

GEORGIA NEWS

Georgia's robust job numbers ignore Fed's efforts to cool things down



Job seekers meet with recruiters during 2023 ATL Airport Career Fair at the domestic terminal atrium of Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, Wednesday, March 8, 2023, in Atlanta, GA. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL) hosts its first 2023 ATL Airport Career Fair on Wednesday, March 8 in the Airport's Domestic atrium. This annual large-scale hiring event seeks to connect metro Atlanta's highly skilled workforce with industry-leading employers who help run the world's busiest airport. Qualified applicants will have the opportunity to apply for over 2,300 positions including managerial roles and jobs with airlines, cargo, maintenance,...

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The Georgia economy jumped off to a strong start this year, adding 16,600 jobs in January as the unemployment rate stayed at a historically low 3.1%, the state Department of Labor said Thursday.

The state, which pre-pandemic lost jobs on average in previous Januarys, has expanded by 159,600 jobs during the past year, seeing especially robust hiring in hospitality and health care — sectors that together accounted for nearly half the month’s new positions, according to Bruce Thompson, labor commissioner.

In the past 12 months, the economy has grown at a 3.5% pace, he said. “Georgia continues to lead the nation in job creation while outpacing the nation with low unemployment numbers.”



campaign by the Federal Reserve to damp down inflation by slowing the economy. The economy's defiance of the Fed has been generally good news for workers — rising wages and the leverage to leave undesirable jobs.

The state in January had 161,750 workers listed as unemployed, that is, without a job and actively searching for one. That is 22,000 fewer unemployed than before the pandemic, despite the expansion of the population since then.

Additionally, many people who had not been looking for jobs have returned to the labor market, which grew in January. That growth is often a sign that people who aren't working believe there are jobs to be had.

And there are, Thompson said: his agency has 129,000 job listings on its online jobs site — more than one-fifth of them in health care, including many nursing positions.

Nearly half of U.S. hiring managers say they have open positions they cannot fill, and most of those having trouble say they aren't getting enough applicants, according to a Harris Poll survey commissioned by [Express Employment Professionals](#), a staffing company.

Georgia ranks 15th in "tightness," that is, in how hard it is for employers to fill positions, according to an analysis by [Revelio Labs](#), a New York-based firm that crunches employment records. The tightest job market is Massachusetts, where it is hardest to fill an opening and takes employers the longest time. Tennessee is the loosest market.

The tighter the market, the better for workers.

But inflation is still higher than the Fed wants it to be, so like a flapping red flag in front of a bull, robust growth in jobs and wages will keep the Federal Reserve charging more to borrow money — which could eventually tilt the labor market back toward employers, said Mark Hamrick, chief economist for Bankrate.



“Inflation has remained sticky,” he said. “The Federal Reserve appears determined to boost interest rates and to keep them high for longer.”

There are some signs that the economy has at least decelerated.

Nationally, [claims for unemployment benefits](#) are at their highest point in five months. But Georgia may be better-positioned than most states to weather a downturn, [said Rajeev Dhawan](#), director of the Georgia State Forecasting Center, during his quarterly conference last week.

And while new jobless claims in Georgia were also up from the end of 2022, filings were still slightly lower last month than they had been in the same month pre-pandemic.

Another window on the local economy is coming later this month, when the state releases its jobs report for February.

Georgia’s unemployment rate

Lowest, pre-pandemic: 3.4% (Dec. 2000)

Highest, pre-pandemic: 10.9% (Nov. 2009)

Recent: 3.2% (Jan. 2023)



Best, pre-pandemic: 20,000 (2019)

Worst, pre-pandemic: -34,200 (Jan. 2009)

Average, pre-pandemic: -1,200

Recent: (Jan. 2023): 16,660

Georgia, new jobless claims, January

Average week, 2019: 10,969

Average week, 2020: 12,110

Average week, 2021: 31,928



Change in labor force*, January

Average, pre-pandemic: 4,649

Recent: 5,620 (Jan. 2023)

*Labor force includes all working or actively looking for a job

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Georgia Department of Labor, U.S. Employment and Training Administration



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