



HOUSING ASSISTANCE COUNCIL

Poverty in Rural America

The issue of poverty is quite complex, but it is much more than an abstract condition for the over 40 million Americans who face daily struggles with food security, access to health care, and search for basic shelter. Poverty rates are on the rise and more Americans are living in poverty than at any other time since the Census Bureau began measuring its occurrence. According to 2006-2010 American Community Survey (ACS) figures, 40.7 million people have incomes below the poverty line, constituting a national poverty rate of 13.8 percent.

The increasing prevalence of poverty in the United States is in part a factor of the recent economic recession. But high poverty rates are also reflective of a systemic situation in which too many Americans have been left behind or shut out of our nation's economic promise and prosperity.

The incidence of poverty is greatest in America's rural areas and central cities. Approximately 10 million persons, or 16.3 percent of the rural and small town population, live in poverty. Nearly one-quarter of people in poverty live in rural areas.

Poverty rates are generally lower in suburban and exurban communities, at 10.5 percent, and highest in large cities, where 17.3 percent of the urban population have below-poverty level incomes.

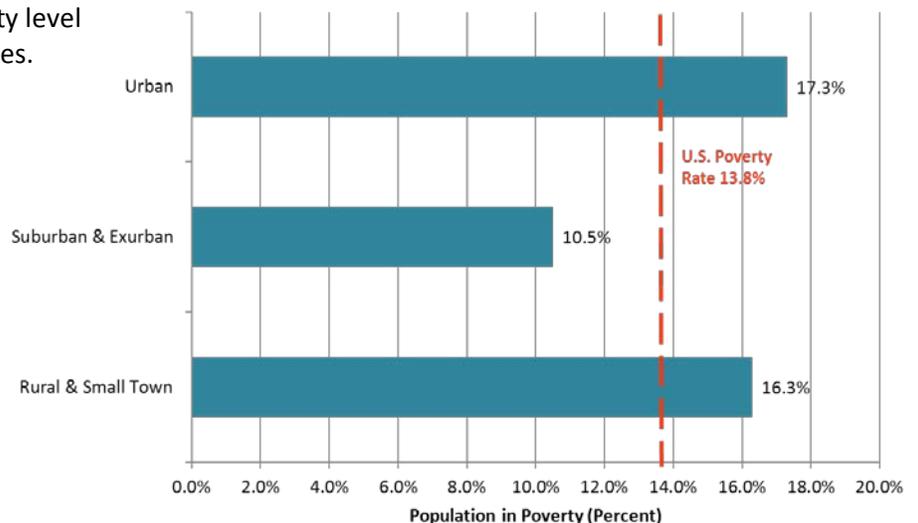
ABOUT THIS SERIES

Poverty in Rural America is the sixth in a series of *Rural Research Briefs* presenting data and findings from the 2010 Census and American Community Survey (ACS).

The Housing Assistance Council (HAC) presents *Rural Research Briefs* highlighting various social, economic, and housing characteristics of rural Americans.

The *Rural Research Briefs* series complements HAC's decennial *Taking Stock* report - a comprehensive assessment of rural America and its housing. Since the 1980s, HAC has presented *Taking Stock* every ten years following the release of Census data. The newest *Taking Stock* report was published in 2012.

POVERTY BY RURAL, URBAN & SUBURBAN STATUS, 2010



The Face of Poverty in Rural America

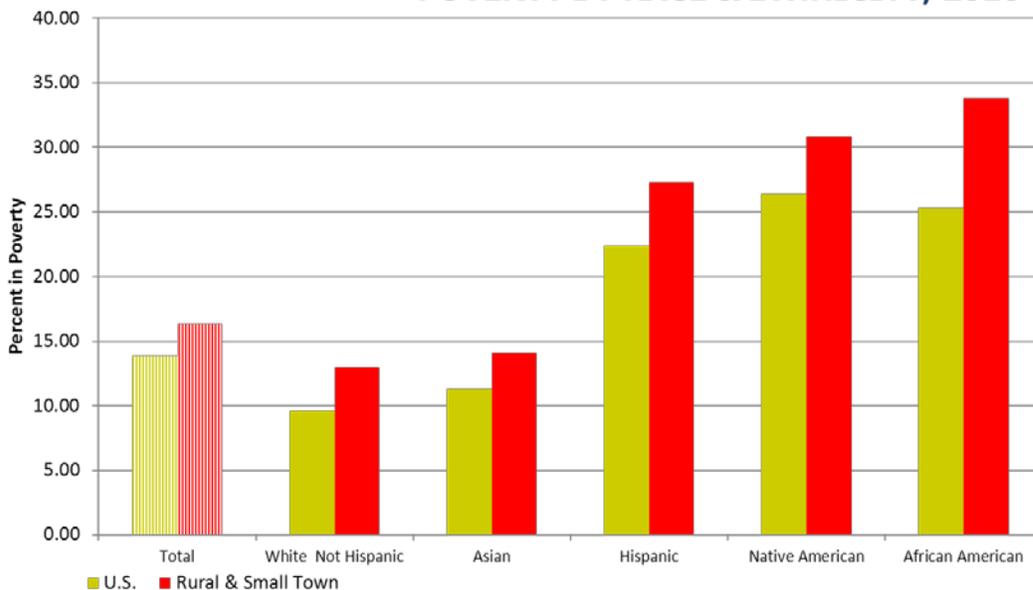
Rural poverty rates generally follow the same trend as national rates, and have fluctuated up and down through periods of economic growth, as well as through recessions similar to what the U.S. experienced in the late 2000s. While some gains have been made in reducing poverty over the past several decades, poverty rates are still stubbornly high for certain populations in rural America –

Consistent with regional patterns, rural poverty rates were highest in southeastern states. Mississippi, Louisiana, Kentucky, South Carolina, Georgia, Arkansas, and Alabama all have rural and small town poverty rates at 20 percent or more. Texas has the greatest number of rural residents in poverty with nearly 730,000 rural residents below the poverty line. North Carolina also has

small town areas. Large numbers of poor, rural Native Americans are concentrated on or near reservations, where the overall poverty rates can exceed half the population in these communities. The poverty rate among rural Hispanics is more than twice the national rate, and five percentage points higher than for Hispanics nationally, at 27.3 percent. In fact, rural minorities consistently have higher poverty rates compared to minorities nationally. Additionally, economic conditions for many rural minorities have not improved over the past decade, as poverty rates for most groups have either remained the same or increased between 2000 and 2010.

While minorities experience exceptionally high rates of poverty proportionate to their population size, it is important to remember that the vast majority of rural residents in poverty are white not Hispanics. More than 6 million individuals, or 63 percent of rural persons below the poverty line, are white not Hispanic.

POVERTY BY RACE & ETHNICITY, 2010



namely minorities and children.

Regionally, rural and small town poverty rates are highest in the South where 19.3 percent of southerners live in poverty. In fact, more than half of all rural and small town persons in poverty reside in the south. Rural and small town poverty rates are lowest in the Northeast and Midwest at 12.9 and 13.6 percent respectively. Approximately 15.4 percent of rural and small town residents in the West have incomes below the poverty level.

more than one-half million rural residents who live in poverty.

Rural minorities continue to experience some of the highest poverty rates in the nation. The poverty rate of rural minorities is more than twice that of rural white not Hispanics, at 28 percent. Rural African Americans have among the highest poverty rates, at nearly 34 percent. Similarly, the poverty rate for rural Native Americans is also above 30 percent, and more than half of all Native Americans in poverty live in rural and

While some gains have been made in reducing poverty over the past several decades, poverty rates are still stubbornly high for certain populations in rural America



FAST FACTS

16.3%

Overall poverty rate in rural and small town areas of the United States in 2010



28.7%

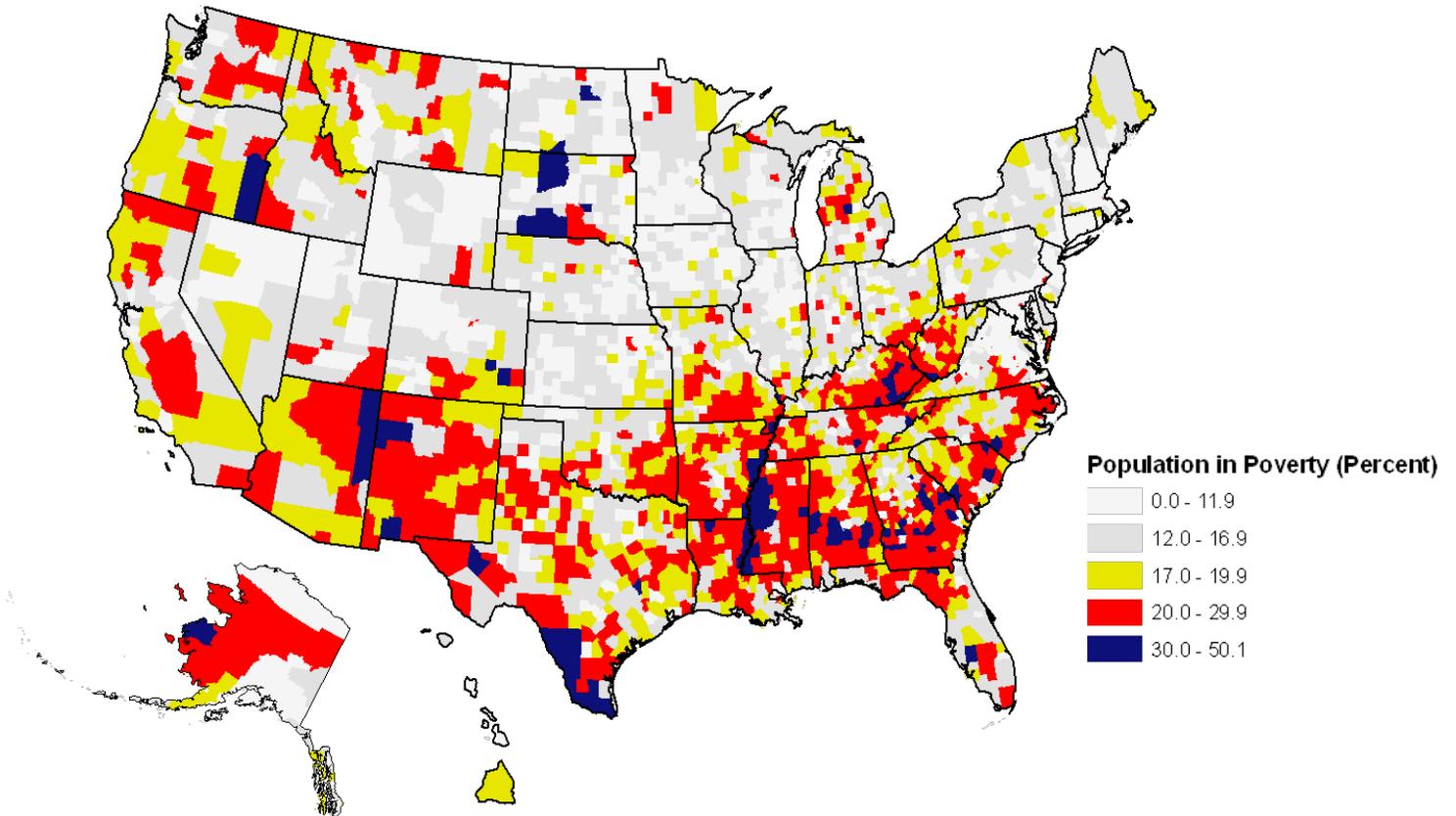
Poverty rate for minorities in rural and small town areas in 2010



10 million

Rural and small town people with incomes below the poverty line in 2010

POVERTY IN THE UNITED STATES, 2010



Persistently Poor: Long-Term Poverty in Rural America

An increasing number of rural communities are experiencing persistently high poverty rates. These areas are often isolated geographically, lack resources and economic opportunities, and suffer from decades of disinvestment and

double-digit poverty rates. Often forgotten or hidden from mainstream America, these areas and populations have had high poverty rates for decades.

Persistently poor counties are classified as having poverty rates of 20 percent or more in 1990, 2000, and 2010. Using this metric, there were 429 persistently poor counties in 2010. These counties experiencing long-term poverty are almost exclusively rural, as 86 percent of persistent poverty counties have entirely rural populations.

Overall, there are more than 21 million people living in persistent poverty counties. Nearly 60 percent of the population in these

communities are racial and ethnic minorities, and the median household income is \$31,581, more than 40 percent less than the national median.

One highly visible impact of this economic distress can be seen in these areas' poor housing conditions. The incidence of housing units lacking adequate plumbing is more than twice the national rate, and nearly 400,000 households in these regions live in crowded conditions. Additionally, while housing costs are relatively low in many of these communities, more

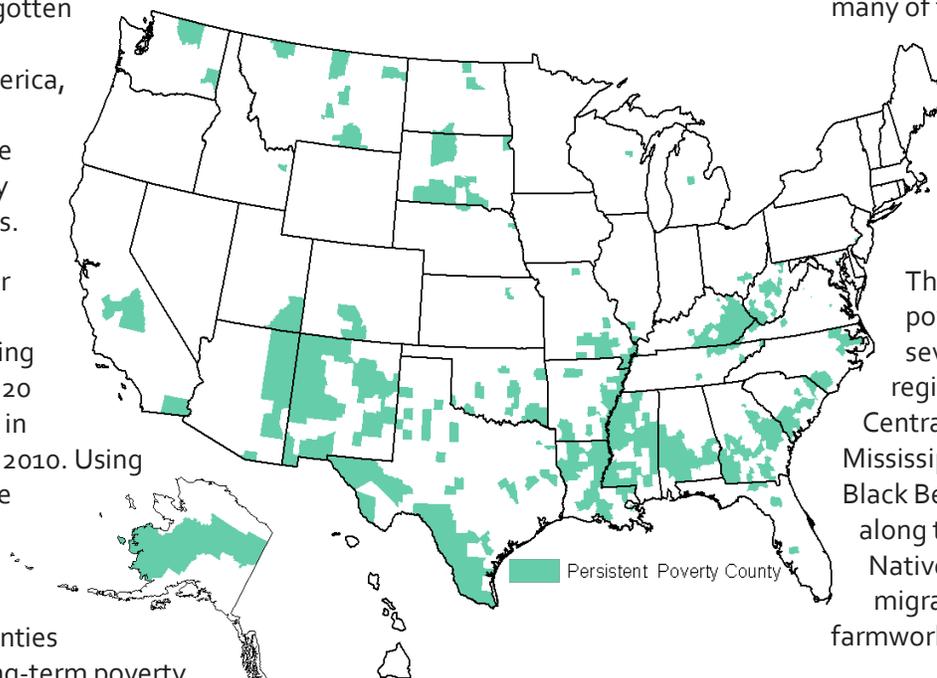
than half of persistent-poverty county renters encounter affordability problems and are considered housing cost burdened.

The continued persistence of poverty is most evident within several predominantly rural regions and populations such as Central Appalachia, the Lower Mississippi Delta, the southern Black Belt, the Colonias region along the U.S.-Mexico border, Native American lands, and migrant and seasonal farmworkers.

One of the more distressing trends is that the number of persistent poverty counties is actually increasing. Using the same benchmark, the number of persistent-poverty counties increased by 8 percent from the year 2000 level.

PERSISTENT POVERTY, 1990 - 2010

Counties with Poverty Rates of 20% or more in 1990, 2000, and 2010



There are more than 5 million people living below the poverty line in these counties, with an overall poverty rate of 25 percent -nearly twice the national rate. The poverty rate for minorities in these communities is even higher, at 32 percent.

Often forgotten or hidden from mainstream America, these areas and populations have had high poverty rates for decades.

10 states with the highest rural & small town poverty rate, 2010

- Mississippi—24.6%
- Louisiana—21.3%
- Kentucky—21.1%
- South Carolina—20.9%
- New Mexico—20.9%
- Georgia—20.8%
- Arkansas—19.6%
- Alabama—19.5%
- North Carolina—19.1%
- West Virginia—19.0%

10 states with the largest number of rural and small town residents in poverty, 2010

- Texas – 728,128
- North Carolina – 538,247
- Georgia—468,900
- California—465,930
- Kentucky—438,129
- Mississippi—435,220
- Ohio—375,127
- Tennessee—356,661
- Missouri—325,513
- Alabama—306,684

ABOUT THE DATA

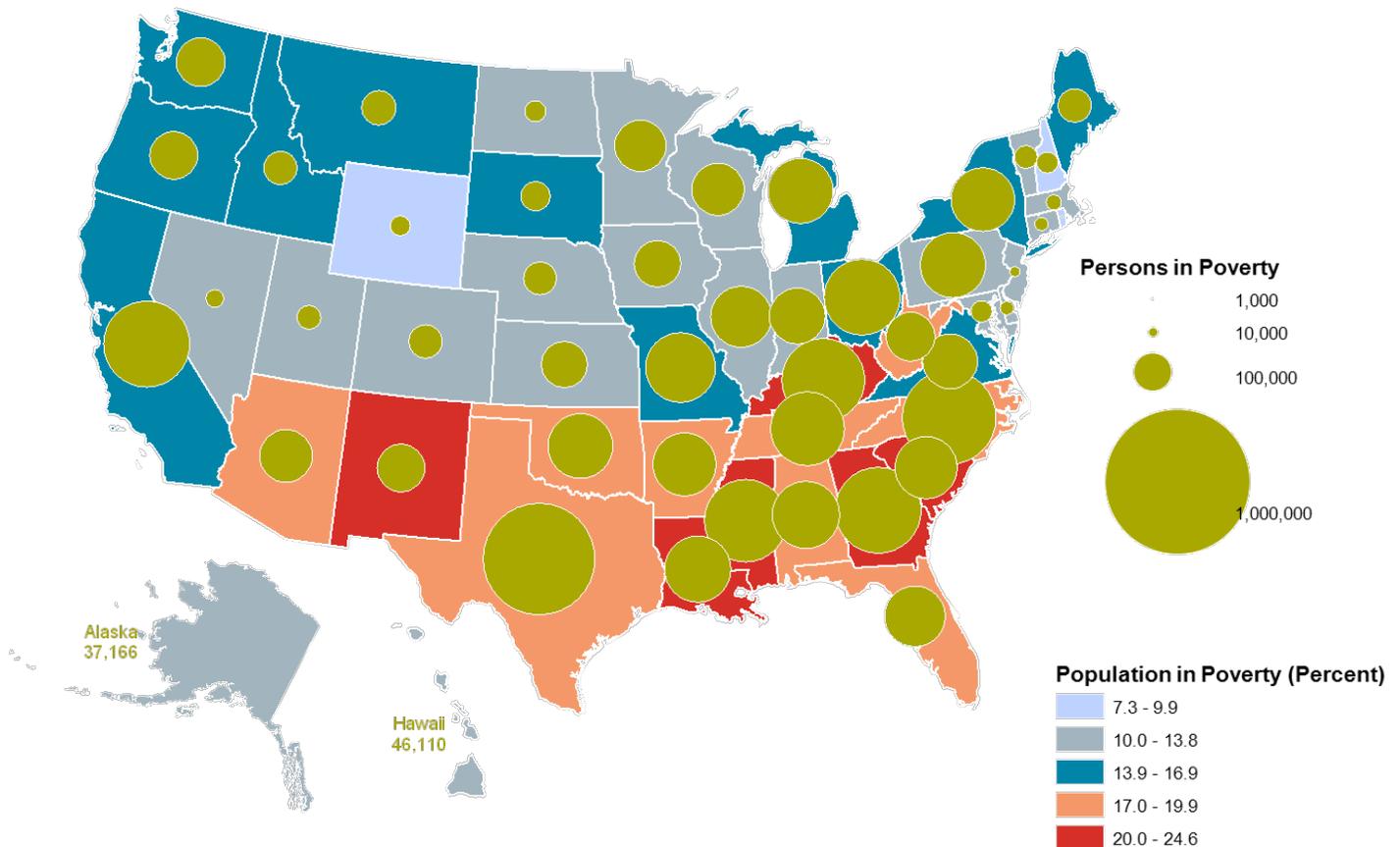
Unless otherwise noted, all data presented in this Research Brief are based on HAC tabulations of the 2006-2010 American Community Survey or the Census Bureau's 2010 Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE).

For more information on this Research Brief contact the Housing Assistance Council

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RURAL & SMALL TOWN POVERTY BY STATE, 2010



Rural poverty and vulnerable populations

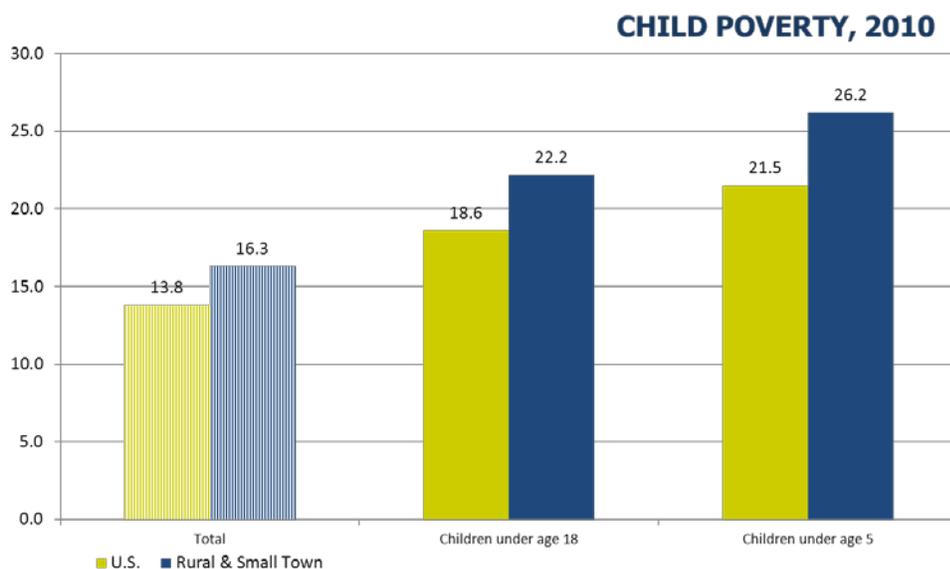
Poverty often has the most detrimental impact on people who are most vulnerable. Children, who cannot fully attend to their own needs, suffer the most from low incomes and poverty. Research suggests that children living multiple years with unhealthy food, substandard housing, and unsafe living environments, are negatively impacted in the long term and have reduced economic prospects. While the poverty rate for all ages hovers at 13 percent, it is estimated that nearly 19 percent of children under the age of 18 live in poverty. In rural and small town communities the child poverty rate increases to 22 percent and is even higher for rural children under age 5, at 26 percent. Similar to national patterns, minority children experience poverty at greater rates than white not Hispanics. The poverty rate for rural minority children is nearly 20 percentage points higher than for rural white not Hispanic children, at 36 percent. For some groups child poverty is even more extreme, as an astounding 45 percent of African American children in rural communities are estimated to live in poverty.

Poverty rates also vary by gender. Approximately 15 percent of rural men are in poverty, while the overall poverty rate for rural women is 18 percent. Female-headed families with children often struggle the most to meet basic needs. In these families, a single parent typically shoulders the responsibility of both

earning income and taking care of children—a task challenging even for two-adult households. Poverty rates are often extremely high in such family situations. The U.S. poverty rate for single-parent families is 32.8 percent, compared to 6.7 percent for all other families with children. Approximately 4.1 million single-parent families, 1.2 million of which live in rural areas, failed to reach the poverty income threshold.

Female-headed households make up the largest proportion of single-parent families, and they often suffer the highest levels of poverty. Rural,

One of the greatest successes in ameliorating poverty has been among older Americans. Until recent decades, older persons in the United States experienced poverty rates at much higher levels than the overall population. However, the enactment of safety net programs such as Social Security, Supplementary Security Income (SSI), and Medicare have helped reduce the rate of older persons in poverty over the past half century. In the mid-1960s, nearly 30 percent of seniors in the United States were in poverty. In 2010, less than 10 percent of persons age 65 nationally



female single-parent families in particular experience poverty at exceptionally high levels. The American Community Survey (ACS) estimates that 45 percent of rural female single-parent families are in poverty.

had incomes below the poverty level. However, rural seniors experience higher poverty than seniors nationwide. Again, older women experience higher poverty rates than their male counterparts. Overall, 14 percent of elderly women have poverty level incomes.

POVERTY BY LOCATION, 2010

Source: HAC Tabulations of 2006-2010 American Community Survey

	Persons and Families With Below Poverty Incomes							
	Small Town & Rural		Suburban & Exurban		Urban		United States	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
FAMILIES (TOTAL)	1,980,465	11.8	2,835,766	7.5	2,869,114	13.3	7,685,345	10.1
With Related Child Under 18	1,494,439	19.4	2,222,517	11.7	2,298,242	20.0	6,015,198	15.7
With Related Child Under 5	327,847	23.4	456,407	13.2	452,215	19.0	1,236,469	17.1
Female-Headed With Related Child Under 18	876,861	45.5	1,349,671	32.8	1,432,403	38.4	3,658,935	37.4
Female-Headed With Related Child Under 5	203,907	57.2	284,405	42.2	280,302	43.3	768,614	45.8
PERSONS (TOTAL)	10,018,664	16.3	14,837,958	10.5	16,060,891	17.3	40,917,513	13.8
18 Years Old and Over	6,634,902	14.2	9,666,674	9.1	10,635,440	15.0	26,937,016	12.1
65 Years Old and Over	1,023,513	10.9	1,266,276	7.2	1,264,502	12.0	3,554,291	9.5
Related Child Under 18 Years	3,291,861	22.3	5,023,012	14.0	5,325,962	24.4	13,640,835	18.8
Related Child 5 to 17 Years	2,211,411	20.5	3,401,679	12.9	3,608,762	23.4	9,221,852	17.5
Unrelated Individuals 15 Years and Over	3,178,832	29.9	4,798,344	21.8	5,483,377	25.5	13,460,553	24.8

RURAL AND SMALL TOWN POVERTY BY STATE, 2010

State	Persons for whom poverty is determined	Persons with below poverty income	Percent
Alabama	1,572,562	306,684	19.5
Alaska	337,384	37,166	11.0
Arizona	1,103,566	204,166	18.5
Arkansas	1,398,660	273,917	19.6
California	2,779,686	465,930	16.8
Colorado	810,648	95,073	11.7
Connecticut	188,429	20,941	11.1
Delaware	186,846	21,985	11.8
Florida	1,447,911	253,882	17.5
Georgia	2,259,014	468,900	20.8
Hawaii	410,308	46,110	11.2
Idaho	613,290	93,220	15.2
Illinois	1,914,109	259,958	13.6
Indiana	1,708,671	223,698	13.1
Iowa	1,522,417	165,597	10.9
Kansas	1,224,157	160,797	13.1
Kentucky	2,078,631	438,129	21.1
Louisiana	1,403,812	298,920	21.3
Maine	681,793	94,053	13.8
Maryland	413,835	44,104	10.7
Massachusetts	208,845	25,198	12.1
Michigan	1,852,173	291,024	15.7
Minnesota	1,630,056	192,899	11.8
Mississippi	1,768,985	435,220	24.6
Missouri	1,951,150	325,513	16.7
Montana	671,874	98,237	14.6
Nebraska	807,230	92,709	11.5
Nevada	295,751	33,194	11.2
New Hampshire	483,297	45,113	9.3
New Jersey	126,727	14,701	11.6
New Mexico	816,633	170,807	20.9
New York	1,934,428	277,393	14.3
North Carolina	2,820,663	538,247	19.1
North Dakota	369,488	42,702	11.6
Ohio	2,496,325	375,127	15.0
Oklahoma	1,573,324	286,088	18.2
Oregon	1,145,078	172,302	15.0
Pennsylvania	2,275,091	287,972	12.7
Rhode Island	22,511	1,653	7.3
South Carolina	1,271,075	265,934	20.9
South Dakota	496,353	76,387	15.4
Tennessee	1,902,061	356,661	18.8
Texas	4,006,746	728,128	18.2
Utah	471,201	53,431	11.3
Vermont	427,561	49,357	11.5
Virginia	1,453,450	216,978	14.9
Washington	1,064,799	176,067	16.5
West Virginia	934,323	177,344	19.0
Wisconsin	1,808,266	199,956	11.1
Wyoming	396,892	39,092	9.8
TOTAL	61,538,085	10,018,664	16.3

The Housing Assistance Council

The Housing Assistance Council (HAC) is a national nonprofit organization that supports affordable housing efforts in rural areas of the United States. HAC provides technical housing services, seed money loans from a revolving fund, housing program and policy assistance, and research and information services. HAC is an equal opportunity lender.

HAC Rural Research Brief

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