



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

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

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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) and b) 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 Great Recession shows no signs of relenting in Milwaukee. Labor market conditions continue to worsen in the city, according to preliminary employment data just released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) for August 2009. The number of employed residents in the city in August 2009 fell by 18,333 in Milwaukee compared to August 2008, a stunning decline of 7.03 percent. This is the largest “over-the-year” employment decline in the city in any month since the recession officially began in December 2007. In addition, the Milwaukee’s preliminary August 2009 employment total of 242,604 is the lowest reported for that month by the BLS since the current data series began in 1990.

Table 1 shows monthly “over-the-year” employment declines in Milwaukee since January 2008, the first month after the National Bureau of Economic Research designated the beginning of the current recession. Regular readers of the *Monthly Employment Watch* will notice that the data in this table vary from earlier months; this is because, as is customary, the BLS has made significant revisions and re-estimations of earlier employment data. This fact should always be kept in mind as we review current and recent employment statistics; these data are regularly corrected.

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

Month	Employment Change	% Change
January (2007-2008)	-71	-0.03%
February	-893	-0.35%
March	+91	+0.04%
April	+1,356	++0.53%
May	+196	+0.07%
June	-505	-0.20%
July	-91	-0.03%
August	+305	+0.12%
September	-881	-0.34%
October	-1,157	-0.44%
November	-3,916	-1.50%
December	-5,628	-2.16%
January (2008-2009)	-9,523	-3.69%
February	-9,828	-3.83%
March	-15,202	-5.91%
April	-16,401	-6.34%
May	-16,592	-6.44%
June	-18,092	-6.93%
July	17,732	-6.84%
August	-18,333	-7.03%

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

The newly revised data in Table 1 show, not surprisingly, that the recession began tightening its grip on the Milwaukee labor market in September 2008, the month the nation's financial system nearly melted down. Over-the-year job losses increased in all but one month after September, accelerating dramatically in early 2009, and reaching a (current) nadir in August. We do not know, of course, when the trough of this recession will be reached, but the employment losses in the city of Milwaukee have already been staggering and show no evidence of bottoming out.

The over-the-year employment data for the nation's 50 largest cities in August, arrayed in Table 2, suggest that the recession is hitting Milwaukee with as much intensity as any urban labor market in the country. In fact, only one city –perpetually distressed Detroit, the epicenter of the auto industry collapse-- suffered a larger employment decline than did Milwaukee between August 2008-2009: this is the lowest year-over-year employment “growth” ranking for Milwaukee among the 50 largest cities since we began the *Monthly Employment Watch* in 2006. Table 2 also vividly shows how no part of the country has escaped the recession: all but four cities (Tulsa, Austin, San Antonio, and El Paso) posted over-the-year employment losses in August 2009. Among the nation's Frostbelt cities –the historically industrial metropolises of the Northeast-Midwest—Milwaukee again ranks next to last in employment performance over the past year; only Detroit's employment decline has been steeper.

Table 3 shows that since 2000, the final year of the last national business cycle, August employment in Milwaukee has shrunk by over 25,000. This staggering 9.4 percent decline places Milwaukee at 45th among the nation's 50 largest cities in employment performance since 2000. Milwaukee ranked 16th among the 20 largest Frostbelt cities in employment “growth” between August 2000 and August 2009.

Finally, the city of Milwaukee's official unemployment rate jumped from 7.2 percent in August 2008 to 11.9 percent in August 2009; the August 2009 rate was almost double the rate (6.0 percent) at the end of the last business cycle (2000). Placed in comparative context, Milwaukee registered the 40th highest unemployment rate among the nation's 50 largest in August 2009. Detroit posted the nation's worst urban unemployment rate in August: a staggering 27.8 percent.

We should underscore that this is the “U-3” rate calculated by BLS –the most limited definition of unemployment. BLS does not calculate more expansive measures of joblessness –such as the “U-6” measure that includes discouraged workers and involuntarily part-time job holders— for cities. But, if the ratio of U-3 to U-6 is comparable in Milwaukee to the national ratios, then Milwaukee's U-6 rate in August was likely around 18-19 percent – a near depression-era level of joblessness. Detroit's is probably near 40 percent.

**Table 2 -- Employment Growth in the Nation's 50 Largest Cities:
2008 -2009**

Rank	City	August 2008	August 2009	% Change
1	Tulsa	181,654	183,857	1.21%
2	San Antonio	596,355	599,960	0.60%
3	Austin	400,058	401,608	0.39%
4	El Paso	237,122	237,509	0.16%
5	Fort Worth	304,183	303,606	-0.19%
6	Wichita	183,719	183,281	-0.24%
7	Oklahoma City	244,685	243,497	-0.49%
8	Tucson	264,744	262,000	-1.04%
9	Dallas	558,011	551,687	-1.13%
10	Seattle	355,781	350,714	-1.42%
11	Virginia Beach	220,575	216,930	-1.65%
12	Houston	1,007,749	984,960	-2.26%
13	Omaha	224,363	218,921	-2.43%
14	Kansas City	217,182	211,815	-2.47%
15	New York	3,741,987	3,648,260	-2.50%
16	Boston	294,874	286,238	-2.93%
17	Minneapolis	207,027	200,743	-3.04%
18	Mesa City	247,067	239,187	-3.19%
19	Phoenix	813,119	787,185	-3.19%
20	Columbus	402,472	388,392	-3.50%
21	Memphis	289,718	279,425	-3.55%
22	Philadelphia	586,559	564,777	-3.71%
23	Honolulu	434,746	418,504	-3.74%
24	Miami	171,809	165,136	-3.88%
25	St. Louis	143,068	137,507	-3.89%
26	Fresno	212,790	204,175	-4.05%
27	Louisville	338,204	324,434	-4.07%
28	Chicago	1,232,966	1,182,116	-4.12%
29	Cleveland	170,545	163,479	-4.14%
30	Colorado Springs	204,796	195,799	-4.39%
31	Baltimore	259,752	248,291	-4.41%
32	Jacksonville	396,057	378,563	-4.42%
33	Denver	307,937	294,293	-4.43%
34	Albuquerque	256,394	244,854	-4.50%
35	San Diego	660,792	629,989	-4.66%
36	Oakland	181,658	172,570	-5.00%
37	Las Vegas	271,127	257,342	-5.08%
38	Long Beach	218,683	207,358	-5.18%
39	Los Angeles	1,765,075	1,673,662	-5.18%
40	Sacramento	199,399	189,003	-5.21%
41	San Francisco	429,248	406,339	-5.34%
42	San Jose	433,313	409,950	-5.39%
43	Nashville	307,390	290,488	-5.50%
44	Indianapolis	405,864	383,063	-5.62%
45	Portland	291,437	273,576	-6.13%
46	Charlotte	337,242	314,360	-6.79%
47	Washington, D.C.	313,857	292,463	-6.82%
48	Atlanta	219,974	204,619	-6.98%
49	Milwaukee	260,937	242,604	-7.03%
50	Detroit	303,515	278,657	-8.19%

**Table 3 - Employment Growth in the Nation's 50 Largest Cities:
2000 – 2009**

Rank	City	August 2000	August 2009	% Change
1	Phoenix	651,138	787,185	20.89%
2	Mesa City	197,849	239,187	20.89%
3	Fort Worth	255,135	303,606	19.00%
4	Tucson	221,362	262,000	18.36%
5	San Antonio	516,566	599,960	16.14%
6	Miami	148,346	165,136	11.32%
7	Las Vegas	231,330	257,342	11.24%
8	Seattle	319,271	350,714	9.85%
9	Albuquerque	225,497	244,854	8.58%
10	Houston	909,036	984,960	8.35%
11	El Paso	219,334	237,509	8.29%
12	Virginia Beach	201,828	216,930	7.48%
13	Wichita	170,634	183,281	7.41%
14	San Diego	586,812	629,989	7.36%
15	Atlanta	192,847	204,619	6.10%
16	Charlotte	296,692	314,360	5.95%
17	Colorado Springs	185,594	195,799	5.50%
18	New York	3,463,103	3,648,260	5.35%
19	Fresno	194,590	204,175	4.93%
20	Omaha	209,342	218,921	4.58%
21	Sacramento	182,535	189,003	3.54%
22	Austin	389,947	401,608	2.99%
23	Jacksonville	373,020	378,563	1.49%
24	Honolulu	412,594	418,504	1.43%
25	Oklahoma City	243,710	243,497	-0.09%
26	Columbus	388,855	388,392	-0.12%
27	Denver	294,655	294,293	-0.12%
28	Washington, D.C.	293,948	292,463	-0.51%
29	Long Beach	211,530	207,358	-1.97%
30	Los Angeles	1,707,337	1,673,662	-1.97%
31	Nashville	301,172	290,488	-3.55%
32	Boston	297,040	286,238	-3.64%
33	Memphis	293,546	279,425	-4.81%
34	Baltimore	263,505	248,291	-5.77%
35	Kansas City	225,536	211,815	-6.08%
36	Philadelphia	602,032	564,777	-6.19%
37	Louisville	347,441	324,434	-6.62%
38	Dallas	591,054	551,687	-6.66%
39	Portland	293,943	273,576	-6.93%
40	Indianapolis	412,305	383,063	-7.09%
41	Oakland	187,592	172,570	-8.01%
42	Tulsa	200,140	183,857	-8.14%
43	Minneapolis	219,534	200,743	-8.56%
44	Chicago	1,303,888	1,182,116	-9.34%
45	Milwaukee	267,833	242,604	-9.42%
46	St. Louis	153,768	137,507	-10.58%
47	San Francisco	459,381	406,339	-11.55%
48	Cleveland	191,234	163,479	-14.51%
49	San Jose	479,970	409,950	-14.59%
50	Detroit	352,609	278,657	-20.97%

**Table 4 - Employment Growth in the 20 Largest Frostbelt Cities
2008 - 2009**

Rank	City	August 2008	August 2009	% Change
1	Wichita	183,719	183,281	-0.24%
2	Omaha	224,363	218,921	-2.43%
3	Kansas City	217,182	211,815	-2.47%
4	New York	3,741,987	3,648,260	-2.50%
5	Boston	294,874	286,238	-2.93%
6	Minneapolis	207,027	200,743	-3.04%
7	St. Paul (MN)	138,161	133,966	-3.04%
8	Cincinnati	152,267	147,562	-3.09%
9	Buffalo	115,891	112,137	-3.24%
10	Columbus	402,472	388,392	-3.50%
11	Pittsburgh	147,213	141,977	-3.56%
12	Philadelphia	586,559	564,777	-3.71%
13	St. Louis	143,068	137,507	-3.89%
14	Chicago	1,232,966	1,182,116	-4.12%
15	Cleveland	170,545	163,479	-4.14%
16	Baltimore	259,752	248,291	-4.41%
17	Indianapolis	405,864	383,063	-5.62%
18	Washington, D.C.	313,857	292,463	-6.82%
19	Milwaukee	260,937	242,604	-7.03%
20	Detroit	303,515	278,657	-8.19%

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**Table 5- Employment Growth in the 20 Largest Frostbelt Cities
2000 - 2009**

Rank	City	August 2000	August 2009	% Change
1	Wichita	170,634	183,281	7.41%
2	New York	3,463,103	3,648,260	5.35%
3	Omaha	209,342	218,921	4.58%
4	Columbus	388,855	388,392	-0.12%
5	Washington, D.C.	293,948	292,463	-0.51%
6	Cincinnati	152,531	147,562	-3.26%
7	Boston	297,040	286,238	-3.64%
8	Pittsburgh	150,443	141,977	-5.63%
9	Baltimore	263,505	248,291	-5.77%
10	Kansas City	225,536	211,815	-6.08%
11	Philadelphia	602,032	564,777	-6.19%
12	Indianapolis	412,305	383,063	-7.09%
13	Buffalo	120,701	112,137	-7.10%
14	Minneapolis	219,534	200,743	-8.56%
15	Chicago	1,303,888	1,182,116	-9.34%
16	Milwaukee	267,833	242,604	-9.42%
17	St. Paul (MN)	149,441	133,966	-10.36%
18	St. Louis	153,768	137,507	-10.58%
19	Cleveland	191,234	163,479	-14.51%
20	Detroit	352,609	278,657	-20.97%

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Table 6 -- Unemployment Rates in the Nation's 50 Largest Cities

Rank	City	August 2000	August 2008	August 2009
1	Omaha	3.3	3.7	5.0
2	Virginia Beach	2.4	4.0	5.7
3	Honolulu	4.0	3.8	6.0
4	Oklahoma City	3.0	3.9	6.0
5	Austin	3.4	4.4	6.6
6	San Antonio	4.6	5.0	6.6
7	Tulsa	3.2	3.7	6.7
8	Albuquerque	4.3	4.2	7.0
9	Colorado Springs	3.0	5.7	7.4
10	Seattle	4.3	4.0	7.6
11	Mesa City	3.5	5.0	7.8
12	Minneapolis	3.2	5.7	7.9
13	Houston	5.3	5.1	7.9
14	Denver	3.2	5.6	8.0
15	Fort Worth	5.2	5.5	8.3
16	Dallas	5.0	5.9	8.5
17	Boston	3.1	5.5	8.8
18	Columbus	3.5	6.0	8.8
19	El Paso	6.8	6.3	8.8
20	Indianapolis	2.8	6.1	8.9
21	Tucson	4.7	6.3	9.0
22	Nashville	3.6	5.7	9.6
23	Phoenix	4.5	6.5	9.9
24	Wichita	4.8	5.0	9.9
25	Charlotte	3.7	6.1	10.0
26	San Francisco	3.7	5.8	10.1
27	New York	5.9	6.0	10.3
28	San Diego	4.3	6.4	10.4
29	Chicago	5.5	7.7	10.5
30	Louisville	3.6	6.7	10.6
31	Philadelphia	5.7	7.7	10.7
32	Cleveland	7.5	9.1	10.9
33	Jacksonville	3.7	7.0	11.0
34	Baltimore	6.4	7.5	11.1
35	Washington, D.C.	5.8	7.3	11.2
36	Atlanta	5.5	7.8	11.5
37	St. Louis	5.8	9.0	11.5
38	Memphis	5.5	8.1	11.5
39	Portland	5.1	6.0	11.8
40	Milwaukee	6.0	7.2	11.9
41	Kansas City	3.9	8.3	12.2
42	Miami	7.4	7.0	12.3
43	San Jose	3.6	7.1	13.3
44	Las Vegas	5.2	7.2	13.6
45	Fresno	8.1	9.0	13.7
46	Long Beach	6.5	9.4	13.8
47	Los Angeles	6.5	9.4	13.8
48	Sacramento	5.3	9.1	14.3
49	Oakland	6.1	10.4	17.5
50	Detroit	7.8	17.1	27.8