Like the nation as a whole, Fourth District states have witnessed sharp declines in unemployment rates since late 1991. Jobless rates in Ohio, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania hover around the U.S. average, but West Virginia’s rate historically exceeds it by a substantial margin and fluctuates more over the business cycle. Employment growth since 1991 has approximated the national average of 10.5% in all of these states except Pennsylvania, which has posted a 4.8% rate.

A low statewide jobless figure can mask regional pockets of high unemployment. Lewis County, Kentucky, for example, now exceeds the national average by 9 percentage points, its situation having worsened when a local apparel manufacturer halved its operations.

Similarly, metropolitan unemployment rates display wide variation. Most have shown solid improvement over the past year. Lima, Ohio, for example, attributes the drop of 1.4 percentage points in its jobless rate to broad-based gains in services and in wholesale and retail trade. By contrast, improvement in many older, industrial areas of West Virginia and Pennsylvania has stalled or recently been reversed. The lingering effects of a steel strike account for a substantial hike in the Steubenville–Weirton unemployment rate.