

U.S. unemployment stays at 7.8 pct in December

WASHINGTON, Jan. 4 (Xinhua) -- The U.S. economy added 155,000 jobs in December and the unemployment rate remained unchanged at 7.8 percent, the Department of Labor said on Friday.

The jobless rate was stable at a four-year low of 7.8 percent, down nearly a percentage point from a year earlier.

Payrolls in private sector grew 168,000 and the governments of all levels slashed 13,000 jobs. The overall job increase was in line with market expectations but slightly lower than the level for November.

Gains on employment were distributed broadly throughout the economy, from health care and construction to manufacturing.

Employment growth averaged 153,000 per month in 2011, the same as the average monthly gain for 2011.

The number of unemployed Americans was little changed at 12.2 million. And the number of long-term unemployed, people who had been jobless for more than 6 months, stood at 4.8 million, accounting for 39.1 percent of the total unemployed.

Average hourly earnings for all employees rose by 7 cent to 23.73 U.S. dollars. It has increased 2.1 percent over the past year.

The changes in total job creation was revised from 138,000 to 137,000 for October, and from 146,000 to 161,000 for November.

The job gains, which generally met market expectation, eased the concerns that the uncertainty over "fiscal cliff" could deliver a hard blow to the job market.

Earlier this week, the U.S. Congress struck a deal to avoid the "fiscal cliff," blocking massive tax hikes and immediate government spending cuts which were originally scheduled to take effect in January and threaten the economy with a recession.

However, analysts argued the budget deal, which left a host of thorny issues untouched, will sow the seeds for another showdown, and they predicted the deal will still dampen U.S. economic growth in 2013.