

Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta

Atlanta Fed Analysis of Jacksonville Job Market Reveals Regional Conditions

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Fulfilling the Federal Reserve System’s dual mandate of price stability and full employment requires a thorough understanding of the economy, both in the national and local context. At the Atlanta Fed, we closely monitor the labor market through both our Community and Economic Development (CED) team that focuses on research and engagement that aims to improve economic opportunity for low- and moderate-income individuals (LMI) and our Regional Economic Information Network (REIN) team that gathers economic intelligence from business leaders.¹ Recently, we leveraged the complementary capabilities of CED and REIN to engage local businesses, workforce development professionals, social services system administrators, and individual workers and job seekers for a 360-degree labor market analysis in one of the most dynamic economies in the Southeast—Jacksonville, Florida.

¹ Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, “Regional Economic Information Network (REIN),” accessed September 9, 2025, <https://www.atlantafed.org/rein>.

Changing conditions in the Southeast: Jacksonville by the numbers

According to US Census Bureau population estimates, the population of the Jacksonville area increased nearly 10 percent between 2020 and 2024. Robust population growth is due in part to Jacksonville’s strong employment growth. With job gains in sectors such as manufacturing, healthcare, and transportation and warehousing, total employment in the Jacksonville metropolitan area in 2024 topped 750,000 for the first time.² In that same year, the unemployment rate was 3.5 percent, among the lowest in the country.³



From 2020 to 2025, the cost of living in Jacksonville rose significantly.

Jacksonville’s growing economy, however, has not come without challenges. In recent years, the overall cost of living in the region has risen significantly. In January 2020, for example, the median list price of single-family homes in Jacksonville was less than \$300,000.⁴ In July 2025, it topped \$400,000. Additionally, childcare costs have also risen in recent years.⁵ Based on recent Atlanta Fed findings, a teacher, police officer, or firefighter making the median wage for their occupation in Duval County would need to pay more than 30 percent of their wages to cover childcare costs for two young children.⁶

Against the backdrop of strong population growth, rising unemployment levels,⁷ and elevated living costs, this 360-degree analysis engages the full circle of labor market stakeholders: business, workforce, and social service providers and workers and job seekers. In hearing their unique perspectives on labor market challenges and opportunities, our study informs a more comprehensive understanding of regional workforce needs and can assist other communities facing similar economic realities.

Table setting: The stakeholders and the questions

During two roundtables in June and July of 2025, we engaged 20 business and economic development leaders representing a cross section of the Jacksonville economy. During these sessions, we asked about the business

² US Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages,” dataset for All Employees in Total Covered Total, all industries for All establishment sizes in Jacksonville, FL MSA, accessed March 26, 2026, <https://data.bls.gov/PDQWeb/en>

³ US Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS),” dataset for Jacksonville, Florida, accessed September 11, 2025, <https://www.bls.gov/lau/>.

⁴ Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, “Housing Inventory: Median Listing Price in Jacksonville, FL (CBSA),” dataset for 2020, Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED), accessed July 31, 2025, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/MEDLISPR127260>.

⁵ US Department of Labor, “Childcare Prices by Age of Children and Care Setting,” dataset for 2022, accessed September 9, 2025, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/topics/childcare/price-by-age-care-setting-2022>.

⁶ Brittany Birken, John Rees, and Jacob Walker, “Too Costly to Work? The Childcare Burden on Household Earnings,” Discussion Paper 2025-02 (Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, November 18, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.29338/dp2025-02>.

⁷ US Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Unemployment Rate in Jacksonville, FL (MSA) [JACK212URN],” Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED), accessed March 3, 2026, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/JACK212URN>.

outlook for the year, plans and adaptations with policy uncertainty, and short- and long-term approaches to hiring trends and practices.

Through a roundtable discussion and one-on-one interviews over May, June, and July of 2025, we spoke with 11 workforce intermediaries and support service organizations to better understand their current operating environment as compared to that of 2024. We asked if and how demand for their services changed, what they saw as the shifting needs of residents seeking services (job placement or otherwise), and how they were working with business and industry to build the talent pipeline Jacksonville needs today and into the future.



“I’m just thankful to have a job... I’m grateful I have a roof over my head. I’m able, you know, to go and get some milk and eggs for my children.”

—Jacksonville Worker

Finally, we engaged directly with workers and job seekers navigating the local labor market. Through two focus groups and four interviews with a total of 12 people,⁸ we asked about employment experiences, ability to cover costs of living, strategies to manage finances, barriers to finding and maintaining work, and confidence in the job market and their experiences in a local job search.

Jacksonville labor market at-a-glance

Discussions between industry representatives, workforce providers, and workers and job seekers in Jacksonville offer some significant insights into longer-term workforce planning risks and opportunities.⁹

Among these insights, four main themes emerge in our 360-degree analysis: (1) the local labor market is following national trends, (2) return-to-office postures require policy shifts, (3) current labor market conditions require adaptations to workforce development, and (4) social assistance programs struggle to fill the gap between wages and cost of living.

In Jacksonville, a softening local labor market mirrors national trends.¹⁰ Most employers note hiring remained flat in 2025 and all business representatives mentioned leveraging technology, distributing tasks across their workforce, and being more intentional about hiring as the market moderated. The slowing market, combined with a sense from workers and job seekers that

⁸ All participants received details about the project and provided informed consent to be our research partners in this effort. Participants were compensated for sharing their time and experience.

⁹ While these insights highlight critical barriers that stakeholders face in maintaining and developing a talent pipeline given current conditions in the regional economy, they are not intended to provide a strategic framework through which that investment and regional coordination should occur.

¹⁰ US Bureau of Labor Statistics “Employment Situation Summary—2025 M08 Results,” US Department of Labor, accessed September 9, 2025, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>.

the job market in the region was weighted disproportionately toward lower-level or entry-level opportunities, has led to an erosion of confidence in the job market and compounded worker frustrations regarding their job search. Job seekers note low confidence in finding a new or better job in the next three to six months, indicating increased difficulty in finding work. Those with jobs who were not actively seeking new employment make similar market observations. Employed workers relay a sense of feeling both stuck in place due to the slowing job market and a general thankfulness for their job, even if they feel underemployed or wages do not comfortably cover the cost of living.



“I think that what I’m really, really pushing for or really looking for, and hopefully I can find it, it’s a work-life balance.”

—Jacksonville worker

The second theme of our analysis underscores that return-to-office is an active renegotiation of workplace norms. All employers reference shifting policies to bring their workforce back into the office, echoing national workplace policy trends for the past few years.¹¹ Several industry representatives note that while employees enjoyed increasing decision-making power over the past several years and have come to expect remote work options, the softening labor market shifts the balance of power in favor of employers. Both workforce providers and workers view these changes as a barrier to employment, as many workers continue to prioritize flexibility in their work location and hours to support their work-life balance. Workforce intermediaries also note that work-life balance considerations had become much more central in conversations with job seekers relative to pre-pandemic counseling norms. The work-life balance enabled by remote employment was frequently prioritized over wages or salary considerations.

The third theme marks that near- and long-term variation in labor supply and demand requires different approaches to building the talent pipeline. While most businesses focus more on attrition management than hiring concerns, the construction and healthcare sectors note ongoing talent pipeline challenges because of the skill sets needed for these jobs. An aging workforce is a major factor compounding workforce pipeline development challenges.

Recruiting available and skilled workers in construction and healthcare, particularly when recruiting workers internationally, has new challenges. As one healthcare employer notes: “We get workers from the Philippines. Demand is at an all-time high. These are college educated professionals. There is a two-year delay to bring on workers, and the process already

¹¹ Tracy Brower, “How RTO Mandates Are Increasing In-Office Work Trends,” Forbes (February 24, 2025) <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2025/02/22/rto-mandates-drive-office-work-trends/>.

takes two years.” With the construction and healthcare sectors projected to account for more than 50 percent of economic growth in Jacksonville over the next ten years, employers emphasize the importance of a coordinated regional strategy to meet current and future workforce needs.¹²

Lastly, balancing the workforce system’s ability to provide needed services against the backdrop of funding challenges remains a significant concern. Elevated costs of living and financial hardships affecting many working individuals and job seekers corresponds with an increase in service demand for housing and food assistance referrals. Virtually all worker and job seeker participants, for example, express concern that salaries are not keeping pace with rising costs. While the rise in demand contributes to greater coordination among nonprofit organizations, there is widespread concern that gaps might arise should a heightened level of service delivery ultimately prove unsustainable. Workforce providers note potential changes to state and federal funding for programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, and care child assistance are especially concerning.



“The workforce isn’t there. The average age of workers in the industry is mid-50s.”

—Jacksonville business leader

Opportunities for impact and implications beyond Jacksonville

The 360-degree view of perceived risks, obstacles, and opportunities in the Jacksonville labor market can inform future efforts benefitting local companies, workers, and workforce providers alike. Given the high levels of investment and economic growth anticipated for the Jacksonville region combined with funding constraints in the talent development ecosystem, it is critical that local businesses and workforce intermediaries coordinate to ensure companies can secure necessary talent while also providing workers opportunities to realize their full potential. Successful cross-sector strategies in Jacksonville could serve as models for communities throughout the Southeast and the nation. These include

- Continuing to engage workers and job seekers in crafting effective policies around issues such as return-to-office and compensation to mitigate potential barriers to labor force participation. The Federal Reserve’s Worker Voices initiative, for example, includes a toolkit with guidance on how to effectively elevate community perspectives in policy, programming, and practice.
- Coordinating and collaborating across the nonprofit and workforce sectors to mitigate service gaps and leverage funding. As highlighted in

¹² Authors’ calculations of Lightcast QCEW Employment Data.



“We’re excited about doing things differently. We can’t keep doing things like they’ve always done. The world has evolved, the workplace has evolved, and our people have a different perspective, and we need to listen to them.”

—Jacksonville nonprofit leader

Reconceptualizing Workers as Lifelong Learners, for example, policies prioritizing skills-based practices among employers and broader adoption of apprenticeships may encourage an increase in employer-based funding for education and training, thereby lessening the burden on traditional education providers and creating the sought after partnership with local employers.

- Building sector-based strategies focused on high employment growth industries to meet workforce needs, develop meaningful skill-building opportunities, and create broader awareness of career opportunities. The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas’ Advance Together initiative illustrates how community partnerships can connect individuals with quality jobs.

Ultimately, we hope our 360-degree analysis can help stakeholders work together towards a stronger future by laying bare the realities that their businesses, services, and workers are facing and by supporting local leaders who increasingly recognize the need to embrace an entrepreneurial mindset aimed at advancing their communities.

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