

Labor Market and Economy Report:

A Look at Trends in January 2026

Sharp insights for well-rounded people.

Aston Carter's monthly Jobs Report offers insights into current market demand and trends across accounting and finance; human resources and talent acquisition; and supply chain and procurement. The report corresponds with the release of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' monthly data. Specifically, readers can expect to learn about:

- Job growth
- Unemployment trends
- Labor categories and industries
- Labor force participation rates
- Job quits and layoffs
- Wages
- Other important news impacting the labor market

 **130K**

Jobs Gained in January

U.S. employment increased by 130,000 jobs in January. Job growth was driven by healthcare, social assistance and construction, while federal government and financial activities lost jobs.

 **62.5%**

Labor Force Participation Rate

The labor force participation rate increased by 0.1% to 62.5% in January, indicating little change in the share of the population that was working or actively seeking work.

 **4.3%**

Unemployment Rate

The unemployment rate declined from 4.4% in December to 4.3% in January. Unemployment rates close to 4.0% suggest a small supply of workers who are unemployed and actively seeking work.

 **1.8M**

December (2025) Layoffs

Layoffs increased from 1.7 million in November to 1.8 million in December. Quits were unchanged at 3.2 million. Note that quits and layoffs data lag one month behind other employment data.

January 2026 Market Trends

A closer look at unemployment by industry and labor category



Overall unemployment rate

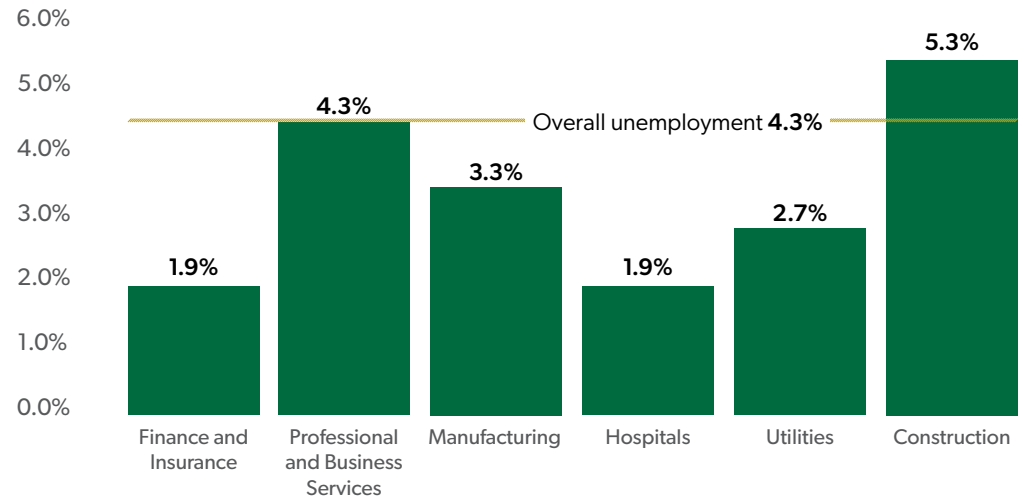


Unemployment rate for
degreed workers

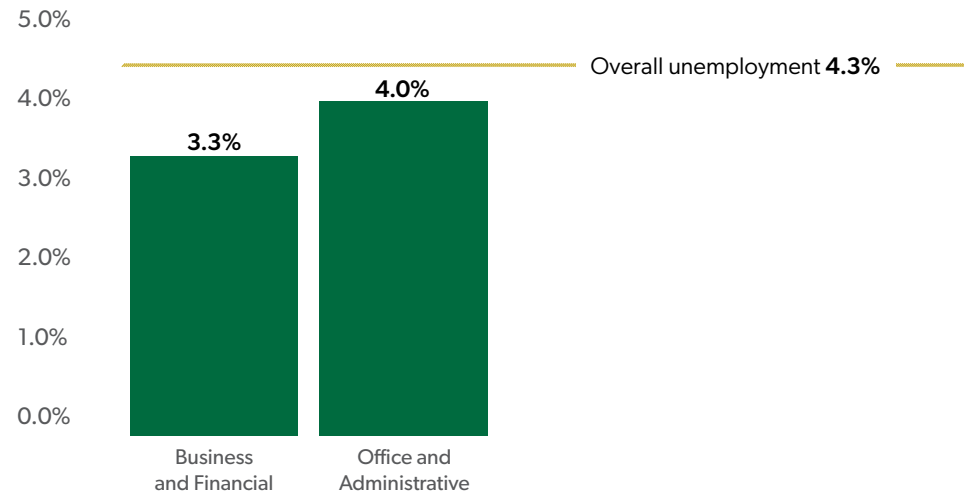


Ratio of unemployed workers
(procurement clerks, AP/AR,
and other core office and
administrative roles) available
per job opening

Unemployment Rates by Industry



Unemployment Rates by Labor Category

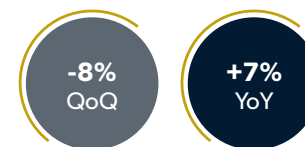


Due to frequent data revisions and statistical noise on a month-to-month basis, Aston Carter employs a rolling 3-month average to best represent unemployment by labor category or industry.

TRENDS

OVERALL ECONOMY

In January, U.S. employment unexpectedly grew by 130,000 jobs and the unemployment rate fell to 4.3%. However, following its annual benchmark revision, the BLS now estimates that employment rose by just 181,000 jobs in 2025, far below the previously-estimated 584,000. According to the CRS, benchmark revisions are often large when employment trends shift unexpectedly, as BLS models struggle to capture off-trend changes. Many experts attribute growing challenges in employment measurement to declining survey response rates, changing employment patterns, budget cuts and staff turnover. Overall, the revisions reinforce the current labor market's "low-hire, low-fire" character and highlight how uneven job growth has been, with healthcare accounting for most gains.



ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE

In 2026, the theme for AI in accounting and finance work will be all about delivering on promises. The potential is widely understood, and the risks are largely defined, but whether costly, time intensive investments will actually meet business needs remains the biggest question. Gartner's latest CFO survey found that only 36% of CFOs are confident their teams are equipped to drive AI impact. At the same time, tax complexity is increasing. New legislation (OBBBA) is reshaping requirements, and 2026 marks the first major compliance year for Pillar Two (the global minimum tax framework) for U.S.-based multinationals.

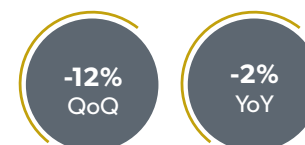
Job postings for Accounting Managers increased by 17% quarter-over-quarter (QoQ), while Treasury Analysts saw a 9% QoQ increase. This growth reflects heightened interest rate volatility and puts a premium on risk management expertise.



HR AND TALENT ACQUISITION

Across nearly every dimension, HR and Talent Acquisition teams are operating in a far more complex environment than just a few years ago. New DEI requirements, immigration changes, evolving return to office (RTO) policies and a sharp rise in state specific regulations have accelerated the pace of change management. Meanwhile, AI has had mixed impacts. While it brings clear efficiencies, it has also introduced significant friction, most notably by increasing noise in job applications and talent pipelines. Easy-apply features and AI driven skills matching have overwhelmed traditional screening and rendered many matching algorithms less effective. Hiring platform Employ estimates the average job posting now receives 250 applicants, with some roles drawing many times that number.

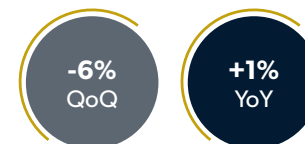
Job postings for HRIS Analysts and Specialists increased 9% quarter-over-quarter (QoQ), while companies hiring for Technical Recruiters jumped 7% QoQ and 27% year-over-year.



SUPPLY CHAIN AND PROCUREMENT

Tariffs are not disappearing anytime soon, and companies are adapting to a state of constant change by emphasizing continuous scenario modeling, multi region sourcing expertise, alternative supplier relationships and landed cost recalculations, among other tactics. Shortages and capacity constraints have re-emerged as key challenges. Copper, electronic memory and injectable drug components are the latest pressure points affecting the manufacturing, mining, automotive products and parts, medical supply and pharmaceutical sectors.

Job postings for Logistics Specialists surged 23% quarter-over-quarter (QoQ) as inventory and logistics needs rose, while postings increased 11% QoQ for Pricing Managers and 5% QoQ for Procurement Analysts amid price renegotiations and material costs changes.



Wages in the United States

How they've changed

+2.4%



Consumer Price Index

The consumer price index (CPI), a measure of inflation, increased by 2.4% for the 12 months ending January, down from 2.7% in December 2025. At its January meeting, the Federal Reserve maintained interest rates, citing signs of stabilization for the unemployment rate and ongoing uncertainty about the economic outlook.

+3.7%



Wage Increases

Average hourly earnings increased by 3.7% for the 12 months ending January. This was unchanged from December's year-over-year increase (revised down from 3.8%).

+1.2%



"Real" Earnings

Real average hourly earnings increased by 1.2% between January 2025 and January 2026. In other words, despite average hourly earnings increasing by 3.7% year-over-year, workers may only feel as if they're making about 1.2% more, on average, due to inflation.

References

OVERALL:

[Current Employment Survey Benchmark Revisions](#)

[Job Growth Was Overstated, New Data Shows](#)

[January 2026 Jobs Report: Revisions to 2025 Data Made an Already Bad Year Worse](#)

ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE:

[A big year for AI in accounting](#)

[Gartner Survey Shows Top Priorities for CFOs in 2026 Include Cost Optimization](#)

HR / TALENT ACQUISITION:

[The Real Cost of Candidate Fraud](#)

[48 State-Specific HR Compliance Changes for 2026](#)

SUPPLY CHAIN / PROCUREMENT:

[Supply chain shortages: What's at risk in 2026](#)

JOB POSTING DEMAND INTELLIGENCE (%'S GROWTH AND CHANGE)

[Lightcast, 2025](#)

About Aston Carter

Aston Carter provides world-class corporate talent solutions to thousands of clients across the globe. Specialized in accounting, finance, human resources, talent acquisition, supply chain, procurement and select administrative professions, we extend the capabilities of industry-leading companies. We draw on our deep recruiting expertise and expansive network to meet the evolving needs of our clients and talent community with agility and excellence. With offices across the U.S., Canada, Asia Pacific and Europe, Aston Carter serves many of the Fortune 500. We are proud to be a ClearlyRated Best of Staffing® double diamond winner for both client and talent service.

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