

on various factors: the state of the labor market, the actions of the individual himself, of employers, etc. In any case, there is no direct information of this kind on a regular monthly basis. However, this study does attempt to measure indirectly the extent of unemployment accounted for by the several major components of frictional unemployment: seasonal fluctuations in employment; job mobility; entrance into the labor market; and structural dislocations in the economy. It should be pointed out, however, that the tools for measurement are imprecise in many respects. Furthermore, the categories of unemployment as they are measured in this report cannot be considered exhaustive or even mutually exclusive; there is some degree of overlap that cannot be readily estimated.

It is in the measurement of structural unemployment that our present data are least adequate. However, studies of the characteristics of the unemployed in relation to the duration of their unemployment provide much light on this subject, since structural unemployment is more likely than other types to result in long-term unemployment. In addition, entirely apart from its value as a measure of the underlying nature of unemployment in periods of full employment, a study of duration is important in its own right from the standpoint of personal and social welfare; the duration of unemployment is probably more significant than the causes, although a knowledge of the latter is vital for remedial action.

The focus of this study is a detailed description of unemployment in the period 1955-57, years for the most part of high and rising employment. The unemployment rate averaged 4.3 percent of the labor force during this period. The availability, for the first time, of some unique forms of data was also a significant factor in determining the period for study. See appendix II, chapter I, for additional discussion of these matters.

THE EXTENT OF SHORT-TERM FRICTIONAL UNEMPLOYMENT

There are many temporary situations in the working lives of individuals that generate unemployment even in periods of relatively full employment. The general striving of workers to improve their economic and social status often involves a job shift and a brief period of unemployment. The high rate of voluntary mobility in the United States is frequently cited as an important reason why the level of frictional unemployment in this country is significantly higher than in virtually any foreign nation. A special retabulation of information from the 1956 Census Bureau study relating to job mobility indicates that groups who left their jobs to improve their status, or because of dissatisfaction with the kind of work or conditions of employment, accounted for about 15 percent of unemployed persons. Moreover, it is estimated that if these persons had been subject only to unemployment from causes other than job mobility, total unemployment in 1955 would have been reduced by about 10 percent. (See ch. III.)

A more significant factor in determining the level of frictional unemployment is the effect of entry of new workers into the labor market (or the reentry of workers—mainly married women—who have been temporarily out of the labor force). These entries are estimated to account for roughly one-fifth of the unemployed total in an average month (ch. II).