In March, the Fourth District’s unemployment rate fell 0.1 percentage point to 6.0%, compared to the 5.2% U.S. average (which was unchanged in April). The number of unemployed people in the District fell by about 7,000 (down 1.3%) from February to March; during the same period, the labor force increased by about 8,000 (up 0.1%).

In almost 75% of District counties, unemployment rates exceed the U.S. average. In fact, every county in the Fourth District portion of western Pennsylvania and West Virginia has an average or above-average unemployment rate. But Fourth District Kentucky, especially the area around Lexington and Covington, looks strong compared to the U.S.

In some of the District’s major metropolitan areas, year-over-year employment growth in goods-producing industries is stronger than the U.S.; Lexington, Cleveland, and Cincinnati have experienced solid growth. However, all of the District’s metropolitan areas lag the nation in service-providing jobs. In every one of these areas, annual employment growth in service-providing industries is less than half the U.S. average. Pittsburgh, with a 0.7% annual rate of employment growth in service-providing industries, leads the other metropolitan areas but remains a full percentage point below the U.S. growth rate for these industries. The lower rate of service employment growth may be caused partly by slower population growth: Except for Lexington, which has kept pace with the U.S. since 2000, population growth in each of the District’s major metropolitan areas during that period was far below the nation’s.