ALLEGHENY INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

November 11, 2026 **Policy Brief: Volume 26, Number 41**

Allegheny County and U.S. employment and GDP in the 21st Century

Summary: A quarter of the century's data is now in the record book, and it is a good time to look back at the economic performance of Allegheny County and compare it to the national performance. This *Policy Brief* focuses on two primary indicators of economic strength, gross domestic product (GDP) and the employee count.

Employment data are readily available through July 2026 for both measures of activity for the county as well as the U.S. Because 2020 was a recession year, it is not used for comparison of change in economic activity. Employment totals are compared for the changes over the periods July 2001-to-July 2019 and July 2019-to-July 2026. For GDP, comparisons are made for 2019-to-2024 because Allegheny County GDP data are available only through 2024.

Employment growth comparisons

Employment is a measure of all the job holders in both private and public sectors. Data are from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. July readings (typically the high point in the year) are used for each year compared. U.S. employment is reported in thousands while Allegheny County counts are actual reported figures.

Employment Count

	United States		Allegheny County	
July	Number (thousands)	Percent change	Number	Percent change
2001	131,930	--	628,978	--
2019	150,658	14.2	645,431	2.6
2026	158,709	5.5	635,259	-1.6

Allegheny County employment gains fared very poorly in comparison to the U.S. growth in both the 2001-to-2019 period and the 2019-to-2026 time frame.

Of course, the large differences in employment growth rates between the U.S. and Allegheny County reflect, to a large extent, the huge differences in population gains.

When jobs are not growing it is hard to sustain population growth and vice versa. The loss, or very slow growth, of private-sector jobs likely leads to people moving away to find employment elsewhere in the country. Then, too, as young people depart, population growth slows as an older population will have much lower birth rates.

Real Gross Domestic Product

Real GDP (2017 dollars)

	United States		Allegheny County	
Annual avg.	Amount (trillions)	Percent change	Amount (billions)	Percent change
2001	$14.2	--	$77.1	--
2019	$20.7	46.8	$102.9	33.5
2024	$23.4	13.0	$107.2	4.2

The relative strength in employment gains between the nation and the county is reflected closely in the growth in Allegheny County and U.S. Real GDP (RGDP) increases (data from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis). The last period—2019-to-2024—is especially dramatic with the county slowing to a paltry five-year gain of only 4.2 percent. County RGDP figures for 2025 should be available soon and it will be important to see if the very slow growth in jobs continues to be reflected with very slow RGDP growth.

In light of the weakness in job gains through 2026, it seems unlikely that a major increase in output will be posted. Clearly, the City of Pittsburgh, with its large population decline over the past few decades, is not likely to lead a major upturn in county employment.

Moreover, as discussed in a *Policy Brief* in November 2025, per capita real income gains in the county have been quite meager. Indeed, although Allegheny County's per capita income rose from $35,173 in 2001 to $77,685 in 2024, a rise of 121 percent and more than double the 2001 figure, unfortunately the price level rose by nearly 80 percent, holding the inflation adjusted income gain to just 21 percent.

Conclusion

The county has been beset by major structural changes to its employment mix with the manufacturing sector having major declines in the last decades of the previous century. While high tech holds promise, most of the future job gains will come in service industries. Education and healthcare will almost certainly carry much of the load in terms of having multiplier effects through the economy.

Universities, colleges and medical facilities are principal sources of strength for the city and the county. Other service sectors will undoubtedly be needed to share the burden of strengthening overall economic and employment growth.

Bear in mind that service-producing jobs have for many years dominated Pittsburgh-area employment gains and have seen their share of total employment rise from an already

high 82.8 percent in 2001 to 86.5 percent in 2019 and 89.5 percent in 2025. Unfortunately, generally speaking, service-sector employment does not have the multiplier effect that is associated with manufacturing or mining jobs.

Jake Haulk, Ph.D., President-emeritus

Policy Briefs may be reprinted as long as proper attribution is given.

Allegheny Institute for Public Policy
305 Mt. Lebanon Blvd.* Suite 208* Pittsburgh PA 15234
Phone (412) 440-0079
E-mail: aipp@alleghenyinstitute.org
Website: www.alleghenyinstitute.org
X (Twitter): AlleghenyInsti1