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An 11-metro area comparison of employment growth 2000 to 2025

Introduction: A quarter of the 21st century has now passed with the 2025 economic performance in the historical data files. This *Brief* looks at the growth, or lack of growth, in private-sector employment for the nation, Pittsburgh and nine other metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) of the same general size as the eight-county Pittsburgh MSA. The Dallas MSA was also reviewed, although it is much larger than Pittsburgh and the other MSAs in the study group.

The comparison will look at the 25-year growth in jobs from 2000 to 2025 to get the longer-term perspective and the six-year period from 2019 to 2025 to evaluate the recent trend.

It is important to note that there were several periods of slow growth, or even declines, in jobs nationally during recessionary periods: 2000 to 2004 (2.5 million job decline); 2007-2012 (8 million job loss) and during COVID in 2020 and 2021 (8 million job decline).

Notwithstanding the recessionary periods, some of which were fairly long and painful, the 25 years from 2000 to 2025 saw a net private employment gain nationwide of 22.5 percent—24.6 million jobs. Virtually all the net job growth since 2000 occurred after 2013 with 21 million net jobs added over the 12 years despite the big setback caused by COVID in 2020. Indeed, that pattern holds for most MSAs that saw growth over the period.

Tabulation of 6-year and 25-year MSA job growth comparison

This section looks at the private-sector job performance during the COVID era, between 2019 and 2025, and longer-term, between 2000 and 2025.

The 2019-to-2025 period, shown in the table below, reveals the extent of recovery and growth over the period, including the sharp decline in jobs across the country as a result of COVID shutdowns and slowdowns. Some areas were harder hit than others, but all suffered job declines from 2019 to 2020. The rate of recovery has varied among the MSAs as the data show.

The MSA data are ranked from slowest to fastest growth as measured by the percentage change in private-sector employment over the period. U.S. total employment and percentage growth included in italics for comparison.

Private-sector jobs: 2019-2025		
Metro area	Percentage change	Total change
Hartford	-1.2	-6,000
Cleveland	-0.9	-8,700
Pittsburgh	-0.3	-3,600
Minneapolis	0.1	2,000
Portland, OR	0.7	7,500
Kansas City, MO	4.7	44,600
Indianapolis	8.9	84,400
Greenville, SC	12.4	46,000
Charlotte	12.6	137,000
Dallas	14.7	487,000
Raleigh	19.2	105,8000
<i>U.S.</i>	5.9	7,600,000

Clearly, with the exception of Indianapolis, sunbelt MSAs in this group have fared much better than the MSAs in the north, whether west or east. Notably, every MSA with fastest growth, including Indianapolis, is in a Right-to-Work (RTW) state. The very fastest gains were in RTW states of long standing. Indiana is a fairly recent addition having adopted RTW in 2012. Finally, note that all MSAs growing more slowly than the U.S. rate were in non-RTW states. Kansas City seems to hold the middle ground. Kansas City's positive growth could reflect the fact that 40 percent of its area is in Kansas (a RTW state) while the remaining 60 percent lies in Missouri (non-RTW).

The differences among MSAs in their rebound from COVID are emblematic of long-term differences in employment gains. The table below shows the performance of the same MSAs between 2000 and 2025.

For the first quarter of the 21st century (2000 to 2025) the MSAs are arranged by weakest to strongest jobs gains as measured by the percentage change in private-sector jobs growth.

Private-sector jobs: 2000-2025		
Metro area	Percentage change	Total change
Cleveland	-6.6	-67,000
Hartford	1.7	8,300
Pittsburgh	4.7	49,000
Minneapolis	13.8	211,000
Kansas City, MO	18.4	155,000
Portland, OR	27.1	230,800
Greenville, SC	28.7	93,000
Indianapolis	33.5	259,000
Charlotte	48.9	402,000
Dallas	53.6	1,330,000
Raleigh	78.5	287,000
<i>U.S.</i>	22.5	24,600,000

The weakest three MSA job gains over the period were the same three with the weakest growth from 2019 to 2025, namely Hartford, Cleveland and Pittsburgh, although not in the same order of growth rates. Similarly, the next three slowest—Minneapolis, Kansas City and Portland in the six-year time frame—also held the 4th, 5th and 6th ranking over the 25-year period, although Portland and Kansas City switched positions.

Greenville had the slowest growth among the top fastest growing MSAs, changing places with Indianapolis from the growth rates during the 2019 to 2025 period. The fastest three growing MSAs from 2019 to 2025 in this sample held the same position over the 25-year period with stunning rates of nearly 49 percent in Charlotte, nearly 54 percent in Dallas and over 78 percent in Raleigh. Cleveland and Hartford stand out as very weak while Pittsburgh jobs are only marginally stronger over the 25 years and remain slightly below the 2019 level.

The top five growth-areas, all in RTW states, enjoyed faster growth than the U.S. average. Portland was the only MSA among the non-RTW states to have surpassed the U.S. growth over the period.

The main conclusion is that MSAs in RTW states fared better in the aftermath period of COVID than MSAs in non-RTW states as the factors promoting faster growth were mostly still present.

Conclusion

These results point to dramatic differences in economic climates in the weak- and strong-growth states. While RTW is a powerful indicator, there is no doubt that other factors involving state government policies such as voter attitudes toward business, government spending priorities and local governance in general that determine economic development policies and thereby growth in the MSAs.

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