasis particularly on unemployment and long-term joblessness trends, finding that unemployment during the period studied tended to be higher than in the 1960s and 1970s.

The July issue in recent years has been the vehicle for taking a look back at developments in producer prices during the previous calendar year. As Joseph Kowal depicts, 2008 was a year full of abrupt and striking movements, particularly in relation to the previous year. After the Producer Price Index (PPI) surged in 2007—by 6.2 percent, the largest calendar-year advance since 1981—it ended 2008 with a decline of 0.9 percent, the first over-the-year drop since 2001. The 2007 increase carried over into the first half of 2008 and was primarily driven by the prices of crude energy

materials (such as crude petroleum, natural gas, and coal), which rose nearly 60 percent during the first 7 months of 2008. Prices for intermediate and finished energy goods followed a similar pattern, rising 25 percent and 19 percent, respectively, through July. All 3 indexes subsequently declined sharply, as did the overall PPI. Producer prices for other goods, such as food, acted in a similar way, rising sharply in the first half of the year and then declining later.

One question frequently asked in households, particularly, perhaps, in the middle of an exasperating plumbing repair, is “Should I do this myself or hire someone else?” The article by Rachel Krantz-Kent examines the time Americans spend performing unpaid household work, or, in other words, undertaking services for themselves or their families that could be purchased from outside the home. “Unlike work that is done for pay,” the author notes, “about which there are a number of timely statistical measures—persons employed, hours worked, earnings generated, and others—the resources involved in doing unpaid household work are less frequently quantified.” She examines data gathered over the 2003–2007 period from the American Time Use Survey to shed light on the extent of these activities, including cooking, cleaning, lawn care, grocery shopping, and the like. Differences in who performs these activities, broken down by age and sex, are one of the article’s specific focuses.

The July issue is rounded out with an examination of new data on the nature of the 12- to 20-year-old farm workforce that is employed by people other than the youths’ parents—in other words, nonfamily youths. The authors shed light on the characteristics of farm or ranch operators who temporarily hire such people, how

they find the employees, the nature of the tasks they expect them to perform, and the skills they believe are necessary to get a variety of agricultural tasks done.

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### A BLS milestone anniversary—continued

It was noted in this column last month that the Bureau of Labor Statistics has been celebrating its 125th anniversary. On June 26 at its national office in Washington, D.C., BLS hosted a number of distinguished luminaries at a commemorative event attended by hundreds of employees and watched via streaming video by more in the Bureau’s network of Regional Offices. The speakers, introduced by BLS Commissioner Keith Hall, included Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis; Christina Romer, Chair of the President’s Council of Economic Advisers; and Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, chair of the Joint Economic Committee. Two former Commissioners, Janet Norwood and Kathleen Utgoff, also participated in the proceedings. Another guest was Ben S. Bernanke, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, who, as part of his remarks, said the following: “Over its 125 years, the BLS has built a reputation for providing timely and accurate economic information. The close relationship that the Bureau’s economists and statisticians maintain with researchers—both those in government and in academia—cultivates that exemplary performance. Researchers’ insights have led to better analysis and higher quality data. Moreover, the Bureau is committed to undertaking the innovations and improvements necessary to ensure that its economic statistics effectively measure and provide insight into an ever-changing economy.” □