

In a "normal" year unemployment is almost 50 percent higher at its peak in June than at its low point in October.⁶ This variation in the number of unemployed is tied to the annual cycle of weather and crop developments and to our social customs and traditional industrial patterns.

Part of the frictional unemployment associated with entry into the labor force is seasonal. The largest regularly recurrent rise in unemployment, which occurs in June, is directly connected with the summer recess in the school year. About 40 percent of the unemployed in June 1957 could be described as seasonally unemployed; they represented mainly the inevitable proportion of students who experience an interval of joblessness when they enter the labor force at the end of the school term. This is one facet of seasonal unemployment—the unemployment of entrants into the labor force who generally have not held full-time jobs before. This group is discussed in some detail in the section on gross changes in the labor force.

There is another facet which results from the layoff of workers in industries bound to the weather or to the agricultural cycle—in farming, canning and food processing, construction, lumbering, railroad transportation—or from layoff connected with social and commercial customs such as the post-Christmas lull in retail trade or the regular introduction of new automobile or television models at various times in the year.

A declining seasonal demand for workers does not always lead to a proportionate rise in unemployment. Most of the peak needs in agriculture are met by unpaid family workers or by young summer workers who leave the labor force during the slack periods. Some of the employees at Christmastime already hold other jobs; when their seasonal jobs are finished they continue with their regular employment.

SEASONAL UNEMPLOYMENT IN 1957

The seasonal unemployment contributed by individual industry divisions is of particular interest because it relates mainly to the unemployment of regular wage earners and because it indicates the source for the periodic increases in total unemployment. In 1957 workers in the construction industry had the highest rates of both seasonal and nonseasonal unemployment.⁷ On the average, 10½ percent of the construction industry workforce was unemployed in any month in 1957; about two-fifths of this unemployment could be termed "seasonal."⁸

The next largest group, both in seasonal and nonseasonal unemployment, were hired workers in agriculture. Of their total unemployment rate of 5.8 percent, 2.4 percent was seasonal—also about 40 percent (table IV-2).

⁶ This represents the spread in the seasonal adjustment factors. In 1957, June unemployment was actually 33 percent above the October level.

⁷ See the appended technical note for an outline of the procedure used in estimating the proportion of seasonal unemployment.

⁸ The statistical procedure for measuring average seasonal unemployment is not sufficiently flexible to include all of the seasonal unemployment in a specific period. The effects of unseasonable variations in weather, for example, cannot be taken into full account.