

The Institute

Turning Information into Insight

2026 Lackawanna & Luzerne County Regional Factbook

A collaboration among Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine, Johnson College, Keystone College, King's College, Lackawanna College, Luzerne County Community College, Marywood University, Misericordia University, Penn State Hazleton, Penn State Scranton, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, The Wright Center for Graduate Medical Education, University of Scranton, Wilkes University, and the business community.

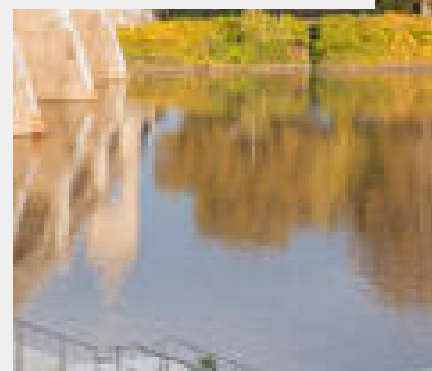
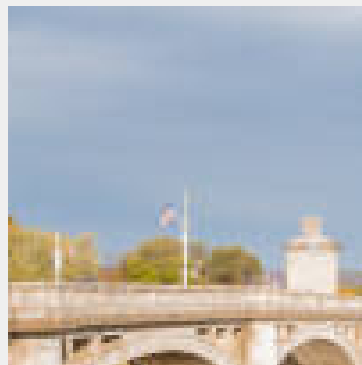
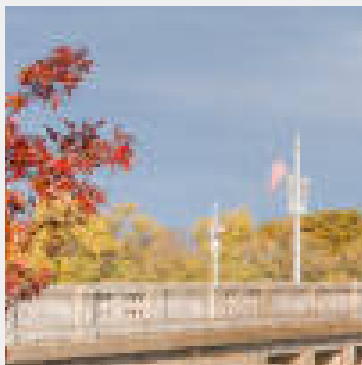


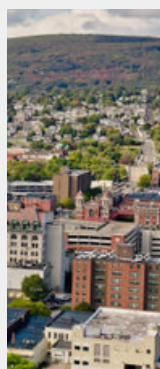
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Selected Current Indicators

Indicator	Lackawanna County	Luzerne County
Population (2020 Census)	215,896	325,594
Median household income	\$66,223	\$63,691
Poverty rate	149%	134%
Bachelor's degree or higher	306%	253%
Employer establishments	5,198	7,212
Median home value	\$201,800	\$174,100

I. The Region



The Region

The Lackawanna-Luzerne county region remains the historic and economic core of Northeastern Pennsylvania. Together, the two counties counted 541,490 residents at the 2020 Census, with Scranton and Wilkes-Barre continuing to function as the principal urban anchors for commerce, education, healthcare, and government. Current data points to a mature region with stable population levels, a durable institutional base, and a quality-of-life advantage rooted in affordability, pre-K-12 and higher education opportunities, location, and access to services.^[iii]

Location

Located in the Susquehanna River Basin, Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties sit within the northeastern corridor between New York and Philadelphia, each of which is approximately within a two-and-a-half-hour drive away. Bordering counties include Columbia, Carbon, Monroe, Schuylkill, Susquehanna, Wayne, and Wyoming. Both counties are uniquely positioned amid airports, interstates, mountain ranges, river and lake systems, and valleys. Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties are also known for their vast farmlands and wilderness, which include state parks and nature reserves. Both county holds are within 20 minutes of their respective county seat. Each county remains connected to surrounding counties through a dense highway network. That strategic location still matters in the current economy. Distribution, warehousing, healthcare, and commuter-serving businesses continue to benefit from the region’s ability to reach major eastern markets by truck within the same day, while residents retain ready access to mountain landscapes, river valleys, and smaller boroughs and townships outside the two county seats.^[iii]



Size

Lackawanna County contains 459 square miles of land area and Luzerne County 891 square miles, giving the combined region a broad mix of downtown blocks, older industrial corridors, suburban development, farmland, and forested terrain. This blend of settlement patterns continues to shape local housing, transportation, recreation, and economic-development choices.^[iv]

Brief History

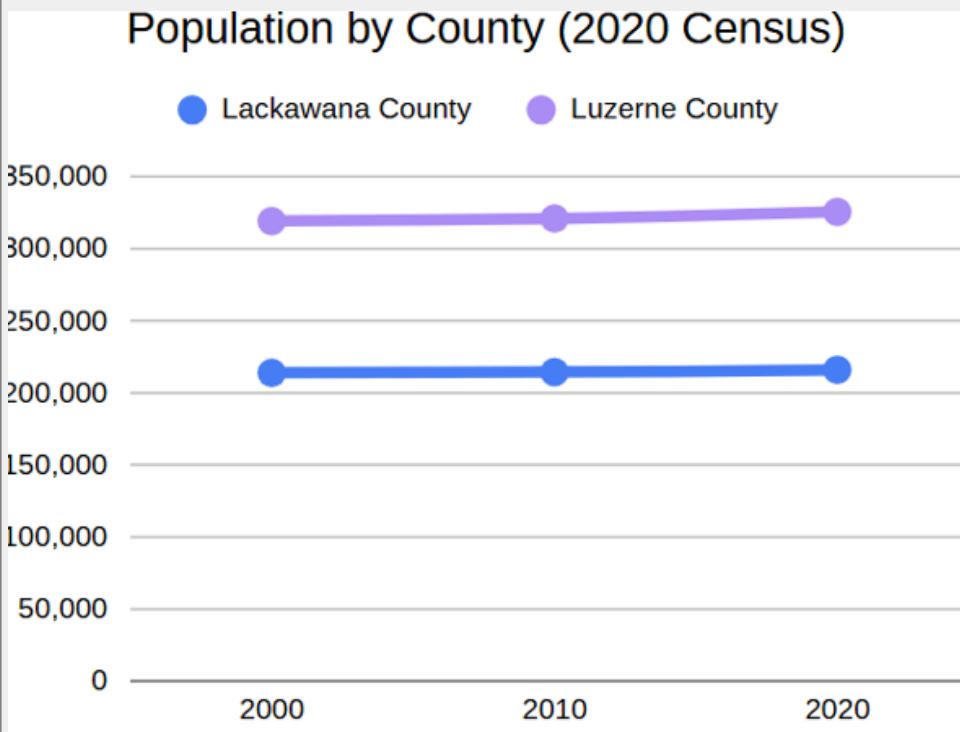
Both counties were formed in the long arc of Pennsylvania's anthracite and transportation era, and that industrial legacy remains visible in community form, downtown architecture, and settlement patterns. Luzerne County was established in 1786 and Lackawanna County in 1878 after separating from Luzerne County. A strong immigrant workforce helped to bolster each counties' initial industries and population. Today, the regional economy is more diversified, with healthcare, education, logistics, retail, public service, and specialized manufacturing carrying much of the employment base.^[wvi]



II. Demographics

Demographics

Demographic indicators show a region that is older than the nation as a whole, still broadly affordable, and gradually more diverse than in earlier decades. Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties both have a population of 65 and older that is larger than the population of 14 and younger. There has been a considerable increase in Asian, Black, and Hispanic/Latino residents in both Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties in the last several years, along with an increase of inward migration because of high cost-of-living in several metro areas. Current educational attainment and household-income levels are stronger than they once were, while poverty remains a persistent challenge in older urban neighborhoods and among vulnerable households.^[vii]



Population

At the 2020 Census, Luzerne County recorded 325,594 residents and Lackawanna County 215,896 residents. Scranton counted 76,328 residents and Wilkes-Barre 44,328, confirming that both county seats remain important urban centers even as population is spread across dozens of municipalities. Both counties have recorded steady population growth since 2000.^[viii]

Race and Gender Diversity

Current Census profiles show that languages other than English are spoken at home in 15.9 percent of Luzerne County households and 10.3 percent of Lackawanna County households, a useful proxy for a more diverse regional population and changing service needs in schools, healthcare, and public administration. The regional narrative is still anchored in long-standing ethnic communities, but it now reflects a broader and more contemporary demographic mix.^[ix]



Age

Lackawanna and Luzerne counties remain older than the nation overall. Residents aged 65 and over account for 20.5 percent of Luzerne County and 21.2 percent of Lackawanna County. This age structure has practical implications for healthcare demand, housing choices, workforce replacement, transit, and social services. At the same time, the presence of colleges, universities, and professional schools ensures a recurring influx of younger adults whose educational and employment decisions continue to shape the region’s future.^[xi]

Income

Median household income stands at \$66,223 in Lackawanna County and \$63,691 in Luzerne County, while per-capita income reaches \$37,168 and \$36,493, respectively. These figures reflect the continued development of a service-oriented regional economy, as well as increased earning potential in the form of a diversifying workforce and the opening of new career pathways. They are best understood alongside housing affordability, commuting patterns, educational attainment, and the persistence of uneven outcomes across municipalities.^[xii]

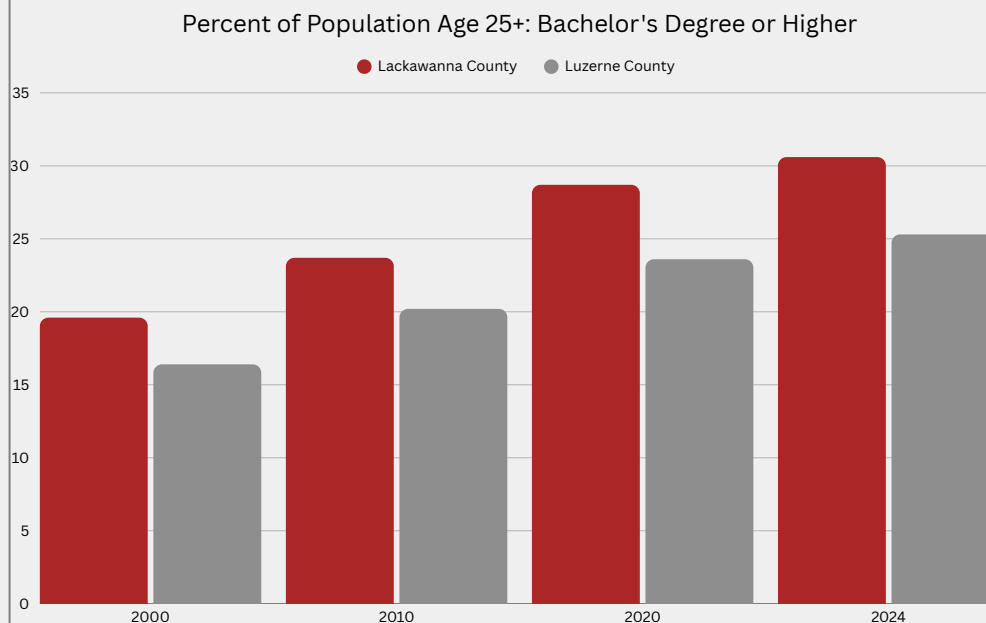
	2000	2010	2020	2024
Lackawanna County	\$34,438	\$43,673	\$54,064	\$66,223
Luzerne County	\$33,771	\$42,224	\$53,194	\$63,691

Median House Income by County (Inflation Adjusted) Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Poverty

Poverty has not disappeared with income growth. Current Census estimates place the poverty rate at 14.9 percent in Lackawanna County and 13.4 percent in Luzerne County. Conditions in the principal cities remain more challenging, with poverty rates of 23.0 percent in Scranton and 23.1 percent in Wilkes-Barre. The updated quality-of-life discussion therefore rests on a more balanced reading of the region: affordability and institutional strength are real advantages, but they coexist with concentrated economic hardship that continues to shape educational, housing, and health outcomes.^[xiii]

Education



Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties boast numerous higher education institutions which feature a wide variety of degree and certificate programs. Among residents age 25 and older, 91.7 percent in Lackawanna County and 90.2 percent in Luzerne County are high school graduates or higher, while 30.6 percent and 25.3 percent hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. These gains matter for labor-market competitiveness and help explain why healthcare, education, finance, logistics, and professional services continue to provide opportunities in the region.^[xvi]

III. Business Composition and Employment

Business Composition and Employment

The region's business base is larger and more varied than a coal-and-manufacturing narrative alone would suggest, now primarily composed of healthcare, government, transportation, and manufacturing and warehousing positions. The Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce and The Greater Wyoming Valley Chamber of Commerce serve Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties respectively and assist with businesses opening and forming local partnerships. In 2023, Luzerne County reported 7,212 employer establishments and 21,411 nonemployer businesses, while Lackawanna County reported 5,198 employer establishments and 14,138 nonemployer businesses. Combined covered employment reached 230,441, and annual payroll totaled several billion dollars.^[xvixvii]

Expanding Firms

The Scranton-Wilkes-Barre-Hazleton metropolitan labor market shows an outsized concentration in transportation and material-moving work, with that occupational group accounting for 15.4 percent of employment in May 2024, well above the national share. That concentration aligns with the region's highway geography, warehouse footprint, and long-standing role as a distribution corridor. Expansion today is therefore best understood not as a list of individual firms, but as a continuing regional advantage in logistics and support activity.^[xix]

Unemployment Rates

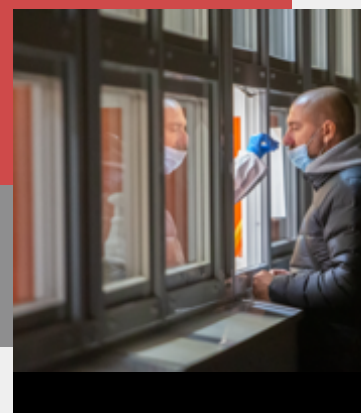
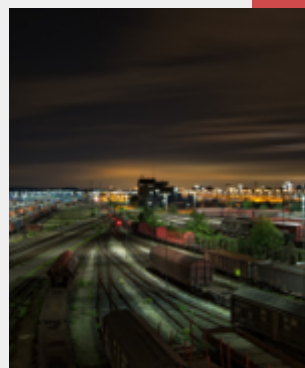
Local labor-market conditions continue to move with broader state and national cycles. In the Bureau of Labor Statistics annual county series for 2023, unemployment averaged 4.1 percent in Lackawanna County and 4.6 percent in Luzerne County. Although unemployment rates have slightly increased in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties for the first time since 2020, labor force participation has also increased in both counties, with workforces approaching full employment. BLS wage releases also show average weekly wages above \$1,000 in both counties during the first quarter of 2025, indicating a regional labor market that is steady rather than distressed.^[xxxxi]

Job Growth Potential

The strongest job growth potential lies in the following industries: healthcare, transportation, warehousing, education, and technical occupations. In the Scranton-Wilkes-Barre-Hazleton metropolitan area, the average hourly wage across all occupations was \$26.59 in May 2024, while transportation and material-moving occupations accounted for 39,020 jobs. Healthcare practitioners and technical occupations represented a larger local employment share than nationally, and transportation occupations remained deeply embedded in the metro economy. Those figures support a forward-looking regional narrative centered on logistics, care work, skilled support occupations, and applied technical roles rather than on speculation alone.^[xxiixxiii]

Types of Firms

Employer establishments, payroll, and retail activity show that healthcare, social assistance, trade, transportation, warehousing, education, finance, and business services all play meaningful roles in the regional economy. The region is sustained by a mix of institutional, logistics, service, and consumer-facing activity rather than by a single dominant industry.^[xviii]



IV. Education and Workforce Development

Education and Workforce Development

Education remains one of the region’s defining strengths. The counties support a substantial higher-education and training footprint that serves recent graduates, adult learners, and career changers alike. Current attainment rates suggest that this educational infrastructure continues to translate into measurable human-capital gains.^[xxiv]

Higher Educational Institutions

The higher-education landscape remains unusually dense for a two-county region of this size. Major institutions include Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine, Johnson College, Keystone College, King’s College, Lackawanna College, Luzerne County Community College, Marywood University, Misericordia University, Penn State Hazleton, Penn State Scranton, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, The University of Scranton, The Wright Center for Graduate Medical Education, and Wilkes University.^[xxv]

Training Providers

Workforce preparation in the region is not limited to traditional colleges. Career and technical education providers, community-college programming, employer partnerships, apprenticeship pathways, and public workforce agencies all contribute to skills development. The region’s training ecosystem is especially important in health services, advanced manufacturing, transportation, building trades, and practical technical fields, where replacement needs and credential requirements increasingly shape the local labor market.^[xxvi]



School Districts

Public school districts across both counties continue to serve as the educational base from which the regional workforce develops. The original report emphasized educational opportunity from the pre-kindergarten years forward, and that framing still holds. In the current update, the school-district discussion is less about a single statewide attendance statistic and more about the broader role of public schools in stabilizing communities, preparing students for postsecondary options, and responding to demographic change, especially in districts serving older urban neighborhoods and newer immigrant populations.^[xxvii]



Pre-K Programs

Early-childhood education remains important to long-term workforce and quality-of-life outcomes. Public-school pre-kindergarten classrooms, Head Start providers, early-intervention services, and community-based childcare programs all contribute to school readiness and family stability. In a region with an older population and pockets of concentrated poverty, consistent access to early learning remains a foundational development issue rather than a peripheral educational topic.

Skills

Current labor-market data support a pragmatic skills agenda for the two-county region. Employers continue to need healthcare workers, commercial drivers, industrial operators, teachers, business-service staff, and technicians with both interpersonal and digital competencies. The strongest regional strategy is therefore not a single pipeline but a layered one: strong K-12 preparation, flexible technical training, employer partnerships, and affordable local higher education that allows residents to build skills without leaving the region.^[xxviii]



Professional Schools

Special reference should also be made to the professional-school infrastructure that now distinguishes the region. Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine’s Northeast Campus operates in Scranton and Wilkes-Barre and links medical education to major hospital systems in both counties. The Wright Center further deepens the region’s educational role through graduate medical education and community-based training, including its National Family Medicine Residency Program.^[xxix]

V. Real Estate

Real Estate

Real estate remains one of the clearest areas in which the region preserves a competitive advantage. Housing costs continue to run below many larger northeastern markets, and that affordability supports both resident retention and relocation. This section therefore focuses on current housing conditions rather than on labor-market indicators that belong elsewhere.^[xxx]

Residential

As of 2024, 88.1 percent of Lackawanna County’s housing units and 89.3 percent of Luzerne County’s housing units were occupied, respectively. Owner-occupied housing remains comparatively accessible in both counties. The median value of owner-occupied housing units is now \$201,800 in Lackawanna County and \$174,100 in Luzerne County. Those values help explain why the region continues to appeal to households priced out of more expensive metropolitan housing markets. They also support the region’s long-standing image as a place where homeownership remains achievable for middle-income families.^[xxx]



Commercial

Commercial real estate is best understood through the broader business and institutional footprint rather than through a single vacancy metric. Downtown Scranton, downtown Wilkes-Barre, Route 309 and Route 315 corridors, the Hazleton area, and interstate-adjacent business parks illustrate the region’s mixed economy: institutional in its core, suburban along major corridors, and logistics-oriented where highway access is strongest.^[xxxii]



Rental Affordability

Rental affordability remains a meaningful quality-of-life asset. Median gross rent is currently \$1,007 in Lackawanna County and \$1,004 in Luzerne County. Lackawanna County renters spent 31.0 percent of their income, and Luzerne County renters spent 31.3 percent of their income on rent, respectively. This is nearly equal to the state average of 30.5 percent of income being spent on rent. Those rents are not low enough to dismiss affordability pressures, especially for lower-income households, but they remain modest by northeastern U.S. standards.^[xxxiii]

VI. Infrastructure

Infrastructure

The infrastructure story in Northeastern Pennsylvania remains one of connectivity. Highways, utilities, communications, rail, airports, and trucking still define the region's physical-development profile, while digital connectivity now sits beside roads and runways as a basic economic-development concern.^[xxiv]

Broadband

Broadband access is now widespread, though not universal. Households with broadband Internet subscription account for 87.5 percent in Lackawanna County and 87.8 percent in Luzerne County. This is a major improvement from the period covered by the original fact book and is one reason the region is better positioned for remote work, online learning, digital healthcare access, and modern business operations. At the same time, the remaining gap matters, especially in lower-income and older households, making digital inclusion an ongoing regional issue rather than a solved problem.^[xxxv]



Utilities

The two counties continue to benefit from mature utility systems that support industry, healthcare, education, and residential development. Electric, gas, and communications infrastructure are no longer novel selling points in themselves, but reliability and reach remain important for industrial parks, commercial corridors, and institutional campuses. In the updated fact book, utilities are treated as enabling infrastructure that underpins the broader competitive strengths of the region rather than as a stand-alone development narrative.

Water

Water and wastewater capacity remain foundational to both daily life and economic development. Older systems still require maintenance and capital investment, but the presence of established municipal authorities and regional providers continues to support residential neighborhoods, legacy commercial areas, and new business development. The updated narrative therefore preserves the original emphasis on water infrastructure while avoiding dated claims that cannot be easily supported with a single contemporary benchmark.

Interstates

Interstate access remains one of the region's clearest advantages. Interstate 81 forms the spine of the corridor, while Interstate 84, Interstate 380, and connecting routes provide access to eastern Pennsylvania, New York, and broader Mid-Atlantic markets. That roadway network continues to support freight movement, commuting, tourism, and the warehousing and distribution activities that now occupy a prominent place in the regional economy.^[xxxvi]

Public Transportation

Public transportation still plays a meaningful supporting role in both counties. In Lackawanna County, COLTS operates 22 daily fixed routes on weekdays and most routes originate at the Lackawanna Transit Center in Scranton. In Luzerne County, the Luzerne County Transportation Authority operates fixed-route and shared-ride service and has recently expanded microtransit connections through LCTA Connects. These systems do not eliminate automobile dependence, but they remain important for workers, students, seniors, and residents without regular car access.^[xxxvii]





Airport

The Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport remains one of the region's signature shared assets and continues to link the two counties to national air service. While the airport's scale differs from that of major hub airports, its regional importance is substantial. It supports passenger travel, business access, medical connectivity, and the broader argument that Northeastern Pennsylvania offers a level of infrastructure that exceeds what might be expected for a region of this size.^[xxxix]

Rail

Rail infrastructure remains part of the region's economic identity in two ways. Freight and industrial rail connections still matter to manufacturing and logistics, while a renewed passenger-rail effort has become one of the region's most closely watched infrastructure developments. In February 2026, PennDOT advanced the Scranton-to-New York City passenger-rail corridor project and continued public engagement on route and station planning, underscoring the project's significance for mobility, downtown access, tourism, and long-term economic development.^[xi]

Trucking

Trucking remains central to the region's present-day economy. The concentration of transportation and material-moving employment in the metropolitan labor market, coupled with interstate access and warehousing activity, confirms that freight movement is one of Northeastern Pennsylvania's most durable competitive advantages. The modern trucking narrative is about connectivity, labor supply, and distribution geography rather than simply about road count or mileage.^[xli]

VII. Healthcare

Healthcare

Healthcare has become one of the region's most important institutional and economic pillars. County business receipts show \$2.76 billion in health care and social assistance receipts in Lackawanna County and \$4.20 billion in Luzerne County in 2022, underscoring the scale of the sector's role in employment, service delivery, and regional stability.^[xiii]

Healthcare Providers

Major healthcare providers in the two-county region include Geisinger Community Medical Center, Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center, Regional Hospital of Scranton, Moses Taylor Hospital, Wilkes-Barre General Hospital, Lehigh Valley Hospital–Dickson City, Lehigh Valley Health Network–Pittston, and The Wright Center's network of community-health and graduate-medical-education facilities.^[xiii] There are a number of federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) around the region along with a couple free clinics.



Medical School

Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine is an established regional institution that attracts students from all over the world. Its Northeast Campus in Scranton and Wilkes-Barre strengthens physician training, community-based medical education, and the region's long-term healthcare identity.^[xiv]

The Wright Center's medical-residency infrastructure further distinguishes the regional healthcare system. Its graduate medical education enterprise offers ACGME-accredited residency and fellowship pathways and includes the National Family Medicine Residency Program, which links Northeast Pennsylvania to a broader teaching-health-center model while reinforcing local clinical training capacity.^[xiv]

VIII. Retail

Businesses

Retail and service activity is sustained by both the region's population base and its role as a wider trade center for surrounding counties. Current Census business data show total retail sales of \$4.12 billion in Lackawanna County and \$7.33 billion in Luzerne County in 2022. Those totals confirm that consumer-facing commerce remains a major part of the regional economy even as spending patterns continue to shift online and toward suburban corridors.^[xlv]



Taxable Sales

Retail sales per capita reached \$19,091 in Lackawanna County and \$22,445 in Luzerne County in 2022. Those figures support the conclusion that both counties still function as active regional consumer markets, with Luzerne County retaining the larger overall commercial footprint.^[xlvi]

Shopping Areas

The shopping geography of the two counties has evolved, but the core pattern remains familiar. Downtown Scranton and downtown Wilkes-Barre still matter symbolically and functionally, yet major retail traffic is also drawn to larger corridors and centers including the Montage Mountain area, the Wyoming Valley retail corridor, Viewmont-area shopping destinations, and commercial strips near major highways. The updated discussion therefore frames shopping areas as a network rather than a single dominant mall or downtown.^[xlvii]

Hospitality

Hospitality remains closely tied to retail, recreation, healthcare travel, and event activity. Accommodation and food-services sales totaled \$524.8 million in Lackawanna County and \$971.5 million in Luzerne County in 2022. The restaurant market is broad as well, spanning national chains, local diners, family restaurants, taverns, pizzerias, coffee shops, upscale dining, food-and-beverage venues tied to tourism and entertainment, and a growing range of ethnic and specialty offerings.^[xlviii]

IX. Life in Northeastern Pennsylvania

Life in Northeastern Pennsylvania

Quality of life in Northeastern Pennsylvania is best described through a combination of affordability, manageable commuting patterns, recreation, institutional density, and cultural identity. The case for the region rests on the way moderate housing costs, outdoor access, sports and entertainment options, and proximity to larger metropolitan markets work together.^[i]



Areas of Attraction

The region continues to offer a diverse set of attractions that combine industrial heritage, sports, outdoor recreation, and family entertainment. Steamtown National Historic Site, the Electric City Trolley Museum, Montage Mountain Resorts, the Lackawanna Coal Mine Tour, RailRiders baseball, trails and parks, theaters, museums, and casino-based entertainment at Mohegan Pennsylvania all contribute to the area’s visitor profile.^[ii]



Lodging

Lodging is best understood as part of the visitor economy that also supports business travel, medical travel, family visitation, and event attendance. The region does not depend on destination tourism in the same way as a resort market, but its hotel base is sustained by highway access, healthcare institutions, universities, festivals, sports, and year-round travel between larger northeastern metros. That pattern gives the hospitality market a steadier base than a purely seasonal economy would provide.

Recreation

Outdoor recreation remains one of the most credible quality-of-life assets in the region. Montage Mountain continues to market more than 140 skiable acres and over two dozen trails within minutes of downtown Scranton. Discover NEPA and related regional tourism sources also point to trails, parks, river access, heritage landscapes, and year-round outdoor programming as defining regional amenities. Recreation is therefore not just scenery; it is a lived part of regional identity and an important argument for both tourism and resident retention.^[iiiiiv]



Famous Residents

Scranton and Wilkes-Barre continue to occupy an outsized place in the Pennsylvania imagination through politics, media references, music, sports, and business leadership. The point is less about maintaining a list than about recognizing that the region continues to produce public figures and institutions whose reach extends well beyond county lines.

Climate

Climate remains a genuine regional identifier. According to the National Weather Service office in Binghamton, yearly precipitation at the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton airport averages 37 inches and yearly snowfall averages 86 inches. Those conditions reinforce the region's four-season identity and support winter recreation, spring and summer outdoor activity, and a landscape that remains greener and more varied than many higher-density northeastern corridors.^[iv]

Safety

Quality of life also depends on public safety, but this fact book avoids sweeping claims that are difficult to support with a single universal benchmark. Instead, it directs readers to the Pennsylvania Uniform Crime Reporting dashboard as the current statewide repository for crime data and trend reporting. That approach is more durable than repeating isolated crime anecdotes or outdated comparisons and better matches the assignment's emphasis on current, authoritative indicators.^[i]

The area also benefits from practical proximity to larger markets, including New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, and other Mid-Atlantic destinations. That location strengthens the region's appeal for residents and businesses that value lower costs while still needing access to larger labor, education, entertainment, and travel markets.^[lvii]

X. About The Institute

Description



The Institute is a data analysis, research, and consulting organization that supports regional planning and decision-making across Northeastern Pennsylvania. In this fact book, it serves as a source of regional analysis that connects demographic, economic, and quality-of-life indicators to practical policy and development questions.^[viii]

Academic Partners

The Institute currently presents itself as a partnership of colleges and universities together with the business community. Academic partners associated with the organization include Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine, Johnson College, Keystone College, King's College, Lackawanna College, Luzerne County Community College, Marywood University, Misericordia University, Penn State Hazleton, Penn State Scranton, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, The University of Scranton, and Wilkes University.^[lix]

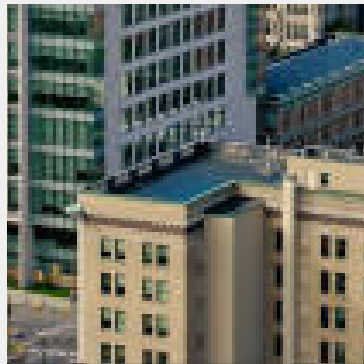
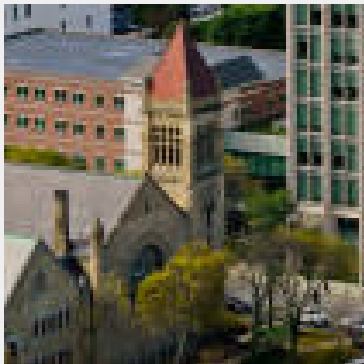
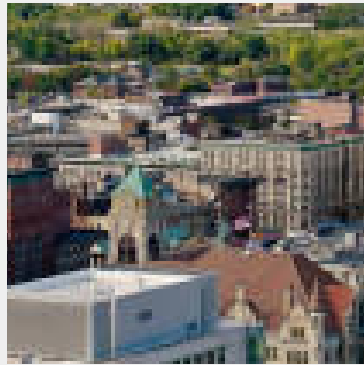
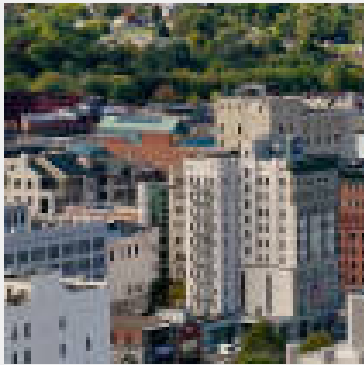
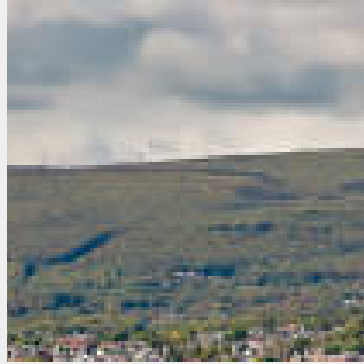
XI. Endnotes

Image Credits

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- ii. U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census. U.S. Census Bureau, QuickFacts: Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania. U.S. Census Bureau, QuickFacts: Luzerne County, Pennsylvania.
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