

Introduction

This edition of Kevin's Corner is the second in a series reviewing regional labor force changes in Vermont. This edition looks at changes in Vermont's most populous region, the Burlington Metropolitan Statistical area (MSA or "Burlington Metro") consisting of Chittenden, Franklin and Grand Isle counties. A previous edition reviewed the state's Northeast Kingdom. The next edition will do the same for the southern Vermont region. For each, we review statewide changes followed by an analysis of the region and a brief comparison of the component counties.

The labor force is defined as the sum of employed persons and unemployed persons (those willing and able to work who have sought work in the past month). While the components of the labor force change with business cycles, the overall size of the labor force is more closely related to long-term demographic trends. Vermont's labor force has grown by about 44% since 1979.

Sources

Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) is a program of the Economic & Labor Market Information Division in cooperation with our federal partners at the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. LAUS data uses data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), Vermont's Unemployment Insurance program, and Current Employment Statistics to generate monthly estimates of the number of Vermonters employed and unemployed (combined, the labor force). This review relies on annual averages for each year. All LAUS data can be found at the data tool on our website [here](#).

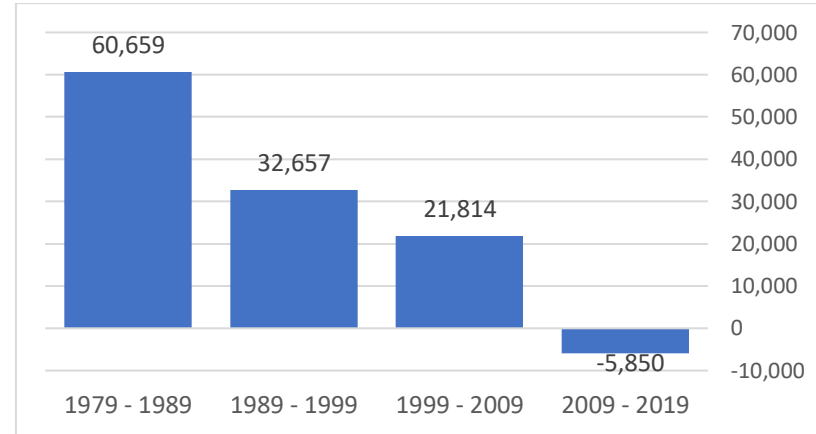
Within this report we will review 10-year changes in annual average labor force figures. The statewide analysis begins with 1979. The

Labor Market Information Division and the US Bureau of Labor Statistics first produced county-level labor force data in 1990. In order to prevent pandemic changes from impacting the decennial analysis we end that portion of analysis with 2019, resulting in slightly incongruent periods: 1990 to 1999 followed by 1999 - 2009 and 2009 - 2019. A review of those periods will be followed by a brief review of pandemic-era changes.

Vermont Statewide, 1979 – Present

Vermont's labor force grew by 43.7% between 1979 and 2023. The growth was not evenly distributed across the decades. Between 1979 and 1989 the labor force expanded by 60,659 persons or 24.8%. In the decade that followed (1989 – 1999) growth slowed to 10.7% (+32,657). Between 1999 and 2009 the rate of growth slowed to 6.5% (+21,814 people). Between 2009 and 2019 the growth turned negative and the state's labor force declined by 5,850 people or -1.6%. See Chart 1.

Chart 1: Change in Annual Average Vermont Labor Force by Decade



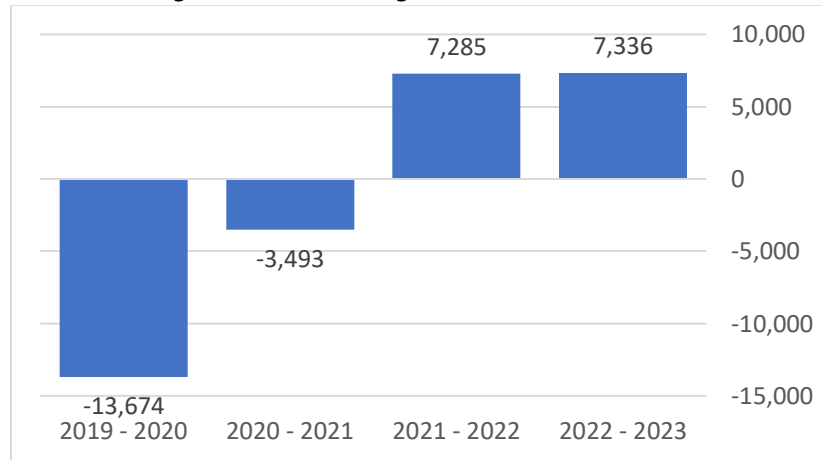
Kevin's Corner is an occasional review of Vermont economic and demographic data. It is written by Kevin Stapleton, Assistant Director of Economic & Labor Market Information (E&LMI) with support from E&LMI staff. Kevin can be reached at kevin.stapleton@vermont.gov. For more information visit our website at www.vtlni.info.

Statewide Pandemic – Era Labor Force Changes

The impact of the COVID pandemic can be seen in Vermont’s 2020 labor force data. On a monthly basis the labor force declined by 13,256 between April and May of 2020, by far the largest monthly decline in the series. On an annual basis the labor force declined by 13,674 Vermonters (-3.9%) between 2019 and 2020.

By 2023 the labor force regained all but 2,546 (0.7%) of its 2019 figure. See Chart 2.

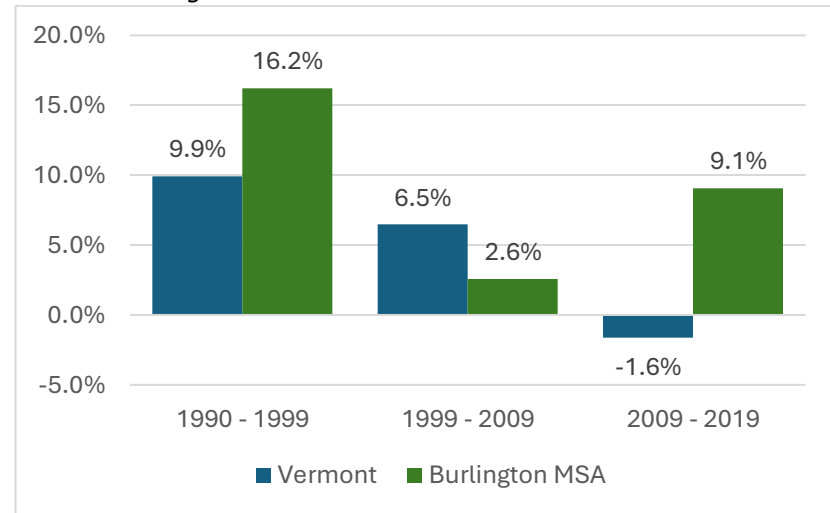
Chart 2: Change in Annual Average Labor Force Since 2019



The Burlington MSA, 1990 – Present

During the 1990s the labor force of the Burlington Metro increased by 16,470 or 16.2%, a rate that far outpaced the statewide growth rate of 9.9%. Over the 1999 to 2009 period the growth rate slowed to 2.6% (+3,046); falling behind the statewide growth rate of 6.5% for the same period. Between 2009 and 2019 the Metro’s growth accelerated again with the labor force increasing by 11,003 (+9.1%). This was in stark contrast to the statewide labor force which declined by 1.6%. See Chart 3.

Chart 3: Burlington MSA and Vermont Labor Force Growth Rates



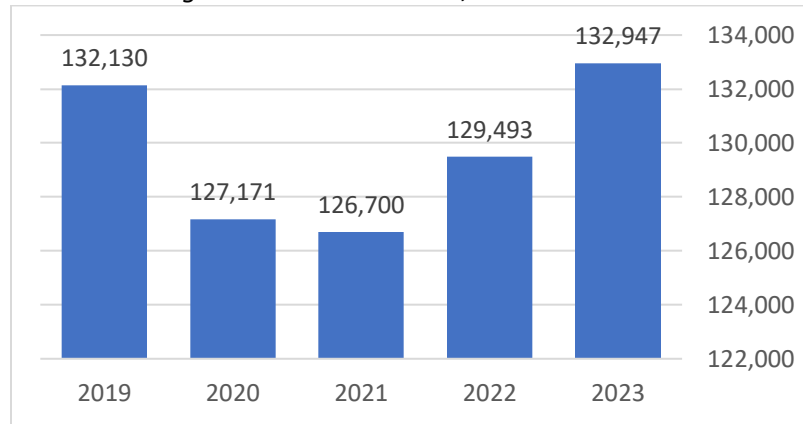
The decade between 2009 and 2019 marked a significant divergence in growth rates across the state. While every county experienced labor force growth between 1990 and 2009, most of the state began to see declines by the 2010s. Between 2009 and 2019 the only counties to experience growth were the three counties of the MSA and Washington County in central Vermont. Meanwhile, ten counties experienced labor force declines averaging -8.8%.

Pandemic-Era Labor Force Changes in the Burlington MSA

2020 labor force data for the Burlington Metro showed an annual average decline of 4,959 (-3.8%) relative to 2019, similar to the statewide decline of 3.9%. The brief decline halted in 2021. By 2023 the labor force averaged 132,947, a 4.5% increase from 2020 and the highest annual average in the history of the series. The previous peak labor force had been 132,502 in 2018. See Chart 4.

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Chart 4: Burlington Metro Labor Force, 2019 – 2023



Burlington MSA Share of Vermont's Labor Force

The three counties of the Burlington MSA constituted 33.1% of Vermont's labor force in 1990. Between then and 2009 the share grew to 33.7%. In the decade between 2009 and 2019 the share increased during the long recovery from the December 2007 recession. It reached 37.4% of Vermont's labor force by 2019. The trend continued after the pandemic and by 2023, 37.9% of Vermont's labor force lived in the Burlington MSA.

County-Level Labor Force Changes within the Burlington MSA

Labor force growth in the three counties of the Burlington MSA has been faster than the statewide average in recent decades. Between 1990 and 2023 the state labor force grew by 14.3%. During that same period Grand Isle's labor force grew by 49.3%, though in numeric terms that growth only represents an increase of 1,396 people. Franklin County's labor force expanded by 35.5% or 7,475. Meanwhile Chittenden expanded by 28.9% or 22,465 people.

Chittenden's labor force contracted slightly (-0.4% or -359 people) between 1999 and 2009; otherwise every county in the Burlington MSA experienced growth in each decade between 1990 and 2019.

While the pandemic led to declines in 2020, Chittenden County's labor force grew to 100,207 by 2023, six-hundred and forty-four persons (+0.6%) larger than 2019. Meanwhile Franklin County's 2023 figure was 216 (+0.8%) above its 2019 total. Grand Isle remained 43 persons (-1.0%) below 2019. See Table 1 below.

Table 1: Burlington MSA Counties Changes in Labor Force

Location	Year	Labor Force	Change	% Change
Chittenden County	1990	77,742	NA	NA
	1999	90,656	12,914	16.6%
	2009	90,297	-359	-0.4%
	2019	99,563	9,266	10.3%
	2020	95,839	-3,724	-3.7%
	2023	100,207	4,368	4.6%
Franklin County	1990	21,039	NA	NA
	1999	23,915	2,876	13.7%
	2009	26,578	2,663	11.1%
	2019	28,298	1,720	6.5%
	2020	27,264	-1,034	-3.7%
	2023	28,514	1,250	4.6%
Grand Isle County	1990	2,830	NA	NA
	1999	3,510	680	24.0%
	2009	4,252	742	21.1%
	2019	4,269	17	0.4%
	2020	4,068	-201	-4.7%
	2023	4,226	158	3.9%

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