Michigan Poverty & Well Being Map: Upper Peninsula Region

The Upper Peninsula Region includes: Alger, Baraga, Chippewa, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron, Keweenaw, Luce, Mackinac, Marquette, Menominee, Ontonagon, and Schoolcraft counties.
Learn more about the map at poverty.umich.edu.

Expanding Workforce Opportunities and Filling Healthcare Gaps Could Improve Economic Well-being in the UP

For many key indicators of economic well-being, the UP Region is comparable to statewide averages. The regional poverty rate is 0.53 percentage points higher than the statewide average, while the regional child poverty rate is 2.56 percentage points lower. Furthermore, the regional rate of households that are Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) and struggling to afford necessities even though their income is above the poverty line is 3.3 percentage points higher than the statewide average. However, regional food security and income data are less reassuring. Approximately 1.5 million, 15.4%, of Michigan residents are food insecure, but in most of the UP, this rate is higher.[1] Twelve of the 15 counties in the UP have food insecurity rates above the state average, with Mackinac, Luce, Iron, Baraga, and Schoolcraft counties all recording food insecurity rates above 18%.[2] In addition, the regional median household income is nearly $12,000 below the statewide median, and every county in the UP has a median household income below the statewide median.

Employment trends help explain the region's hardships. At 6.4%, regional unemployment is significantly higher than the statewide rate of 5.2%. Unemployment is highest in Iron, Schoolcraft, Alger, and Mackinac counties, ranging from 8.1% to 10.8%, with wide seasonal variation.[3] For example, unemployment in Mackinac County reached 22.1% in February 2025.[4] With 17% of jobs in the UP in the leisure and hospitality industry, these trends are likely tied to tourism.[5]

	State	Region
Population	10,077,761	303,392
Median Household Income	$72,336	$60,520
Children in Poverty	17.7%	15.2%
Population in Poverty	13.4%	13.9%
ALICE	26.3%	27.9%
ALICE + Poverty	39.7%	43.0%
Households Receiving Food Stamps / SNAP	13.5%	11.4%
Housing Cost Burdened	32.7%	28.3%
Adults Without Insurance	7.1%	7.2%
Single- Parent Households	30.6%	26.5%

Furthermore, an employment gap for older workers is a growing problem in the UP. Residents who are 55 and older have higher unemployment (4.9%) and lower labor force participation (28.4%) than their statewide peers.[6] The UP's aging population heightens this gap; 38.1% of the region is 55 and older, compared to just 32.4% of Michigan residents.[7] A factor behind this disparity may be the lack of white-collar jobs in the UP; professional and business services make up only 8% of UP jobs, compared to 17% statewide.[8]

One area where the UP can effectively invest to build a more stable workforce is the healthcare industry. Much of the UP is designated as a Medically Underserved Area (MUA). The entire Upper Peninsula is designated as a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) for primary care, dental, and mental health services. Furthermore, 28% of all job postings in the UP are for the healthcare industry.[9] Thus, investing in healthcare-related higher education and workforce training programs may provide stable employment and better health outcomes for residents.

The UP houses a significant number of college students. In addition to its community college students, Michigan Tech, Northern Michigan, and Lake Superior State universities enroll 16,050 students combined.[10] However, for each of these schools, less than 50% of graduates remain in the UP.[11] Additionally, since 2014, 20% to 25% percent of all degrees completed in the region have been in engineering fields.[12] However, this supply does not currently match employer demands. Notably, less than 30% of job postings require an associate's degree or higher.[13] Officials may seek to capitalize on its graduating talent by supporting local businesses and investing in infrastructure to support growth. Attracting industries that keep students in the UP post graduation would help fuel economic growth and offset the challenges of supporting an aging population.

The UP may attract employers and a growing workforce by investing in infrastructure such as housing and broadband. Broadband access in the UP has improved, but still lags behind Michigan averages in many areas. While 90.5% of Michiganders have broadband internet subscriptions, fewer than 85% of residents in Marquette, Mackinac, Baraga, and Iron counties do. Furthermore, while 95.1% of Michigan households have a computer, fewer than 90% of residents in Baraga, Iron, and Menominee counties do. Continued digital inclusion efforts can help bridge the gaps experienced by UP residents.

References

1 Hunger & Poverty in Michigan, Mapping the Meal Gap. Feeding America. https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2023/overall/michigan

2 *Ibid*

3 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

4 *Ibid*

5 Chloe Wieber et al., "Upper Peninsula Regional Economic Development Strategy," W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, May 2025, https://research.upjohn.org/up_technicalreports/52/

6 *Ibid*

7 *Ibid*

8 *Ibid*

9 *Ibid*

10 *Ibid*

11 *Ibid*

12 *Upper Peninsula Labor Market Study*. Invest UP, May 2023.

13 *Ibid*