

Middle-Income Job Market Coming Alive

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WASHINGTON—Jobs for middle-income workers—including those without a university degree—are on the upswing and now amount to 65 percent of all jobs available in urban areas.

“Despite the economic downturn, middle-wage jobs remain a prominent feature of [the labor market](#) in metropolitan areas nationwide,” according to a new report by the Brookings Institution, a nonprofit think tank based in Washington D.C.

According to May 2009 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data, about 70 percent of the U.S. work force did not attain a bachelors degree or higher. Of those, about 25 percent finished high school and 23.8 percent took some college classes or hold an associate degree. Only about 30 percent of the U.S. civilian labor force holds a 4-year university degree.

“During the next two decades, therefore, most Americans will need jobs that do not require a four-year degree,” the Brookings report said.

The Brookings researchers suggest that by 2028, only 36 percent of the adult labor force will hold a bachelor's degree. By that calculation, 64 percent of American adults will need jobs not requiring a university degree.

Competition for middle-income jobs is and will remain strong, experts believe, especially with many highly educated workers losing their jobs.

Workers with college degrees jumped from close to 20 percent in 1980 to almost 24 percent in 2005, according to a recent article published by the [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#).

Lacking Experience

However, many low-skilled American workers are ill prepared to fill middle-income jobs. The Brookings researchers fault lax policies that don't [fund](#) programs to provide adequate training to lower skilled workforce.

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“More employers reported difficulty filling these [middle-wage] positions than did so during the previous survey. Among firms attempting to hire, 51 percent reported difficulty finding qualified job applicants, compared with 45 percent two years ago,” according to a Washington State Employers survey.

The survey is conducted twice a year and the state researchers found that “in every biennial survey, the shortage is greatest for jobs requiring postsecondary training, but not a baccalaureate degree.”

“The skill content of those jobs will matter not only to the workers who hold them, but also to the economic well-being of the nation,” the Brookings report said. “Some analysts, such as Harvard economist Dale Jorgenson and his colleagues, worry that the projected leveling off of baccalaureate-level education attainment (and therefore, it is assumed, of higher skills) will harm the economy.”

Some experts suggest programs offered in European nations. Europeans who don't attend college have to go into training programs, which require them to work to gain experience and take classes at the same time. At the end of the training program the young people are tested on their skills.

Middle-Income Jobs in America

Middle-wage jobs that are on top of the list in most urban areas include bookkeepers, accounting and auditing clerks, heavy tractor-trailer and truck drivers, general maintenance and repair workers, electricians, automotive mechanics and technicians, and a few more. Most other jobs vary in importance in different urban areas.

Urban areas in the U.S. South provide more middle-wage jobs than any other regions, while in Northeastern and Western urban areas, such jobs are often difficult to find.

Best paying jobs for people with no university degree are found in certain urban areas in Florida, North Carolina and South Carolina.

“Metropolitan areas that specialize in leisure and hospitality industries (hotels, restaurants, performing arts, sports, and the like) offer much better than average middle-wage job accessibility,” the Brookings report said.

The Future Job Market

Middle-income jobs are projected to grow in the future. Greater environmental awareness will help to create opportunities in the agricultural, building, [transportation](#), recycling and waste management, renewable energy fields for those with or without college degrees.

The Seattle Jobs Initiative was created in 1995 to help middle-income earners find decent paying jobs, and is lobbying in Washington for policies to provide funding for skills training and job placement assistance.

“Construction, health care, aerospace, professional & business services, logistics and international [trade](#), leisure & hospitality, green building and clean technology” are industries with the highest potential for middle-wage jobs, according to one of the Seattle Jobs Initiative 2008 publications.

Jobs in the United States are moving from manufacturing to service-type jobs and will account for 15.7 million new jobs between 2006 and 2016, according to a recent BLS trending study.

During that period, jobs in the education and health care sector will increase 18.8 percent.

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