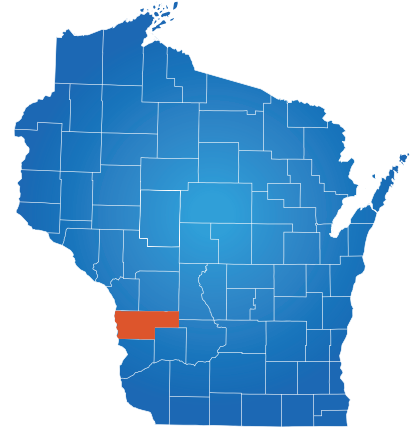


Vernon County

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.

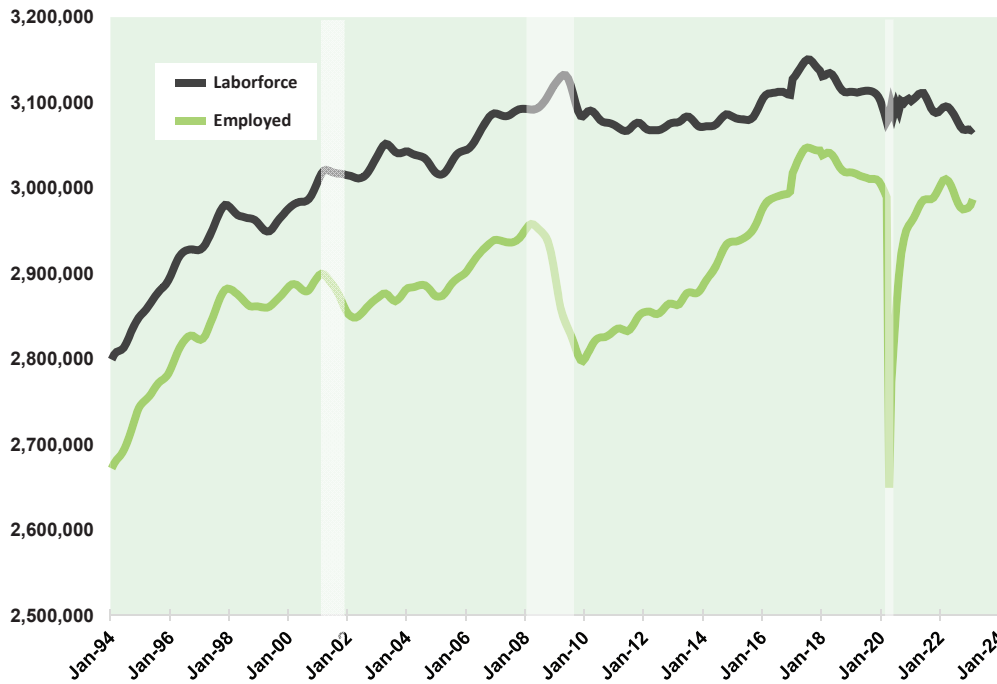


EMPLOYMENT

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.

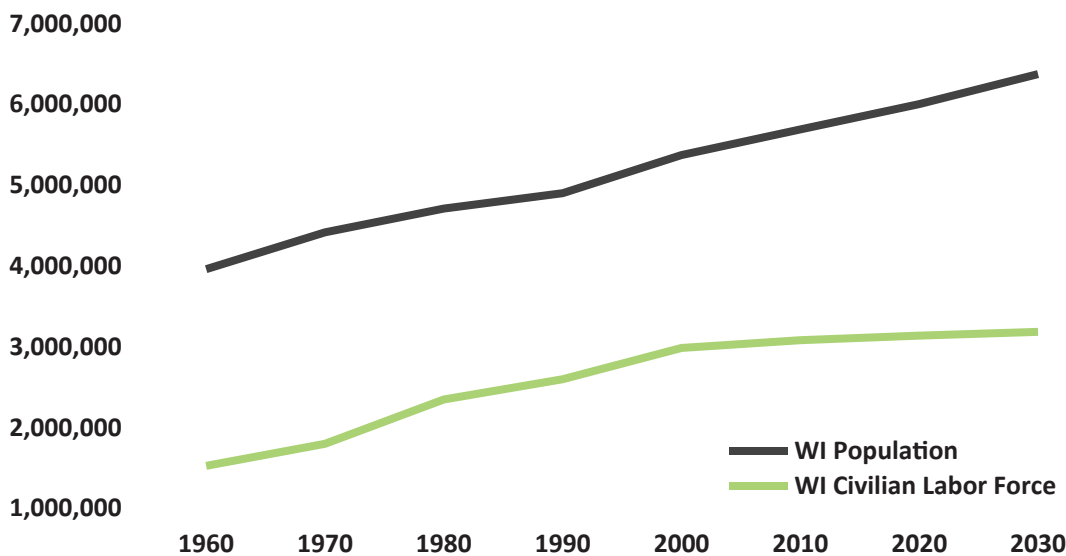
LONG-RUN CHALLENGE

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



Vernon County

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Vernon County is the 31st least populated county among Wisconsin's 72 counties. With an estimate of 30,965 residents in 2022, the county's population has continued its steady growth in the first two years of this decade. The county gained 251 residents, equivalent to 0.8% of its population. By comparison, Wisconsin experienced population growth of 0.9% and the United States experienced population growth of 0.3% over the same period. Of the county's 10 most populous municipalities, the Town of Clinton gained the most residents (62), while the City of Viroqua lost the most residents (-60).

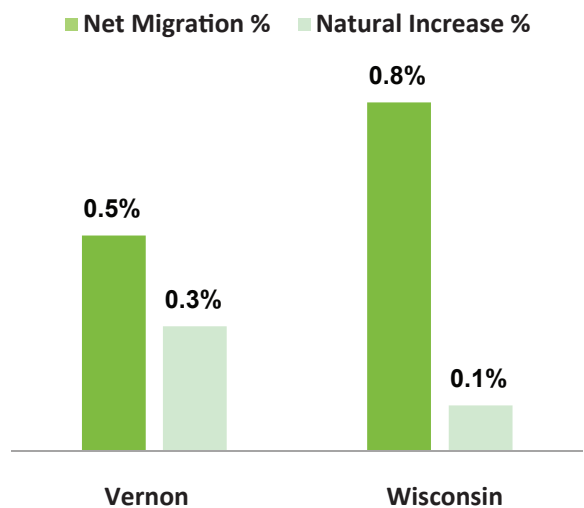
Graphic 3: 10 Most Populous Municipalities in County

	2020 Census	2022 Final Estimate	Numeric Change	Percent Change
Viroqua, City	4,504	4,444	-60	-1.3%
Westby, City	2,332	2,342	10	0.4%
Viroqua, Town	1,744	1,778	34	2.0%
Clinton, Town	1,374	1,436	62	4.5%
Hillsboro, City	1,397	1,427	30	2.2%
Bergen, Town	1,365	1,365	0	0.0%
Jefferson, Town	1,270	1,281	11	0.9%
Franklin, Town	1,106	1,105	-1	-0.1%
Christiana, Town	993	1,013	20	2.0%
Hamburg, Town	956	953	-3	-0.3%
Vernon County	30,714	30,965	251	0.8%
Wisconsin	5,893,718	5,949,155	55,437	0.9%

Source: WI Dept. of Administration, Demographic Services Center

Net migration and natural increase are the two factors that contribute to population change. A net migration rate of 0.5% in Vernon County indicates that there are more people moving into the county than exiting. This rate is lower than the statewide rate, which is 0.8%. While 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. A natural increase rate of 0.3% implies that the number of births exceed deaths in the county. It 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.

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 has increased by 370 jobs (4.5%) across all industries. This growth raised county's total employment to 8,652, just below its pre-pandemic level in 2019 (9,022), a change of -1.7%. 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.

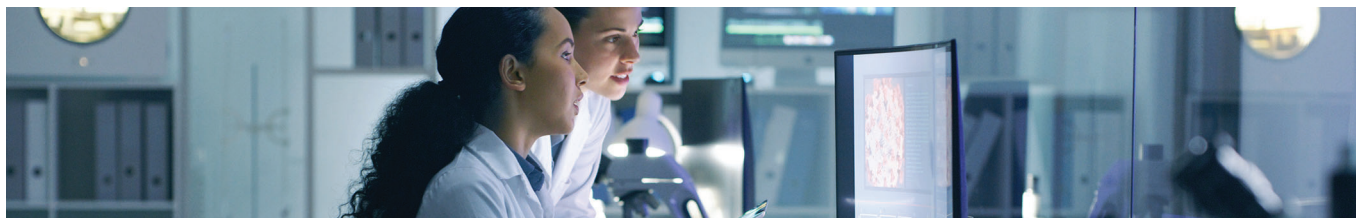
Graphic 5: Employment Change by Industry

	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	388	40	11.5%	60	18.3%	4.5%
Education & Health Services	2,583	-38	-1.4%	-257	-9.0%	29.9%
Financial Activities	380	14	3.8%	18	5.0%	4.4%
Information	120	-8	-6.3%	-15	-11.1%	1.4%
Leisure & Hospitality	737	108	17.2%	-47	-6.0%	8.5%
Manufacturing	994	193	24.1%	158	18.9%	11.5%
Natural Resources & Mining	294	7	2.4%	17	6.1%	3.4%
Other Services	122	5	4.3%	-26	-17.6%	1.4%
Professional & Business Services	622	-1	-0.2%	-46	-6.9%	7.2%
Public Administration	619	12	2.0%	-6	-1.0%	7.2%
Trade, Transportation, Utilities	1,791	37	2.1%	-7	-0.4%	20.7%
All Industries	8,652	370	4.5%	-149	-1.7%	100.0%

Source: WI DWD, Labor Market Information, QCEW 2021

Eight of 11 industries registered growth from 2020 to 2021, and four of 11 industries surpassed their 2019 level. The three largest industries in terms of employment share are education and health service; trade, transportation, and utilities; and manufacturing. Together, they account for 62% of total employment in the county. Manufacturing and trade, transportation, utilities grew from 2020 to 2021, while education and health services saw a slight decline. Overall, these three industries added 192 jobs over 2021.

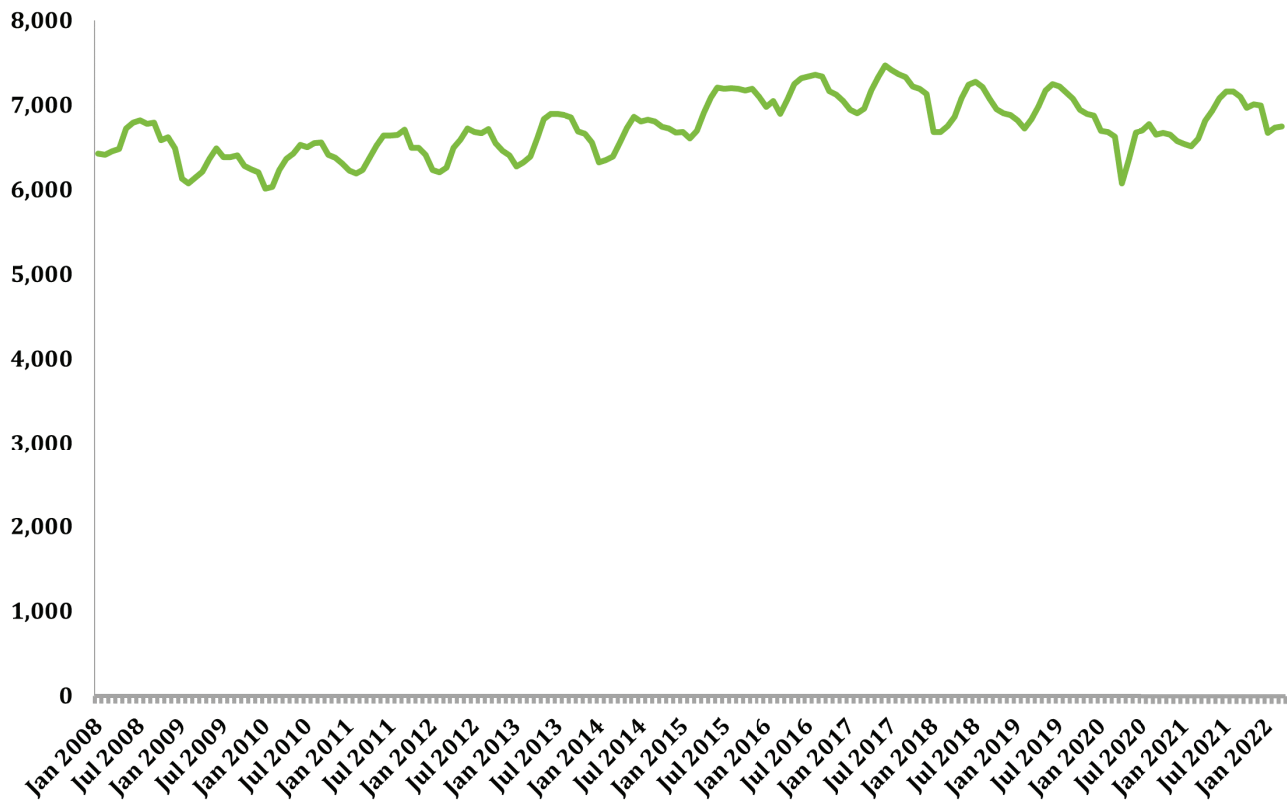
In Vernon County, the leisure and hospitality industry suffered the second greatest numerical and proportional loss in 2020 due to the pandemic. However, the industry experienced a strong recovery over the course of 2021. Employment in the industry grew by 17.2%, adding 108 jobs during the year. The strong growth in manufacturing industry was also encouraging. The industry saw a 24.1% growth during the year 2021, the highest in the county. It accounts for 52.2% of jobs added during the year. In contrast, the manufacturing industry in the state grew roughly 1.6% during the same time frame.



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 brief changes. Prior to COVID-19, the county's average monthly employment was stable, hovering at around 7,000 since 2015. During economic shutdowns in April 2020, the county employment plummeted to 6,074, near a historic low. After the disruption, employment recovered to approximately 99% of its pre-pandemic level.

Graphic 6: QCEW Monthly Employment



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

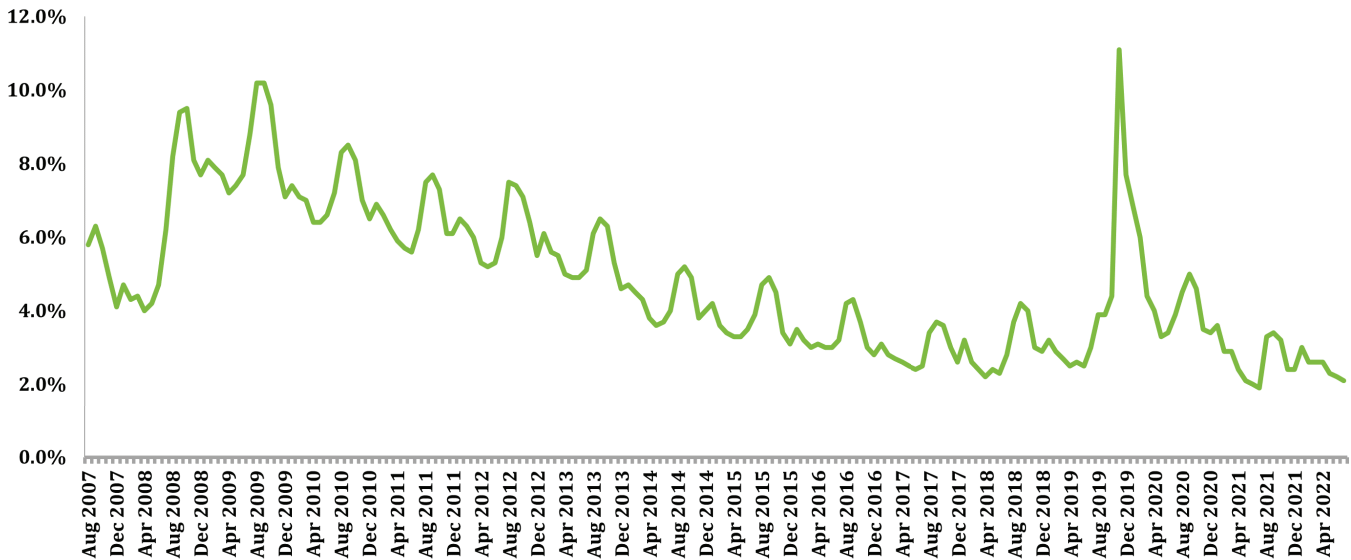
Seasonal fluctuation occurs regardless of economic conditions. For example, retail employment generally ramps up for the winter holiday season and construction activity is higher during the summer months. Comparing the same month of a previous year accounts for these seasonal patterns. In April 2020, county job counts were down 13% compared to April 2019. In the fourth quarter 2020, county job counts were down 4% compared to the same quarter in 2019, which indicates a quick initial employment recovery. As of March 2022, the latest month for which county-level data are available, county employment was down 1.3% compared to the same month in 2019.

While the overall employment recovery is strong, many trends already underway in various industry are being accelerated by the impact of 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 learning. On the positive side, digital transformation of the economy creates more flexibilities to workplace and unlocks a wider range of opportunities for job seekers. However, more jobs become 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, Vernon county's unemployment rate climbed 6.7 percentage points, resulting in a peak rate of 11.1%, higher than the rates following the 2008 financial crisis. In December 2021, nearly two years after this initial spike, the unemployment rate fell to a historic low of 1.9%. However, high inflation has disrupted 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 at a historical low of 2.1% in December 2022.

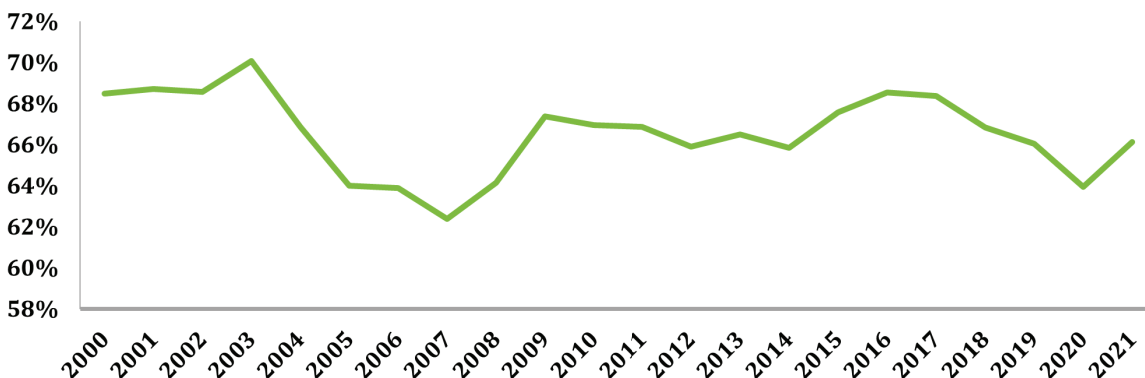
Graphic 7: Unemployment Rate



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

Even though much of the recent attention on the labor market has focused on the difficulty employers face finding and retaining workers, it is important to remember that some of those pressures were building up years 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. Vernon County's LFPR has been lower than the state since 2000. The local LFPR was 68.5% in 2000 and has dropped to 66.1% 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 participating or fully participating in the labor market. These vary across the state and among individuals. 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. Vernon County is a rural county. 41.4% of the residents travel outside of the county for work, and two-fifth of those that work in the county reside in another county. The Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit System provides weekday bus services in the county. The route connects Viroqua, Westby, and Coon Valley to the city of La Crosse. However, most of the county residents drive to work. 84.8% of employed county residents rely on a car to get to work. Over three quarters drive alone. The average commute time is 24.9 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 reimbursement.

Graphic 9: Means of Transportation

	Wisconsin	Vernon County
Drive Car	87.6%	84.8%
Drive Alone	79.9%	77.3%
Mean Commute Time - Residents	22.2	24.9
Mean Commute Time - Workers	21.9	N
% of Residents Working in another County	28.0%	41.4%
% of Workers Residing in another County	24.3%	40.0%

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



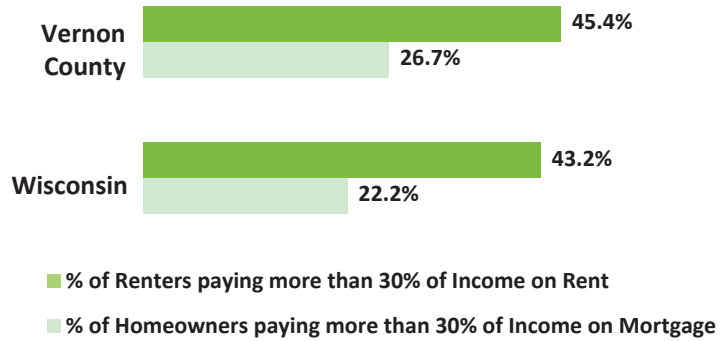
Housing

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% over two years, while mortgage rates have more than doubled since January. This double-whammy has priced many buyers out of the market and slowed the construction of new homes, putting more stress into the rental market. High housing costs discourage job seekers from moving into the region, leading to a shortage of workers, especially for lower-wage roles.

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

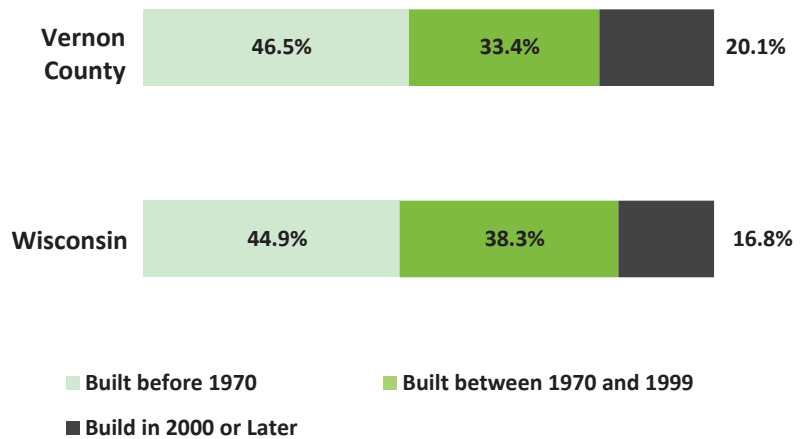
Nonetheless, approximately more than four out of 10 renters still allocate more than 30% of income to housing. In addition to cost, housing availability is also a challenge in Wisconsin. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the state has a shortage of more than 120,000 rental units. Owner-occupied housing is in short supply in many communities as well. Like the state, construction of new homes in the county had 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 neighborhood is also important. This includes provides 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

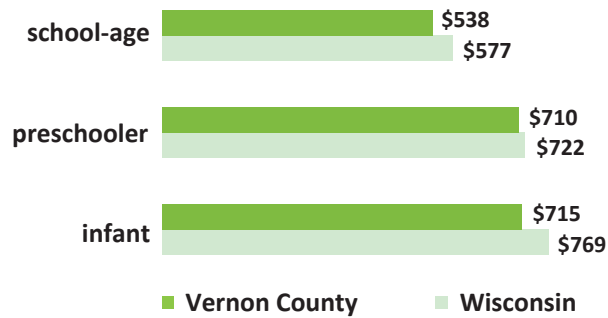
Childcare is costly in Wisconsin. In Vernon County, the monthly cost of care ranges from \$715 for an infant to \$538 for a school-age child. To put this cost in perspective, a household with median earnings in Vernon County would need to pay 15% of their earnings on infant care. Childcare availability 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 11 total providers with a potential capacity of 85 in Vernon County. The county has a much lower capacity when compared to the state. There is one childcare slot for every 100 children under the age of 14 in Vernon County compared to 14 statewide. Additionally, even families that have childcare struggle with childcare disruptions. Easing the cost and access burden would help more parents achieve their full employment potential. Employers could also help improve participation by providing flexibility to parents with childcare responsibilities.

Graphic 12: Childcare Capacity

	Wisconsin	Vernon County
Providers	3,863	11
Maximum Capacity	132,075	85
Capacity/100 Children Under 14**	0.14	0.01

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

Elements of the work-from-home economy and virtual learning environment will likely remain after the pandemic is over. Employers can use 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, high-speed internet access is needed to reap the benefits of virtual options.

Graphic 14 displays the share of households that do not have high speed internet in the home. It compares the percentages of households who do not have high speed internet access in the county to the state based on income level.

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

	Wisconsin	Vernon County
Total	14.8%	24.0%
Less than \$20,000:	38.4%	52.4%
\$20,000 to \$74,999:	17.5%	22.2%
\$75,000 or more:	4.6%	11.0%

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

According to the coverage map provided by the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin, high-speed internet coverage is weaker comparing to the state in general. Households that do not have high speed internet access is 9.2% higher than the state average. It is no surprise that low-income households are less likely to have high speed internet access. 52.4% percent of households with income below \$20,000 do not have high speed internet. However, it is worth noting that the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin 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.

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. Vernon County is part of the Western WDA that also includes Buffalo, Crawford, Jackson, Juneau, La Crosse, Monroe, and Trempealeau 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 retainment 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.