Employment Security Department
WASHINGTON STATE

The Monthly Employment Report

September 2026

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On a seasonally adjusted basis, preliminary estimates from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) show nonfarm employment in Washington decreased by 15,400 from August to September 2026. This dip in employment is the second consecutive decline following three months of job growth.[a] The deepest sector level losses in September were observed in two of the largest employment sectors: government and private education and health services. Professional and business services and construction posted the largest one-month gains.

On a not seasonally adjusted basis, estimates for September 2025 through September 2026 show an increase of 9,200 jobs statewide. Employers in the private sector collectively added 8,900 jobs while employers in the public sector added an estimated 300 jobs over the year.

Washington's preliminary seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for September 2026 was 4.8%, down relative to 4.9% reported in August. This marks the third consecutive month of a declining unemployment rate following a relatively steady climb over the previous 19 months. For comparison, the unemployment rate in September 2025 was 4.7%.

BLS estimates of monthly job gains and losses are based on a survey of businesses. Preliminary estimates are subject to revision.

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[a] Most of the employment numbers in this report refer to jobs, not people. For example, if a person holds two positions, these positions are counted as two jobs in the employment series. In the unemployment section, these positions refer to individuals, not jobs. In this case, a person holding two jobs is counted only once.

Resident civilian labor force and unemployment

The resident civilian labor force is the total number of people in the workforce, employed and unemployed, ages 16 and older.

The number of unemployed is the estimated number of people who currently do not have a job, are available for work and have actively looked for work in the last four weeks.

The unemployment rate is the ratio of the estimated number of unemployed divided by the civilian labor force.

Figure 1: Resident civilian labor force and unemployment, seasonally adjusted, United States, Washington state, and Seattle MSA, August and September 2026 and August and September 2025

United States	September 2026 (p)	August 2026	September 2025	August 2025
Unemployment rate	4.1%	4.2%	4.4%	4.3%

Washington	September 2026 (p)	August 2026	September 2025	August 2025
Unemployment rate	4.8%	4.9%	4.7%	4.6%
Resident labor force	4,045,430	4,043,696	4,056,992	4,053,622
Unemployed	193,018	197,389	192,034	187,705

Seattle/Tacoma/Bellevue	September 2026 (p)	August 2026	September 2025	August 2025
Unemployment rate	4.8%	4.9%	4.8%	4.6%
Resident labor force	2,309,942	2,304,393	2,311,082	2,309,753
Unemployed	111,986	113,550	110,160	105,970

Source: Employment Security Department/LMIR Division; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics. The most recent month reports preliminary data (p). Past months report data revised from their original publication. This is a standard practice as data matures.

Unemployment, seasonally adjusted

The BLS estimates Washington's preliminary seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for September 2026 was 4.8%, down relative to 4.9% reported in August 2026 (revised). The revised estimate for September 2025 was 4.7%. The drop in September was the third consecutive dip in the unemployment rate following a gradual and consistent increase from late 2024.

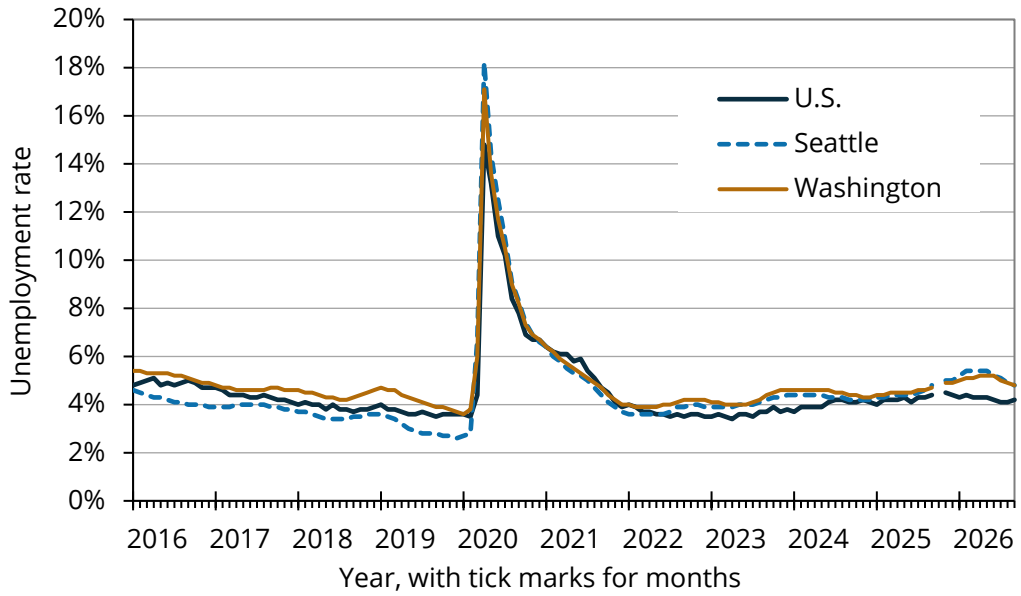
According to BLS estimates, the number of unemployed Washington residents decreased by 4,371 from August to September and the estimated number of employed Washington residents increased by 6,105, pushing the unemployment rate down over the month.

Over the year, the estimated number of unemployed workers increased by 984 and the number of employed workers decreased by 12,546. The total labor force decreased by 11,562 or 0.3% over the year.

September 2026 preliminary unemployment rates:

- United States: 4.1%.
- Washington: 4.8%.
- Seattle area: 4.8%.

Figure 2: Unemployment rates, seasonally adjusted, U.S., Washington and Seattle, January 2016 through September 2026



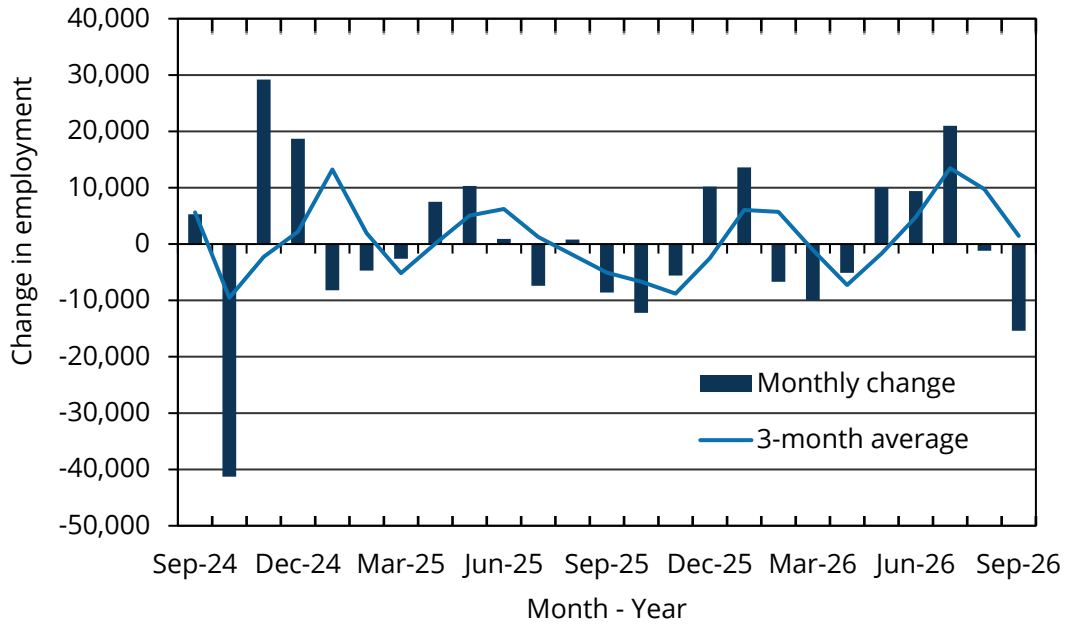
Source: Employment Security Department/LMIR; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, See this report's charts and data on esd.wa.gov.

Employment change, seasonally adjusted

Based on BLS estimates, Washington state nonfarm employment decreased by 15,400 from August to September 2026. Recent employment change:

- July 2026: up 21,000 (revised).
- August 2026: down 1,200 (revised).
- September 2026: down 15,400 (preliminary).

Figure 3: Monthly employment change, seasonally adjusted, Washington state, September 2024 through September 2026



Source: Employment Security Department/LMIR; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics. See this report's charts and data on esd.wa.gov.

Employment and unemployment, seasonally adjusted

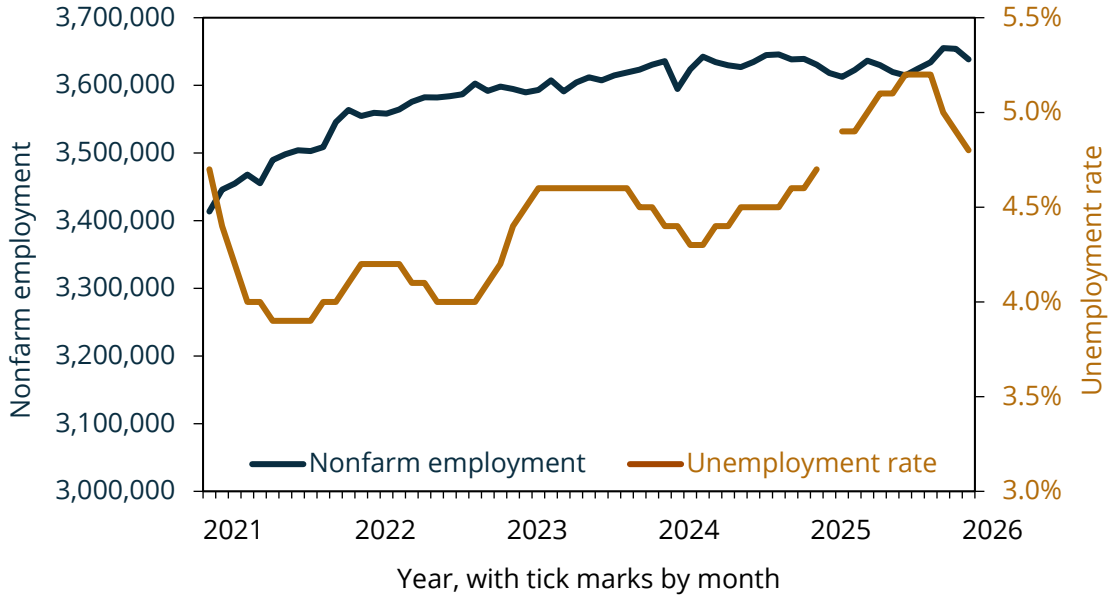
January 2021 (revised)

- Nonfarm employment: 3,262,300.
- Unemployment rate: 6.4%.

September 2026 (preliminary)

- Nonfarm employment: 3,638,500.
- Unemployment rate: 4.8%.

Figure 4: Nonfarm employment and unemployment rates, seasonally adjusted, Washington, January 2021 through September 2026



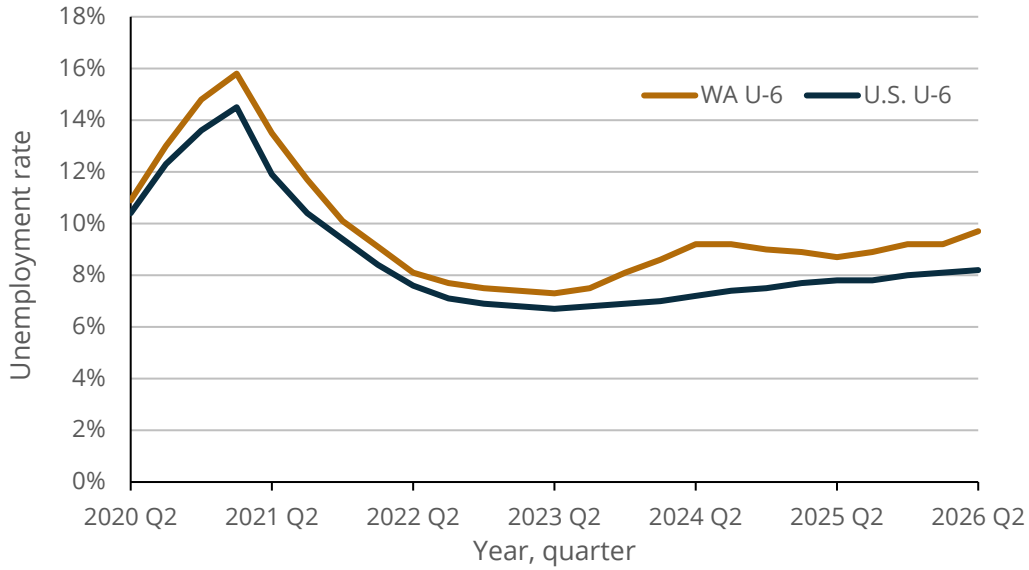
Source: Employment Security Department/LMIR; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics. See this report's charts and data on esd.wa.gov.

U-6: Broader annual average unemployment remained virtually unchanged

BLS recently updated its alternative measures of labor underutilization for states to include four-quarter rates through the second quarter of 2026. One such alternative measure is the U-6 rate, which considers not only the unemployed population in the official U-3 unemployment rate, but also marginally attached workers and those employed part time for economic reasons. The U-6 rate is defined by BLS as the "total unemployed, plus all marginally attached workers, plus total employed part time for economic reasons, as a percent of the civilian labor force plus all marginally attached workers." This U-6 measure measures the "unemployed, underemployed, and those who are not looking but who want a job."

The U-6 annual average unemployment rate for the four-quarter period through the second quarter of 2026 for Washington state was 9.7%. This marks in increase relative to the previous two four quarter moving averages (9.2% through fourth quarter of 2025 and through the first quarter of 2026). The U.S. U-6 average for the four-quarter period through the second quarter of 2026 was 8.2%. Washington's U-6 rate tends to run higher than the national rate.

Figure 5: Alternative measures of labor underutilization, four-quarter moving average, Washington state and U.S. U-3 and U-6 unemployment rates



Source: Employment Security Department/LMIR; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey and Local Area Unemployment Statistics. See this report's charts and data on esd.wa.gov.

Figure 6: Alternate measures of labor underutilization, four quarter moving average, Washington

Year	WA/U.S.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Annual average
2026	WA	9.2%	9.7%	-	-
2026	US	8.1%	8.2%	-	-
2025	WA	8.9%	8.7%	8.9%	9.2%
2025	U.S.	7.7%	7.8%	7.8%	8.0%
2024	WA	8.6%	9.2%	9.2%	9.0%
2024	U.S.	7.0%	7.2%	7.4%	7.5%
2023	WA	7.4%	7.3%	7.5%	8.1%
2023	U.S.	6.8%	6.7%	6.8%	6.9%
2022	WA	9.1%	8.1%	5.0%	7.5%
2022	U.S.	8.4%	7.6%	7.1%	6.9%
2021	WA	15.8%	13.5%	11.7%	10.1%
2021	U.S.	14.5%	11.9%	10.4%	9.4%
2020	WA	8.1%	10.9%	13.0%	14.8%
2020	U.S.	7.7%	10.4%	12.3%	13.6%

Source: Employment Security Department/LMIR; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey and Local Area Unemployment Statistics

Industry employment in Washington, one-month changes

Overview of seasonally adjusted changes, August to September 2026

Based on a BLS survey of businesses and governments, Washington employers collectively shed an estimated 15,400 jobs.

- The one-month decrease in employment is the second consecutive month of declining employment tallies that was preceded by three consecutive months of job growth. 2025 and 2026 have been characterized by a mix of brief periods of increasing employment and brief periods of decreasing employment.
- Employment increased in four major industry sectors, decreased in eight, and remained unchanged in one.
- Employment losses were observed in both the public and private sectors. Private sector employment decreased by 5,000 in September. Public sector employment decreased by 10,400 on a seasonally adjusted basis.

Increases compared to August 2026

- The largest one-month gains were observed in professional and business services (up 1,800), construction (up 1,500) and information (up 1,400).
    - The professional and business services sector added the largest number of jobs in September (up 1,800). One-month gains were observed in professional, scientific and technical services as well as administrative and support and waste management and remediation (each up 800) and in management of companies and enterprises.
        - Several specialties within the broader classifications shed jobs, including employment services (down 800).
    - Construction sector employment increased by 1,500 in September. Gains were attributable to hiring by businesses in specialty trades (up 1,800). Construction of buildings slipped by 300 in September.
    - The information sector added 1,400 jobs in September. None of the increases were attributable to software publishing employers this month.

Decreases compared to August 2026

- The deepest sector level losses were observed in government (down 10,400), private education and health services (down 4,900), transportation, warehousing and utilities (down 1,800), and manufacturing (down 1,700).
    - Losses in government were widespread. Federal government employment was down 200, state government dropped by 8,800 and local government employment was down 1,400 in September. Within state and local government, the deepest one-month losses were observed in educational services.

- Losses in education and health services were concentrated in private educational services (down 4,500) but observed throughout the sector.
- Transportation, warehousing and utilities losses came from transportation and warehousing industries; mostly from detailed industries that are not specifically broken out in this report.
- Losses in manufacturing were reflective of employment losses among Washington's food manufacturing industries (down 1,400).

Figure 7: Estimated one-month employment change by industry sector, seasonally adjusted, Washington state, September 2026

Industry sector	One-month change
Total nonfarm	-15,400
Professional and business services	1,800
Construction	1,500
Information	1,400
Leisure and hospitality	1,000
Mining and logging	0
Other services	-100
Financial activities	-100
Wholesale trade	-1,000
Retail trade	-1,100
Manufacturing	-1,700
Transportation, warehousing and utilities	-1,800
Private education and health services	-4,900
Government	-10,400

Source: Employment Security Department/LMIR; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics

Industry employment in Washington: changes over the year

Overview of not seasonally adjusted changes, September 2025 to September 2026

Based on a BLS survey of businesses and governments, on a not seasonally adjusted basis, Washington businesses collectively added an estimated 9,200 jobs from September 2025 to September 2026. This is a 0.3% increase in employment over the year, continuing a trend of generally flat employment growth over the year.

- Over the past 12 months, employment in seven major industry sectors increased and six decreased.
- Private sector employment increased by 8,900 jobs (0.3%).

- Public sector employment increased by 300 jobs (0.1%).
    - One-year losses were concentrated in state and federal government. State employment decreased by 2,900 and federal government employment decreased by 2,100. Local government employment increased by 5,300.

Increases compared to September 2025

- The largest private sector gains were attributable to hiring in education and health services (up 10,500), leisure and hospitality (up 7,400) and manufacturing (up 5,900).
    - The increase in education and health services was predominantly observed in health services (up 9,900) with more than half of the increases attributable to hiring by ambulatory health services such as doctor's offices. Nursing and residential care facilities and social assistance employers also added jobs over the year (2,600 and 2,400 respectively).
    - Leisure and hospitality gains were largely concentrated in the arts, entertainment and recreation industries (up 6,200).
    - Manufacturing employment gains were primarily attributable to hiring in Washington's aerospace products and parts manufacturing industries (up 6,100). Gains in durable goods were partially offset by losses in nondurable goods manufacturing.

Decreases compared to September 2025

- The deepest private sector losses were in professional and business services (down 11,000), wholesale trade (down 4,200), information (down 2,700), and retail trade (down 2,500).
    - Employment losses in professional and business services sector were widespread among the range of services that comprise the sector. Administration and support and waste management and remediation services decreased by 9,400 over the year; professional, scientific and technical services decreased by 1,200, and management of businesses and enterprises decreased by 400.
    - One-year employment losses in wholesale trade were observed throughout the sector. The deepest losses in wholesale trade were from merchant wholesalers dealing with nondurable goods and electronic markets and agents and brokers (down 2,600 and 1,100 respectively).
    - Information sector losses included 1,400 from the software publishing industry.
    - Retail sector losses were widespread throughout the sector, with the largest losses broken out in this report attributable to motor vehicle and parts dealers (down 1,000).

Figure 8: Estimated employment change by industry sector over the year, not seasonally adjusted, Washington state, September 2025 through September 2026

Industry sector	One year change
Total nonfarm	9,200
Private education and health services	10,500
Leisure and hospitality	7,400
Manufacturing	5,900
Other services	3,800
Financial activities	3,100
Government	300
Construction	200
Mining and logging	-100
Transportation, warehousing and utilities	-1,500
Retail trade	-2,500
Information	-2,700
Wholesale trade	-4,200
Professional and business services	-11,000

Source: Employment Security Department/LMIR; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics

Seasonally adjusted employment

Seasonally adjusted numbers account for normal seasonal patterns that occur year after year, such as strong seasonal hiring in retail trade around the holidays. Taking into account normal seasonal variations makes it possible to see unusual changes in employment levels.

- Normal seasonal change: expected monthly change in employment based on history.
- Estimated change: employment change over the month based on BLS survey data.
- Seasonally adjusted change: change in employment accounting for normal seasonal patterns.

Figure 9: Normal seasonal change, estimated change and seasonally adjusted change, Washington state, September 2026

Industry sector	Normal seasonal change	Estimated change	Seasonally adjusted change
Total nonfarm	13,600	-1,800	-15,400
Professional and business services	-1,100	700	1,800
Construction	-1,500	0	1,500
Information	-1,000	400	1,400
Leisure and hospitality	-6,500	-5,500	1,000
Mining and logging	0	0	0
Other services	-1,700	-1,800	-100
Financial activities	-900	-1,000	-100
Wholesale trade	0	-1,000	-1,000
Retail trade	-1,900	-3,000	-1,100
Manufacturing	200	-1,500	-1,700
Transportation, warehousing and utilities	800	-1,000	-1,800
Private education and health services	7,900	3,000	-4,900
Government	19,300	8,900	-10,400

Source: Employment Security Department/LMIR; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics

Contact us

For more Washington labor market information, visit Employment Security's website. Contact us at lmir@esd.wa.gov with any questions.

County level information will be available at 10 a.m. on October 20, 2026.

Find the 2026 publication schedule on the monthly employment report page of Employment Security's website.

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