

Monroe County

2023 WORKFORCE PROFILE



2022 Wisconsin Overview

Wisconsin's economy broke numerous records during 2022, as the rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic continued.

During January through April, the state achieved a record low seasonally adjusted unemployment rate of 2.8%, while also achieving record lows in initial and continuing weekly unemployment insurance claims. As the number of unemployed people trended downward, construction employment reached a record high, and the manufacturing industry also experienced strong growth.

By year end, the state had regained 99% of the 404,000 jobs lost during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the short, sharp recession of March and April 2020. In addition to the strong rebound in jobs during 2022, Wisconsin's real GDP reached record highs and the state concluded the year with a record high state surplus approaching \$7 billion.

While Wisconsin's year-ending labor force participation rate of 64.6% remained more than 2 percentage points above the national average, demographic trends including the aging and retirement of Baby Boomers contributed to the labor quantity challenge. Concerns over inflation, compounded by China's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting supply chain disruptions, also defined the year.

As demand for workers grew throughout 2022, employers voiced concerns about their inability to attract talent and workers in general. This is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. The primary underlying challenge is the demographic situation as Baby Boomers exit the workforce. This lifecycle event will continue to complicate employers' ability to find workers and talent. These demographic problems extend beyond Wisconsin and affect the upper Midwest, the U.S. as a whole, much of Western Europe, and in fact, the developed world. Even China faces a talent shortage.

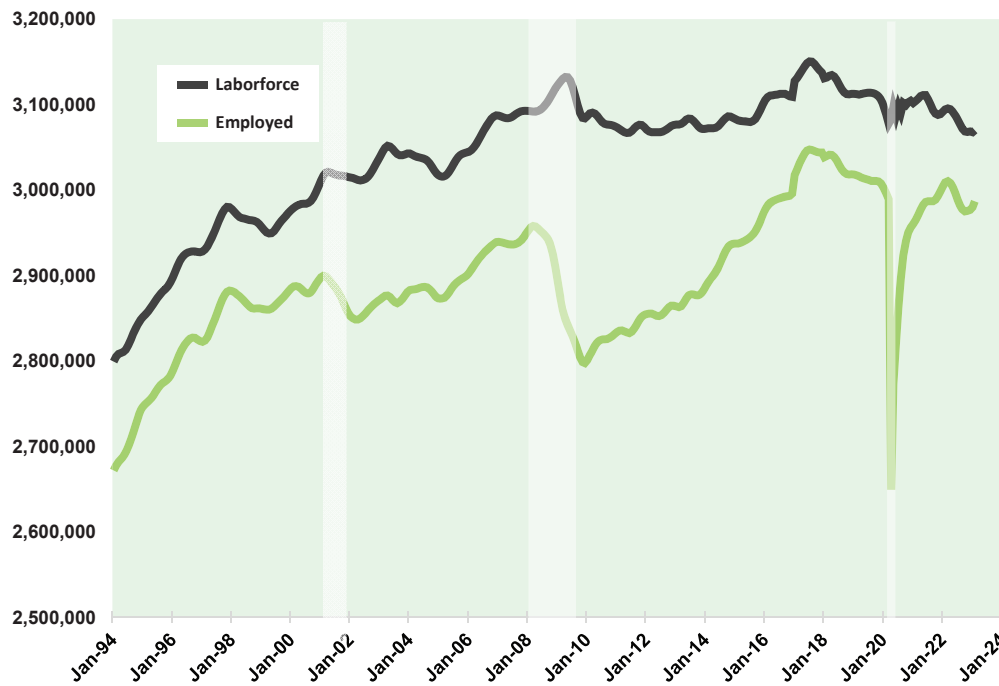


EMPLOYMENT

Wisconsin’s labor force held relatively steady through the pandemic, while employment dropped severely and then recovered quickly. See Graphic 1.

The employment gyrations pushed the unemployment rate to 14.1% in April 2020. As employment recovered, the unemployment rate fell to new lows of 2.8% in March and April of 2022. As of December 2022, Wisconsin’s seasonally adjusted unemployment is 3.2%.

Graphic 1: Wisconsin's Labor Force and Employment



Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Bureau of Labor Statistics

SHORT-RUN OUTLOOK

The short-run outlook for the state looks positive. Job levels continue at high levels, registering gains in 10 out of 12 months in 2022.

Job gains coupled with higher wages translate into healthy consumption, which makes up two-thirds of the economy. Wage gains have been robust. However, the surge in inflation brought about by supply chain disruptions and the war in Europe have undercut the gains in real terms. We expect high inflation to be transitory while wage gains will be permanent. With continued job and wage gains, consumption will be the underpinning of economic growth.

The most prominent economic risk is the Federal Reserve Bank (Fed) aggressively combatting inflation through higher interest rates. The Fed raised interest rates seven times in 2022 – going from essentially zero to 5%. They set a range of 25 basis points. As of March 1, 2023 the range is 4.7 – 5%. Interestingly, Fed fiscal policy contributed to inflation pressures over the last few years.

Experts expect that inflation pressures will ease as supply chains readjust. As inflation pressures ease, the Fed will be able to conduct a more accommodative monetary policy. Tighter fiscal policy will have an influence over the coming years as well.

Businesses continue to voice lack of workforce talent as the primary constraint on production growth. Pursuit of workers has brought about wage and benefit increases, signing bonuses, and other incentives to attract workers. However, other workforce barriers such as transportation, dependent care, housing affordability, and the uncertainty of workplace safety surrounding COVID-19. Solutions to these barriers are discussed below.

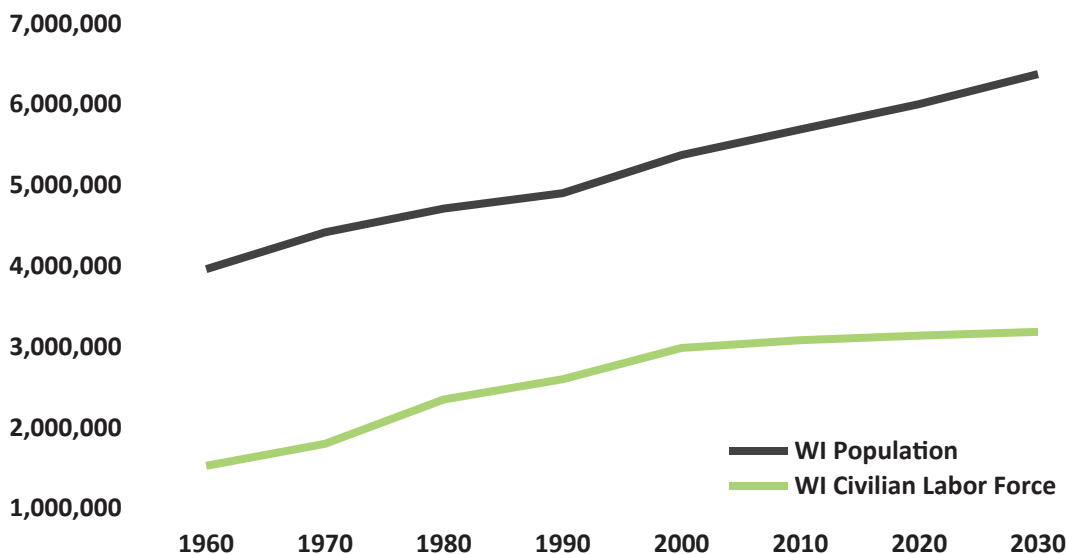
LONG-RUN CHALLENGE

Workforce quantity is the primary challenge facing Wisconsin's economic future. The demographic dynamics facing the state, other upper-Midwest states, the U.S., and most of the developed economies will advance unaltered in the coming decades.

While Wisconsin's population will continue to grow over the next 20 years, the workforce faces serious constraints. The labor force trend began to seriously flatten in 2008 after slowing in the late 1990s as the first baby boomers (those born in 1946) reached age 62 and began to leave the workforce. Baby boomers continue to exit the workforce in great numbers and will continue to do so over the next 20 years.

The number of retiring baby boomers nearly match the influx of new workers, resulting in a slow-growing workforce. This constrains employers' ability to secure talent across industries. Many businesses report that the lack of available workers has hindered expansion, and in some cases, even curtailed the ability to meet current business needs.

Graphic 2: Wisconsin Population and Labor Force



Source: WI DWD, OEA Special Tabulation

There are four solutions to the macroeconomic labor quantity challenge: 1) offshoring production, 2) immigration, 3) mitigating barriers to employment of the chronically unemployed, and 4) technological advancement. Critical to the technology solution is the concomitant match of labor skills with technologies' sophistication. This is true for designing, building, installing, operating, and maintaining the advanced technology being put in place as well as for development of the infrastructure and facilities needed to support technological progress: broadband, power, water, transportation.

Worker skills must align with skills demanded by the position. If you have the talent and not the job, the talent goes elsewhere. If you have the job and not the talent, the job goes elsewhere. For Wisconsin to successfully compete in the global economy, the state needs to attract and retain every body it can and educate and train everybody to match the requirements of the new technologies.

FOUR SOLUTIONS



Buffalo County

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Monroe County is Wisconsin's 31st most populated county with an estimate of 46,697 residents in 2022. The county registered population growth in five consecutive decades. It gained 423 residents in the first two years of the 2020s, or 0.9% of its population. By comparison, Wisconsin's population grew 0.9% and population in the United States rose 0.3% over the same period. Nine of the county's 10 most populous municipalities added residents. The Town of Angelo gained the most residents (107), while the Town of Byron lost one resident.

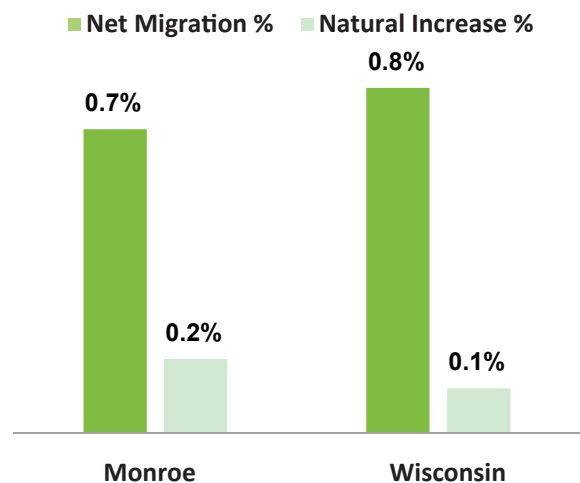
Graphic 3: 10 Most Populous Municipalities in County

	2020 Census	2022 Final Estimate	Numeric Change	Percent Change
Sparta, City	10,025	10,075	50	0.5%
Tomah, City	9,570	9,631	61	0.6%
Sparta, Town	3,253	3,258	5	0.2%
LaGrange, Town	1,948	1,948	0	0.0%
Angelo, Town	1,697	1,804	107	6.3%
Little Falls, Town	1,509	1,541	32	2.1%
Tomah, Town	1,488	1,488	0	0.0%
Byron, Town	1,234	1,233	-1	-0.1%
Cashon, Village	1,158	1,167	9	0.8%
Leon, Town	1,144	1,154	10	0.9%
Monroe County	46,274	46,697	423	0.9%
Wisconsin	5,893,718	5,949,155	55,437	0.9%

Source: WI Dept. of Administration, Demographic Services Center

Net migration and natural increase contribute to population change. A net migration rate of 0.7% in Monroe County indicates that there were more people moving into the county than exiting. This rate is lower compared to the statewide rate (0.8%). A natural increase rate of 0.2% means the number of births exceeds deaths in the county. This is largely a function of age and is expected to decline in the coming decade as the state's fertility rate has been below replacement level since 1975. Currently, births in the state exceed deaths by only 0.1%. Improving net migration could help mitigate long-run workforce challenges as baby boomers age out of the workforce. Net migration has an immediate impact on the county's labor force, natural increase provides some insights into the county's future labor force condition.

Graphic 4: Components of Population Change



Source: Demographic Services Center, WI Dept. of Administration

EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY

From 2020 to 2021, employment in the county increased by 252 jobs (1.2%) across all industries. This growth raised total employment to 20,597, 2.1% below the pre-pandemic level in 2019 (21,046). In comparison, Wisconsin's total employment grew by 2.4% over the year. However, the state's total employment was still 3.1% below its pre-pandemic level in 2019.

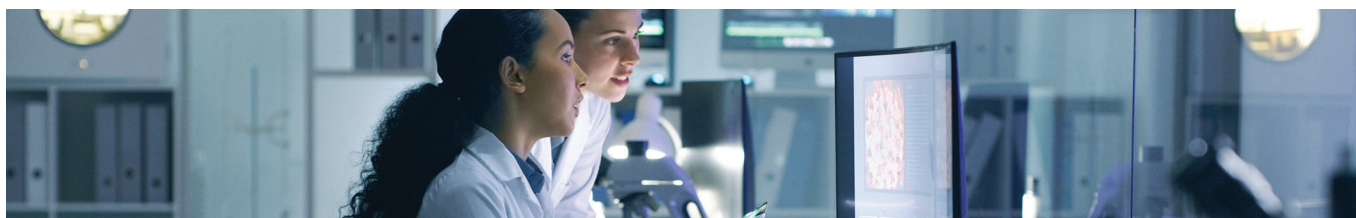
Graphic 5: Employment Change by Industry

	2021 Average Monthly Employment	1-year Numeric Change	1-year Percent Change	2-year Numeric Change	2-year Percent Change	Percent of Total Employment
Construction	691	37	5.7%	52	8.1%	3.4%
Education & Health Services	4,598	42	0.9%	-20	-0.4%	22.3%
Financial Activities	484	12	2.5%	-4	-0.8%	2.3%
Information	81	-5	-5.8%	-33	-28.9%	0.4%
Leisure & Hospitality	1,655	51	3.2%	-154	-8.5%	8.0%
Manufacturing	3,777	42	1.1%	-269	-6.6%	18.3%
Natural Resources & Mining	681	11	1.6%	-175	-20.4%	3.3%
Other Services	349	-19	-5.2%	-31	-8.2%	1.7%
Professional & Business Services	1,319	37	2.9%	-30	-2.2%	6.4%
Public Administration	2,169	-7	-0.3%	-8	-0.4%	10.5%
Trade, Transportation, Utilities	4,793	51	1.1%	225	4.9%	23.3%
All Industries	20,597	252	1.2%	- 449	-2.1%	100.0%

Source: WI DWD, Labor Market Information, QCEW 2021

Eight of 11 industries registered growth from 2020 to 2021, and two of the eight surpassed the 2019 level. The three largest industries in terms of employment share are trade, transportation, and utilities; education and health services; and manufacturing. Together, they make up 63.9% of total employment in the county. All three industries grew from 2020 to 2021.

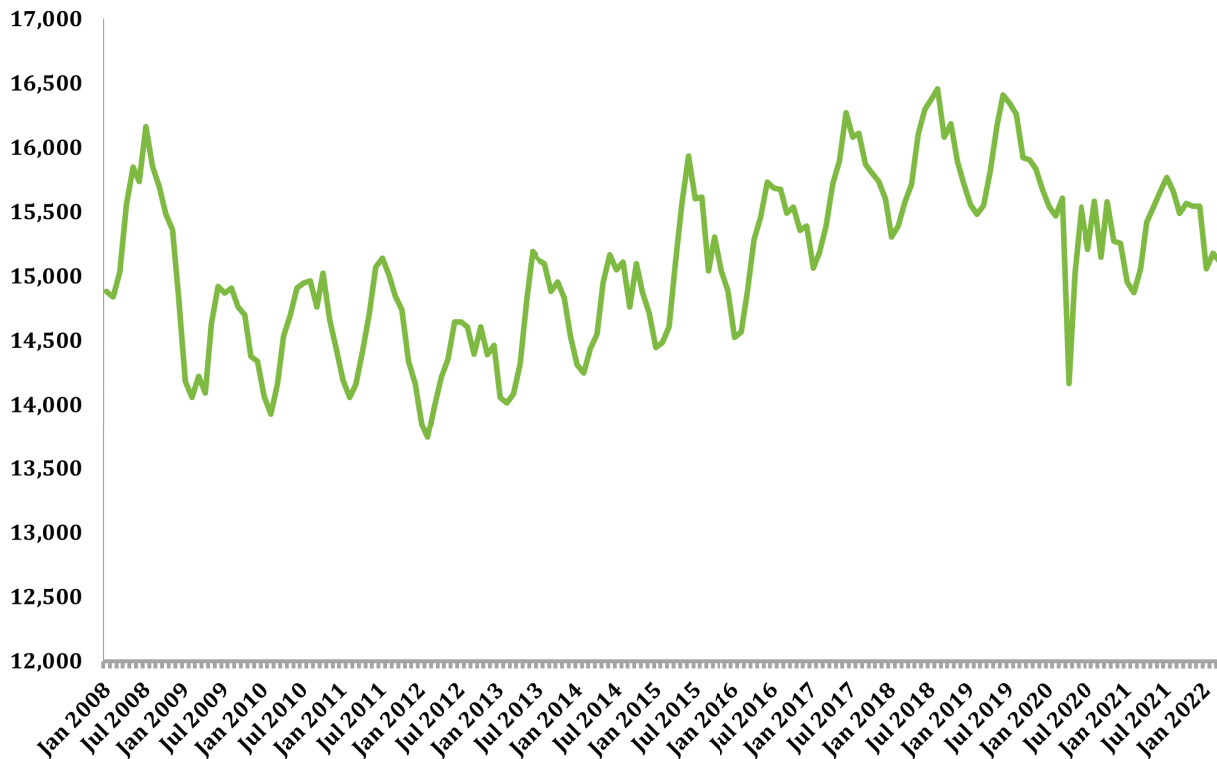
In Monroe County, the manufacturing industry experienced the greatest numerical loss in employment in 2020 because of the pandemic. The industry rebounded in 2021, gaining 42 (1.1%) jobs over the year. For comparison, the manufacturing industry in the state grew roughly 1.6% during the same time frame. On the other hand, the strong growth number in trade, transportation, utilities was encouraging. The industry added 51 jobs during the year 2021, the highest in the county, surpassing the 2019 employment level by 4.9%. Leisure and hospitality industry also added 51 jobs over the year. However, the employment level is still down 8.5% from 2019.



TOTAL MONTHLY EMPLOYMENT

Graphic 6 is a traditional staple of the county profiles. In non-pandemic years, it provides a sufficient summary of how local employment conditions have changed in the past year. However, economic disruption and volatility driven by COVID-19 complicate efforts to separate structural economic shifts from ephemeral changes. Prior to COVID-19, the county's average monthly employment levels in the private sector had been increasing steadily, peaking at 16,458 in August 2018. During economic shutdowns in April 2020, the county employment dropped to 14,164, close to the lowest level since 1990. After the disruption, the county has recovered the majority of its jobs lost. The annual average employment level is at approximately 98% of the 2019 level.

Graphic 6: QCEW Monthly Employment



Source: WI DWD, Labor Market Information, QCEW Second Quarter

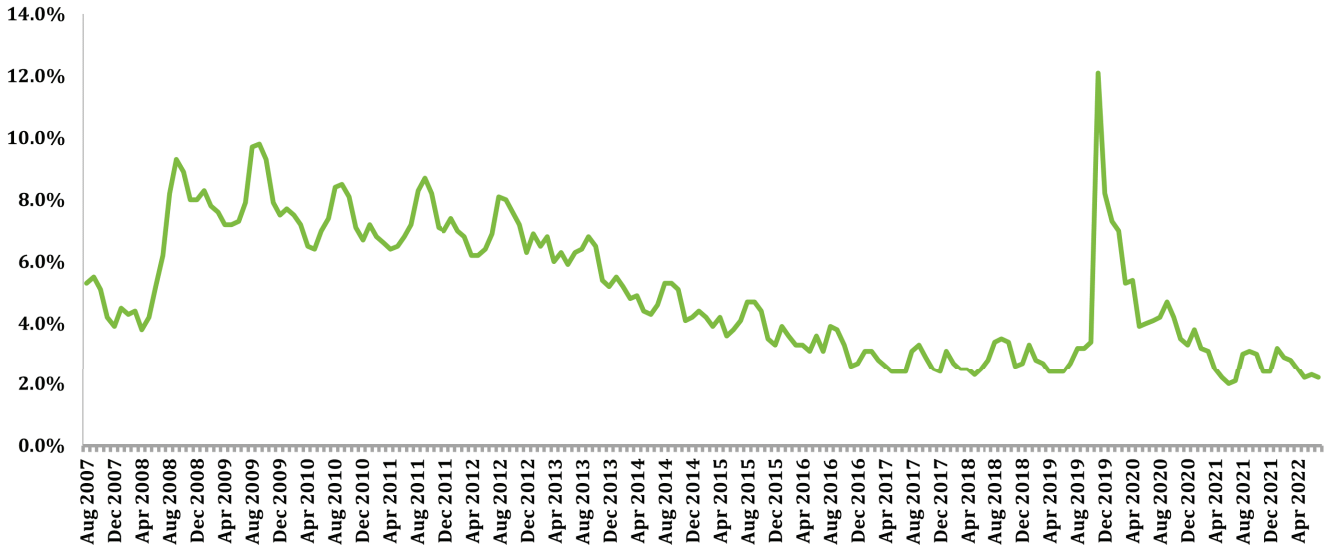
Seasonal fluctuation occurs regardless of economic conditions. For example, retail employment generally ramps up for the Christmas holiday season. Construction activity is higher during the summer months when weather conditions are better. Comparing the same month of a previous year accounts for these seasonal patterns. In April 2020, county jobs were down 10.5% compared to the same month in 2019. In Q4 of 2020, the number of county jobs were down 2.8% compared to the same quarter in 2019, which indicates a quick initial employment recovery. As of March 2022, county employment was down 2.8% compared to the same month in 2019.

While the overall employment recovery is strong, many trends already occurring in various industries were accelerated by COVID-19. These are structural changes that often arise in economic recoveries. Perhaps the most significant change is the dramatic increase in remote working and education. On the positive side, digital transformation of the economy creates more flexibility to workplaces and unlocks a wider range of opportunities for job seekers. However, more jobs are at risk of automation, and there is a greater need for workers to adapt to occupational transitions. Challenges that already existed prior to COVID-19 such as income polarization and inequity in high-speed internet access still need attention.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

In contrast to the Great Recession, jobs were lost more swiftly at the onset of the pandemic but returned quickly. In April of 2020, Monroe County's unemployment rate climbed 8.7%, resulting in a peak rate of 12.1%, significantly higher than the rates following the 2008 financial crisis. In November 2021, nearly two years after this initial spike, the unemployment rate fell to a historic low of 2%. However, high inflation has slowed the rapid economic recovery. In June 2022, the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers increased 9.1% year-over-year, the largest increase in 40 years. The economy began to slow down as the Federal Reserve raised interest rates to tackle inflation. Despite this challenge, industries remained resilient. The unemployment rate remained low at 2.2% in December 2022.

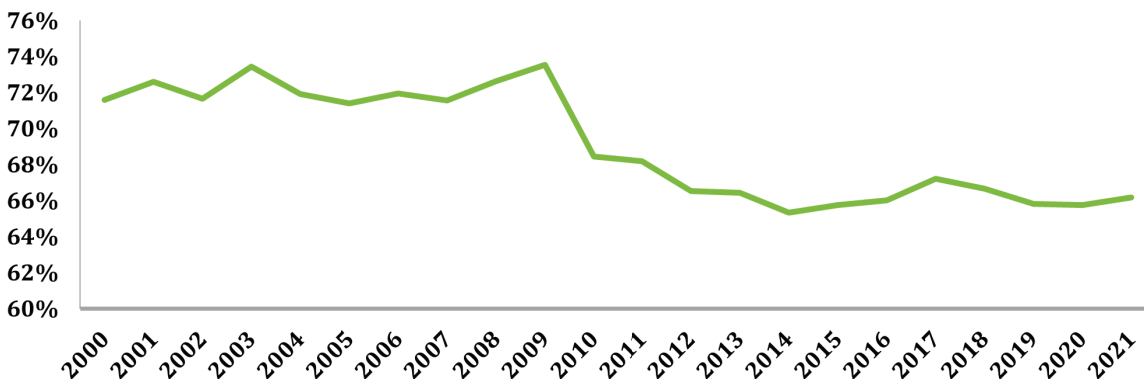
Graphic 7: Unemployment Rate



Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Bureau of Labor Statistics

Much of the recent attention on the labor market has focused on employers' difficulty finding and retaining workers. But it's important to remember that some of those pressures were building up before the pandemic – and will likely persist. The labor force participation rate (LFPR) measures the percentage of the civilian noninstitutional population 16 years and older that is working or actively looking for work. This rate faces downward pressure anytime there is an aging population. Monroe County's LFPR has been trending steadily downward since 2009, when many baby boomers were in the latest stages of their prime working years. The local LFPR was 73.5% in 2009 and has diminished to 66.2% in 2021.

Graphic 8: Labor Force Participation Rate



Source: WI DWD, Office of Economic Advisors (OEA)

BARRIERS TO FULL UTILIZATION

Given the aging population in Wisconsin, staffing difficulties will be an ongoing challenge. Therefore, it is increasingly important to address barriers that prevent people from attaining their full employment potential. Although there is no single solution to demographically driven staffing challenges, four common barriers persist across areas and industries. These barriers are transportation, housing, childcare, and access to broadband.

Transportation

Lack of reliable transportation can prevent individuals from pursuing opportunities and makes it difficult for employers to fill good-paying positions. Monroe County is a rural county. About one-fifth of the residents travel outside of the county for work, and 19.5% of those that work in the county reside in another county. The Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit System provides weekday bus services in the county connecting Tomah and Sparta to the city of La Crosse. However, 86.4% of employed county residents rely on a car to get to work and over three quarters drive alone. The average commute time is 19.5 minutes. Car-centered infrastructure leads to a difficult conundrum: qualified individuals could fill a job if they had transportation and could afford transportation if they had a job. Some employers address this issue by offering telecommuting and transportation reimbursements.

Graphic 9: Means of Transportation

	Wisconsin	Monroe County
Drive Car	87.6%	86.4%
Drive Alone	79.9%	77.3%
Mean Commute Time - Residents	22.2	19.5
Mean Commute Time - Workers	21.9	N
% of Residents Working in another County	28.0%	20.1%
% of Workers Residing in another County	24.3%	19.5%

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2020 5-year File



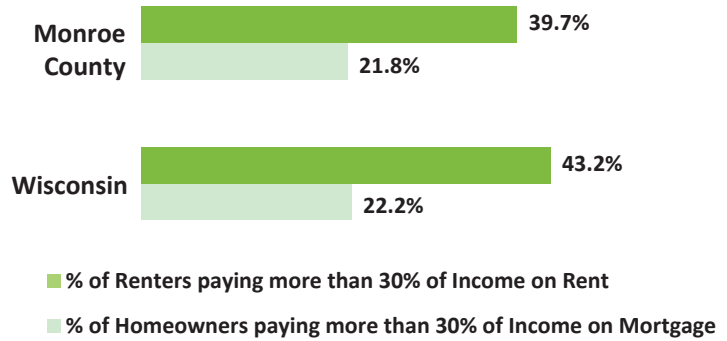
Housing

Affordable and available housing that can fit different lifestyles and family needs are essential to attracting and retaining a productive workforce. Less time commuting lead to higher productivity and better mental health. However, as of December 2022, home prices have surged almost 40% since 2020, while mortgage rates have more than doubled since the beginning of the year. This has priced many buyers out of the market and slowed the construction of new homes, putting more stress on the rental market. High housing costs discourage job seekers from moving into the region, leading to a worker shortage, especially for lower-wage roles.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development uses 30% of income as a guideline for housing affordability. Monroe County has a lower share of renters allocating more than 30% of income for housing compared to the state.

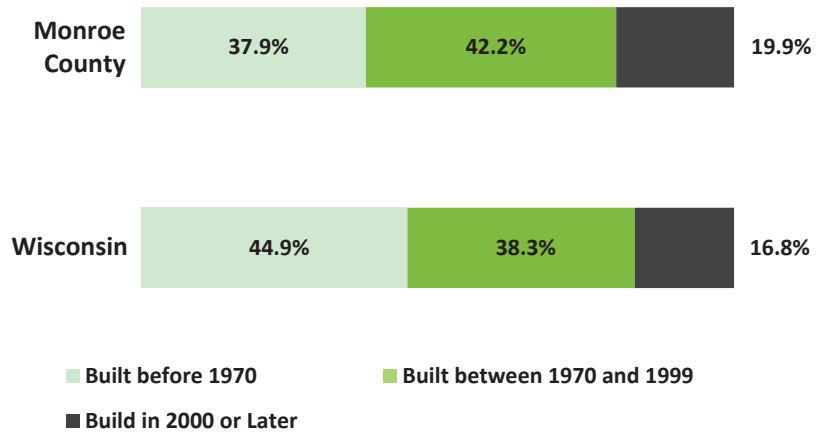
Nonetheless, nearly four out of 10 renters still pay more than 30% of income on housing. In addition to cost, housing availability is also a challenge in Wisconsin. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the state has a shortage of more than 120,000 rental units. Owner-occupied housing is in short supply in many communities as well. Like the state, construction of new homes in the county slowed down significantly after the housing bubble burst in 2008. A direct way to increase the number of quality and affordable housing stock is incentivizing the creation of new multi-family units, which requires loosening zoning regulation. Stabilizing existing neighborhoods is also important. This includes providing more funds and loans for replacement housing, and housing rehabilitation.

Graphic 10: % Paying more than 30% of Income on Housing



Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2020 5-year File

Graphic 11: Housing Share by Year Built



Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2020 5-year File



Childcare

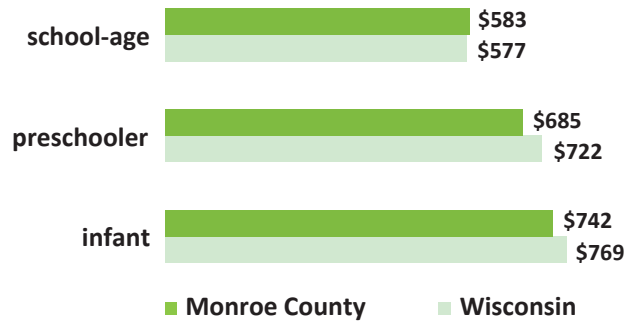
Childcare is costly. In Monroe County, the average childcare cost is approximately the same as the state. The monthly cost of care ranges from \$742 for an infant to \$583 for a school-age child. To put this cost in perspective, a household with median earnings in Monroe County would need to pay 14% of their earnings on infant care. Childcare availability is also a barrier to employment for Wisconsin families. There is no definitive source for access or availability relative to need. According to the YoungStar provider database, which tracks approximately 82% of providers in the state, there are 24 total providers with a potential capacity of 549 in Monroe County. The county has a relatively low capacity when compared to the state. There are six childcare slots for every 100 children under the age of 14 in Monroe County compared to 14 statewide. Additionally, even families that have childcare struggle with care disruptions. Easing challenges of cost and access would help more parents attain their full employment potential. Employers could also help improve participation by providing flexibility to parents with childcare responsibilities.

Graphic 12: Childcare Capacity

	Wisconsin	Monroe County
Providers	3,863	24
Maximum Capacity	132,075	549
Capacity/100 Children Under 14**	0.14	0.06

Source: Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, Youngstar Database

Graphic 13: Childcare Cost



Source: Center for Women's Welfare, Uni. of Washington, 2019 Self-Sufficiency Standards

Broadband

Innovations in the work-from-home economy and virtual learning environment arose during the pandemic. Employers can use these innovations developed out of necessity to meet Wisconsin's workforce needs. For example, increased work-from-home options could alleviate talent shortages by providing flexible scheduling options that benefit workers. However, individuals and businesses need access to high-speed internet to reap the benefits of virtual options.

Graphic 14 displays the share of households that do not have internet in the home. It compares the percentages of households who do not have internet access in the county to the state based on income level. According to the Public Service Commission (PSC) of Wisconsin's coverage map, most municipalities in Monroe County have high-speed internet coverage. However, service in rural areas varies. The level of access is below state average. Low-income households are especially likely to lack internet access. Of households with income below \$20,000, 46.5% do not have internet. However, it is worth noting that PSC has a Lifeline Program which provides low-income Wisconsin residents affordable access to essential telecommunications services by discounting the cost of phone, cell, and internet services.

Graphic 14: Percent of Households that DO NOT have Internet Access by Annual Household Income

	Wisconsin	Monroe County
Total	14.8%	18.4%
Less than \$20,000:	38.4%	46.5%
\$20,000 to \$74,999:	17.5%	20.2%
\$75,000 or more:	4.6%	7.3%

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2020 5-year File

INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS

Graphic 15: Industry Employment Projections

Industry	2020 Employment	Projected 2030 Employment	Employment Change	Percent Change (2020-2030)
Total All Industries	154,728	164,757	10,029	6.5%
Natural Resources and Mining	5,842	5,774	-68	-1.2%
Construction	4,941	5,409	468	9.5%
Manufacturing	21,541	22,558	1,017	4.7%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	29,226	31,312	2,086	7.1%
Information	1,112	1,304	192	17.3%
Financial Activities	6,097	6,923	826	13.6%
Professional and Business Services	8,806	9,373	567	6.4%
Education and Health Services	36,241	37,675	1,434	4.0%
Leisure and Hospitality	11,215	13,126	1,911	17.0%
Other Services (except Government)	6,558	7,749	1,191	18.2%
Public Administration	12,538	13,395	857	6.8%
Self Employed and Unpaid Family Workers	10,611	10,159	-452	-4.3%

Previous sections examined past and current economic trends. DWD also produces future projections of industry and occupation employment because the workforce is constantly evolving. DWD's projection methodology accounts for retirement, career changes, promotions, and retraining. The state is split into 11 Workforce Development Areas (WDAs), and projections are updated every two years. Monroe County is part of the Western WDA that also includes Buffalo, Crawford, Jackson, Juneau, La Crosse, Trempealeau, and Vernon Counties.

Regional employment is expected to grow 6.5% over the 10-year period, or by 10,029 jobs. Statewide employment is projected to grow by 6.3% during the same timeframe. Growth is projected to be stronger in service industries than product industries due to strong growth in trade, transportation, and utilities and leisure and hospitality. This projection only forecasts levels of filled positions rather than potential demand, which further illustrates the issues associated with the aging population. While growth in the labor force is slowing, and in some counties even declining, job growth is expected to continue. Employers may experience difficulties finding replacement workers even if overall employment in the industry declines. Businesses are already having challenges filling the job openings vacated by retirees, but they will feel this difficulty when filling new openings as well. This could constrain job growth by limiting expansion. Solutions will be different for each business but will likely include a combination of talent pipeline development, increased focus on talent attraction and retention, engagement of under-utilized populations, increased automation, and retention of retirees in non-conventional work arrangements.



OCCUPATIONAL EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS

Graphic 16: Occupational Employment Projections

Occupation Title	2020 Employment	Projected 2030 Employment	Occupational Openings	Percent Change (2020-2030)
Total All Occupations	154,728	164,757	18,538	6.5%
Management	9,391	9,418	795	0.3%
Business and Financial Operations	7,759	8,554	782	10.3%
Computer and Mathematical	2,677	2,860	211	6.8%
Architecture and Engineering	1,733	1,867	138	7.7%
Life, Physical, and Social Science	1,179	1,297	122	10.0%
Community and Social Service	2,324	2,469	251	6.2%
Legal	465	510	36	9.7%
Education, Training, and Library	9,683	9,879	879	2.0%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, & Media	1,827	1,976	206	8.2%
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	11,142	11,840	710	6.3%
Healthcare Support	7,717	8,554	1,063	10.9%
Protective Service	2,673	2,864	335	7.2%
Food Preparation and Serving Related	11,352	13,106	2,328	15.5%
Building & Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	3,843	4,079	541	6.1%
Personal Care and Service	3,735	4,534	656	21.4%
Sales and Related	13,256	13,696	1,844	3.3%
Office and Administrative Support	17,292	17,116	1,878	-1.0%
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	3,442	3,106	474	-9.8%
Construction and Extraction	5,555	6,264	649	12.8%
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	6,566	7,195	714	9.6%
Production	15,688	16,180	1,749	3.1%
Transportation and Material Moving	15,429	17,393	2,177	12.7%

While industry projections provide a broad view of employment expectations, a more functional approach is projected occupational need. Occupational projections are separated into three categories: growth, labor force exits, and occupational transfers. Retirements will be a key driver in the labor force exits category. While actual retirement age varies among individuals, age 65 is used as a rough proxy for expected retirement. Considering this benchmark, Wisconsin is approximately at the halfway point of baby boomer retirement. The other category is occupational transfers, which can include workers that advance in careers or make lateral movements into different occupations. Generally, a higher need for replacements due to transfers can be expected in lower-paying occupations.

An examination of projected occupational employment reveals a higher need for replacements than filling new positions due to growth. Office and administrative support occupations provide a perfect example of the importance of replacements, as this occupation group has the third-highest number of projected openings but a declining total number of jobs. The need is entirely driven by labor force exits and occupational transfers. Personal care and service occupations stand out as the fastest growing field in the western WDA. It is expected to expand by 21% over 10 years. This growth rate is driven by the rapid recovery of service industries from the pandemic.