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February 19, 2026

Our Competitors are Beating Us Badly in Creating Good-Paying Jobs

Summary

- **PA is Falling Behind Competing States:** Neighboring states are doing far better in creating higher-paying manufacturing, construction, and other 'goods producing' jobs.
- **The Pittsburgh region is worse off than the rest of the state:** Every other metro area in the state is doing better than the Pittsburgh region at creating these jobs.
- **Pittsburgh is getting clobbered by its Ohio competitors:** Columbus, Cincinnati, and Cleveland are doing better creating these good-paying jobs.
- **Goods-producing jobs pay far more than service jobs:** In PA, the average goods-producing job pays 33% better, $76K annually versus $57K.
- **The lack of construction jobs does not bode well:** Pennsylvania, and the Pittsburgh region in particular, are trailing far behind competitors in these jobs, which can be viewed as an indicator of which way the economy is headed.

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Pennsylvania is falling behind its nearby competitors in creating manufacturing, construction, and the kinds of other good-paying jobs that make things.

And the Pittsburgh region is performing the worst in the state in that effort.

Unlike the competing states of Ohio, West Virginia, and Indiana, Pennsylvania still does not have as many of the jobs that economists classify as "goods producing" as it did prior to COVID, according to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. In addition to factory jobs, that category also includes construction, oil and gas drilling, and agriculture.

STATE GOODS-PRODUCING JOBS

STATE	IN 000s*	% OF PRE-COVID JOBS**
OH	964.4	103.4
WV	101.3	103.2
IN	692.0	100.1
MI	803.9	99.9
PA	842.5	98.6

* Dec 2025, not seasonally adjusted

** Dec 2019

And Pittsburgh is doing even worse in that category compared to other markets in Pennsylvania, as well as those in Ohio. While every other market in Pennsylvania is close to or above its pre-COVID total for goods-producing jobs, the number in the Pittsburgh region has shrunk by more than 8%.

PA GOODS-PRODUCING JOBS

REGION*	IN 000s**	% OF PRE-COVID JOBS***
Scranton	41.0	106.5
Lehigh Valley (Allentown)	54.6	102.8
York	44.9	100.7
Harrisburg	34.1	100.6
Erie	23.6	100.0
Reading	39.8	99.5
Philadelphia	201.5	98.5
Pittsburgh	150.7	91.7

* MSAs, except Philadelphia (Philadelphia, Delaware, Chester, Buck, Montgomery counties)
** Dec 2025, not seasonally adjusted
*** Dec 2019

In Ohio, the worst performing major market is Cleveland, which has recovered to its pre-pandemic level, while Cincinnati (106.7%) and Columbus (113.7%) are much larger than six years ago.

If Pittsburgh's goods-producing sector had simply kept pace with Cleveland's performance, the region would have 13,700 more jobs paying an average of $76,128 per year.

And that's one reason why goods-producing jobs are so important: On average they pay 33% more than service-sector jobs in Pennsylvania, according to BLS data. Service-sector jobs pay an average of $57,096.

The one bright spot in the data is Pennsylvania's relatively good showing in the manufacturing sector compared to its neighbors. There are fewer manufacturing jobs in the state than there were when COVID hit, but most other nearby states have shrunk more.

(Please see charts at the end of this report.)

The notable exception: Ohio, which has more manufacturing jobs and is rebuilding them faster than Pennsylvania.

The Pittsburgh region is not sharing in the state's relatively good manufacturing performance. Every other region in the state, except Harrisburg, is doing better. Scranton and the Lehigh Valley have more manufacturing jobs today than six years ago, while Philadelphia, Erie, and the other regions have shrunk less than Pittsburgh.

All three Ohio markets are doing better than Pittsburgh as well, with Cincinnati and Columbus both boasting more manufacturing jobs than prior to the pandemic.

Unfortunately for Pennsylvania and the Pittsburgh region, the data is not particularly promising for the future, either. Construction jobs can be seen as leading economic indicators, as construction jobs can represent projects or supporting infrastructure that will result in permanent jobs in the future.

STATE CONSTRUCTION JOBS

STATE	IN 000s*	% OF PRE-COVID JOBS**
WV	35.9	116.6
OH	260.7	116.2
MI	197.5	115.0
IN	167.9	114.9
PA	258.8	101.5

* Dec 2025, not seasonally adjusted

** Dec 2019

In Pennsylvania overall, there are slightly more construction jobs than pre-COVID. In the worst-performing of nearby competitor states, construction jobs are up 15% higher.

And as with the other data, Pittsburgh is doing worse than the rest of the state and its neighboring competitors, with construction jobs down 12% in the region from the pre-pandemic level.

It is not a surprise when the Pittsburgh region and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania score poorly compared to fast-growing sunbelt states on measures of manufacturing and construction jobs. But when our state and region perform so poorly against other similar markets to ours, it is a clear indication that we need to be far more creative and aggressive in attracting businesses and jobs.

STATE MANUFACTURING JOBS

STATE	IN 000s*	% OF PRE-COVID JOBS**
OH	694.8	99.5
PA	561.9	98.0
IN	518.7	96.2
MI	599.2	95.7
WV	44.6	95.3

* Dec 2025, not seasonally adjusted
** Dec 2019

PA MANUFACTURING JOBS

REGION*	IN 000s**	% OF PRE-COVID JOBS***
Scranton	30.6	108.1
Lehigh Valley (Allentown)	41.2	103.0
York	32.4	99.7
Lancaster	36.9	99.2
Reading	31.7	98.4
Erie	19.2	98.0
Philadelphia	121.4	96.7
Pittsburgh	86.5	96.2
Harrisburg	21.2	95.5

* MSAs, except Philadelphia (Philadelphia, Delaware, Chester, Buck, Montgomery counties)
** Dec 2025, not seasonally adjusted
*** Dec 2019

PITTSBURGH VS. OTHER MARKETS

MARKET*	% OF PRE-COVID MANUFACTURING JOBS	% OF PRE-COVID 'GOODS PRODUCING' JOBS
Cincinnati	105.0	106.7
Columbus	102.7	113.7
Cleveland	97.2	99.8
Philadelphia	96.7	98.5
Pittsburgh	96.2	91.7

* MSAs, except Philadelphia (Philadelphia, Delaware, Chester, Buck, Montgomery counties)

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