

U.S.

WORLD  
ECONOMY

Programs

Experts

Events

Brookings  
Institution PressExecutive  
Education

About Brookings

NEWSLETTERS

MULTIMEDIA

PODCASTS

RSS

BLOG

FACEBOOK

TWITTER

MOBILE

ESPAÑOL

中文

عربي

TEXT SIZE

a a a

METROPOLITAN OPPORTUNITY SERIES | NUMBER 8

« Previous | Next »




## Strained Suburbs: The Social Service Challenges of Rising Suburban Poverty

U.S. Poverty, Welfare, Working Poor, Cities, Jobs and the Economy

Scott W. Allard, Nonresident Senior Fellow, Metropolitan Policy Program  
Benjamin Roth, School of Social Science Administration, University of Chicago

Brookings Institution

 Save |
  Download (4)

 Share |
  Email |
  Print

OCTOBER 07, 2010 — Cities and suburbs occupy well-defined roles within the discussion of poverty, opportunity, and social welfare policy in metropolitan America. Research exploring issues of poverty typically has focused on central-city neighborhoods, where poverty and joblessness have been most concentrated. As a result, place-based U.S. antipoverty policies focus primarily on ameliorating concentrated poverty in inner-city (and, in some cases, rural) areas. Suburbs, by contrast, are seen as destinations of opportunity for quality schools, safe neighborhoods, or good jobs.

Several recent trends have begun to upset this familiar urban-suburban narrative about poverty and opportunity in metropolitan America. In 1999, large U.S. cities and their suburbs had roughly equal numbers of poor residents, but by 2008 the number of suburban poor exceeded the poor in central cities by 1.5 million. Although poverty rates remain higher in central cities than in suburbs (18.2 percent versus 9.5 percent in 2008), poverty rates have increased at a quicker pace in suburban areas.

[Watch video of co-author Scott Allard explaining the report's findings »](#) (video courtesy of the University of Chicago)

This report examines data from the Census Bureau and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), along with in-depth interviews and a new survey of social services providers in suburban communities surrounding Chicago, IL; Los Angeles, CA; and Washington, D.C. to assess the challenges that rising suburban poverty poses for local safety nets and community-based organizations. It finds that:

**Suburban jurisdictions outside of Chicago, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C. vary significantly in their levels of poverty, recent poverty trends, and racial/ethnic profiles, both among and within these metro areas.** Several suburban counties outside of Chicago experienced more than 40 percent increases of poor residents from 2000 to 2008, as did portions of counties in suburban Maryland and northern Virginia. Yet poverty rates declined for suburban counties in metropolitan Los Angeles. While several suburban Los Angeles municipalities are majority Hispanic and a handful of Chicago suburbs have sizeable Hispanic populations, many Washington, D.C. suburbs have substantial black and Asian populations as well.

**Suburban safety nets rely on relatively few social services organizations, and tend to stretch operations across much larger service delivery areas than their urban counterparts.** Thirty-four percent of nonprofits surveyed reported operating in more than one suburban county, and 60 percent offered services in more than one suburban municipality. The size and capacity of the nonprofit social service sector varies widely across suburbs, with 357 poor residents per nonprofit provider in Montgomery County, MD, to 1,627 in Riverside County, CA. Place of residence may greatly affect one's access to certain types of help.

**In the wake of the Great Recession, demand is up significantly for the typical suburban provider, and almost three-quarters (73**

### Metropolitan Opportunity Series

 Save |
  Subscribe


[▶ Metropolitan Opportunity Series](#)

ALSO IN THIS SERIES

NUMBER 9

 [The Great Recession and Poverty in Metropolitan America](#)  
Elizabeth Kneebone, October 07, 2010

NUMBER 7

 [The Child Tax Credit after ARRA: How Would Expiration Affect Metropolitan Families?](#)  
Elizabeth Kneebone, July 08, 2010

NUMBER 5

 [Job Sprawl and the Suburbanization of Poverty](#)  
Steven Raphael, Michael Stoll, March 30, 2010

ViewAll »

A man bags up food during a Thanksgiving meal outside the Los Angeles Mission.



KEYWORD SEARCH



Advanced Search | Tips

My Portfolio

My New Content

Save your settings:

- ▶ [Create a Brookings Account](#)
- ▶ If you already have an account, please login

+ My Topics [Edit](#)+ My Programs [Edit](#)+ My Experts [Edit](#)+ Saved Content [Edit](#)


### Related Topics

- ▶ [U.S. Poverty](#)
- ▶ [Welfare](#)
- ▶ [U.S. Economy](#)
- ▶ [Cities](#)
- ▶ [Children & Families](#)

ViewAll Topics »

### Upcoming Events

HEALTH CARE

 [Accelerating Health Care Innovation to Achieve System-Wide Impact](#)

October 18, 2010  
The Brookings Institution

BROADBAND POLICY

 [Confronting the Looming Shortage of Wireless Spectrum: A Federal Technology Policy Imperative](#)

October 20, 2010  
Washington Center

ViewAll Events »

### METRO Update

A weekly newsletter on publications, events, and news from the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program.

E-mail Address

SIGN UP

More Newsletters »

percent) of suburban nonprofits are seeing more clients with no previous connection to safety net programs. Needs have changed as well, with nearly 80 percent of suburban nonprofits surveyed seeing families with food needs more often than one year prior, and nearly 60 percent reporting more frequent requests for help with mortgage or rent payments.



[View Larger](#)

Reuters / Danny Moloshok

**Almost half of suburban nonprofits surveyed (47 percent) reported a loss in a key revenue source last year, with more funding cuts anticipated in the year to come.** Due in large part to this bleak fiscal situation, more than one in five suburban nonprofits has reduced services available since the start of the recession and one in seven has actively cut caseloads. Nearly 30 percent of nonprofits have laid off full-time and part-time staff as a result of lost program grants or to reduce operating costs.

#### RELATED CONTENT

##### [The Great Recession and Poverty in Metropolitan America](#)

Elizabeth Kneebone  
Brookings Institution  
October 07, 2010

##### [Leaders Among Us: Developing a Community Health Worker Program in Washington, D.C.](#)

Kathy Patrick and Martha Ross  
The Brookings Institution  
October 01, 2006

##### [Washington's Metro: Deficits by Design](#)

Robert Puentes  
Presentation to the WMATA Board Committee  
June 03, 2004

[More Related Content »](#)

#### [DOWNLOADS](#)

##### [Full Report](#)

3.33 MB PDF

##### [Suburban Chicago Factsheet](#)

107 KB PDF

##### [Suburban Los Angeles Factsheet](#)

107 KB PDF

[Save](#)

[Share](#)

[E-mail](#)

[Print](#)



BROOKINGS 1775 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20036  
Phone 202.797.6000 | E-mail [Brookings](#)

©2010 The Brookings Institution  
[Site Map](#) | [Terms and Conditions](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [RSS](#)