Deutsche Bank Research

North America United States **Fconomics**

US Economic Perspectives

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Rising unemployment: Where help may not be wanted

- In our 2023 outlook, we outlined why we forecast a recession next year that will lead to a material rise in the unemployment rate (see "US outlook 2023: Dark side of the boom"). A common question we received in response to this forecast is where are job losses most likely to occur, particularly with some sectors still under-staffed. In this short piece we provide a framework for identifying sectors where employment losses are more likely to occur, leading to a higher unemployment rate.
- In recent months, there has been a strong negative relationship between the employment shortfall/overshoot and employment momentum across sectors. Indeed, while three under-staffed sectors leisure and hospitality, health services and local government have combined to add nearly 200k jobs per month on average over the last three months, the over-staffed sectors manufacturing, retail trade, professional and business services, and transportation and warehousing have lost 25k jobs on average over the past three months. This bifurcation suggests that the extent of under-/ over-employment in sectors remains an important driver in employment trends in the near-term.
- Looking ahead, it seems likely that those sectors that have employment levels well above pre-covid trends should continue to soften and shed jobs. This is particularly true for those sectors that are tied to the goods area of the economy, such as manufacturing, where demand growth is set to slow more materially as spending patterns normalize and eventually a recession comes into view. In addition, we would expect meaningful job losses in typical cyclical sectors, including construction, even if employment levels are currently somewhat below pre-covid trends. The extent of pent-up demand in leisure and hospitality is also up for debate, given a low average workweek and moderating wage growth.

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Introduction

In our 2023 outlook, we outlined why we anticipate a recession next year that will lead to a material rise in the unemployment rate, which is projected to peak around 5.5% in early 2024 (see "US outlook 2023: Dark side of the boom"). A common question we received in response to this forecast is where are job losses most likely to occur. One motivation for this query is the presence of a few sectors that could have pent-up demand for labor given that employment levels are running well below pre-covid trends. In this short piece we provide a framework for identifying sectors where employment losses are more likely to occur, leading to a higher unemployment rate.

A sectoral look at employment

Figure 1 provides a breakdown of sectors according to a variety of metrics. Sectors are sorted by their shortfalls relative to pre-covid trend employment levels, which are computed relative to a time trend from January 2019 through February 2020. Not surprisingly, the most under-staffed sectors include leisure and hospitality (about 1.8mn below the pre-covid trend), health care services (1.4mn below the pre-covid trend) and local government (nearly 750k below the pre-covid trend). Together, these three sectors represent an employment shortfall of about 4mn that could drive employment gains even as the economy slows.

On the other side of the picture are a few sectors where employment levels substantially exceed the pre-covid trend, including retail trade (more than 400k above trend), professional and business services (nearly 300k above trend), and manufacturing (almost 300k above trend). Transportation and warehousing employment is also meaningfully above 2019 extrapolated levels. Together, these sectors represent more than a million jobs in excess of what would have been expected if not for the pandemic, and thus are areas where job losses could be concentrated.

Figure 1: Employment picture by sector

Sector	Current employment (1,000)	Pre-covid trend employment (1,000)	Employment – pre- covid trend (1,000)	Job gains/losses (3m MA) (1,000)	Average workweek (pre-covid – current)	Wage growth (%6m ann, pre-covid – current)
eisure and Hospitality	16,003	17,840	-1,837	86	0.3	-2.4
Healthcare services	20,944	22,318	-1,374	74		
Local government	14,263	14,985	-722	21		
Other Services	5,765	6,113	-348	20	-0.3	-1.5
Financial Activities	8,997	9,320	-323	10	0.2	-1.5
State government	5,284	5,589	-305	8		
Construction	7,750	8,044	-294	17	0.5	-1.7
ederal government	2,871	2,977	-106	2		
Education services	3,861	3,941	-80	7	-0.3	-2.8
Wholesale Trade	5,909	5,933	-24	4	-0.2	-4.2
Jtilities	543	539	4	0	0.2	0.2
nformation	3,065	3,061	4	11	-0.2	-12.1
Mining and Logging	639	539	100	3	-0.9	-2.3
Transportation and Warehousing	6,493	6,387	106	-12	-0.1	-8.0
Manufacturing	12,934	12,680	254	22	0.2	0.4
Professional and Business Services	22,459	22,197	262	19	-0.5	-0.8
Retail Trade	15,767	15,353	414	-21	0.4	-0.6

In recent months, there has been a strong negative relationship between this

Page 2



employment shortfall/overshoot and employment momentum across sectors. Indeed, while leisure and hospitality, health services and local government have combined to add nearly 200k jobs per month on average over the last three months – about two-thirds of total job gains – manufacturing, retail trade, and professional & business services have subtracted 10k jobs per month on average. If we were to add in transportation and warehousing, employment losses in the latter group have averaged -25k over the past three months. The clear differences in trends in these sectors, with those over-employed slowing quickly and beginning to shed jobs and those under-employed showing stable job gains, can be observed in figures 3 and 4. This bifurcation suggests that the extent of under-/over-employment in sectors remains an important driver in employment trends.

Figure 2: Sectors with shortfalls accounting for most job gains

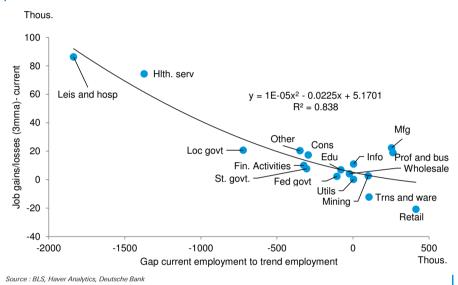


Figure 3: Over employed sectors see sharply slowing (and even contracting) employment

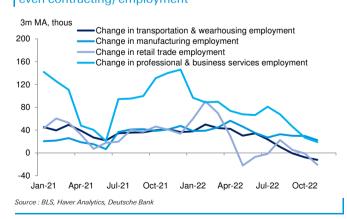
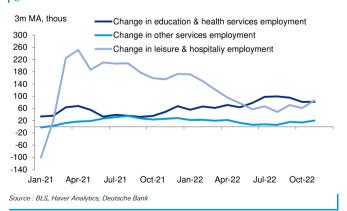


Figure 4: Under employed sectors show resilient job growth





What will a labor market slowdown look like?

Looking ahead, it seems likely that those sectors that have employment levels well above pre-covid trends should continue to soften and shed jobs. This is particularly true for those sectors that are tied to the goods area of the economy, such as manufacturing, where demand growth is set to slow more materially as spending patterns normalize and eventually a recession comes into view. In addition, we would expect meaningful job losses in typical cyclical sectors, particularly those experiencing a sharp decline in activity like construction, even if employment levels are currently somewhat below pre-covid trends.

The key question will then be how much pent up demand there is for employment in the few services sectors that appear under-staffed. Education and health care services are acting as if they are severely under-staffed, with shortfalls relative to a pre-covid trend, meaningful employment momentum, average workweek above pre-covid, and fast wage growth.

On the other hand, leisure and hospitality, which is often cited as a sector with pent up demand, displays mixed signals on this question. Consistent with substantial pent up demand for hiring are still solid job gains and elevated job openings and quits, among others. Conversely, the average workweek is actually meaningfully lower today than pre-covid in this sector, and wage growth has decelerated sharply. These facts do not necessarily fit with the idea that the sector is severely understaffed—if it were we would expect a higher workweek and much higher wage growth to incentivize greater hiring. As such, the pre-covid trend could overstate the degree of pent up demand for hiring in leisure and hospitality.

Figure 5: Average workweek actually lower in leisure & hospitality despite jobs shortfall

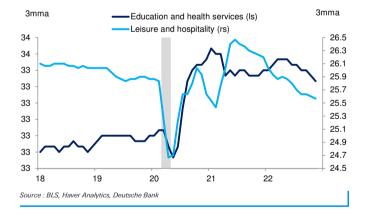
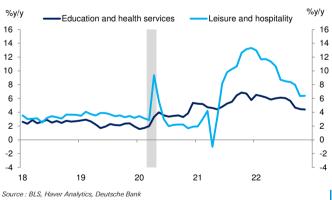


Figure 6: Nominal wage growth (AHEs) decelerating quickly for leisure & hospitality



For overall employment dynamics, the extent to which the pre-covid trend represents the appropriate benchmark for leisure and hospitality will likely determine how quickly overall payrolls slow and eventually turn negative.

Page 4

3 January 2023 US Economic Perspectives



Appendix 1

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3 January 2023 US Economic Perspectives



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3 January 2023

US Economic Perspectives



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3 January 2023

US Economic Perspectives



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3 January 2023 US Economic Perspectives



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