



***The Monthly Employment Watch:  
Milwaukee and the Nation's Largest Cities***

**A monthly report on employment trends in the nation's largest cities**

**Prepared by:**

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### ***About This Report***

Each month, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Center for Economic Development, drawing on data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Local Area Unemployment Statistics*, monitors employment trends in Milwaukee and the nation's 50 largest cities. In addition, the Center also compares employment trends in Milwaukee to a smaller and more directly comparable group of "peer" cities, the 20 largest cities of the Northeast-Midwest "Frostbelt" region. Each month, the data compiled by the Center display year-over-year total employment for three different time periods: a) the most recent year (2007-2008); b) the past four years (2004-2008), since the current mayoral administration took office (the last political cycle); and c) since 2000, the peak of the last business cycle. By looking at three different time periods, and two different samples of cities, we hope to provide a fuller sense of how Milwaukee's employment growth stacks up against other big cities over time, and how Milwaukee's position has changed over time.

## ***The Monthly Employment Watch: August***

The city of Milwaukee remains stuck in a recessionary labor market, according to preliminary city employment data released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics for August 2008. For the 13<sup>th</sup> consecutive month, the city lost employment compared to the same month a year earlier. Employment in Milwaukee fell by 2,499 residents in August 2008 compared to August 2007, an annual decline of 1.00%. This marks the fifth biggest monthly “year-over-year” decline since the latest cycle of employment contraction in Milwaukee began in August 2007. As Table 1 shows, employment decline appeared to be slowing in the city in the early months of 2008; however, the employment losses since May 2008 suggest that recession in the city’s labor market has yet to bottom out. The August data are, of course, preliminary and losses could be revised in subsequent BLS reports. But, at this stage, the trend line is not encouraging. What’s more, with the credit meltdown of September 2008 and expected further national economic contraction ahead, the forecasts cannot be rosy for the city’s employment situation.

**Table 1:**  
**Monthly “Year-over-Year” Employment Change in the City of Milwaukee\***

<b>Month</b>	<b>Employment Change</b>	<b>% Change</b>
July (2006-07)	+617	+0.25%
August	-156	-0.06%
September	-709	-0.28%
October	-2,266	-0.90%
November	-2,366	-0.93%
December	-3,871	-1.53%
January (2007-08)	-4,008	-1.61%
February	-1,938	-0.78%
March	-1,004	-0.41%
April	-612	-0.25%
May	-1,468	0.59%
June	-3,835	-1.52%
July	-2,764	-1.10%
August	-2,466	-1.00%

\* These figures vary from earlier *Monthly Employment Watch* tables, which reported preliminary BLS monthly employment estimates. The data in Table 1 reflect revisions and re-estimates by BLS and are considered more accurate.

Among the nation’s 50 largest cities, 20 registered “year-over-year” employment declines in August 2008 (including, of course, Milwaukee). This compares to 22 in July, 19 in June, and 14 in May, a sign that the labor markets of cities across the country remain weak, and potentially an important economic trend as the November presidential election approaches.

In August 2008, Milwaukee ranked 36<sup>th</sup> among the nation's 50 largest cities in the rate of annual employment growth (compared to 37<sup>th</sup> in July), and 13<sup>th</sup> among the nation's 20 largest Northeast-Midwest Frostbelt cities (compared to 15<sup>th</sup> in July). Since the UWMCED *Monthly Employment Watch* began in June 2007, Milwaukee has consistently ranked well below the median in employment growth in both groups of cities. The slight ranking improvements for Milwaukee in the past two months –despite our continued employment losses-- may reflect the deepening of employment loss in cities across the country. But, given the ongoing employment losses in Milwaukee, the slight ranking improvement in the July and August employment reports is small comfort.

Since 2004, August employment in Milwaukee has shrunk by 2,398 residents (0.96%), placing the city 45<sup>th</sup> among the nation's 50 largest cities in employment “growth” during this period (compared to 44<sup>th</sup> in July). Among the 20 largest Frostbelt cities, Milwaukee ranked 14<sup>th</sup> in employment change between August 2004-2008, (compared to 15<sup>th</sup> in July). These rankings confirm, once again, that Milwaukee ranks among the bottom tier of the nation's largest cities in employment growth in recent years. Moreover, the employment decline between August 2004-2008 means City Hall claims that over “11,00 jobs” have been created in the city of Milwaukee since the current administration came to office are, to put it euphemistically, overstated.

Since 2000, the end of the last national business cycle, August employment in Milwaukee has shrunk by 20,948, a substantial 7.82% decline. Milwaukee ranks 45<sup>th</sup> among the nation's 50 largest cities during this period in employment performance; among Frostbelt cities, we rank 16<sup>th</sup> out of 20.

Finally, comparison of August unemployment rates in the 50 largest cities reveals that Milwaukee had the 38<sup>th</sup> highest unemployment rate among the nation's 50 largest cities; in July 2008, we ranked 39<sup>th</sup> and in June 2008 we ranked 37<sup>th</sup>. Between June 2007 and March 2008, Milwaukee consistently ranked in the 44-49 range on this indicator, compared to an average ranking in the high 20s in the late 1990s (and as high as 16<sup>th</sup> in the early 1990s). Since April 2008, Milwaukee has ranked between 37-40, a modest improvement over very recent trends, but still poor by historical standards. As noted above, this trend apparently reflects a weakening in other urban labor markets since April, rather than a strengthening of the Milwaukee market.

**Table 2 -- Employment Growth in the Nation's 50 Largest Cities:  
2007- 2008**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>August 2007</b>	<b>August 2008</b>	<b>% Change</b>
1	Las Vegas	272,082	280,718	3.17%
2	El Paso	233,339	240,035	2.87%
3	Virginia Beach	220,983	225,274	1.94%
4	San Antonio	586,191	596,911	1.83%
5	Tucson	250,197	254,743	1.82%
6	Honolulu	431,667	439,160	1.74%
7	Houston	980,530	996,953	1.67%
8	Washington, D.C.	308,985	313,848	1.57%
9	Austin	398,834	405,094	1.57%
10	Fort Worth	298,301	302,664	1.46%
11	San Francisco	415,219	420,837	1.35%
12	Dallas	565,225	572,405	1.27%
13	Portland	284,869	287,363	0.88%
14	New York	3,655,964	3,687,746	0.87%
15	San Jose	423,584	426,440	0.67%
16	Seattle	351,169	353,287	0.60%
17	Phoenix	806,210	810,246	0.50%
18	Mesa City	244,968	246,194	0.50%
19	Omaha	220,885	221,956	0.48%
20	San Diego	656,946	659,784	0.43%
21	Boston	291,913	293,133	0.42%
22	Atlanta	214,631	215,427	0.37%
23	Columbus	401,088	402,243	0.29%
24	Jacksonville	395,791	396,763	0.25%
25	Oklahoma City	245,115	245,710	0.24%
26	Albuquerque	253,768	254,334	0.22%
27	Baltimore	259,199	259,719	0.20%
28	Fresno	214,658	215,065	0.19%
29	Indianapolis	407,210	407,925	0.18%
30	Philadelphia	581,973	581,956	0.00%
31	Miami	168,642	168,511	-0.08%
32	Sacramento	202,957	202,489	-0.23%
33	Wichita	180,658	180,159	-0.28%
34	Denver	303,284	302,143	-0.38%
35	Oakland	180,928	179,997	-0.51%
<b>36</b>	<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>249,384</b>	<b>246,885</b>	<b>-1.00%</b>
37	Minneapolis	208,205	205,959	-1.08%
38	Louisville	340,210	336,495	-1.09%
39	Charlotte	327,294	323,660	-1.11%
40	Chicago	1,252,703	1,236,183	-1.32%
41	Nashville	304,778	300,583	-1.38%
42	Colorado Springs	209,500	205,725	-1.80%
43	Detroit	311,208	305,566	-1.81%
44	Cleveland	174,981	171,158	-2.18%
45	Kansas City	222,151	216,526	-2.53%
46	Memphis	295,671	288,069	-2.57%
47	Los Angeles	1,808,277	1,761,365	-2.59%
48	Long Beach	224,036	218,223	-2.59%
49	St. Louis	145,275	141,026	-2.92%
50	Tulsa	197,528	183,619	-7.04%

**Table 3 - Employment Growth in the Nation's 50 Largest Cities:  
2004 - 2008**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>August 2004</b>	<b>August 2008</b>	<b>% Change</b>
1	Fort Worth	264,023	302,664	14.64%
2	Miami	149,456	168,511	12.75%
3	Phoenix	731,378	810,246	10.78%
4	Mesa City	222,230	246,194	10.78%
5	Atlanta	195,806	215,427	10.02%
6	Seattle	323,109	353,287	9.34%
7	Albuquerque	234,192	254,334	8.60%
8	San Antonio	550,709	596,911	8.39%
9	Washington, D.C.	290,779	313,848	7.93%
10	Jacksonville	367,736	396,763	7.89%
11	Boston	276,207	293,133	6.13%
12	Tucson	240,322	254,743	6.00%
13	Wichita	170,017	180,159	5.97%
14	New York	3,481,020	3,687,746	5.94%
15	Fresno	203,102	215,065	5.89%
16	San Francisco	397,876	420,837	5.77%
17	San Jose	404,005	426,440	5.55%
18	Houston	947,446	996,953	5.23%
19	Austin	385,070	405,094	5.20%
20	Charlotte	307,680	323,660	5.19%
21	Denver	287,439	302,143	5.12%
22	Virginia Beach	215,357	225,274	4.60%
23	Las Vegas	268,421	280,718	4.58%
24	Honolulu	420,399	439,160	4.46%
25	El Paso	230,183	240,035	4.28%
26	Colorado Springs	197,340	205,725	4.25%
27	Omaha	212,966	221,956	4.22%
28	Portland	276,375	287,363	3.98%
29	Columbus	387,156	402,243	3.90%
30	Memphis	278,244	288,069	3.53%
31	Nashville	290,332	300,583	3.53%
32	San Diego	637,842	659,784	3.44%
33	Sacramento	196,018	202,489	3.30%
34	Baltimore	252,993	259,719	2.66%
35	Los Angeles	1,722,533	1,761,365	2.25%
36	Long Beach	213,413	218,223	2.25%
37	Louisville	329,946	336,495	1.98%
38	Chicago	1,215,700	1,236,183	1.68%
39	Oakland	177,602	179,997	1.35%
40	Indianapolis	402,702	407,925	1.30%
41	Philadelphia	577,485	581,956	0.77%
42	Dallas	569,432	572,405	0.52%
43	Kansas City	216,054	216,526	0.22%
44	Oklahoma City	245,973	245,710	-0.11%
<b>45</b>	<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>249,283</b>	<b>246,885</b>	<b>-0.96%</b>
46	Minneapolis	209,059	205,959	-1.48%
47	Tulsa	191,426	183,619	-4.08%
48	St. Louis	147,625	141,026	-4.47%
49	Cleveland	180,246	171,158	-5.04%
50	Detroit	323,662	305,566	-5.59%

**Table 4 - Employment Growth in the Nation's 50 Largest Cities:  
2000 - 2008**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>August 2000</b>	<b>August 2008</b>	<b>% Change</b>
1	Phoenix	651,138	810,246	24.44%
2	Mesa City	197,849	246,194	24.44%
3	Las Vegas	231,330	280,718	21.35%
4	Fort Worth	255,135	302,664	18.63%
5	San Antonio	516,566	596,911	15.55%
6	Tucson	221,362	254,743	15.08%
7	Miami	148,346	168,511	13.59%
8	Albuquerque	225,497	254,334	12.79%
9	San Diego	586,812	659,784	12.44%
10	Atlanta	192,847	215,427	11.71%
11	Virginia Beach	201,828	225,274	11.62%
12	Sacramento	182,535	202,489	10.93%
13	Colorado Springs	185,594	205,725	10.85%
14	Seattle	319,271	353,287	10.65%
15	Fresno	194,590	215,065	10.52%
16	Houston	909,036	996,953	9.67%
17	El Paso	219,334	240,035	9.44%
18	Charlotte	296,692	323,660	9.09%
19	Washington, D.C.	293,948	313,848	6.77%
20	New York	3,463,103	3,687,746	6.49%
21	Honolulu	412,594	439,160	6.44%
22	Jacksonville	373,020	396,763	6.37%
23	Omaha	209,342	221,956	6.03%
24	Wichita	170,634	180,159	5.58%
25	Austin	389,947	405,094	3.88%
26	Columbus	388,855	402,243	3.44%
27	Los Angeles	1,707,337	1,761,365	3.16%
28	Long Beach	211,530	218,223	3.16%
29	Denver	294,655	302,143	2.54%
30	Oklahoma City	243,710	245,710	0.82%
31	Nashville	301,172	300,583	-0.20%
32	Boston	294,746	293,133	-0.55%
33	Indianapolis	412,305	407,925	-1.06%
34	Baltimore	263,505	259,719	-1.44%
35	Memphis	293,546	288,069	-1.87%
36	Portland	293,943	287,363	-2.24%
37	Louisville	347,441	336,495	-3.15%
38	Dallas	591,054	572,405	-3.16%
39	Philadelphia	602,032	581,956	-3.33%
40	Kansas City	225,536	216,526	-3.99%
41	Oakland	187,592	179,997	-4.05%
42	Chicago	1,303,888	1,236,183	-5.19%
43	Minneapolis	219,534	205,959	-6.18%
<b>44</b>	<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>267,833</b>	<b>246,885</b>	<b>-7.82%</b>
45	Tulsa	200,140	183,619	-8.25%
46	St. Louis	153,768	141,026	-8.29%
47	San Francisco	459,381	420,837	-8.39%
48	Cleveland	191,234	171,158	-10.50%
49	San Jose	479,970	426,440	-11.15%
50	Detroit	352,609	305,566	-13.34%

**Table 5 - Employment Growth in the 20 Largest Frostbelt Cities  
2007 - 2008**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>August 2007</b>	<b>August 2008</b>	<b>% Change</b>
1	Washington, D.C.	308,985	313,848	1.57%
2	New York	3,655,964	3,687,746	0.87%
3	Omaha	220,885	221,956	0.48%
4	Boston	291,913	293,133	0.42%
5	Pittsburgh	145,472	146,056	0.40%
6	Columbus	401,088	402,243	0.29%
7	Baltimore	259,199	259,719	0.20%
8	Indianapolis	407,210	407,925	0.18%
9	Philadelphia	581,973	581,956	0.00%
10	Wichita	180,658	180,159	-0.28%
11	Cincinnati	158,094	157,340	-0.48%
12	Buffalo	115,231	114,644	-0.51%
<b>13</b>	<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>249,384</b>	<b>246,885</b>	<b>-1.00%</b>
14	Minneapolis	208,205	205,959	-1.08%
15	St. Paul (MN)	138,747	137,250	-1.08%
16	Chicago	1,252,703	1,236,183	-1.32%
17	Detroit	311,208	305,566	-1.81%
18	Cleveland	174,981	171,158	-2.18%
19	Kansas City	222,151	216,526	-2.53%
20	St. Louis	145,275	141,026	-2.92%

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**Table 6- Employment Growth in the 20 Largest Frostbelt Cities  
2004 - 2008**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>August 2004</b>	<b>August 2008</b>	<b>% Change</b>
1	Washington, D.C.	290,779	313,848	7.93%
2	Cincinnati	147,396	157,340	6.75%
3	Boston	276,207	293,133	6.13%
4	Wichita	170,017	180,159	5.97%
5	New York	3,481,020	3,687,746	5.94%
6	Omaha	212,966	221,956	4.22%
7	Columbus	387,156	402,243	3.90%
8	Baltimore	252,993	259,719	2.66%
9	Chicago	1,215,700	1,236,183	1.68%
10	Indianapolis	402,702	407,925	1.30%
11	Philadelphia	577,485	581,956	0.77%
12	Pittsburgh	145,634	146,056	0.29%
13	Kansas City	216,054	216,526	0.22%
<b>14</b>	<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>249,283</b>	<b>246,885</b>	<b>-0.96%</b>
15	Minneapolis	209,059	205,959	-1.48%
16	Buffalo	117,157	114,644	-2.14%
17	St. Paul (MN)	140,462	137,250	-2.29%
18	St. Louis	147,625	141,026	-4.47%
19	Cleveland	180,246	171,158	-5.04%
20	Detroit	323,662	305,566	-5.59%

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**Table 7- Employment Growth in the 20 Largest Frostbelt Cities  
2000 - 2008**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>August 2000</b>	<b>August 2008</b>	<b>% Change</b>
1	Washington, D.C.	293,948	313,848	6.77%
2	New York	3,463,103	3,687,746	6.49%
3	Omaha	209,342	221,956	6.03%
4	Wichita	170,634	180,159	5.58%
5	Columbus	388,855	402,243	3.44%
6	Cincinnati	152,531	157,340	3.15%
7	Boston	294,746	293,133	-0.55%
8	Indianapolis	412,305	407,925	-1.06%
9	Baltimore	263,505	259,719	-1.44%
10	Pittsburgh	150,443	146,056	-2.92%
11	Philadelphia	602,032	581,956	-3.33%
12	Kansas City	225,536	216,526	-3.99%
13	Buffalo	120,701	114,644	-5.02%
14	Chicago	1,303,888	1,236,183	-5.19%
15	Minneapolis	219,534	205,959	-6.18%
<b>16</b>	<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>267,833</b>	<b>246,885</b>	<b>-7.82%</b>
17	St. Paul (MN)	149,441	137,250	-8.16%
18	St. Louis	153,768	141,026	-8.29%
19	Cleveland	191,234	171,158	-10.50%
20	Detroit	352,609	305,566	-13.34%

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**Table 8 -- Unemployment Rates in the 50 Largest Cities**

Rank	City	August 2000	August 2004	August 2007	August 2008
1	Omaha	3.3	4.8	3.4	3.7
2	Tulsa	3.2	5.0	4.3	3.7
3	Oklahoma City	3.0	4.6	4.6	3.8
4	Honolulu	4.0	3.0	2.5	3.9
5	Seattle	4.3	4.9	3.2	4.1
6	Austin	3.4	5.4	3.5	4.2
7	Virginia Beach	2.4	3.4	2.9	4.2
8	Albuquerque	4.3	5.1	3.2	4.3
9	Mesa City	3.5	4.0	2.9	4.5
10	San Antonio	4.6	6.0	4.1	4.8
11	Wichita	4.8	7.0	4.4	5.0
12	Houston	5.3	7.3	4.3	5.0
13	Boston	3.1	5.7	4.4	5.2
14	Fort Worth	5.2	7.1	4.5	5.3
15	Nashville	3.6	4.8	3.9	5.6
16	Dallas	5.0	7.8	4.6	5.6
17	Phoenix	4.5	5.1	3.7	5.8
18	Tucson	4.7	5.1	4.1	5.9
19	San Francisco	3.7	5.8	4.6	5.9
20	Colorado Springs	3.0	5.4	4.2	5.9
21	Denver	3.2	6.2	4.1	5.9
22	New York	5.9	6.7	5.3	5.9
23	Portland	5.1	7.3	4.9	5.9
24	Minneapolis	3.2	5.0	4.5	6.1
25	El Paso	6.8	7.1	5.5	6.1
26	Indianapolis	2.8	5.6	4.6	6.2
27	Columbus	3.5	5.3	4.8	6.2
28	San Diego	4.3	4.7	4.8	6.4
29	Charlotte	3.7	5.6	4.3	6.4
30	Louisville	3.6	5.0	4.9	6.6
31	Miami	7.4	7.6	4.4	6.7
32	Jacksonville	3.7	5.0	4.5	6.9
33	Washington, D.C.	5.8	7.3	5.7	7.0
34	Atlanta	5.5	7.8	5.2	7.0
35	Las Vegas	5.2	4.7	5.1	7.2
36	San Jose	3.6	6.9	5.6	7.3
37	Baltimore	6.4	7.6	6.0	7.5
<b>38</b>	<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>7.6</b>
39	Philadelphia	5.7	7.3	6.1	8.0
40	Memphis	5.5	7.9	5.7	8.1
41	Chicago	5.5	7.5	6.0	8.2
42	Kansas City	3.9	8.1	6.6	8.3
43	St. Louis	5.8	9.6	7.8	8.9
44	Long Beach	6.5	7.3	5.9	9.0
45	Los Angeles	6.5	7.3	5.9	9.0
46	Fresno	8.1	8.0	6.9	9.1
47	Sacramento	5.3	6.5	6.7	9.1
48	Cleveland	7.5	8.0	7.9	9.7
49	Oakland	6.1	9.0	7.8	10.5
50	Detroit	7.8	14.3	15.0	16.7