

SEPTEMBER 2025



Workforce Optics

INSIGHTS, NUMBERS & KNOWLEDGE FOR A COMPETITIVE WORKFORCE

Welcome! In this issue of *Workforce Optics*, we pair employment data and trends from across the marketplace with insights from Staffmark leaders and experts. Let our experience with workforce changes, challenges, and transformations help you put the numbers in perspective.

Jobs Update

In August, U.S. employers added just 22,000 nonfarm payroll jobs, nudging the unemployment rate up to 4.3%. The weak gain—**well below economists' forecasts of 70,000 to 80,000**—underscores a labor market losing momentum. Key data points from the [BLS Employment Situation Summary](#) include:

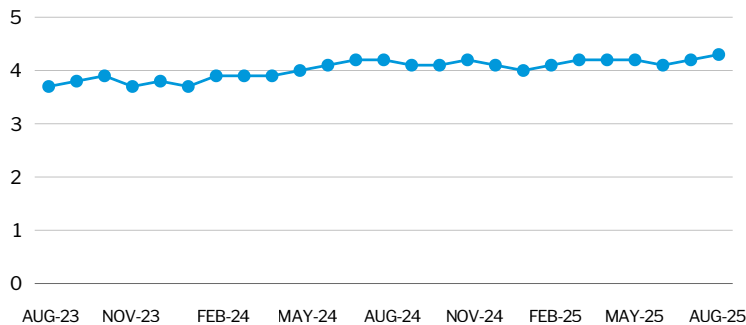
- Health care was the lone bright spot, adding 31,000 jobs even as most sectors shed positions.
- Average hourly earnings rose 3.7%, the slowest wage growth since July 2024.
- Revised figures show employment actually fell by 13,000 jobs in June—the first net monthly loss since December 2020.

With clear signs of a slowdown, the real question for employers is: **what signals and opportunities beneath the surface should they watch as they manage teams and plan workforce strategies?**

To explore that idea, *Workforce Optics* turned to Karen Waldrop, SVP of Specialty Solutions at Staffmark and a 25-year employment industry veteran. Here are her insights on what to take from the numbers and how employers can move forward. “The real signal in the data for employers is the need to build flexibility into workforce strategies. That means blending core stability with roles and teams designed to scale when demand returns, adopting modular approaches that shift with business priorities, and using data to guide where to invest now versus where to stay agile.”

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

(Seasonally Adjusted, August 2023 - August 2025)



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

4.3%

National Unemployment Rate

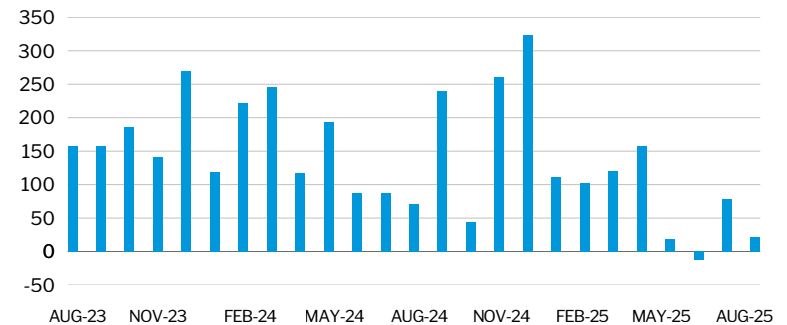
AUGUST 2025

0.1% MoM Change



NONFARM PAYROLL EMPLOYMENT OVER-THE-MONTH CHANGE

(Seasonally Adjusted, August 2023 - August 2025)



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

7.3

MILLION

Unemployed Persons

AUGUST 2025

148k MoM Change



EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

OpenAI Looks to Answer the Jobs Question

OpenAI is building a Jobs Platform to connect AI-fluent workers with opportunities at companies including Walmart, John Deere, Boston Consulting Group, Accenture, and job search leader Indeed. (Indeed shares the same parent company as Staffmark Group, Recruit Holdings.)



Announced in a [blog post by Fidji Simo](#), CEO of Applications at OpenAI, the initiative's goal is to help businesses find the AI talent they need while giving workers new pathways to economic opportunity. Alongside the platform, OpenAI is expanding its Academy with new AI certifications. The goal is to certify 10 million Americans by 2030.

STEM (including Tech) Jobs to Fuel the Next Decade

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) *August 2025 Employment Projections*, the U.S. economy will add 5.2 million jobs by 2034. And the tech sector will be a bright spot. While overall growth is anticipated at just 3.1%, demand for digital skills is expected to surge:

- Professional, scientific & technical services are projected to see **7.5% growth**.
- Information sectors are projected to expand by 6.5% driven by AI systems, software, and data services.
- Computer & mathematical occupations are expected to grow by 10.1%, more than **three times faster than the economy overall**, fueled by AI model building, data science, and cybersecurity.

One Economy, Two Diverging Outlooks

LinkedIn's Workforce Confidence survey finds that workers and executives are looking at the same economy but seeing vastly different futures.



THE WORKER PERSPECTIVE

Only 16% of U.S. workers expect things to improve in the next six months, while nearly half brace for decline.



THE EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

Executives are sunnier: a quarter of leaders predict short-term gains while 43% expect a rebound within a year.

The divergence reflects a labor market that's stayed sluggish for three years, leaving workers feeling stuck while leaders bet on better days ahead.

Sources: BLS, Gartner, LinkedIn

The CHRO's Ever-Growing Plate

Today's HR leaders may feel like they've piled their proverbial "work plates" sky high at the buffet table and have no time to clear a scrap. That's the picture painted by Gartner's latest *Labor Market Insights* report, which highlights the [heavy and growing workload facing people leaders](#):

- Budgets are tightening
- Headcount is under review
- AI expectations are soaring
- Policy shifts are rippling through payroll and benefits



In response, HR leaders are adapting with agility, often under the mantra of "doing more with less." [Budgets may be shrinking, but the demand for HR to demonstrate measurable business impact has never been greater.](#) At the same time, pressure is mounting for AI to deliver not only productivity gains but cost savings (a promise that has yet to fully materialize). Still, many expect agentic AI to reshape their workforces within the next two years.

To understand how HR leaders can keep moving forward as all these dynamics play out, we posed a question to Staffmark's very own Chief People Officer, Suzanne Perry:

Q *With CHROs facing tighter budgets, rising AI expectations, and policy shifts all at once, **what should be the top priorities for people leaders to keep their organizations—and their people—moving forward?***

& A "As HR leaders, we must advance business outcomes while protecting the employee experience. That means clarifying priorities, using AI to enhance—not replace—human impact, and aligning decisions with our values," shared Perry. "People look to us for stability, so we must balance innovation with trust, simplify priorities, and stay agile as policy shifts continue."

THE STAFFMARK TAKEAWAY? ► ORGANIZATIONS THAT KEEP PEOPLE AT THE CENTER WHILE STAYING AGILE WILL BE BEST POSITIONED TO THRIVE.

Source: [Gartner Labor Market Insights August 2025](#)

Six Months of Manufacturing Contraction (Served with a Side of Optimism)

U.S. manufacturing activity shrank again last month, but the pace of contraction slowed according to the August 2025 *ISM® Manufacturing PMI® Report*. As [new orders ended a six-month losing streak and returned to growth](#), the Manufacturing PMI® rose to 48.7%—up from 48% in July and possibly hinting at early signs of industry stabilization.

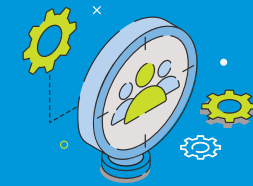
However, production fell back into contraction and employment remained subdued, keeping pressure on the sector.

While 69% of manufacturing GDP contracted in August (down from 79% in July), the share in “strong contraction” dropped sharply to just 4%, signaling that [the worst pain may be easing](#). Some industries — including Food, Beverage & Tobacco Products, and Petroleum & Coal Products — showed expansion for the first time in months.

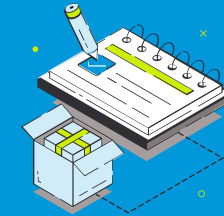
KEY INDICATORS CONTINUE TO REFLECT A MIXED PICTURE:

- **New Orders (51.4%)** expanded, providing the strongest boost to the PMI®
- **Production (47.8%)** slipped back into contraction after July’s brief growth
- **Employment** remained weak at **43.8%** despite a slight uptick
- **Supplier Deliveries (51.3%)** slowed, typically a sign of improving demand
- **Prices (63.7%)** stayed high, though inflationary pressures eased slightly
- **Imports (46%)** weakened further while New Export Orders (47.6%) improved

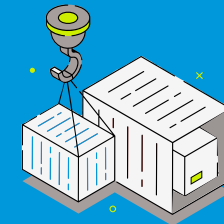
According to Professor of Economics at Haile College of Business, Dr Abdullah Al-Bahrani, the new data offers encouraging signs. “While manufacturing continues to contract, the latest PMI data offers a hint of stabilization, as orders turned positive for the first time in six months,” said Dr. Al-Bahrani. “Production and employment remain weak, but the shift away from deep contraction is an encouraging sign.” [Dig deeper into issues like this and the economic big picture with Dr. Al-Baharani and Staffmark at our Webinar “What’s Next for the Economy & Workforce?”](#)



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New Orders (**51.4%**) expanded, providing the strongest boost to the PMI®



Imports (**46%**) weakened further while New Export Orders (**47.6%**) improved

Source: [Manufacturing ISM® Report On Business®](#)

About Staffmark Group

STAFFMARKGROUP.COM

Staffmark Group (SMG) is one of the largest staffing companies in the United States and is a portfolio company of RGF Staffing and Recruit Group, renowned for pioneering brands like Indeed and Glassdoor. Harnessing our global strength and innovation, we power your business with the people, flexibility, and data insights you need to succeed in your market.

From the bustling floors of manufacturing facilities to the dynamic environments of technical and professional firms, we offer the widest range of specialized workforce solutions. The expertise of our specialty brands, Advantage Technical, Digital People, Hunter Hamilton, Advantage xPO, Employee Management Services and Staffmark, ensures the talent and customized solutions to propel your business forward.



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