

Unemployment and What it Means for Hunger in NYC

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by *Ashley Baughman*

The recession is not likely to end any time soon for most New Yorkers.

This month the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the January unemployment rate in New York City was 10.4 percent (almost 412,802 people) — more than double the city's 4.8 percent unemployment rate at the start of the recession, and higher than the current national rate of 9.7 percent (14.9 million people).

And these figures don't even include workers who are unemployed but have not looked for a job in the past four weeks or underemployed workers who are seeking full-time work but were forced to take a part-time job. If these groups were included, the US's total unemployment rolls would include *26.2 million people*.

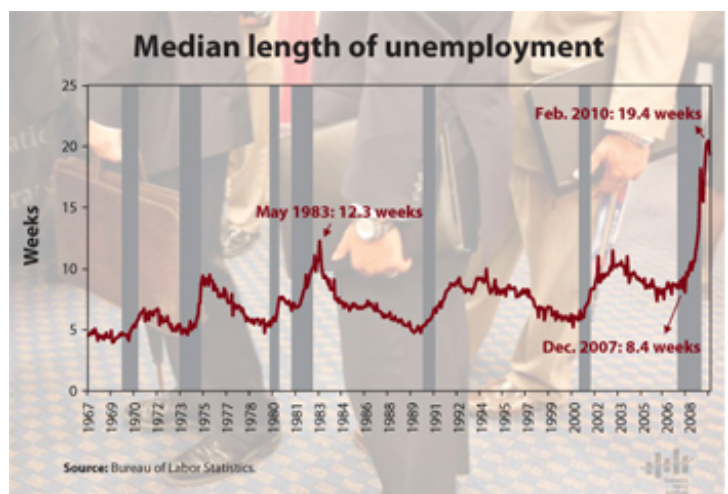
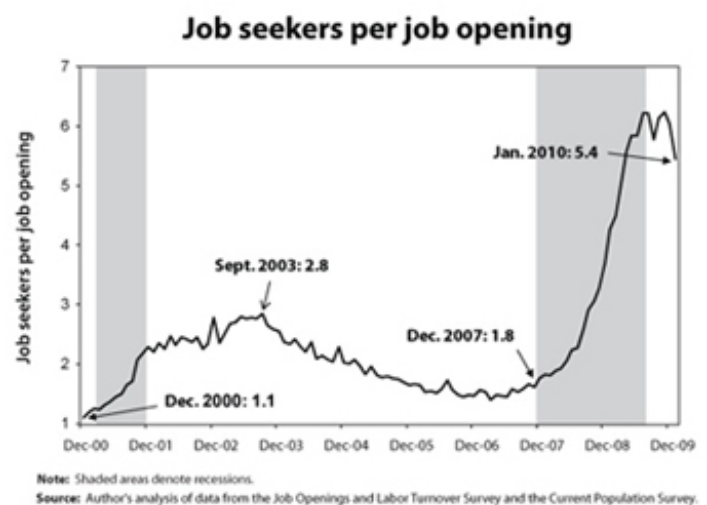
As a result, more people are now trying to fill fewer and fewer jobs. Analysis conducted by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) found there are now **5.4 workers for every job opening**, up from 1.7 at the start of the recession. That means the **length of time workers are unemployed** is also rising: laid-off workers now spend more time unemployed than at any other time on record — a median of almost five months.

Higher rates of unemployment and poverty mean more people will be forced to choose between food or rent, utilities and other necessities when allocating scarce dollars. January is the sixth, consecutive month of double-digit unemployment in our city, and **local soup kitchens and food pantries** are already feeling the effects: in the past year, more than 90 percent of our city's emergency food programs have reported an **increase in the number of people seeking assistance**.

Alleviating hunger caused by high unemployment in New York City will require the preservation — even the expansion — of safety nets like the city's **Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP)**, which provides food to hundreds of soup kitchens and food pantries.

It will require the implementation of policies like **Universal School Meals**, which help more **children** from low-income families gain access to needed food while creating jobs in school kitchens and cafeterias.

And it will require the implementation of sustainable solutions — a **living wage**, more affordable



housing and lower health care costs — that would help struggling families afford food, even during difficult times.