State's jobless rate stays at 5.3%

By David Dykes
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South Carolina's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate held firm at 5.3 percent in June, reflecting no change since April, state officials said Friday.

Greenville and Lexington counties had the state's lowest jobless rate at 4.8 percent, although the rate for each was higher than a month earlier.

Greenville's rate rose to 4.8 percent in June from 4.3 percent in May. That figure was down from 6.8 percent in June 2013.

Statewide, an estimated 115,583 people were unemployed, an increase of 630

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from May, while the number employed decreased by 847 to 2,050,128, according to the state Department of Employment and Workforce.

Over the month, the labor force declined by 217 people to 2,165,711.

Economists have been watching closely to see if the state's economic momentum continued.

Some cautioned that the unemployment figure has multiple parts and said that rather than gauge the number of people without jobs, it's essential to assess employment gains.

At issue is whether people are dropping out of the workforce, frustrated that they don't have needed skills, or have been forced to retire.

Since June 2013, the state's unemployment rate has fallen by 2.5 percentage points as more than 35,000 people have found work, the DEW officials said. The labor force has dropped by 20,082 people, the officials said.

For June, economists predicted a good chance of gains in construction employment as well as continued gains in manufacturing.

Manufacturing employment rose by 300, but construction dropped by 600, according to the latest DEW data.

Bruce Yandle, a Clemson University economist, said the "large remaining question" had been health and education services employment and effects of the Affordable Care Act.

Employment in that sector rose by 1,600, DEW said.

Nationally, the unemployment rate declined to 6.1 percent in June, from 6.3 percent in May.