

# RURAL RESEARCH NOTE

## 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.

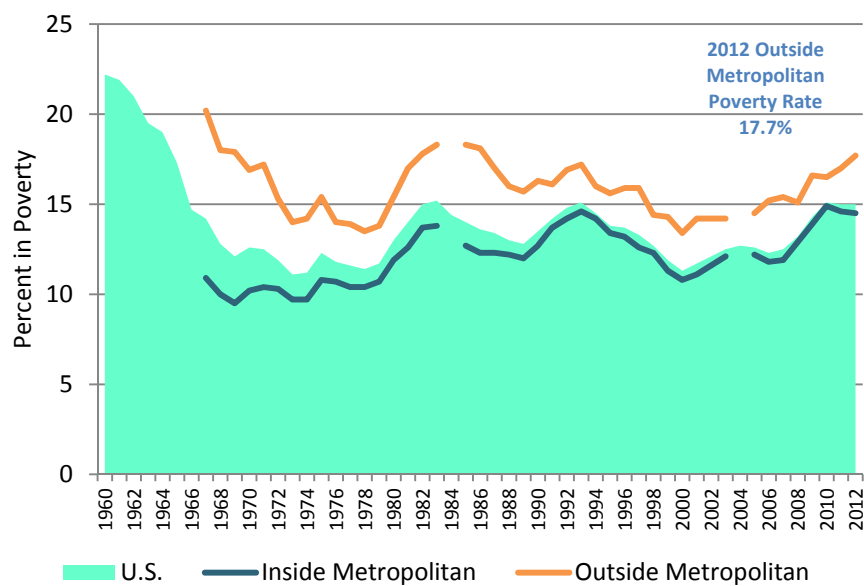


September 17, 2013

## RURAL POVERTY INCREASES, WHILE THE U.S. POVERTY RATE REMAINS UNCHANGED

The number of rural Americans living in poverty increased significantly last year, according to a new report from the U.S. Census Bureau. Overall, the official poverty rate for the United States was 15.0 percent in 2012 - statistically unchanged from the 2011 level. Released today, the U.S. Census Bureau's annual report, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2012*, estimates that 46.5 million people had incomes below the poverty line in 2012, a figure also statistically unchanged from 2011.

POVERTY IN THE U.S. BY RESIDENCE, 1960-2012



The official poverty rate in rural areas (persons living outside of metropolitan areas), was 17.7 percent, nearly 3 percentage points higher than the national level. The poverty rate outside metro areas was up from 17.0 percent in 2011.<sup>1</sup>

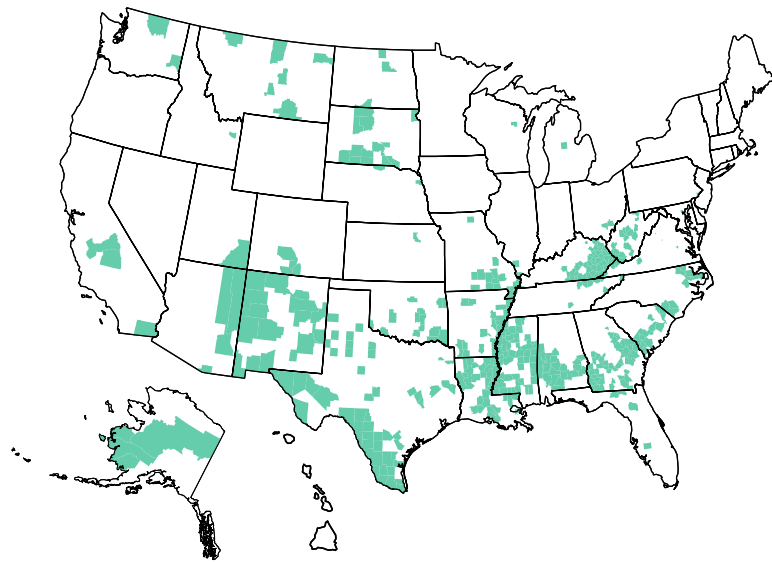
<sup>1</sup> The outside metropolitan poverty rate change between 2011 and 2012 was not statistically significant according to the Census report.

Overall, 8.5 million people outside metropolitan areas had incomes below the poverty line in 2012, a statistically significant increase of more than 400,000 persons from the 2011 level.

“There is a tendency to believe that the economic crisis is over. But today’s report highlights the reality that millions of American households still struggle with poverty and low incomes, especially in our rural communities. The number of rural persons in poverty is increasing and poverty rates are consistently higher in rural America than the nation as a whole,” says Moises Loza, Executive Director of the Housing Assistance Council (HAC).

## PERSISTENT POVERTY, 1990 - 2010

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



Additional HAC research on poverty using data from the Decennial Census and American Community Survey (ACS), indicate that poverty rates are still stubbornly high among certain populations and areas in rural America. Several rural regions and communities have experienced persistently high poverty rates for long periods of time. Often forgotten or hidden from mainstream America, these areas are isolated geographically, lack resources and economic opportunities, and suffer from decades of disinvestment and double-digit poverty rates. The Housing Assistance Council has identified 429 counties with poverty rates of 20 percent or more in 1990, 2000, and 2010. The

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

### Rural Income Gap Remains

Household incomes in rural America continue to lag behind those in suburban and urban areas. The Census Bureau estimated the national household median income at \$51,017 in 2012 – not statistically different from the 2011 level. Household incomes were highest in metropolitan areas outside of central cities (\$58,780) and lowest outside of metropolitan areas (\$41,198). The high proportion of low-skill and low-paying jobs in rural areas, combined with lower educational attainment levels, are substantial factors in the rural income divergence.

The economic tumult of the past decade has reduced incomes and increased income inequality nationally and in rural areas. According to the Census Bureau estimates, incomes outside of metropolitan areas actually declined between 2007 (before the recession) and 2012.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, measures of income inequality increased as the gap between the highest and lowest income levels continued to grow.

### Number With Uninsured Health Coverage Continues Decline

Additionally, the Census report estimates that 15.4 percent, or nearly 48 million Americans, were without health insurance in 2012 – a statistically significant decrease from 15.7 percent in 2011. The 2012 uninsured rate for those living outside of metropolitan areas was 15.2 percent. The Census Bureau estimates that 7.3 million persons outside of metropolitan areas were without health insurance in 2012 – a decrease of 58,000 persons from the number of rural uninsured in 2011.

<sup>2</sup> HAC tabulations of U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey figures.

## Contact Us

### HOUSING ASSISTANCE COUNCIL

1025 Vermont Avenue, Northwest  
Suite 606  
Washington DC 20005

202-842-8600

[hac@ruralhome.org](mailto:hac@ruralhome.org)

[www.ruralhome.org](http://www.ruralhome.org)

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ON POVERTY IN RURAL AMERICA

### Download the Census Bureau's Official Report on Poverty

For more information on poverty and income figures download the U.S. Census Bureau's new report: *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States:2012* at:

<http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p60-245.pdf>

### Additional HAC Resources on Rural Poverty

For more information on rural poverty, access HAC's *Rural Research Note: Poverty in Rural America*,

[http://www.ruralhome.org/storage/research\\_notes/rrn\\_poverty.pdf](http://www.ruralhome.org/storage/research_notes/rrn_poverty.pdf)

HAC's Decennial Report: Taking Stock: Rural People, Poverty, and Housing in 21<sup>st</sup> Century. <http://www.ruralhome.org/component/content/article/587-taking-stock-2010>

Access data on poverty and income for your community at HAC's *Rural Data Portal*: [www.ruraldataportal.org](http://www.ruraldataportal.org)

Also download HAC's decennial poverty map poster:

<http://www.ruralhome.org/component/content/article/500-poverty-map-2012>

---

HOUSING ASSISTANCE COUNCIL

