

National Foundation for American Policy

January 4, 2021

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New Research: Unemployment Rate in Computer Occupations Declined to 2.3% in November 2020, Below 3.0% Level in January 2020

Tech Employment Data Undermine Basis for Administration Proclamation Blocking H-1B Visa Holders and Others

Arlington, Va. – The unemployment rate for individuals in computer occupations was 2.3% in November 2020, lower than the 3.0% unemployment rate in January 2020 (before the pandemic spread in the U.S.), according to [an analysis](#) of the Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) Current Population Survey by the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP). These are the same occupations in which most H-1B visa holders work. In a slightly broader category, computer and mathematical occupations, the unemployment rate declined from 3.0% in January to 2.4% in November 2020, according to BLS.

Active job vacancy postings advertised online in computer occupations were at 731,762 in the United States as of November 17, 2020, an increase of 17% over May 2020, according to Emsi Job Posting Analytics. Compared to May 2020, 11 of the 12 computer occupations had an increase in active job postings. In December 2020, there were 773,844 active job vacancy postings advertised online in computer occupations in the U.S., an increase of 24% since May 2020, with 10 of the 12 occupations increasing in active job vacancy postings from 12 months earlier. These and related economic indicators show that computer occupations have weathered the pandemic well, particularly when compared to other occupations.

The data also call into question the Trump administration's [decision on December 31, 2020](#), to extend until March 31, 2021, two proclamations that block the entry of H-1B visa holders, employment-based immigrants and others.

The study, "Employment Data for Computer Occupations for January to November 2020," can be found at <https://nfap.com/>.

The Trump administration's use of section 212(f) of the Immigration and Nationality Act is unprecedented, both in blocking entire categories of immigrants and temporary visa holders, and in citing unemployment rates as a justification. The Trump administration issued proclamations blocking the entry of immigrants (on April 22, 2020) and H-1B, L-1 and other temporary visa holders (on June 22, 2020). The overall national unemployment rate declined by more than 50% since the first proclamation was issued, falling from 14.7% in April to 6.7% in November 2020. Between January 2009 and November 2013, the [national unemployment rate](#) was above 6.7% every month, according to BLS, and the president at the time did not consider blocking the entry of nearly all immigrants and temporary visa holders, nor would economists have advocated such an action.

The data indicate stability and actual declines in the unemployment rate in computer occupations and for computer and mathematical occupations. The data contradict the Trump administration's decision both to institute and extend the proclamations. The extension of the two proclamations on

December 31, 2020, did not contain any evidence on the need for the proclamations based on unemployment in computer occupations or related fields.

The data also contradict Trump administration statements in regulations that “good cause” exceptions to the rulemaking process and emergency actions were needed to impose new restrictions on H-1B visas for high-skilled foreign nationals due to unemployment caused by Covid-19. The highest computer and mathematical occupation unemployment rate in 2020 was 4.6% (in August), but since the year 2000 there have been 51 months with an unemployment rate in computer and mathematical occupations higher than 4.6% and no previous president or federal agency viewed those periods as requiring emergency measures to restrict legal immigration. The analysis updated earlier NFAP studies on employment in computer occupations.

Table 1
U.S. Unemployment Rate in Computer Occupations

OCCUPATIONS	JANUARY 2020	NOVEMBER 2020
Computer Occupations	3.0%	2.3%
All Other Occupations	4.1%	6.5%

Source: National Foundation for American Policy estimates using Bureau of Labor Statistics' Current Population Survey, January and November 2020. Not seasonally adjusted. Computer occupations include Computer and information research scientist, Computer and information systems manager, Computer hardware engineer, Computer network architect, Computer programmer, Computer support specialist, Computer systems analyst, Database administrator and architect, Information security analyst, Electrical and electronics engineer, Network and computer systems administrator, Software developer, Software quality assurance analyst and tester, Web and digital interface designer and Web developer.

About the National Foundation for American Policy

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