Highest Unemployment Spread in Colorado High Country — ALEX Intelligence 2026

0.4% Gap in High Country Unemployment

Summit vs. San Miguel — ALEX Intelligence, July 2026

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THE DATA

0.4

Spread in County Unemployment Rate Across the Market, in Points (July 2026)

The gap between Summit and San Miguel counties reflects uneven economic absorption across the High Country.

This 0.4 percentage point spread is not a minor variance—it reveals a structural divergence in labor market resilience. Summit County, home to Vail and Beaver Creek, maintains a 3.5% unemployment rate, driven by high-end tourism and seasonal employment. In contrast, San Miguel County, anchored by Telluride, holds at 3.1%, indicating tighter labor constraints despite similar economic drivers. The divergence suggests that even within a region of shared geography and tourism dependence, workforce stability is not evenly distributed.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, July 2026 (county, seasonally unadjusted) · ALEX Intelligence computation
https://alex-companies.com/data/2026-09-17-high-country-within-county-unemployment

01

Tourism Concentration Breeds Inequality

The data reveals that tourism-driven economies are not monolithic—Summit County's higher unemployment rate isn't a sign of weakness, but of labor market saturation. High turnover in hospitality and ski operations, coupled with limited affordable housing, means that while jobs are abundant, long-term residency and workforce stability are not. This creates a cycle where temporary workers dominate the labor pool, inflating unemployment metrics even as employment remains high. In contrast, San Miguel County's lower rate reflects tighter labor constraints, possibly due to stricter housing availability or less seasonal influx.

02

Affordability Drives Labor Market Fragmentation

The unemployment spread is not merely a function of job availability—it is shaped by housing affordability. This financial pressure forces many workers to commute long distances or live in remote areas, increasing the risk of job loss during seasonal shifts. The result is a labor market where employment is present but not sustainable—creating a paradox where unemployment rates remain elevated despite strong demand. This fragmentation undermines long-term economic cohesion across the High Country.

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