

## An Uptick in Unemployment Could Be a Good Sign

Vermont's unemployment rate ticked up slightly—to 5.8 percent in December from 5.7 percent in November. In reality, joblessness was unchanged; the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics did not consider the rise statistically significant. Still, the new numbers may mean things are looking up. The rate increased, in part, because more Vermonters moved into the labor force. This may be a simple result of population growth. But it might also mean that people who had stopped looking for work felt optimistic enough about their job prospects to try again.

### A Program to Avoid Layoffs Sees a One-Year Spike

Work sharing spiked in 2009 as Vermont employers reduced their labor costs in response to the recession but didn't want to lose skilled workers. Work sharing, also known as the Short-Time Compensation Program, is an alternative to layoffs. It allows workers to receive unemployment insurance as partial compensation for having their hours reduced. Businesses must meet specific [requirements](#), and all work-share plans must be approved by the Vermont Department of Labor. But the program allows both employers and employees to avoid the cost and hardship of total unemployment.

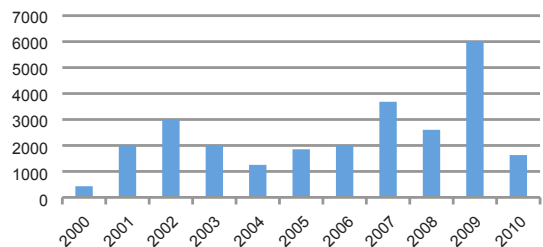
### Unions Represent a Smaller Share of Vermont Workers

The share of employed Vermonters represented by unions shrank in 2010, according to new figures from the U.S. Bureau of Labor. Just 11.8 percent of Vermonters working were union members in 2010, and unions represented 13.6 percent of workers, including those who were not members but were covered by union contracts. Vermont ranked fourth in union membership among the New England states, the same as in 2009.

	Dec. 2010	Nov. 2010	Dec. 2009
Labor Force	358,600	357,400	358,500
Employment	337,900	336,900	334,600
Unemployment	20,700	20,500	23,900
Rate	5.8%	5.7%	6.7%

### Work Sharing Up in 2009

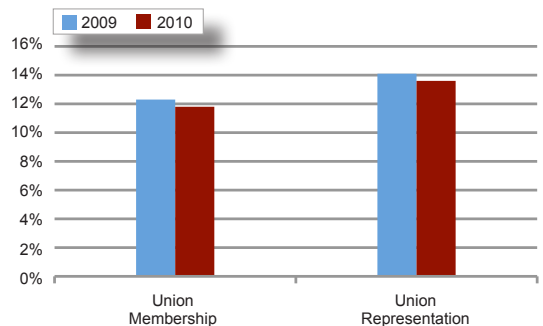
Employees in Vermont work-share programs



Data source: Vermont Department of Labor

### Lost Ground For Organized Labor

Percentage of Vermont jobholders represented by unions



Data source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics