

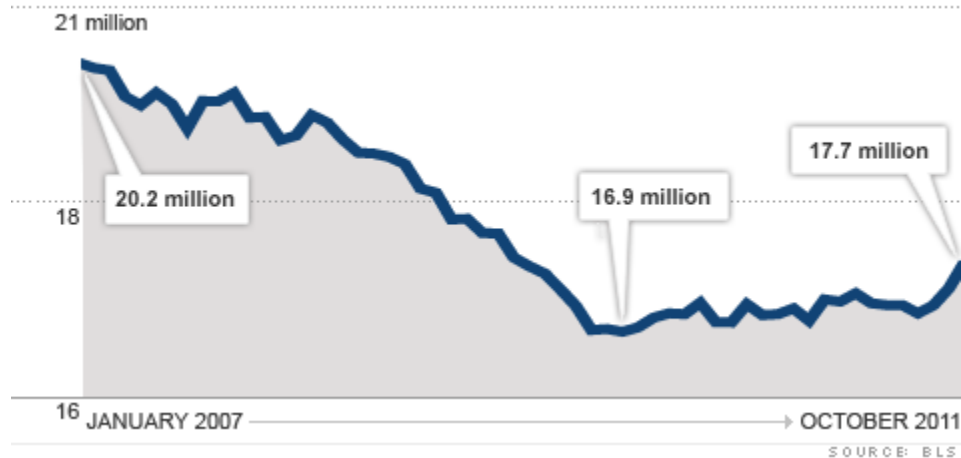


Young workers getting hired again

By Tami Luhby

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YOUNG WORKERS GETTING HIRED AGAIN



The total number of employed people ages 16-24 is on the rise.

NEW YORK (CNNMoney) -- Young workers are landing jobs again.

Some 650,000 workers aged 16 to 24 found employment in the past three months, the biggest spike for that age group since the recession began, according to Labor Department statistics.

Young Americans were hit harder than most other groups during the Great Recession. Dubbed by some as "the lost generation," the unemployment rate for college graduates age 24 and younger hit an all-time high in 2010.

More broadly, the percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds with jobs fell to as low as 44.6% of their age group, down from 52.2% at the start of the recession.

Certainly, people of all ages suffered. But the share of those in their working prime, age 25 to 54, who had jobs fell only 5 percentage points to 74.7% at its worst, while the percentage of employed older folks held fairly steady.

Since August, however, young people have been flooding the workforce. They account for nearly two-thirds of the rise in employment in the past three months, with older workers making up the rest. Those in the middle saw their employment levels drop by 212,000.

Still, labor market experts say the revival may not be so rosy for those just starting out. Many economists say it may not last, particularly if there's another downturn. Younger workers are often the first to get fired.

"This is a promising indication, but the question is whether it will continue," said Harry Holzer, a professor at the Georgetown Public Policy Institute.

Also, experts worry about the quality of the jobs. It would be great if companies were bringing on young workers and training them so they can one day move up the employment ladder, said Paul Ashworth, the chief U.S. economist at Capital Economics. But it's more likely that these folks are getting retail or restaurant jobs, which usually don't pay very well.

"I'm not sure it's such a good sign," Ashworth said of the employment bounce.

Many young workers have given up on their career aspirations for the time being, experts said. Instead, they take jobs out of their fields or go back to school to ride out the economic storm. Some settle for part-time work, while others are just sitting on the sidelines.

The competition for positions is particularly intense for younger workers, since workers have their pick of candidates, many with much more experience who are willing to work cheap, said Carl Van Horn, director of Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University. That can be discouraging for those trying to land their first jobs.

"They've just given up," he said of younger workers.

Economists will find out whether younger workers continue to find work on Friday, when the Labor Department releases its November data.