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Small businesses are hiring, and employment at smaller firms grew in Illinois and Indiana last month.

Intuit's December Small Business Indexes showed that companies with fewer than 20 employees added a total of 20,000 jobs in December.

The company makes financial, payroll processing and tax preparation software, such as QuickBooks and TurboTax. Intuit tracks data from about 210,000 small businesses nationwide that use either Intuit Online Payroll or QuickBooks Online Payroll, to provide nearly real-time insight into how small businesses are doing.

In December, small business employment continued to recover with an seasonally adjusted increase of 0.09 percent nationwide. Small business employment rose by 0.02 percent in Illinois, and 0.01 percent in Indiana.

“After no progress from May through October, small business employment has now resumed its slow rise for the second month in a row,” said Susan Woodward, an economist who works with Intuit to create the indexes. “For December, the growth rate is about one-tenth of 1 percent, for an annualized of just over 1 percent.”

Small businesses have added 555,000 jobs since March 2010, when they first started to crawl out of the recession. But the pace of job creation has been slow.

“Small business employment continues to recover even more slowly than overall employment,” said Woodward. “The recovery for non-farm payroll employment is just under 6 percent from the trough in February 2010, while the employment recovery for private payroll, not including government, is a bit over 7 percent. By comparison, small business recovery is only 2.8 percent for the same period.”

Though small businesses added jobs, workers compensation — including wages

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Employers also worked 0.16 percent fewer hours in December, a decline of about 12 minutes to 107.2 hours per month. Hourly employees at small firms averaged work weeks of 24.7 hours.

Revenue fell, dropping 0.19 percent per-business as compared to November. Small businesses in all industries except construction saw revenue decline. The largest drop was in the real estate services industry, where revenue decreased by 0.6 percent.

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