

Michigan Poverty & Well Being Map: East Central

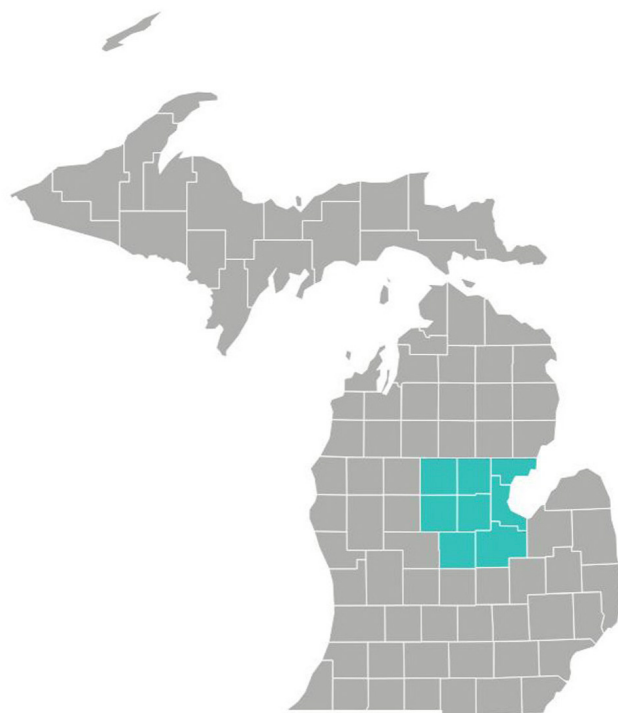
The East Central region includes: Arenac, Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Gratiot, Isabella, Midland, and Saginaw counties. Learn more about the map at poverty.umich.edu.

Low Incomes, Distance from Groceries Drive Food Insecurity in Michigan's East Central Region

The East Central Region trails slightly behind statewide averages in most key indicators of poverty and well-being. The regional poverty rate is 14.8%, while the statewide rate is 13.4%. Also, the region has higher rates of households that are Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) households that are struggling to afford necessities compared to the state overall, and higher poverty rates and lower median household income. Looking at the counties within the East Central Region, Clare and Isabella counties have particularly high poverty rates, 19.3% and 19.0%, respectively. Clare County also has an especially low median household income of \$48,238, and 55.4% of households are considered ALICE.

Economic hardships, including high poverty and low incomes, have contributed to significant food insecurity in the East Central Region, meaning households have limited or uncertain access to safe, nutritious food, or are unable to acquire it consistently due to financial or geographical constraints. Food insecurity is higher than the statewide average of 15.4% in every county in the region except Midland.¹ Clare and Isabella counties, which have the two highest poverty rates, have food insecurity rates above 18%.² Notably, Clare County has the second-highest food insecurity rate in the state, at 20.9%.³

Current food and assistance networks are leaving vulnerable people behind. There are many census tracts in the region where residents have low



	State	Region
Population	10,077,761	553,368
Median Household Income	\$72,336	\$61,474
Children in Poverty	17.7%	19.2%
Population in Poverty	13.4%	14.8%
ALICE	26.3%	25.9%
ALICE + Poverty	39.7%	41.0%
Households Receiving Food Stamps / SNAP	13.5%	15.7%
Housing Cost Burdened	32.7%	30.9%
Adults Without Insurance	7.1%	7.5%
Single- Parent Households	30.6%	33.6%

incomes and live relatively far from a grocery store, increasing transportation and food costs and worsening food insecurity.⁴ These tracts are concentrated in the City of Saginaw and Bay City, with others scattered throughout the region. Furthermore, according to a study by the Urban Institute, the maximum food stamps benefit per meal across all counties in the region does not cover the cost of a modest meal, meaning families must rely on other food assistance networks to fill this gap.⁵ Additionally, a substantial proportion of the food-insecure population is not eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – also known as food stamps – because they make too much money, ranging from 18% in Clare County to 44% in Midland County.⁶ SNAP enrollment is expected to decrease drastically due to new work requirements mandated by the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. People will now need to work 80 hours per month to enroll in SNAP, which will have a drastic impact on the East Central Region, given its unemployment rate of 6.1% compared to the statewide rate of 5.2%.⁷ It is important to note, however, that Arenac County, Bay City, and the City of Saginaw are exempt from these work requirements due to particularly high unemployment.⁸

Many regional food banks and community organizations attempt to close the meal gap for food-insecure residents. Key organizations in the East Central Region include the [Food Bank of Eastern Michigan](#), the [Greater Lansing Food Bank](#), and the [Mid Michigan Community Action Agency](#). These organizations provide services such as food pantries, weekend meals for school children, summer food services, mobile pantries, and administration of a federally funded program in which seniors receive a monthly food box to supplement their diet.

Importantly, food banks cannot ensure everyone has access to enough food. Food pantries are sparsely located in rural areas, leaving many in the region unable to access them. Additionally, charitable food assistance is generally insufficient to meet dietary needs consistently and may limit how often a person can access services. Mobile distributions and home deliveries may help reach areas without easy access to a pantry, but gaps will remain. For lasting progress, policymakers must address the inadequacies of SNAP, and communities must encourage the growth of grocery-related businesses and farm markets to help make food more accessible.

References

- 1 Hunger & Poverty in Michigan, Mapping the Meal Gap. Feeding America. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2023/overall/michigan>.
- 2 *Ibid*
- 3 *Ibid*
- 4 Food Access Research Atlas. Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas>.
- 5 "Does Snap Cover the Cost of a Meal in Your County?" Data Tool, Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/data-tools/does-snap-cover-cost-meal-your-county>.
- 6 Hunger & Poverty in Michigan, Mapping the Meal Gap. Feeding America. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2023/overall/michigan>.
- 7 Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor. accessed via: Michigan Labor Market Information Website. <https://milmi.org/DataSearch/LAUS>
- 8 Work Requirements for Food Assistance, Michigan Department of Health and Humand Services, 2026. <https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/assistance-programs/food/learn-more/work-requirements>.