

Job-Seeking Teens Might Get a Break This Summer

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Teenagers looking to make some money this summer could have an easier time finding a job than in recent years, if the economic momentum of the last few months holds up.

That would be a welcome turn of events for the youngest generation of workers, who have had an incredibly tough time finding work after so many years of a weak economy.

"Young people have been hit the hardest by all this," said Harry Holzer, a professor of public policy at Georgetown University who studies low-wage work.

Holzer said the good news for young people is overall job growth has been relatively strong for the past few months. Plus, other sectors of the economy, such as the housing market, also appear to be improving.

But by this summer, teens also could find their job prospects hurt by other factors weighing on the economy, such as the government belt-tightening due to the sequester. "It's a mixed picture," Holzer said.

Managers who plan to hire hourly summer workers expect to add an average of 30 workers this year, up from 27 last year, according to a survey conducted on behalf of the job placement company Snagajob. The Ipsos survey of 1,005 seasonal hiring managers found that 68 percent plan to hire summer workers this year.

They should find plenty of willing applicants.

The unemployment rate for 16- to 19-year-olds was 25.1 percent in February, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. That compares with 14.9 percent in February 2007. The nation officially went into recession in December 2007, and the weak recovery began in June 2009.

The unemployment rate, which includes only people who are actively looking for a job, is seasonally adjusted to account for variations such as more teens employed in the summer.

The overall unemployment rate for all working Americans fell to 7.7 percent in February, the lowest level in four years, as the economy added 236,000 new jobs.

The March unemployment report is due out Friday, and economists will be watching closely to see if the momentum in the job market continues.

Teens have always had more trouble finding a job than adults. Still, the recession and weak recovery appear to have made it especially hard for young people trying to dip their toe in the working world.

"These are people in a tough job market who have the least skills (and) the shortest work history," said Paul Ashworth, chief North American economist for Capital Economics.

Ashworth said the good news for young workers is that some of the recent job growth has been in sectors such as leisure and hospitality that tend to employ younger, less skilled workers.

Younger workers also tend to be cheaper and less in need of health benefits, and that could be appealing to cost-conscious employers.

Ashworth also noted that American teens are much better off than young people in countries such as Spain or Italy, which have grappled with drastically higher jobless numbers for younger workers.

But he conceded that American teens haven't had it too easy, either.

"Young people probably have suffered unduly, but being brutally honest that's often the way it goes in recessions," Ashworth said.

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