



The changing mix of jobs in the Pittsburgh metro area

Introduction: This *Policy Brief* reviews the changes (growth or decline) in establishment payroll employment over the period 1990 to 2025 for the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The analysis examines overall private-sector jobs, as well as major industry categories and changes over major time intervals, during the 35-years—a period long enough to evaluate long-term changes following the dramatic downturn in steel and related industry manufacturing from the 1950s through the 1970s.

Employment 1990 to 2025

The following table shows the 1990 and 2025 employment data for total private as well as the goods-producing and the private service-providing major sub-sectors.

Employment (000's)	1990	2025	Change	% Change
Total private	940.3	1,087.4	147.1	15.6
Private service-providing	745.9	933.5	187.6	25.2
Goods-producing	194.4	153.9	-40.5	-20.8

Over the period 1990 to 2025 private-sector employment rose 147,100 jobs (15.6 percent) with private service-producing jobs accounting for all the gains while goods-producing payrolls fell by 40,500 (20.8 percent).

From 1990 to 2000, total private employment rose by 108,300, the strongest 10-year interval during the period, accounting for two-thirds of the total 35-year increase. In the 1990 to 2000 interval, private-service-providing jobs climbed 102,500 and goods-producing jobs rose 5,800. Goods-producing employment rose during those 10 years on the strength of a pickup in mining and construction jobs while manufacturing fell by 2,300 employees.

During the recessionary period in 2010, total private employment fell by almost 25,000 compared to the 2000 number. However, following the downturn, total private employment gains returned over the next nine years, rising a cumulative 5.1 percent or 53,400 jobs from 2000 to reach 1.102 million in 2019. In 2020, jobs fell significantly because of the COVID epidemic.

Between 2019 and 2025, total private employment dropped by 14,600—from 1.102 million to 1.0874 million—and had not fully rebounded from the losses during the 2020 COVID downturn.

For comparison, during the 35-year period 1990 to 2025, the nation’s private jobs count rose 43.8 million or 48.1 percent, three times faster than the Pittsburgh MSA’s total jobs gain over the period. Indeed, for the U.S. growth to reach 48 percent there must be some states and metro areas that have grown faster than the U.S. average over the period. Two MSAs are used to show much faster growth that lifts the U.S. gain to 48 percent, well above the gains in the Pittsburgh MSA and other northern cities that once were national economic drivers. For example, private-sector employment in the Nashville MSA rose 122 percent over the 1990 to 2025 period while San Antonio MSA jobs climbed 136 percent during the 35-year period.

Pittsburgh MSA employment change by industry sector

This section looks at changes in employment levels by major subsectors for the Pittsburgh MSA in 1990, 2019 and 2025. This provides both a long term 35-year picture and a review of the recovery since COVID through 2025.

As noted earlier, total private employment climbed from 940,300 in 1990 to 1.102 million in 2019. In 2025, total private employment stood at 1.087 million, having failed to recover the job losses related to COVID. The following tables and discussion examine the changes in employment by major subsectors of goods and service sectors, including government.

Service-providing subsectors

Employment (000s)	1990	2019	2025
Private Education and Health Services	164.9	265.9	268.4
Leisure and Hospitality	91.3	123.3	121.4
Information	21.7	19.2	21.0
Trade, Transportation and Utilities	231.2	212.9	207.9
Retail Trade	135.3	122.2	114.8
Financial Activities	60.6	77.5	78.6
Professional and Business Services	128.6	184.6	186.3
Government	130.2	118.2	117.4

Goods-producing subsectors

Employment (000s)	1990	2019	2025
Mining, Logging and Construction	60.0 (2005)	76.9	66.5
Manufacturing	137.5	90.6	87.4

In the service-providing sector, two subsectors stand out as having strong employment gains during the 1990–2025-time frame. The private education and health services subsector posted the largest percentage gain at 62.8 percent—103,600 jobs. Most of that growth—101,000 jobs—came from 1990 to 2019. While there was some drop off during the pandemic, this subsector rebounded nicely. Professional and business services employment grew by 56,000 (43.5 percent) from 1990 to 2019 to reach 184,600 and then posted a small gain through 2025 to reach 186,400.

The leisure and hospitality (35 percent) and finance (27.8 percent) subsectors also posted modest gains over the 1990-to-2019 period. At the same time the trade, transportation and utilities

subsector, led by its subsector retail trade, and the information subsector suffered significant declines in jobs over the period.

Meanwhile, over the 1990 to 2025 period government employment—which includes public k-12 personnel—fell from 130,200 to 117,400—12,800 or 9.8 percent. Government jobs reached 132,700 in 2010 but lost 15,300 through 2025.

Manufacturing continued its long-term trend of losses that began well before 1990 as jobs fell by half from 1970 to 1990. From 1990 to 2019 employment in the sector fell by 46,900 or 34 percent. These jobs declined further through 2025 to 87,400. The 2025 reading amounts to 29 percent of the 1970 level. This figure is dramatically important because manufacturing employment and output have much larger multiplier effects on the local economy than most service sectors.

Mining, logging and construction employment rose by a solid 28 percent (16,900 jobs—60,000 to 76,900) between 2005 (the first available data) and 2019. Unfortunately, following 2019, this sector lost 10,400 jobs over the six years through 2025, a decline of 13.4 percent. The significant increase in mining jobs and the following decline likely reflected the advent of Marcellus Shale gas drilling and production in the period before 2019.

Conclusions

Pittsburgh MSA private-sector employment has lagged well behind national job growth for the 1990-to-2025 period. Very strong gains in private education and health services and professional and business services were significantly offset by a massive loss in manufacturing and a sizable loss in trade, transportation and utilities. Other sectors posted small or modest gains over the period.

Note, too, that population in the eight-county MSA was down over 143,000 or 5.5 percent over the 35 years. All but two of the counties suffered losses. Butler, a gain of about 30,000 and Washington with a gain of about 5,200.

Weak growth or falling employment is consistent with a declining economy. Manufacturing job losses can result in disproportionate wealth losses compared to other industry sectors. Population losses are consistent with fewer weaker employment opportunities relative to faster growth areas.

Political environment is also very important to employment and economic growth.

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