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## Jobless rate eases to 5.3% in January

By CZERIZA VALENCIA

Unemployment eased in January but the number of Filipinos seeking full time work or additional jobs increased, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported yesterday.

Results of the PSA's January 2018 Labor Force Survey showed the unemployment rate fell to 5.3 percent from 6.6 percent in 2017.

At the same time, the employment rate grew to 94.7 percent in January 2018 from 93.4 percent in the same period the previous year, translating to 41.8 million employed Filipinos.

The pool of potential workers widened as indicated in 62.2 percent labor force participation rate in January 2018 from 60.7 percent in January 2017. This was derived from a labor force population of 70.8 million consisting of Filipinos aged 15 and above.

More women are also opting to balance careers and household duties as reflected by the rise in the female labor force participation rate to 47.5 percent in January 2018 from 45.2 percent in January 2017.

"This reflects the sharp de-

cline in the number of economically inactive married women and females who opt out of the labor force due to household duties," said the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) in a statement.

Among those employed, more than half (55.9 percent) were in the services sector. Workers in the agriculture sector comprised the second largest group, making up 26 percent of total. The rest were engaged in the industry sector, particularly in the manufacturing and construction subsectors.

A little over a fourth of Filipinos —27.6 percent—were engaged in so-called elementary occupations or simple and repetitive tasks which are usually manual labor. Managers comprised the second largest occupation group (16.3 percent), followed by service and sales workers (14.7 percent), and skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers (13.1 percent) in January 2018.

In terms of compensation, most Filipino workers (61.7 percent) were salaried employees. The rest were self-employed and unpaid family workers.

"These improvements in

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the labor market indicate that more Filipinos are encouraged to join and re-join the labor force, and that more people are being employed. This signals that the economy is responding positively to the economic reforms and programs that the government has been laying down," said Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto Pernia.

As employment rose, those looking for additional hours of work or additional jobs likewise increased, indicating the need for more quality employment. The underemployment rate in January 2018 rose to 18 percent from 16.3 percent in January 2017.

These underemployed workers render services for less than 40 hours in a week. Most of these workers (44.6 percent) are in the services sector.

Pernia said there is a need to attract more investments to boost productivity and create more high quality jobs.

"Despite these encouraging numbers, the government must continue to raise investments and improve productivity, which in turn, will help boost the productive sectors of the economy and encourage

the generation of higher quality employment opportunities," he said.

He also noted there is a need to move the labor force in the agriculture sector out of low-productivity jobs. This can be facilitated by shifting rice farmers to high-value crops, promoting crop diversification, accelerating development of local infrastructure and training farmers in technological advancements.

Among the unemployed, meanwhile, more than half (65.5 percent) were males and the majority (43.2 percent) were young workers aged 15 years to 24 years.

By educational attainment, 21.9 percent of Filipino jobseekers were college graduates while 13.7 percent were undergraduates. The rest completed high school and junior highschool.

Pernia said, however, that more jobs are expected to be created during the Duterte administration's infrastructure build up.

To further ease unemployment, Pernia said it may be time to put in place the legal and regulatory framework to allow part-time work especially in low-paying jobs.