**Fiscal Facts: Job Recovery in Wisconsin Robust but Unequal**

Wisconsin’s job market made a strong recovery from the pandemic, with total employment hitting record levels in 2023. Our state also boasts an unemployment rate below the nation's, and saw an increase in average worker wages that outpaced inflation since 2019.

But Wisconsin’s economic recovery has been highly uneven, with employment in a majority of Wisconsin counties still below 2019 levels. Some key industry sectors, including manufacturing, also continued to lag pre-pandemic employment levels.

These are key takeaways from the Forum’s analysis of newly released data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages – the most accurate employment data available.

Places that added jobs the fastest between 2019 and 2023 were a mix of counties including some on the outskirts of the Twin Cities, Madison, and Chicago metros. In raw totals, fast-growing Dane County added the most jobs during this time, while Milwaukee County shed the most.

Several rural counties lost jobs at the fastest rates during this period. In some counties such as Milwaukee, a declining working-age population during the pandemic years may be contributing to a lack of job recovery, but that is not a consistent statewide trend.

The sectors that added the most jobs between 2019 and 2023 also were growing the fastest pre-pandemic: construction; professional, scientific, and technical services.

The manufacturing sector stands out for having lost the most jobs in Wisconsin during this period. This is particularly concerning given the sector’s outsized importance to Wisconsin’s economy. Our state’s recent trend in this sector contrasts with previous growth in the manufacturing sector and modest growth that has occurred nationally.

At a statewide level, worker wages have risen in Wisconsin. Average wages per employee increased 21.1% between 2019 and 2023, slightly outpacing the inflation rate of 19.2%.

Considering the severity of the disruption the pandemic inflicted on society and the economy, Wisconsin’s jobs picture is relatively bright overall. Yet a closer look reveals an uneven return of jobs across the state and across industry sectors. Wisconsin has plenty of economic news to celebrate, but its long-standing challenges stemming from an aging population and shrinking labor pool remain.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at* [*wispolicyforum.org*](https://wispolicyforum.org/research/state-tax-burden-up-but-overall-burden-still-falling/)*.*