

Metro area job growth comparisons—2000 to 2024

Introduction: This review of employment changes compares the performance of the Pittsburgh region with several metro areas across the country that are not state capitals. It reviews private job gains as well as changes in government employment. The study looks at the growth from 2000 to 2024 (the last full year of data) and 2019 to 2024 to see the extent of recovery and growth since COVID in 2020. The employment in the Pittsburgh region is for the seven-county Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). In 2025, Lawrence County was added to the Pittsburgh MSA. But the BLS has not included it in the historical data. It will be included in 2025 and the years after.

Pittsburgh and comparison metro areas

The comparison MSAs reviewed include Buffalo; Charlotte; Cincinnati; Kansas City, Mo.; Newark and San Antonio. U.S. data are shown for comparison.

The BLS made downward revisions in national and Pennsylvania statewide employment from March 2024 to March 2025. Revised Pennsylvania numbers have been posted. Presumably, the Pittsburgh MSA data and other MSA data have also been revised where necessary.

MSA private-sector job growth

<i>MSA</i>	<i>% change 2000 to 2024</i>	<i>% change 2019 to 2024</i>
Pittsburgh	3.4	-1.6
Buffalo	-0.1	-2.3
Charlotte	45.1	9.9
Cincinnati	15.1	3.6
Kansas City, Mo.	18.5	4.8
Newark	3.4	3.5
San Antonio	61.9	9.8
U.S.	21.0	4.9

These data point out the extreme differences in economic and private employment growth among MSAs across the country. Pittsburgh, Buffalo and Newark had the weakest 24-

year increases in this group of MSAs. Interestingly, Newark had virtually no employment increase from 2000 to 2019 but saw a 3.5 percent uptick between 2019 and 2024.

Unfortunately, after five years, employment in the Pittsburgh MSA had not returned to the pre-COVID 2019 level. Even worse, Buffalo has no net gain over the 24 years after failing to recover to the 2019 job count. At the same time, Cincinnati fared reasonably well over both periods although it fell short of national gains over the two time periods. The same was true for Kansas City, even though the posted gains were respectable compared to the national increases. Four of the MSAs in this sample that experienced slower than national gains are in non-Right-to-Work states. Kansas City's MSA occupies land in both Missouri and Kansas. Kansas is a Right-to-Work state, Missouri is not.

Meanwhile, for the 24-year period, Charlotte (up 45 percent) and San Antonio (up 61 percent) recorded far above national employment growth rates. They were also up almost twice as fast as the national rate since 2019. Notably, these two MSAs are in Right-to-Work states that have been enjoying a strong period of growth and domestic migration from far less growth-oriented states. Natural population growth from births minus deaths could not provide the labor forces necessary to sustain such massive growth in jobs.

MSA government sector job growth

<i>MSA</i>	<i>% change 2000 to 2024</i>	<i>% change 2019 to 2024</i>
Pittsburgh	-15.7	-0.1
Buffalo	1.7	1.0
Charlotte	57.2	9.0
Cincinnati	8.2	2.2
Kansas City, Mo.	14.2	3.6
Newark	7.1	-1.2
San Antonio	34.9	9.2
U.S.	12.4	3.6

Notably, the Pittsburgh MSA posted a significant 15.7 percent decline in total government employment for 2000 to 2024. Interestingly, the Pittsburgh area had significantly fewer total government employees (117,200) than the other MSAs in this sample except Buffalo which is smallest in terms of population and total jobs in this group. Then, too, the Pittsburgh MSA had the lowest ratio of government jobs to private sector jobs in all three years examined (2000, 2019, 2024) than all other MSAs in the study group. In 2024 that ratio stood at 10.8 percent and far below the level of the faster-growing Charlotte MSA with its 14.7 percent government-to-private jobs ratio and its 176,200 government employees.

Of course, to a large extent, absent major state or federal offices or operations, local government employment should be closely related to population and population gains as well as the age distribution of the population. For example, a higher percentage of school-age children will normally require higher numbers of teachers and school employees. Other demographic factors can also play a role in public-services demand.

Population growth or loss also plays a large role in MSA employment level both private and government. For example, the Pittsburgh MSA (including Lawrence County) saw a decline of over 90,000 residents (-3.8 percent between 2000 and 2024). Thus, the weakness in both private and government employment is consistent with the population. In contrast, over the same 24 years, the Charlotte MSA population rose by 200 percent from 768,000 to 2,321,000. The substantial increase in government employment is not surprising in light of the very fast population growth.

Population and labor force

The Pittsburgh MSA has seen population decline since 2000, continuing the longer-term trend dating back to 1970. As a [Policy Brief](#) from earlier this year noted, the MSA lost over 400,000 residents from 1970 to 2024 with Allegheny County losing over 300,000 during the period.

Such a lower population count is very consistent with weak job growth. The MSA's labor force has not weakened as much as population, owing to factors such as female participation rates and age distribution of the population. The labor force grew slightly over 38,000 from 2000 to 2008 when it peaked at 1,279,087. Through 2024, the labor force has declined by just over 41,000 members since the 21st century peak of 2008. Thus, between 2000 and 2024, there has been a net drop of 3,000 labor force participants. That's far smaller than the decline in population.

Conclusion

Nonetheless, population losses do not bode well for labor force gains. At some point, the participation rate increases will not be enough to offset the population losses if they continue. In any case, as the data show, there has already been a great slowdown in Pittsburgh Metropolitan Statistical Area job gains—both private-sector and government employment during the 21st century.

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