

## **Mexico 'maquiladora' plants create new jobs in January**

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MEXICO CITY, March 30 (Reuters) - Employment at Mexico's "maquiladoras", factories which send duty-free exports to the United States, jumped 0.65 percent in January compared to December as a manufacturing rebound took hold.

Jobs at the "maquiladoras" fell 0.5 percent compared to January 2003, the government said on Tuesday.

The maquiladoras, which import raw materials duty free from the United States and then ship the finished product back across the border, are expected to be the primary driver for Mexico's broad recovery in 2004 from a three-year slump.

Economists have said the rebound driven by greater demand in the United States -- where Mexico sends 90 percent of its exports -- is unlikely to translate into meaningful job creation until later this year.

However, January marked the sixth straight month of job growth on a monthly basis.

The maquiladoras employed 1,060,880 people in January, but they have shed about 200,000 jobs since their peak in 2000 as many multinational firms have opted to shift production to countries with cheaper labor -- especially China.

In the overall manufacturing sector, employment grew by 0.02 percent in January compared to December, the government said on Monday.