

Job offers-to-seekers ratio averaged record low 0.47 in '09

Kyodo News

The average ratio of job offers to job seekers dropped to a record low in 2009, down 0.41 point from the previous year to 0.47, the government said Friday.

The ratio, the lowest since the survey began in 1963, means there were only 47 job offers for every 100 job seekers. In December, the ratio stood at 0.46, up from 0.45 in November, marking a fractional increase for the fourth consecutive month.

The unemployment rate averaged 5.1 percent in 2009, the highest since 2003, when it hit 5.3 percent, the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry said.

Last year's jobless rate jumped a record 1.1 points from 2008, it said, adding that the average number of jobless people in 2009 also increased to an all-time high since 1954, when comparable data became available, rising by 710,000 to 3.36 million.

Hit by the 2008 global economic crisis, unemployment turned significantly higher, rising steadily from 4.1 percent in January to a record high 5.7 percent in July and staying above the 5 percent since then, though it has improved slightly in recent months.

The seasonally adjusted jobless rate in December unexpectedly fell to 5.1 percent from 5.2 percent in the previous month, a preliminary report by the internal affairs ministry showed.

The rate was slightly lower than the average 5.3 percent forecast by economists in a Kyodo News survey.

"The (unemployment) rate improved slightly. But it is far from giving grounds for optimism," Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama told reporters at his office Friday morning.

The jobless rate for men fell 0.1 percentage point from the previous month to 5.3 percent, while that for women rose 0.1 point to 5.0 percent.

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