
16.8 Million Out of Work in US, 'Uncharted Territory' Economists Warn

By: Telesur
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The United States Department of Labor announced Thursday that 6.6 million more people filed unemployment claims last week, bringing the three-week total to roughly 16.8 million, meaning about 10 percent of the nation's workforce has become jobless during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

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"Unprecedented. Unheard of. Uncharted territory. These are phrases I use all the time now but they are deeply inadequate for describing what's going on," Economic Policy Institute (EPI) senior economist Heidi Shierholz said.

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Yet the real numbers could be even higher because state unemployment offices around the country have been overwhelmed with claims, and some people have been unable to get through by telephone or website.

Also "claims figures in recent weeks don't include people who aren't eligible for regular unemployment insurance

but are nevertheless out of work due to the virus—people like independent contractors, those who had to quit work to care for a child whose school closed, and those who don't have long enough work histories," Shierholz and fellow EPI economist Elise Gould.

"In other words, coronavirus job losses are greater than what today's numbers show," they added in a joint statement. And still, more job cuts are expected as the U.S. is far from 'flattening the curve' of infections, the country reported Thursday over 462,000 cases.

For this reason, both economists agree that the next relief and recovery package should provide aid to state and local governments, extend unemployment insurance benefits, and provide better protection for workers. Also, incentivize employers to keep workers on the payroll in order to minimize job losses.

Last week U.S. economists at the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis [warned](#) that if the current rate of job losses continue the country's unemployment rate could reach 32.1 percent, the highest in nearly a century.

As CNBC noted, that number would be "more than three times worse than the peak of the Great Recession," which in 1929 peaked at 25 percent unemployment.
