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Monroe County

General Overview

Monroe County is the region's urban center and reflects the highs and lows, and stark disparities, of the Finger Lakes region. It has the most educated adult population and high-performing suburban districts but also the highest child poverty rate and the lowest high school graduation rate. Monroe is the most diverse county and home to most of the region's arts and tourist attractions.

Monroe is by far the largest county in the region, with almost two-thirds of the total regional population, giving it an outsized influence on regional statistics. Monroe is considered home to the urban and suburban portions of the census-defined Rochester Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), while the counties of Livingston, Ontario, Orleans, Wayne, and Yates comprise the exurbs and rural areas of the metro. All municipalities in the MSA with over 25,000 population are within Monroe County.

Monroe contains many of the most visited and well-known tourist attractions in the region, including The National Museum of Play, The George Eastman Museum, The Memorial Art Gallery, Seabreeze Amusement Park, Mount Hope Cemetery (home to the remains of Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony, among others), Seneca Park Zoo, and Highland Park (site of the Lilac Festival). In particular, Rochester hosts many well-attended festivals throughout the year, including the Lilac Festival and the Xerox Rochester International Jazz Festival.

Rochester is home to many prestigious colleges and universities, including the University of Rochester, Rochester Institute of Technology, Nazareth College, SUNY Brockport, and St. John Fisher College.

Throughout most of the 20th century, Rochester was known as headquarters of the "big three" imaging companies – Xerox, Eastman Kodak, and Bausch & Lomb – which together employed more than 15% of the nonfarm employment in 1981. However, their role as anchors of regional employment has abated as Kodak emerged from bankruptcy in 2013 and Xerox and Bausch & Lomb have moved their headquarters from Rochester. Today, the top regional employers are the University of Rochester, the Rochester Regional Health System, and Wegmans.

Various indicators highlighted below will include a comparison to the City of Rochester. Rochester has long struggled with entrenched and concentrated poverty, which is reflected in sometimes striking disparities between the city and the county for economic and quality of life indicators. It is important to note that the Monroe County figures all include the residents of the City of Rochester. Comparisons between Monroe and Rochester should not be interpreted as comparisons between the city and the suburbs.

Demographic Overview

Monroe County is the population center of the Rochester region, accounting for 62% of the total, yet the county's population has grown by just 1.7% since 2000. Monroe had just over 747,000 residents in 2016, with 28% of those residents living in the City of Rochester. Rochester lost about 5% of its population between 2000 and 2016, compared to a 4% increase in the state and a 14.8% increase nationwide.

Similar to the state, nation, and the rest of the region, Monroe's population is aging:

- From 2000 to 2012-16, the population 85 and over grew by 38% in Monroe, similar to a 40% increase statewide and a 46% increase for the nation. In stark contrast, the City of Rochester saw a decline of 27% in this age group over that period.
- Monroe's population between 60 and 84 grew by 18%, below the nation (46%), state (40%), and region (40%). This age group in the City of Rochester increased by 4% whereas all other age groups decreased in population.
- The share of residents 20 and younger in Monroe fell by 12%, compared to a statewide decrease of 8% and a national increase of 3%.

Monroe County is the most racially and ethnically diverse county in the region, and has become more diverse since 2000:

- The white population shrank by 2% in Monroe from 2000 and stood at 76% of the total population in 2012-16. This proportion is the greater than the nation and the state (73 and 64% white respectively) and well below every other county in the region (all at 92% or above). Just 46% of Rochester residents were white.
- African Americans made up 15% of the population in Monroe, above the nation (13%) and below the state (16%). The proportion in Monroe was more than twice as high as any other county in the region. The African American population grew by 14% in Monroe from 2000 to 2012-16, slightly below the nation (16%) and well above the state (2%). Rochester's African American population grew by 2% over that period. African Americans making up 41% of the total population.
- Monroe County also had a higher share of Hispanic residents than the surrounding counties (8%), but was below the state (19%) and nation (17%). Monroe's Hispanic population has grown by 56% since 2000, similar to regional and national rates.

Monroe County has seen a decline in the share of households of married couples with children and an increase in singles with children and single-person households:

- In 2012-16, 16% of Monroe households were married with children, down from 22% in 2000. During the same period, households of those living alone rose by three points to 32% and singles with children rose 2 points to 12%. These changes were mostly similar in the nation, state and region.
- Monroe's share of married with children households was smaller than the state (19%) and nation (21%), while its proportion of those living alone (32%) was higher than in the state (30%) and nation (28%).
- The City of Rochester had a much larger share of single-person households (41%) and a much smaller share of married with children households (8%) than Monroe as a whole.

Arts, Culture and Leisure

Monroe County is the center of the region's cultural scene and home to most of our area's museums, sports venues and other attractions. Visitors spent over \$1 billion in 2016, an increase of 3% from 2005. Monroe's tourism revenue accounts for 64% of the total for the region. Total tourism revenue per resident was \$1,353, a decrease of 9% from its high of \$1649 in 2007, but above the amount for the surrounding counties as a whole (\$1,228).

Spending by tourists on recreational activities was \$65 per Monroe County resident in 2016, below the region (\$72) and well below the state (\$363). Recreational spending per resident was down 14% from its high in 2007.

Attendance at arts and cultural attractions in the region, most of which are in Monroe, rose by 25% from 3.4 million in 2004 to 4.3 million total attendees in 2016. Professional sports team attendance, however, has fallen by 20% since 2000 and stood at 821,372 in 2016.

Children and Youth

Monroe County has a rate of child poverty that is similar to the nation, state, and region, and is driven primarily by high child poverty in Rochester:

- In 2012-16, 22% of the county's children lived in poverty, similar to the region (21%), state (22%), and nation (21%). The child poverty rate in Rochester was a troubling 50% in 2012-16.
- The county's poverty rate increased 6 points from 2000 to 2012-16; while a larger increase than the state and nation (2 and 4 points respectively), it was a much smaller increase than the City of Rochester (12 points).

Monroe had a large disparity in child poverty between races/ethnic groups:

- The child poverty rate for African Americans in Monroe was 48%, compared to 12% for white children, 18% for Asian children, and 48% for Hispanic children. Child poverty among the county's African American children was higher than for the state and nation, while white child poverty was lower.
- The disparity between ethnic groups was smaller in Rochester, even though the rates were higher: Hispanic and African American children had poverty rates of 53% and 54% respectively, while white children had a rate of 45%.

Similar to the state and nation, Monroe County has seen an increase in the number of children living in single-parent families:

- In 2012-16, 41% of families were headed by single parents, up from 33% in 2000. The figures were dramatically higher in Rochester, where 73% of families were headed by one parent. Monroe's rate was higher than the nation (35%), state (37%), and region as a whole (39%).
- Monroe's increase of 8 points from 2000 was greater than that of the nation (6 points) and state (4 points) and on par with the region.

On several measures of early childhood health, the City of Rochester fared poorly compared to Monroe, the rest of the region, and the state:

- The rate of low birth-weight babies in the city was 11.2%, greater than in the region (7.6%), state (7.8%), and nation (8.1%). The rate in Rochester has increased slightly from 2000, as have the national, regional, and state rates.
- After a fairly consistent decline from 2006 to 2014, the infant mortality rate in Rochester increased by 77% in 2015 to a rate of 12 per 1,000 live births. It remains significantly higher than the region (6.3) and state (4.6).
- The 10 point increase in the rate of mothers receiving early prenatal care in Rochester from 2000 to 2015 has shrunk the gap between the City (73%) and the region (79%) and the state (76%). The overall rate in Monroe was 81%.

Monroe has consistently had one of the lowest county rates of indicated cases of child abuse and neglect in the region. Indicated cases are those reported and investigated where credible evidence of abuse or neglect is found:

- In 2016, there were 14 cases of abuse and/or neglect per 1,000 children, below the state (16) and region (18).
- Monroe's rate increased by 14% from 2000, less than increases of 21% at the state level and 25% for the region.

The rate of foster care admissions is low and falling:

- In 2016, there were 2.0 foster care admissions per 1,000 children in Monroe, similar to the state (2.0).
- The rate has fallen by almost 50% from 2000, a greater decrease than for the region and state.

The teen pregnancy rate has sharply declined in both Monroe County and the City of Rochester, but a large discrepancy between the two remains:

- In 2015, 2.6% of all females ages 15-19 in Monroe became pregnant, higher than the region (2.2%). In Rochester, the rate was 5.9%.
- The rates for Rochester and Monroe have been falling in step with the state and region, decreasing by about half from 2000 to 2015 in Monroe County.

Community Engagement

Voter registration in Monroe exceeds state rates:

- In 2016, 84% of the eligible population were registered to vote, above the state (80%) and the region (82%)
- Voter registration was slightly higher than in 2008 and on par with 2012 elections. Voter registration increased by 3 points from 2000 to 2016.

Voter participation in Monroe, like the region, outperforms the state:

- In the 2014 midterm elections, 35% of eligible voters in Monroe voted, same as the region and 10 points above the state turnout.
- During the 2016 presidential election, Monroe's turnout rate of 60% was slightly above the region (58%) and the nation (55%), and well above the state (50%).

Monroe County's level of registered borrowers was the second highest in the region following Genesee:

- In 2016, 69% of residents of Monroe's county library system were registered borrowers, above the state (55%) and region (63%), and every county in the region except Genesee.
- While library visits in Monroe County decreased by 2% since 2000 and were at 6.1 visits per resident, the City of Rochester had a much higher rate of 8.1 visits per resident.

Monroe County had the highest level of charitable giving in the region, with the average donor contributing \$4,925 in 2015. However, this was well below the average giving for the state (\$6,949) and nation (\$6,004). Monroe's rate has increased 30% since 2011, above the 26% increase for the state and 23% increase for the nation.

Donations to two of the largest regional charities fell between 2000 and 2016. Total donations to the two charities decreased by 25% in that time period. Between 2015 and 2016, however, the United Way's contributions increased by 4%, while contributions to the Rochester Area Community Foundation (RACF) decreased by 59%, largely driven by a contribution spike in 2015 (RACF 2016 giving was up 2% from 2014).

Economy

Monroe's unemployment rate has remained lower than the state and nation throughout the recession and through 2016:

- Unemployment grew from 4.4% in 2007 to 8.0% in 2010. Since 2010, the rate has dropped to 4.7% -- more than 3 points lower than at its peak but still 1.1 points above the low of 3.6% in 2000.
- Rochester, whose rate has consistently been above that of Monroe, peaked at 10.8% in both 2010 and 2012 and now stands at 6.5% - higher than the nation, state, region, and every county in the region. The gap between Rochester's rate and Monroe's rate was at its lowest in 2000 (1 point higher in Rochester), peaked in 2011-2012 with a difference of 2.9 points, and has since decreased to a difference of 1.8 points in 2016.

Monroe County is the anchor of the regional economy, supplying 68% of the region's jobs in 2016. Monroe's job gain since 2001 was 3% as compared to a 17% increase nationally, 18% for the state, and 4% regionally.

Reflecting the steady shrinkage of manufacturing in the region and the state, the largest sectors in Monroe County in 2016 were Health Care and Social Assistance; Trade, Transportation, and Utilities; and Professional and Business Services; each making up about 15% to 16% of the county's jobs.

Monroe's economic performance (measured by total jobs) has lagged behind the state and nation in most sectors:

- Monroe's Education sector increased by 52% from 2001 to 2016, similar to the state and regional increases and below the national increase.
- Similar to the state and nation, Monroe has seen a dramatic decline in its Manufacturing sector, losing 46% of jobs from 2001 to 2016. The decrease was more than for the state (down 33%) and nation (down 23%) over that period.
- Monroe has also seen a larger contraction in the Information sector (down 38%) than the state (down 13%) and nation (down 17%).

As the highest in the region, Monroe's average salary had been flat since 2000 compared to the increases of the nation, state, and region:

- Monroe County's average salary, at \$48,808 in 2016, was the highest in the region but lower than the state (\$67,093) and nation (\$52,953).
- Salaries fell in several sectors, including Leisure and Hospitality, Manufacturing, and Natural Resources and Mining, but they were up substantially in Government; Financial Activities; and Health Care and Social Assistance.

Education

Monroe County students perform near state levels on state tests, however, a persistent and extreme disparity exists between the county and the Rochester City School District, its largest district. Most of the other districts in Monroe perform at or above state averages, while Rochester is consistently ranked among the bottom 10 performing districts in the state.

- For example, 10% of RCSD students passed the 3rd grade English test in 2017, compared to 43% statewide and 38% for Monroe. The discrepancy was even higher for 4th grade math – Rochester at 8.3%, versus 43% for the state and 40% for Monroe.
- Performance was even lower for 8th grade exams – in English, just 9% of Rochester students passed, compared to 45% statewide and 40% in Monroe, while for 8th grade math, 1% of Rochester students passed, compared to 22% statewide and 13% for Monroe and 15% for the region.
- The same discrepancy was present for performance on high school Regents – 44% passed Common Core Algebra 1 and 53% passed English in Rochester, versus 74% and 81% passing in Common Core Algebra 1 and English respectively in Monroe.

In 2017, 83% of students across Monroe graduated on time, 2 points higher than in 2008. The rate was above the state (82%) and below the region (85%). In contrast, just 57% of Rochester students graduated on time; this is increased from 48% in 2013.

Monroe County consistently has the highest levels in the region of educational attainment among adults:

- In 2012-16, 66% of county residents 25 and older had attended at least some college, 7 points above the state and national figures.
- There was also a higher concentration of adults with a bachelor's or higher - 37% - in Monroe more than in the state (35%), nation (30%), and region (31%).
- Only 10% of Monroe residents lacked a high school diploma or equivalent, a lower proportion than statewide or nationwide.

Spending per student by school districts in Monroe has increased 43% since 2000, a smaller increase than for the state (52%) and the region (46%).

- In 2016, Monroe school districts spent \$21,259 per student, below the state rate of \$23,361 and on par with the region. Spending in the Rochester district was \$22,820 per student in 2016, an increase of 39% since 2000.

Financial Self-Sufficiency

Median household income has fallen faster than the nation, state, and region:

- In Monroe, median income fell by 17% from 2000 to 2012-16, a larger drop than for the region (13%), state (3%), and nation (9%).
- In 2012-16, median income was \$53,568, below the region (\$54,106), state (\$60,741) and nation (\$55,322). Monroe's median income was above most other counties in the region (except Ontario and Wyoming). Rochester's median income was much lower, at \$31,684 in 2012-16.
- There was a vast discrepancy in Monroe between median income for white residents (\$59,930) versus African American (\$28,560) and Hispanic (\$29,950) residents. While median income was lower for each ethnicity in Rochester, the discrepancy was less (\$38,960 for whites versus \$25,150 for African Americans and \$22,760 for Hispanics).

Monroe's poverty rate was on par with the nation at 15% in 2012-16.

- Monroe's rate rose by 4 points from 2000, a greater increase than the state (no change) and nation (3 points) and on par with the region.
- Rochester had both a much higher poverty rate in 2012-16 (33%) and a sharper increase since 2000 (7 points).

A larger portion of Monroe residents received temporary assistance than other counties:

- In 2016, 3.7% of Monroe residents received temporary assistance, well above the state (2.9%) and region (2.8%). The rate has decreased 0.6 points since 2001.

The rate of people receiving emergency food rose at a slower rate than the region:

- In 2016, there were 5.6 emergency meals served per resident: lower than the state (7.4), region (6.8), and every county in the region.
- The rate rose by 65% from 2000, a smaller increase than the region (119%) but larger than the state (1%).

Health

Monroe County had a smaller proportion of people without health insurance than the nation and state:

- In 2015, 6% of Monroe residents lacked health insurance, on par with 6% for surrounding counties, as well as 6% for the region as a whole, 8% for the state, and 11% for the nation.
- Like the nation and region as a whole, Monroe's rate has decreased from 2008.

In 2014, there were 42 doctors per 10,000 residents in Monroe, a rate above the state and almost three times the rate for the surrounding counties.

Monroe has a large and growing percent of the population enrolled in Medicaid Managed Care:

- In 2016, 18% of Monroe residents were enrolled in Medicaid Managed Care, slightly above the region (16%) but below the state (22%).
- The rate was down one point from 2015 to 2016, matching the fall in the region and state.

Monroe saw a decline (14%) in its overall mortality rate from 2000 to 2015, and much larger reductions in mortality from certain diseases:

- In 2015, the mortality rate was 680 per 100,000 residents, higher than the state (634) but well below the rate for the surrounding counties (748).
- From 2000 to 2015, there were even greater declines in mortality from heart disease, cancer, respiratory disease, and stroke.

Monroe County's rate of Sexually Transmitted Infections have been higher than the state or the region since 2002.

- Monroe's rate of chlamydia infection (620 per 100,000 residents) was the highest in the region and considerably above the state (555) and region (496). Chlamydia infection rates increased considerably from 2000-2016 in the state and region, yet Monroe rates increased to an even greater degree.
- Monroe's 2016 gonorrhea rate of 295 per 100,000 was the highest by far and an increase of 24% from 2015, even though the rate has fallen by 7% since 2000. Monroe's gonorrhea rate decreased by 7% since 2000, in contrast to increases for the state and no change in the region.
- The rate of people living with HIV in Monroe has increased by 16% point since 2002.
- Monroe's rate of 133 per 100,000 residents is greater than NYS (excluding NYC) (87) and the region (97). Monroe's rate of people living with AIDS, 170 per 100,000 residents is also greater than the state and region rate and much greater than any local county.

Housing

Median home values in Monroe have risen slightly since 2000:

- In 2012-16, the median home value in Monroe was \$140,200, higher than the region (\$130,460) but below the state (\$286,300) and nation (\$184,700).
- The median home value (inflation-adjusted) rose by 2% from 2000 to 2012-16, in contrast to a 2% decline in the region, and larger increases in the state and nation (39% and 19% respectively).
- The median home value in Rochester was just \$77,800 in 2012-16, a 10% decline from 2000.

In 2012-16, median rent in Monroe was \$843, lower than the state (\$1,160) and nation (\$950), but the highest in the region. Rent fell slightly (4%) in Monroe from 2000 to 2012-16, in contrast to increases in the state and nation (20% and 9% respectively).

Homes are relatively affordable in Monroe compared to the state and nation:

- In 2012-16, the ratio of median home value to median income - a measure of housing affordability - was 1.9 in Monroe, on par with the region and well below the state (3.4) and nation (2.6). A ratio less than 2 or 3 is considered affordable.
- Monroe's ratio rose by 19% from 2000 to 2012-16. Greater increases were seen for the state (42%) and nation (24%) during this same time period.

Housing has become less affordable for renters:

- In 2012-16, Monroe renters spent 35% of their income on rent, slight lower than the state (36%) but more than the nation (32%). The rate increased by 5 points from 2000 to 2012-16, similarly to the region (5 points) and nation (6 points), and slightly below the state (8 points). Rent is considered affordable if it is less than 30% of income.
- In Rochester, 43% of income went to rent in 2012-16, up 8 points from 2000; while median rent was lower in Rochester than Monroe, median income was much lower, therefore rent was relatively less affordable in Rochester.
- Rent was considerably more affordable for white and Asian renters in Monroe than for Hispanic and African American renters.

In Monroe, the homeownership rate was higher than the state and equal to the nation, but much lower than for surrounding counties (driven by a very low rate in Rochester):

- In 2012-16, 64% of occupied housing units in Monroe were owner-occupied, compared to 54% statewide. The rate in Monroe remained relatively unchanged from 2000.
- In Rochester, the rate was just 36%, a decline from 40% in 2000.

Public Safety

Overall, crime has fallen in Monroe, but remains higher than most counties, driven primarily by extremely high crime rates in the City of Rochester:

- In 2016, there were 249 serious crimes per 10,000 residents in Monroe, below the nation (284) but above the state (166) and region as a whole (215). In Rochester, the rate was 462, down 40% from 2000. Serious crime rates fell by about a third for the nation, 46% in the state, 39% in the region, and 43% in Monroe from 2000 to 2016.
- Similarly, the rate of property crimes in Monroe in 2016 (216 per 10,000) was slightly below the nation and above the state and region, while Rochester's rate (374 per 10,000) was much higher. Property crime fell 40% for the state and 42% for the region while the rate declined 47% in both Monroe and Rochester.
- In contrast to other types of crime, violent crime rates have increased in Rochester and Monroe while decreasing statewide and nationally. In 2016, there were 33 violent crimes per 10,000 residents in Monroe, below the state and nation (37 and 39, respectively). Rochester's rate of 88 was more than twice as high as the nation, state, region, and every regional county. Rochester's rate rose by 19% from 2000 to 2016.

Despite declining over the past 7 years, the rate of domestic violence in Monroe was higher than the state and region:

- In 2016, there were 64 reported victims of domestic violence per 10,000 residents in Monroe, a higher rate than the state excluding New York City (42) and region (52). The rate in Rochester (118) was almost twice as high as in Monroe as a whole.
- The rate in Monroe fell by 18% from 2009 to 2016, a greater decrease than the state excluding New York City and region. Rochester's rate has also fallen 23% since 2009.

Monroe's rate of juvenile delinquency intakes declined 57% between 2000 and 2016, to 45 per 10,000 children ages 7–16. This rate was below the region (51) and on par with the state.

Note: Data research and analysis completed by [the Center for Governmental Research](#).