



# WISCONSIN POLICY FORUM

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## **Key Indicators Show Positives, Concerns for Kenosha County Economy, Residents' Wellbeing** *Employment growth outpaces national comparison counties; Average worker pay trails them*

As Kenosha County has landed several major economic development projects in the past decade, it has trended favorably on economic measures such as unemployment and poverty rates, and compares favorably to peer counties nationally in its recent pace of employment growth, according to a new analysis from the Wisconsin Policy Forum.

Yet the analysis also finds areas of concern that county policymakers and business and civic leaders may wish to consider. Relative to a group of 11 comparison counties, Kenosha County ranks at or near the bottom on economic indicators such as average worker pay, and on several key social indicators.

“These findings suggest that progress has been made on many fronts, but much work remains to ensure that the benefits of new economic development and jobs are maximized and flow to all Kenosha County residents,” the report finds.

Kenosha County has shown impressive economic growth in the past decade, attracting new headquarters for major companies like Uline and Nosco and becoming home to large new distribution and production facilities for Amazon and HARIBO. In the wake of this growth, the Kenosha Area Business Alliance (KABA) commissioned WPF to examine the broader question of how the county stacks up with other similar counties in the Midwest and nationally on key economic and social indicators.

WPF has released both a summary report and a more robust [online interactive data tool](#) that help gauge Kenosha County’s performance, and its residents’ wellbeing in several categories, including population and demographics; education, health, and safety; employment and financial stability; housing; economic activity; and property values and taxes.

In addition to documenting Kenosha County’s progress since 2010 on each indicator, the analysis compares Kenosha County to a set of 11 comparison counties of similar size and demographics, each classified as either peer or aspirational. These data reveal strengths and weaknesses and can be used to set priorities for the county’s future advancement.

**Positive indicators** for Kenosha County from these data include:

- Kenosha County saw **impressive growth in total employment** in the last decade. There were 23.8% more jobs in Kenosha County in 2020 than in 2010, a larger increase than in all selected comparison counties.
- Kenosha County’s **unemployment rate declined** from 10.1% in 2010 to 4.3% in 2021, a larger percentage point decline than in all other comparison counties.

- The poverty rate decreased substantially in Kenosha County between 2010 and 2019 and **the county's youth poverty rate was cut in half** during this period, the second-largest percentage-point improvement (-9.9%) among the comparison counties.
- **Kenosha County's median home value has risen steadily**, reaching \$203,200 in 2019. Among the comparison counties, Kenosha's median home value is only exceeded by three aspirational counties with considerably higher median household incomes.
- **Kenosha County has seen its total commercial value nearly double since 2010**, far outpacing the two Wisconsin counties in the peer comparison group: Racine and Outagamie.
- Between 2012 and 2020, **Kenosha County's pace of growth in micro businesses (those with between one and nine employees) and small businesses (10-99 employees) was higher than in most comparison counties**. Kenosha's 5.8% growth in micro businesses during that period outpaced all but two comparison counties.

**Areas of concern** that local leaders may wish to target for improvement include:

- Average annual earnings for all workers increased considerably in Kenosha County between 2010 and 2020, yet **the county started and ended the decade with lower average pay** than all comparison counties. Kenosha's relatively low wages could reflect the types of industries concentrated there – it has a much higher share of residents employed in warehousing and storage than the national average, and that sector has considerably lower average annual wages compared to all industries.
- Kenosha County's GDP rose steadily over the last decade. **But in 2020, Kenosha County's output per employee (\$114) ranked at the bottom** of the comparison counties. This could again reflect differences in the industry concentrations in Kenosha.
- Educational attainment is steadily increasing in Kenosha County, and since 2010, it has increased the share of its population ages 25 and over with bachelor's or advanced degrees faster than all but one comparison county. However, **the share of the county's adult population with bachelor's degrees or higher (29.6%) continues to lag** all comparison counties but Racine.
- On a per-capita basis, Kenosha County ranked **near the bottom of the comparison counties in the number of arts, entertainment, and recreation establishments** in operation in 2020. Access to cultural and recreational activities contributes to community vitality and quality of life and can be a factor in attracting and retaining residents and businesses.
- The share of Kenosha County households that are “rent-burdened” (i.e. those that spend more than 30% of their gross income on rent) improved slightly from 2010 to 2019 **but at 46%, remained higher than in eight of the 11 comparison counties**.
- Though a smaller share of Kenosha County's population was uninsured in 2019 than in 2010, **the uninsured accounted for a larger share of the overall population in Kenosha County (8.1%) in 2019** than in all of the comparison counties.
- The **median household income for Black households in Kenosha County (\$32,328) is less than half the median among white households (\$70,416)** and considerably lower than the national median among Black households (\$43,862). To a lesser extent, the median income among Hispanic households in Kenosha County (\$53,066) also lags.

[Click here to read the report: “Moving the Needle? How Kenosha County measures up on key economic and social indicators.”](#)

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