# Small Towns, Big Opportunities

## Many Workers in Rural Areas Have Good Jobs, but These Areas Need Greater Investment in Education, Training, and Career Counseling


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# Introduction

The notion of a disadvantaged rural America has long permeated the national discourse, going back at least to President Lyndon Johnson's 1967 National Advisory Committee on Rural Poverty report, *The People Left Behind*. That report, documenting the economic depression of rural America,[1] has shaped both policy and public opinion, leading to extensive measures aimed at reducing rural poverty so that rural Americans could "share in our [country's] economic abundance."[2] It appears that work remains to be done: half a century later, "left behind" is still a common sentiment about rural areas and the hard statistics that describe them.[3]

The "left behind" narrative has perpetuated the idea of two Americas: stumbling rural areas juxtaposed to bustling urban cities and suburbs. This depressing view of rural America is, to a degree, based in fact; rural America has a declining population, and residents of rural America have lower levels of educational attainment than residents of urban areas, lower participation in the labor force, and higher rates of poverty and disability.

But, like many stereotypes, this characterization diminishes the positive aspects of rural areas. Taking into account the differences in cost of living, the likelihood of holding a good job — one that pays at least middle-class wages[4] — is almost as high for a working adult in a rural area (50 percent) as for a working adult in an urban area (54 percent). Workers in some occupations, especially blue-collar workers, have a better chance of having a good job in a rural area than in an urban area. Further, the lines between urban and rural communities have blurred as once-rural areas on the periphery of major cities experience substantial economic development. Small communities further from the hustle and bustle of cities have become more attractive to workers as telework opportunities become more plentiful.[5] As high-speed broadband internet connections spread into rural areas, workers who can live wherever they want are drawn to the comparatively low property prices and cost of living.

Traditional economic and demographic metrics used to study the rural population have resulted in a portrait of a struggling rural America. Recent work, however, has shifted the focus toward the strengths and assets of rural America.[6] This report advances that framework by using the metric of "good jobs" to explore rural opportunities. In order to revitalize rural America, we need to go beyond what rural areas are lacking. We need to understand the strengths that rural areas already have and identify where their competitive advantages may lie.

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1 Breathitt, *The People Left Behind,* 1967.
2 Breathitt, *The People Left Behind,* 1967.
3 Wuthnow, *The Left Behind,* 2018; Lichter and Schaftt, "People and Places Left Behind," 2017.
4 For the purposes of this report, a good job is defined, at the national level, as one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44, and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars). We then adjusted these thresholds, by state, to account for the lower cost of living in rural areas. For a further explanation, see Appendix B.
5 An analysis of recent migration patterns shows that the likelihood that people who work remotely will move has increased substantially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Remote workers have moved from expensive cities toward less expensive cities and more rural areas, particularly locations near the Atlantic Ocean and mountain ranges. Badger et al., "The Places Most Affected by Remote Workers' Moves around the Country," 2023.
6 For example, see Byun et al., "Rural-Nonrural Disparities in Postsecondary Educational Attainment Revisited," 2012; and Scally et al., "Reenvisioning Rural America," 2021.

It is true that economic trends such as the falling demand for coal have undermined core sources of vitality (for example, high union wages for miners). But rural America has not been frozen in time: blue-collar employment, manufacturing, and alternative energy development are quite strong in rural areas and continue to gain momentum.

Nonetheless, America's rural areas, writ large, have many hurdles to overcome:

- The rural population is declining, through both out-migration and aging.[7] The decade of 2010–20 was the first decade in American history in which the population of rural areas declined.[8]
- The working-age population in rural areas is also declining. From 2010 to 2020, the working-age population *declined* by 5 percent in rural areas, compared to a 6 percent *increase* in urban areas.[9]
- In the aftermath of the Great Recession, the labor-force participation rate fell more drastically and has been slower to recover in rural than in urban areas. Between 2007 and 2018, the rural labor-force participation rate fell by about 3 percentage points, compared to a drop of less than 1 percentage point in the urban population.[10]
- Rural areas have higher levels of poverty.[11] In 2019, the poverty rate in rural areas was 15 percent, compared to 12 percent in urban areas.[12] Furthermore, counties with "extreme poverty" are only found in rural areas.[13]
- While educational attainment has risen in rural areas over the years, the rural population still has a significantly lower level of educational attainment than the urban population. Forty percent of people residing in urban areas have at least a bachelor's degree, while only 25 percent of the rural population has the equivalent.[14]

While increased postsecondary educational attainment would be helpful in rural redevelopment, the solutions to rural challenges are much more complex than simply prescribing more college. Research has found that rural youth are less likely than students from urban areas to pursue college,[15] and increasing rural postsecondary attainment would require addressing significant academic and cultural barriers to postsecondary enrollment.[16]

These barriers include the fact that rural high schools generally have fewer resources than urban high schools, including access to advanced classes for college-bound students.[17]

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7 Marre, "Rural Population Loss and Strategies for Recovery," 2020.
8 Johnson, "Rural America Lost Population over the Past Decade for the First Time in History," 2022.
9 Davis et al., *Rural America at a Glance: 2022 Edition*, 2022.
10 Pender et al., *Rural America at a Glance: 2019 Edition*, 2019.
11 Cromartie, *Rural America at a Glance: 2018 Edition*, 2018.
12 Dobis et al., *Rural America at a Glance: 2021 Edition*, 2021.
13 Farrigan, "Extreme Poverty Counties Found Solely in Rural Areas in 2018," 2020.
14 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
15 Roscigno et al., "Education and the Inequalities of Place," 2006.
16 Roberts and Grant, "What We Know and Where to Go," 2021.
17 At least 92 percent of urban and suburban high schools offered at least one Advanced Placement course as of 2015, but only 73 percent of rural high schools offered at least one Advanced Placement course. Mann et al., *Advanced Placement Access and Success*, 2017.

Children in rural areas also are more likely than children in urban areas to have grown up in poverty.[18] Partly as a result, rural youth are more likely than youth from urban areas to say that postsecondary education is unaffordable and not necessary.[19] Rural youth and their parents, overall, have lower postsecondary educational aspirations than their urban counterparts.[20] This points to a greater need for college and career counseling, with an emphasis on where job growth is going to occur in local labor markets, how much those jobs are likely to pay, and what kind of credentials will be necessary to obtain them. Comprehensive approaches to educating young people about the outcomes of postsecondary programs might convince more of them to pursue such credentials.[21] However, availability of postsecondary program options in rural areas presents another barrier. Even for students who do not want a four-year degree, access to two-year degrees, certifications, certificates, and postsecondary training are hard to come by in rural areas. The average number of colleges offering middle-skills programs is 13 times greater in very urban areas as in very rural areas.[22]

Furthermore, rural areas face physical constraints that make it difficult to pursue postsecondary education:

- Rural areas are geographically isolated.
- "Education deserts," geographic areas with limited access to postsecondary opportunities, are concentrated in rural areas.[23]
- Transportation is limited.[24]
- Widespread and reliable access to broadband internet is lacking.[25]

Collectively, these factors may keep many students from pursuing postsecondary education and training. But they are surmountable through coordinated strategies that capitalize on the skills already available in rural America, build additional rural human capital, and stimulate rural economic growth. Students from rural areas who are attending college say they feel a strong attachment to their hometowns, often feeling compelled to remain near their families to support them financially and emotionally.[26] Those students, if they obtain postsecondary credentials, are likely to be the leading professionals and community leaders of tomorrow in their hometowns.

18 Ali and McWhirter, "Rural Appalachian Youth's Vocational/Educational Postsecondary Aspirations," 2006.
19 Ali and McWhirter, "Rural Appalachian Youth's Vocational/Educational Postsecondary Aspirations," 2006.
20 Haller and Virkler, "Another Look at Rural-Nonrural Differences in Students' Educational Aspirations," 1993; Provasnik et al., *Status of Education in Rural America*, 2007.
21 Provasnik et al., *Status of Education in Rural America*, 2007.
22 Carnevale et al., *The Great Misalignment*, forthcoming.
23 Hillman and Weichman, *Education Deserts*, 2016; Koricich et al., *Introducing Our Nation's Rural-Serving Postsecondary Institutions*, 2022.
24 US Department of Transportation, "The Critical Role of Rural Communities in the U.S. Transportation System," 2023.
25 Turner Lee et al., *Why the Federal Government Needs to Step Up Efforts to Close the Rural Broadband Divide*, 2022.
26 Hlinka, "Tailoring Retention Theories to Meet the Needs of Rural Appalachian Community College Students," 2017.

## Low labor-force participation rates hurt rural America.

The economic fortunes of rural America are held back by the high percentage of the working-age population[27] who are not in the labor force. Rural Americans have a lower rate of labor-force participation[28] than the rest of the nation: 26 percent of adults in rural America are not in the labor force, a higher proportion than in urban America (21 percent).

The level of non-participation in the rural labor force varies by demographic characteristics and geography, but some details stand out:

- Almost half of all rural adults with less than a high school diploma are not in the labor force, compared to about one-third of urban adults with the same credential level.
- Nearly one out of every three adults in the rural South is not in the labor force.
- More than 30 percent of all American Indian/Alaska Native and Black/African American adults in rural areas are not in the labor force, a much larger share than for white (25 percent) and Hispanic/Latino (24 percent) adults.

These high non-participation rates should not be interpreted as suggesting that rural adults have less desire to work than urban adults. To the contrary, rural adults may be less able to work: half of rural adults who are not in the labor force report that it is because they are ill or have disabilities, compared to about a third of urban adults who are not in the labor force.[29]

Disability rates are higher in rural areas for a number of reasons. First, occupations in rural areas — such as farming, forestry, and mining — are often physically demanding. Collectively, rural workers' occupations have a 25 percent higher incidence of workplace injuries than urban workers' occupations.[30] Rural residents are twice as likely to receive Social Security disability payments as urban workers.[31] They likely depend more on Social Security because they have less access to healthcare and fewer options for economic uplift in areas with few available jobs, low wages, and limited purchasing power.[32] Disabilities are almost always permanent: only about 4 percent of Social Security disability recipients get off disability within 10 years of their first payment.[33]

In addition, the high incidence of workplace injuries in rural areas and the older age of the population led to a higher rate of prescriptions per capita for pain relievers, contributing to the opioid crisis that has disproportionately affected rural areas.[34]

27 This includes the entire population of 25-to-64-year-olds.
28 The sample is made up of all 25-to-64-year-old individuals excluding those living in group quarters. Group quarters include state prisons, local jails, institutional halfway houses, barracks at military posts, and correctional institutions.
29 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), 2015–19 (pooled).
30 Myers et al., "America at a Glance: Occupational Injuries among Rural Workers," 2022.
31 McCoy, "Did You Know in Rural America, Disability Benefit Rates Are Twice as High as in Urban Areas?," 2017.
32 Rajagopal, "Why Disability Rates Are Much Higher in Rural America," 2017.
33 McCoy, "Did You Know in Rural America, Disability Benefit Rates Are Twice as High as in Urban Areas?," 2017.
34 Warshaw, "Bringing Medical Help to Rural Areas Overwhelmed by Opioid Abuse," 2017.

Among rural workers, many inequalities exist in the likelihood of having a good job:

1. Gender: Women in rural areas are less likely to have good jobs than both men in rural areas and women in urban areas.
2. Racial/ethnic groups: White workers are the only group in which a majority of rural workers have a good job.
3. Educational attainment: Workers with bachelor's degrees are the only group in which a majority of rural workers have a good job.
4. Occupation: Most workers in middle-skills white-collar and services occupations in rural areas do not have good jobs.
5. Geography: Workers in the Northeast and the Midwest have the highest likelihood of having good jobs, and the majority of workers in these regions have good jobs. Less than half of the rural workers in the South and the West have good jobs, however.

## The rural economy is particularly good for blue-collar jobs.

The rural economy has long been built on jobs requiring intensive physical labor. It still is — 31 percent of the rural workforce works in blue-collar jobs compared to 21 percent of the urban workforce. But the rural labor market is in transition. Many small farms have disappeared. At the peak of the farming economy in 1935, there were 6.8 million farms in the United States. Today, about 2 million farms remain.[35] Traditional mining and lumber industries, once mainstays of the rural economy, now offer a dwindling number of jobs. For example, the coal-mining industry employed about 180,000 workers overall in 1985. Today, there are fewer than 40,000 coal-mining workers.[36]

Other industries have increased their presence in rural areas, however, offsetting these declines and leading to overall employment growth. In recent years, 14 percent of rural jobs were in manufacturing — twice the share of manufacturing jobs in urban areas.[37] As foreign competition has pushed out manufacturing jobs from urban areas, rural areas have not suffered the same kinds of losses.[38] Because of lower wages, land prices, and property taxes, employers are more likely to move plants, warehouses, and call centers to rural areas.[39] In addition, smaller independent manufacturing plants in rural areas are resilient; they are more likely to remain open than larger manufacturing facilities and plants that are part of multi-unit networks.[40]

35 Kassel, "Farming and Farm Income," 2022.
36 US Bureau of Labor Statistics, "All Employees, Coal Mining," 2022.
37 Low, "Manufacturing Is Relatively More Important to the Rural Economy than the Urban Economy," 2017.
38 Lund et al., *The Future of Work in America*, 2019; Autor et al., *The Work of the Future,* 2020.
39 Low, *Rural Manufacturing Resilience*, 2017.
40 Low, *Rural Manufacturing Resilience*, 2017.

Although the number of farms has fallen as the number of factories has risen, agriculture — including family farms — still sustains a significant portion of the rural economy.[41] In fact, compared to other industries, agriculture appears to be highly insulated from economic fluctuations, such as during the Great Recession.[42]

Meanwhile, new energy industries have emerged. Counties with natural gas and ample land for wind turbines have contributed to overall employment gains in rural areas, especially as federal dollars pour in to stimulate renewable energy.[43] The US Department of Agriculture has invested $464 million in recent years to build rural renewable energy infrastructure, another significant source of blue-collar jobs.[44] Renewable energy sources have contributed to overall economic and social development in rural areas. By 2030, wind and solar energy projects are expected to create $60 billion in annual revenues.[45]

Blue-collar jobs are not the only area of the rural economy that is showing strength. Recreation, tourism, and related businesses have also generated opportunity in rural areas and contributed to their economic and social well-being.[46] Recreation counties — counties that have been identified by the US Department of Agriculture as being dependent on recreational activity[47] — have bucked the trend of rural population decline: in fact, these counties have experienced significant population growth, and with it, economic growth.[48] While the number of farming- and manufacturing-dependent counties has decreased over the years, the number of recreation counties has increased.[49]

All of these trends have helped buffer jobs in rural areas. Workers without a bachelor's degree have a better chance of having a good job in rural America than they do in urban America. If rural areas hold on to this edge, they might continue to strengthen their relative advantages, at least for the time being. The long-term answer will have to involve increased levels of educational attainment and training.

41 Family farms made up 98 percent of all farms and contributed 88 percent of agricultural production in 2018. Whitt and Todd, "Family Farm Households Reap Benefits in Working Off the Farm," 2020.
42 Sundell and Shane, "The 2008–09 Recession and Recovery," 2012.
43 Brown et al., *Emerging Energy Industries and Rural Growth,* 2013.
44 US Department of Agriculture, "USDA Invests $464 Million in Renewable Energy Infrastructure to Help Rural Communities," 2021.
45 Siegner et al., *Seeds of Opportunity,* 2021.
46 Reeder and Brown, *Recreation, Tourism, and Rural Well-Being,* 2005.
47 Johnson and Beale, "Nonmetro Recreation Counties," 2002. Recreation counties include Eagle County, CO, where Vail is located, and Dare County, NC, which includes part of the Outer Banks.
48 Johnson and Beale, "Nonmetro Recreation Counties," 2002.
49 Parker, "Updated ERS County Economic Types Show a Changing Rural Landscape," 2015.

## Persistent inequality in rural America hits members of racial/ethnic minority groups hardest.

The population of rural America is disproportionately made up of white residents — only about a quarter of rural residents are members of racial/ethnic minority groups.[50] Rural areas are becoming increasingly racially diverse, though, with the overall share of white Americans declining over time.[51] The rural population encompasses a substantial and growing Hispanic/Latino population (9 percent of all residents) and new-immigrant population.[52]

Racial and economic diversity is not spread evenly across rural areas. Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Indigenous residents of rural areas have higher levels of poverty than their white counterparts. Black/African American individuals in rural areas have the highest rate of poverty (31 percent), followed closely by Indigenous individuals (30 percent).[53] Hispanic/Latino residents of rural areas have a lower rate of poverty, but even so, more than one in five is living in poverty.

This inequality follows patterns of geographic segregation: rural areas with high poverty levels — with the exception of Appalachia — map directly onto where members of racial/ethnic minority groups reside in the largest numbers. Poverty rates are especially high in the rural South, where Black/African American residents are concentrated; in the Southwest, where Hispanic/Latino residents are concentrated; and in tribal nations in the Great Plains and the West.[54]

These are historical and systemic problems that defy simple solutions. Rural America is not monolithic. Some areas are trying to overcome generations of disinvestment and decline, but not all rural areas are struggling and poor.[55] Efforts to increase rural prosperity will need to be endlessly flexible to meet local conditions. Some rural counties will add enough people to be reclassified as urban.[56] But many rural areas are nowhere near cities and are unlikely to ever become population centers. Indeed, the goal for success in rural areas can't be simply to grow large enough that they are no longer rural. The task ahead is to spread rural prosperity to more areas, and not just those close to urban areas. New policy efforts will need to acknowledge deep and wide disparities in opportunity that exist by history, by geography, and by race/ethnicity, gender, and class.

50 Cromartie, *Rural America at a Glance: 2018 Edition*, 2018.
51 Johnson and Lichter, "Growing Racial Diversity in Rural America," 2022.
52 Lichter and Johnson, "A Demographic Lifeline?," 2020.
53 US Department of Agriculture, "Data Show U.S. Poverty Rates in 2019 Higher in Rural Areas Than in Urban for Racial/Ethnic Groups," 2021.
54 Lichter and Johnson, "The Changing Spatial Concentration of America's Rural Poor Population," 2007.
55 Johnson and Lichter, "Is Rural America Failing or Succeeding? Maybe Both," 2020.
56 Johnson and Lichter, "Metropolitan Reclassification and the Urbanization of Rural America," 2020.

## What is a good job?

The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce has been writing about good jobs since 2017.[57] We consider the entry point to a good job to be the minimum earnings required for economic self-sufficiency. At the national level, we define a good job as one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars). The median earnings for all these good jobs are approximately $82,000.[58]

Many workers think of a good job as one that includes not only good pay, but also other benefits, such as health insurance, paid time off, and retirement plans. However, because of limitations in the available data about such benefits,[59] we have defined a good job on the basis of pay alone. While our definition of a good job does not include benefits, the vast majority of workers who have good jobs (89 percent) have access to health insurance coverage at work, compared to a lower share (63 percent) of workers who don't have good jobs.[60]

Our analysis accounts for geographic differences in the cost of living. We recognize that in different local areas, the minimum earnings required for economic self-sufficiency may be higher or lower than the national good jobs threshold. All good jobs analysis in this report is based on data that have been adjusted to reflect the differences in prices among geographic areas, including differences between urban and rural areas.[61]

57 Carnevale et al., *Good Jobs That Pay without a BA*, 2017.
58 When we first began writing about good jobs, we defined a good job as one that pays a minimum of $35,000 in nominal dollars for workers younger than age 45. When this threshold was established in 2016, $35,000 was the minimum earnings necessary to enter the middle class, as defined by the lower bound of the fourth decile of the earnings distribution among full-time, full-year workers ages 25–44. In this report, we adjusted the threshold based on cost-of-living increases since 2016 to account for the fact that earnings must rise for a good job to remain good as the cost of living increases. At a national level, the minimum earnings for a good job are $42,779 for workers ages 25–44 and $55,003 for workers ages 45–64. For more details on our methodology, see Appendix A.
59 Katz et al., *Measuring Job Quality*, 2022.
60 Carnevale et al., *How Limits to Educational Affordability, Work-Based Learning, and Career Counseling Impede Progress toward Good Jobs*, 2022.
61 For a detailed explanation of the methodology for this report, see Appendix A. Differences in urban and rural median earnings before and after adjustment for different subgroups and states can be found in Appendix B.

PART 1.

# Working Rural America: Some Success Despite Challenges

Despite facing barriers to economic opportunity, workers in rural America are only 4 percentage points less likely to have a good job than those in urban America. In fact, rural America offers a better chance of having a good job for workers without a bachelor's degree than urban America.

But the good jobs in rural America are not equally attainable for all. Striking inequalities emerge in the distribution of good jobs when gender, race, and education are considered. Women are underrepresented in good jobs relative to their share of the population. Some racial/ethnic groups — such as Hispanic/Latino workers — have slightly better chances of having good jobs in rural America than in urban America, while members of other racial/ethnic groups face more significant barriers to attaining good jobs in rural areas than in urban ones. Not all regions are created equal, either: the likelihood of having a good job in the South and the West is lower than in the Midwest and the Northeast.

## There are many good jobs in rural America.

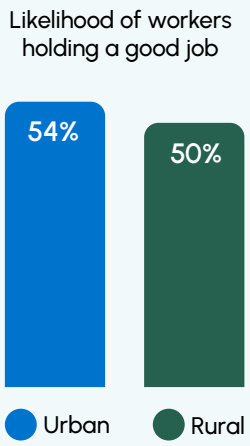
Of the 119 million 25-to-64-year-old workers in the United States, 15 million live in rural America, and 7.4 million of these rural workers have good jobs (Table 1). The rural workforce comprises 13 percent of the total 25-to-64-year-old working population and holds 12 percent of the good jobs in America, a roughly equal share.

**TABLE 1.** Rural America's share of good jobs is comparable to its share of the labor force.

| | LABOR-FORCE DISTRIBUTION | | DISTRIBUTION OF GOOD JOBS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total workers | Share of total | Total good jobs | Share of total |
| Urban | 104.1 million | 87% | 55.9 million | 88% |
| Rural | 14.9 million | 13% | 7.4 million | 12% |
| **Total** | **119 million** | **100%** | **63.3 million** | **100%** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.

**FIGURE 1.** Half of the jobs in rural America are good jobs, a proportion very similar to that in urban America




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.

As these data show, good jobs are distributed across urban versus rural areas in similar proportions to the distribution of workers. As a result, the likelihood of having a good job is nearly as high in a rural area (50 percent) as in an urban area (54 percent) (Figure 1).

## Men hold the majority of good jobs, and this advantage is more pronounced in rural areas.

Good jobs in America skew toward men, and this is true in both rural and urban areas. Men in rural areas represent 52 percent of the 25-to-64-year-old workforce, but hold 63 percent of the good jobs (Table 2). Women in rural areas represent 48 percent of the workforce and only hold 37 percent of the good jobs. Men hold 60 percent of the urban good jobs, even as they make up just 52 percent of the urban workforce.

Men in rural areas are at parity with men in urban areas in the likelihood of having a good job: 61 percent (Figure 2). By contrast, only 38 percent of rural women workers hold a good job, compared to 46 percent of urban women workers. The gender difference in the likelihood of holding a good job within rural areas is much greater than the difference between rural and urban areas, suggesting that women suffer even greater economic inequality in rural areas than in urban areas.

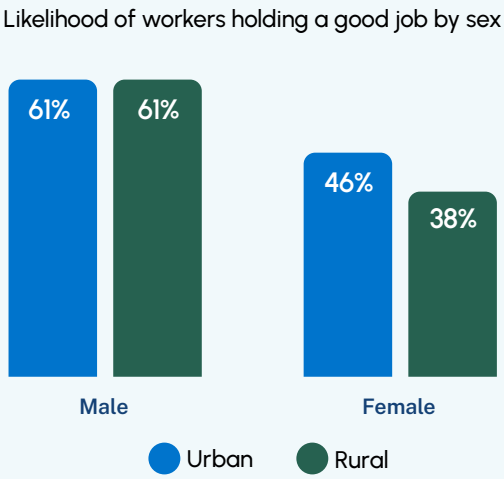
The fact that women are generally less likely to have a good job is explained, in part, by the high proportion of working women who hold part-time work. Overall, 65 percent of working men work full-time full-year, compared to 53 percent of working women. Among those full-time,

**TABLE 2.** Men are overrepresented in good jobs, especially in rural areas.

| | LABOR-FORCE DISTRIBUTION | | DISTRIBUTION OF GOOD JOBS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural |
| Male | 52% | 52% | 60% | 63% |
| Female | 48% | 48% | 40% | 37% |
| **Total** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** |

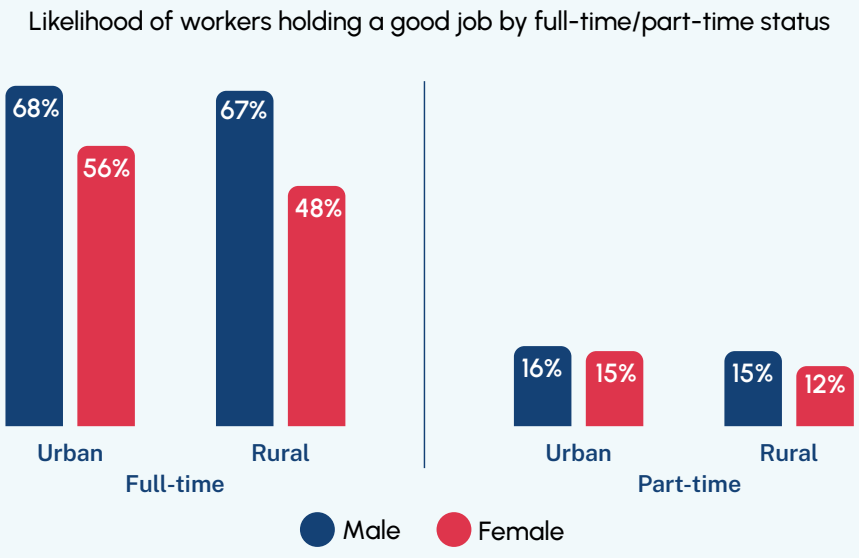
Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.

**FIGURE 2.** Rural men have the same likelihood of having a good job as their urban counterparts, but rural women are far less likely than urban women to have a good job.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.

**FIGURE 3.** Women are less likely to have a good job than men, especially in full-time, full-year jobs.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.

**TABLE 3.** In rural areas, a higher proportion of women than men work in white-collar, services, and middle-skills white-collar occupations.

| | LABOR-FORCE DISTRIBUTION | |
|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female |
| White-collar | 26% | 41% |
| Blue-collar | 50% | 11% |
| Services | 8% | 18% |
| Middle-skills white-collar | 12% | 29% |
| Protective services | 4% | 1% |
| **Total** | **100%** | **100%** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include workers ages 25–64.

full-year[62] workers, there is a 19-percentage-point difference in the likelihood of holding a good job (67 percent for men; 48 percent for women) in rural areas, compared to a difference of 12 percentage points in urban areas (68 percent for men; 56 percent for women). There is little difference, meanwhile, in the likelihood of holding a good job among men and women with part-time jobs in both urban and rural areas (Figure 3). This discrepancy between full-time and part-time good jobs for women reinforces that the gender wage gap is a persistent source of inequality in the labor market.[63]

In addition to the greater likelihood that women work part time, another possible explanation for the gender gap is occupational segregation, through which men are overrepresented in occupations that pay well and women are more likely to work in occupations that pay low wages. For instance, half of the men working in rural areas are in relatively well-paying blue-collar occupations, compared to 11 percent of women in rural areas (Table 3).

The gender difference in the likelihood of holding a good job within rural areas is much greater than the difference between rural and urban areas, suggesting that **women suffer even greater economic inequality in rural areas than in urban areas.**

62 The sample of workers includes full-year workers who worked at least 35 hours a week for a minimum of 50 weeks.
63 Blau and Kahn, "The Gender Wage Gap," 2017.

**TABLE 4.** White-collar, blue-collar, and protective services occupations pay higher earnings on the whole than other occupations in rural areas, but women make less than men in all occupational categories.

| | MEDIAN EARNINGS (2022$) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Overall |
| White-collar | $71,000 | $50,000 | $57,000 |
| Blue-collar | $48,000 | $30,000 | $44,000 |
| Services | $29,000 | $22,000 | $23,000 |
| Middle-skills white-collar | $50,000 | $32,000 | $36,000 |
| Protective services | $55,000 | $41,000 | $52,000 |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include workers ages 25–64 and are not adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.

Workers in white-collar,[64] blue-collar,[65] and protective services[66] occupations have the highest earnings in rural areas (Table 4), which helps explain the higher likelihood of good jobs for men, who have higher representations in blue-collar and protective services occupations. Services[67] and middle-skills white-collar occupations,[68] in which women have larger shares of the jobs, pay the least, which helps explain the lower likelihood of holding a good job for women in rural areas.

However, occupational choice does not fully explain why women in white-collar occupations do not have good jobs. The share of rural women in white-collar jobs (41 percent) is much higher than the share of rural men who hold such jobs (26 percent), and white-collar jobs constitute the highest-paying occupational group as a whole. But women still lag behind men in the likelihood of having a good job. When we analyze the male and female samples separately, we find that women of all occupational groups trail their male counterparts in median earnings. The biggest disparity is in white-collar occupations, where men earn a median of $71,000 a year while women earn $50,000. The disparity in earnings could be the result of women being in lower-paying jobs than men within white-collar occupations or could be attributed to discrimination, either overt or implicit.[69]

64 White-collar occupations include management; business operations; finance; computer and mathematical science; architecture and engineering; life and physical science; social science; community and social services; legal; education, training and library; arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media; and healthcare professional and technical.
65 Blue-collar occupations include farming, fishing, and forestry; construction; extraction; installation, maintenance, and repair; production; and transportation and material moving.
66 Protective services occupations include police officers and sheriff's deputies, firefighters, correctional officers, and fish and game wardens.
67 Services occupations include healthcare support, food preparation and serving, building and grounds cleaning and maintenance, and personal care and services.
68 Middle-skills white-collar occupations include sales and related occupations, and office and administrative support occupations.
69 For more on gender wage differences, occupational segregation, and discrimination, see Carnevale et al., *Women Can't Win*, 2018.

## Members of racial/ethnic minority groups struggle to obtain good jobs in rural areas where white workers have a historical advantage.

White workers make up a greater share of the workforce and hold a greater share of good jobs in rural areas than in urban areas (Table 5). The overwhelming majority of good jobs in rural America are held by white workers, who account for 81 percent of the rural workforce but hold 86 percent of good jobs, compared to 60 percent of the workforce and 68 percent of the good jobs in urban America.

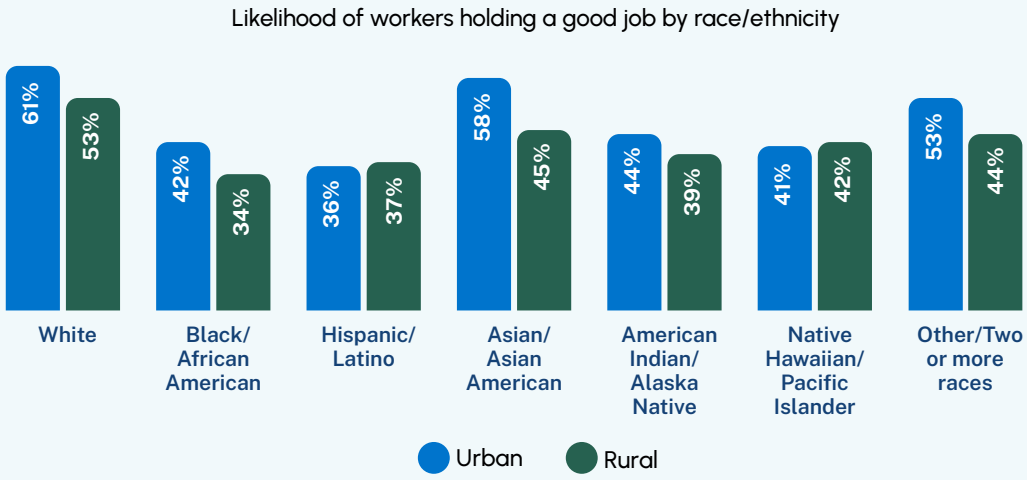
All other racial/ethnic groups are underrepresented in good jobs in rural areas: Black/African American workers, for example, make up 7 percent of the rural workforce but hold only 5 percent of good jobs in rural areas. Hispanic/Latino workers make up 8 percent of the rural workforce but hold only 6 percent of rural good jobs.

**TABLE 5.** White workers are the only racial/ethnic group that is overrepresented in good jobs in both rural and urban areas.

| | LABOR-FORCE DISTRIBUTION | | DISTRIBUTION OF GOOD JOBS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural |
| White | 60% | 81% | 68% | 86% |
| Black/African American | 12% | 7% | 10% | 5% |
| Hispanic/Latino | 18% | 8% | 12% | 6% |
| Asian/Asian American | 7% | 1% | 8% | 1% |
| American Indian/Alaska Native | 0% | 2% | 0% | 1% |
| Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Other/Two or more races | 2% | 1% | 2% | 1% |
| **Total** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living. Columns may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

**FIGURE 4.** In rural America, white workers are the only racial/ethnic group in which the majority of workers have good jobs.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.

In rural America, white workers are the only racial/ethnic group in which the majority (53 percent) of workers hold good jobs (Figure 4). Asian/Asian American workers have the second-highest likelihood (45 percent) of holding a good job in rural areas. In comparison, only 34 percent of Black/African American workers in rural areas hold good jobs. In urban America, the majority of white, Asian/Asian American, and multiracial/other workers have good jobs, but good jobs are still elusive to the majority of Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander workers.

Hispanic/Latino and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander workers are slightly more likely to have good jobs in rural areas than in urban areas. However, the likelihood of holding a good job for Hispanic/Latino and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander workers is still low in rural areas, at 37 percent and 42 percent, respectively.

The largest good jobs disparities are actually greater in urban America. The 25-percentage-point gap in likelihood of having a good job in urban America between white workers and Hispanic/Latino workers is greater than any gap in rural America, where the largest gap is a 19-percentage-point difference between white and Black/African American workers. Rural America may not offer equal opportunity to all racial/ethnic groups, but the gaps in likelihood of having a good job are smaller than in urban America.

## Workers with lower levels of educational attainment have better jobs in rural America than in urban America.

Levels of educational attainment are much lower in rural areas than in urban areas. Only a quarter of rural working adults have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 40 percent of urban workers. Rural workers with lower educational attainment levels are much more likely to have a good job, however, than workers with similar levels of educational attainment in urban areas. Workers with an associate's degree or some college make up the largest share of the rural workforce (35 percent) and hold 34 percent of the good jobs. Workers with a high school diploma make up 32 percent of the rural workforce, but they hold 26 percent of the good jobs. By comparison, in urban areas, workers with a high school diploma make up 22 percent of the workforce but hold only 15 percent of the good jobs (Table 6).

**TABLE 6.** Only one in four rural workers has a bachelor's degree or higher, but these workers hold 36 percent of good jobs in rural America.

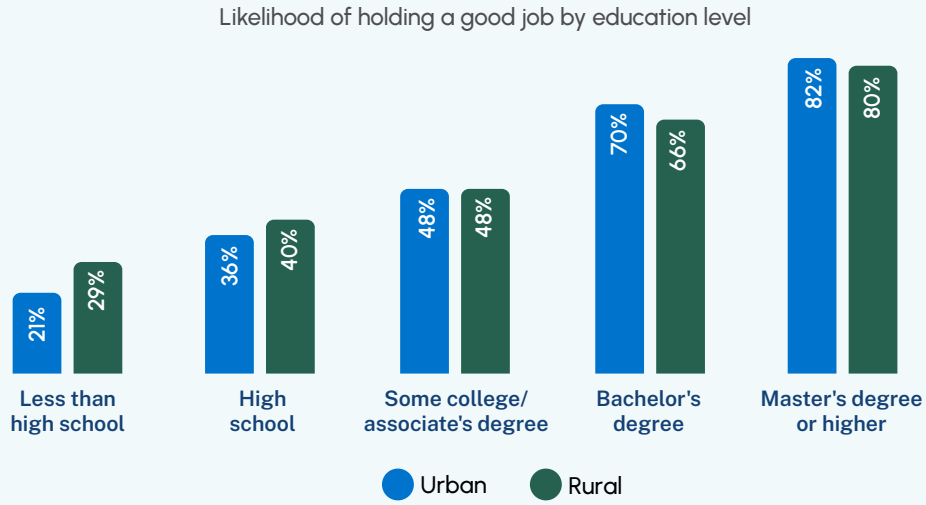
| | LABOR-FORCE DISTRIBUTION | | | DISTRIBUTION OF GOOD JOBS | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Urban | Rural | Total | Urban | Rural | Total |
| Less than high school | 8% | 8% | 8% | 3% | 5% | 3% |
| High school | 22% | 32% | 23% | 15% | 26% | 16% |
| Some college/associate's degree | 30% | 35% | 30% | 26% | 34% | 27% |
| Bachelor's degree | 25% | 16% | 24% | 33% | 22% | 31% |
| Master's degree or higher | 15% | 9% | 15% | 23% | 14% | 22% |
| **Total** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living. Columns may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

All told, workers with less than a bachelor's degree hold 65 percent of all good jobs in rural areas. Workers with the same level of educational attainment hold only 44 percent of the good jobs in urban America.

In both rural and urban areas, those with lower levels of education hold a smaller share of good jobs than their share of the workforce, while the converse is true for those with more education (bachelor's degree or higher). The likelihood of having a good job increases with each level of educational attainment, but workers in rural areas with lower levels of educational attainment are more likely to have a good job. Among workers with less than a high school diploma, 21 percent of urban workers have a good job, compared to 29 percent of rural workers (Figure 5).

**FIGURE 5.** Rural workers with a high school diploma or less are more likely to hold a good job than urban workers with the same level of educational attainment.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.

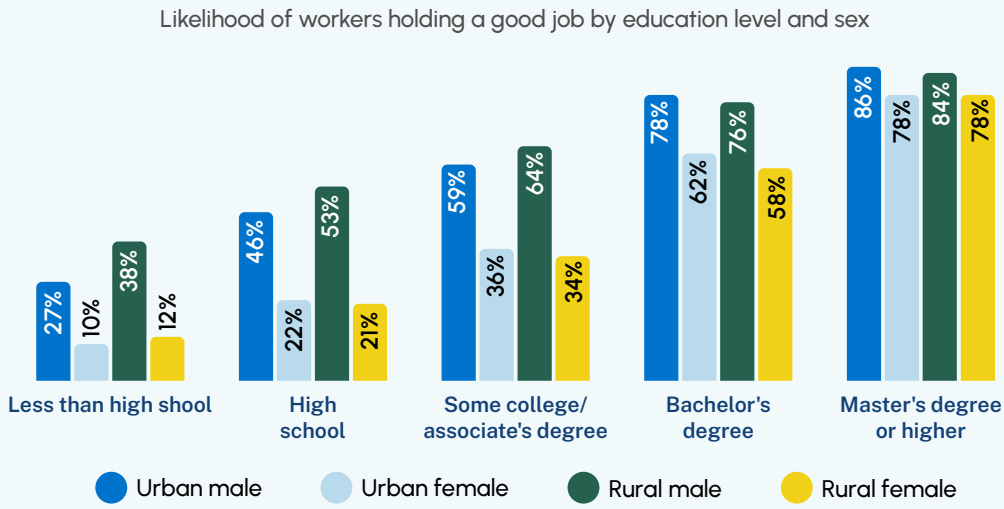
The highest levels of educational attainment are not as financially rewarding in rural areas as in urban areas: 66 percent of workers with bachelor's degrees and 80 percent of workers with graduate degrees in rural areas have good jobs, in contrast to 70 percent of workers with bachelor's degree and 82 percent of workers with graduate degrees in urban areas.

The rural good-jobs advantage for men is seen at every level of educational attainment. More than half of men in rural areas with no more than a high school diploma have a good job, but the same is true for only 21 percent of women with a high school diploma (Figure 6). The men's advantage extends to higher levels of educational attainment as well. Among rural workers with a bachelor's degree, 76 percent of men have good jobs, but only 58 percent of women do.

## Blue-collar good jobs are a larger proportion of all good jobs in rural areas than in urban areas.

Blue-collar jobs make up a much larger share (31 percent) of the workforce in rural areas than in urban areas (21 percent). Blue-collar workers also hold a larger share of the good jobs in rural areas (32 percent) than in urban areas (17 percent). The largest occupational cluster in both urban and rural areas is white-collar professional occupations. These occupations make up 43 percent of all jobs in urban America and account for 60 percent of all good jobs in cities and suburbs (Table 7).

**FIGURE 6.** Rural men with lower levels of educational attainment are far more likely to have a good job than rural women with the same educational level.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.

White-collar professional occupations make up a third of the rural labor force and 46 percent of the good jobs in rural areas. Compared to the urban labor force, the rural labor force is much more evenly distributed among white-collar professional occupations, blue-collar occupations, and jobs in middle-skills white-collar, services, and protective services occupations.

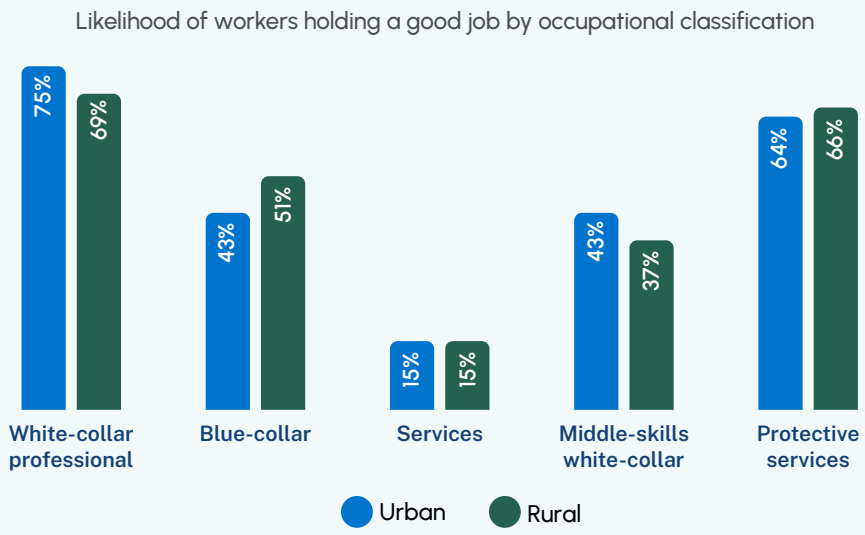
As in urban areas, middle-skills white-collar and services occupations in rural areas are relatively unlikely to lead to good jobs. Middle-skills white-collar workers constitute 20 percent of the rural labor force but hold only 15 percent of the good jobs. The disparity is even greater for services occupations, which compose 13 percent of the rural jobs, but only 4 percent of the good jobs in rural areas.

**TABLE 7.** White-collar professional jobs are less likely to be good jobs in rural areas than in urban areas.

| | LABOR-FORCE DISTRIBUTION | | GOOD JOBS DISTRIBUTION | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural |
| White-collar professional | 43% | 33% | 60% | 46% |
| Blue-collar | 21% | 31% | 17% | 32% |
| Services | 13% | 13% | 4% | 4% |
| Middle-skills white-collar | 21% | 20% | 17% | 15% |
| Protective services | 2% | 2% | 3% | 3% |
| **Total** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.

**FIGURE 7.** The likelihood of holding a good job in a blue-collar occupation is 8 percentage points higher in rural areas than in urban areas.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.

More than half of all the blue-collar jobs (51 percent) in rural areas are good jobs (Figure 7). This percentage is 8 percentage points higher than in urban areas (43 percent). The likelihood of holding a good job is also slightly higher for workers in protective services occupations in rural areas; at 66 percent, their likelihood of holding a good job is 2 percentage points higher than for protective services workers in urban areas. White-collar professional and middle-skills white-collar occupations are strong components of the urban workforce, but of the two groups, only the white-collar professional occupations have a majority of jobs (75 percent) that are good jobs, compared to 43 percent of urban jobs in middle-skills white-collar occupations.

## Management and healthcare professional occupations are overrepresented, and services and support occupations are underrepresented, in good jobs in rural areas.

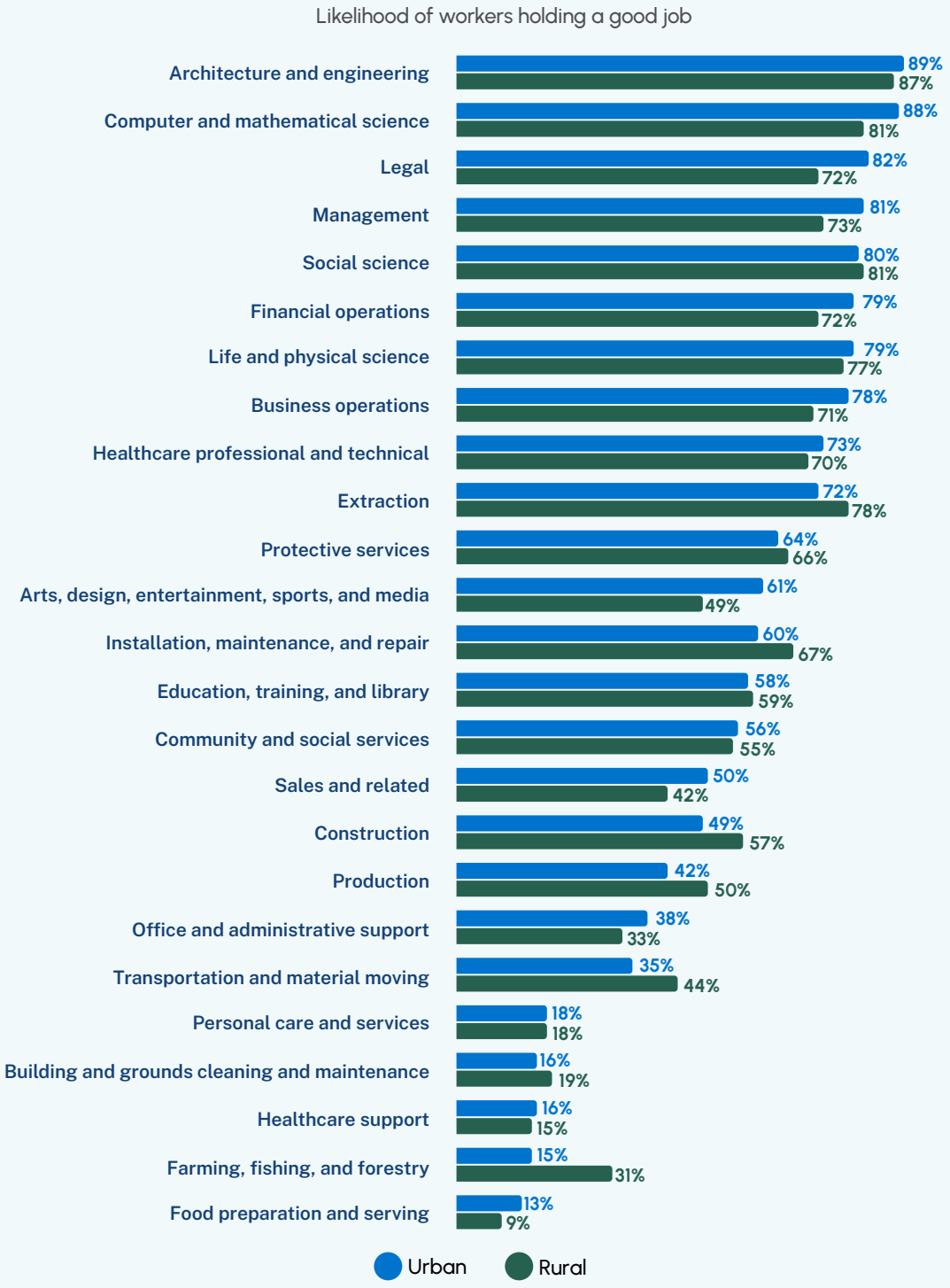
When we look at more detailed occupational categories, certain occupations stand out in having more than their proportional share of good jobs (Table 8). In rural areas, the biggest excess of good jobs is in white-collar occupations. Specifically, management occupations make up 13 percent of the good jobs in rural areas, but only 9 percent of the workforce. Similarly, healthcare professional and technical workers make up 10 percent of the good jobs, but only 7 percent of the workforce. Both of these occupational categories require relatively high levels of educational attainment: at least 58 percent of workers who hold these jobs in rural areas have a bachelor's degree or higher. On the other hand, healthcare support, food preparation and serving, building and grounds cleaning and maintenance, and office and administrative support all have smaller shares of good jobs than their labor-force representation. Each of these occupational categories requires much lower levels of educational attainment: at least 30 percent of workers in these categories in rural areas have a high school diploma or less.

**TABLE 8.** Management occupations have the largest gap between their share of the labor force (9 percent) and their share of good jobs (13 percent) in rural areas.

| | LABOR-FORCE DISTRIBUTION | | GOOD JOBS DISTRIBUTION | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural |
| Management | 11% | 9% | 17% | 13% |
| Business operations | 4% | 2% | 5% | 3% |
| Financial operations | 3% | 2% | 4% | 2% |
| Computer and mathematical science | 4% | 1% | 6% | 2% |
| Architecture and engineering | 2% | 2% | 4% | 3% |
| Life and physical science | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% |
| Social science | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Community and social services | 2% | 2% | 2% | 2% |
| Legal | 1% | 1% | 2% | 1% |
| Education, training, and library | 6% | 7% | 7% | 8% |
| Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media | 2% | 1% | 2% | 1% |
| Healthcare professional and technical | 7% | 7% | 9% | 10% |
| Healthcare support | 3% | 4% | 1% | 1% |
| Protective services | 2% | 2% | 3% | 3% |
| Food preparation and serving | 4% | 4% | 1% | 1% |
| Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance | 3% | 4% | 1% | 1% |
| Personal care and services | 2% | 2% | 1% | 1% |
| Sales and related | 9% | 8% | 8% | 7% |
| Office and administrative support | 12% | 12% | 8% | 8% |
| Farming, fishing, and forestry | 1% | 1% | 0% | 1% |
| Construction | 5% | 6% | 4% | 7% |
| Extraction | 0% | 1% | 0% | 1% |
| Installation, maintenance, and repair | 3% | 4% | 3% | 6% |
| Production | 6% | 10% | 4% | 10% |
| Transportation and material moving | 7% | 9% | 5% | 8% |
| **Total** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living. Columns may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

**FIGURE 8.** Workers in 10 occupational categories, mostly blue-collar, have a higher likelihood of holding good jobs in rural areas than in urban areas.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.

In rural areas, the likelihood of holding a good job is 50 percent or greater for workers in 16 of the 25 occupational groups (Figure 8). Generally, white-collar professional workers have a higher likelihood of being in good jobs. Nine of the top 10 occupational groups with the highest likelihood of good jobs are white-collar occupational groups;[70] the lone exception is extraction occupations, in which 78 percent of the jobs are good. In rural areas, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) occupations have the highest likelihood of offering good jobs: specifically, workers in architecture and engineering occupations have the highest likelihood of having a good job (87 percent), followed by workers in computer and mathematical science and social science occupations (81 percent each). On the other end of the occupational spectrum are mostly services occupations: jobs in food preparation and serving, healthcare support, personal care and services, and building and grounds cleaning and maintenance each have less than a 20 percent likelihood of being good jobs.

The familiar narrative is that cities are where economic opportunities are. However, we find that in 10 of the 25 occupational groups, workers have a higher likelihood of holding a good job in rural areas. Jobs within all six blue-collar occupational groups[71] and the protective services occupational group have a higher likelihood of being good jobs in rural areas. The occupational variation in the ranking and likelihood of good jobs between rural and urban areas suggests that the prevalence of good jobs within an occupation depends largely on local economies.

## The likelihood of having a good job in rural areas is highest in the Midwest and the Northeast.

Good jobs appear at first glance to be proportionately distributed around the country. About 75 percent of all rural jobs are in the South and the Midwest, the same two regions that collectively have 75 percent of all good jobs in rural areas (Table 9).

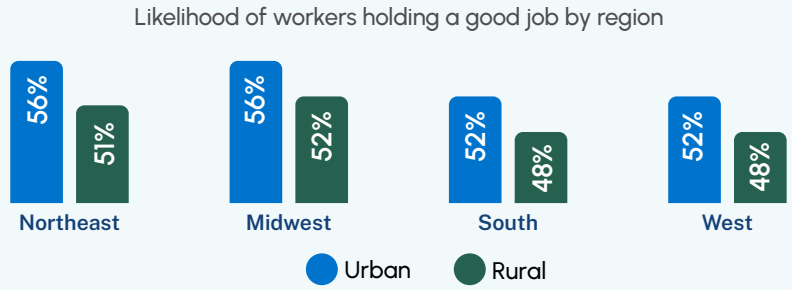
**TABLE 9.** Rural good jobs are heavily concentrated in the South and the Midwest.

| | LABOR-FORCE DISTRIBUTION | | GOOD JOBS DISTRIBUTION | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural |
| Northeast | 19% | 11% | 20% | 11% |
| Midwest | 20% | 35% | 20% | 36% |
| South | 36% | 40% | 35% | 39% |
| West | 25% | 14% | 24% | 14% |
| **Total** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living. Columns may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

70 White-collar jobs include 12 occupational categories: architecture and engineering; arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media; business operations; community and social services; computer and mathematical sciences; finance; healthcare professional and technical; life and physical science; legal; education, training, and library; management; and social sciences.
71 The six blue-collar occupational groups are: construction; extraction; farming, fishing, and forestry; installation, maintenance and repair; production; and transportation and material moving.

**FIGURE 9.** More than half of rural workers have good jobs in the Midwest and the Northeast.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.

Differences emerge between regions in the likelihood of having good jobs, however. The majority of rural workers in the Midwest (52 percent) and the Northeast (51 percent) have good jobs (Figure 9). Slightly less than half of rural workers (48 percent) in the South and the West have good jobs.

The likelihood of having a good job in urban America is also the highest in the Northeast and the Midwest, but unlike in rural America, the majority of urban workers in all regions have good jobs. The differences in the likelihood of having a good job among the regions are related, in part, to educational levels, the race/ethnicity of workers, and the predominant occupations in the regions.

The relationship between educational level and good jobs is somewhat uneven, however. In rural areas, the regions with the highest percentage of workers with at least a high school diploma are the Northeast (95 percent) and the Midwest (94 percent) (Table 10). This aligns with the regions in which workers have the greatest likelihood of having a good job in rural areas.

**TABLE 10.** The Northeast and the Midwest have the smallest shares of rural workers who have less than a high school diploma.

| | DISTRIBUTION OF RURAL WORKERS BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT LEVEL AND REGION | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Northeast | Midwest | South | West |
| Less than high school | 5% | 6% | 10% | 8% |
| High school | 34% | 32% | 34% | 27% |
| Some college/associate's degree | 31% | 37% | 34% | 37% |
| Bachelor's degree | 18% | 17% | 15% | 19% |
| Master's degree or higher | 12% | 8% | 8% | 10% |
| **Total** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include workers ages 25–64. Columns may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

The Northeast (30 percent) and the West (29 percent) have the highest percentages of rural workers with a bachelor's degree or higher. The educational distribution helps account for the relatively high good job rate in the Northeast, but educational attainment does not fully explain the regional dispersion of good jobs.

In the Midwest and the Northeast, the only two regions in which more than half of rural workers have a good job, white workers hold an especially high proportion of jobs (Table 11). Indeed, white workers make up the majority of rural workers, but they are more than nine of 10 rural workers in the Northeast (94 percent) and Midwest (91 percent). By contrast, less than three-quarters of the rural workers in the South and the West are white. Black/African American rural workers hold a relatively high share of jobs in the South (15 percent), as do Hispanic/Latino workers in the West (16 percent) and the South (9 percent). As discussed earlier in this report, white workers have the greatest likelihood of having a good job. The two rural regions in which white workers hold the largest shares of jobs are also the regions with the highest rates of good jobs. Conversely, in the South and the West, where Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino workers are more strongly represented in the workforce, the likelihood of good jobs is lower.

**TABLE 11.** White workers hold the highest shares of rural jobs in the Northeast and the Midwest, while Black/African American workers have their highest representation in the South and Hispanic/Latino workers have their highest representation in the West.

| | DISTRIBUTION OF RURAL WORKERS BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND REGION | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Northeast | Midwest | South | West |
| White | 94% | 91% | 72% | 73% |
| Black/African American | 1% | 1% | 15% | 1% |
| Hispanic/Latino | 2% | 4% | 9% | 16% |
| Asian/Asian American | 1% | 1% | 1% | 3% |
| American Indian/Alaska Native | 0% | 1% | 1% | 5% |
| Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian | 0% | 0% | 0% | 1% |
| Other/Two or more races | 1% | 1% | 1% | 3% |
| **Total** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include workers ages 25–64. Columns may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

The Northeast and the West have the largest shares of the top five occupations with the highest likelihood of a good job[72] in rural areas. The Northeast and the Midwest have the lowest shares of the five occupations with the lowest likelihood of a good job (Table 12).[73]

**TABLE 12.** Occupations are fairly evenly distributed by region in rural areas across the country.

| | DISTRIBUTION OF RURAL WORKERS BY OCCUPATION | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Northeast | Midwest | South | West |
| Management | 9% | 9% | 8% | 10% |
| Business operations | 2% | 2% | 2% | 2% |
| Financial operations | 2% | 2% | 1% | 1% |
| Computer and mathematical science | 2% | 1% | 1% | 2% |
| Architecture and engineering | 2% | 2% | 1% | 2% |
| Life and physical science | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% |
| Social science | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Community and social services | 2% | 2% | 2% | 2% |
| Legal | 1% | 0% | 1% | 1% |
| Education, training, and library | 8% | 6% | 7% | 7% |
| Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% |
| Healthcare professional and technical | 7% | 7% | 7% | 6% |
| Healthcare support | 4% | 4% | 4% | 4% |
| Protective services | 2% | 2% | 3% | 3% |
| Food preparation and serving | 4% | 4% | 4% | 5% |
| Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance | 4% | 3% | 4% | 4% |
| Personal care and services | 2% | 1% | 1% | 2% |
| Sales and related | 8% | 8% | 8% | 8% |
| Office and administrative support | 12% | 12% | 11% | 12% |
| Farming, fishing, and forestry | 1% | 1% | 1% | 3% |
| Construction | 6% | 5% | 6% | 6% |
| Extraction | 0% | 0% | 1% | 1% |
| Installation, maintenance, and repair | 4% | 4% | 5% | 4% |
| Production | 8% | 12% | 10% | 5% |
| Transportation and material moving | 8% | 10% | 9% | 8% |
| **Total** | **100%** | **99%** | **99%** | **100%** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include workers ages 25–64. Columns may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

72 The occupations with the highest likelihood of good jobs in rural areas are architecture and engineering; computer and mathematical science; social science; extraction; and life and physical science occupations.
73 The occupations with the lowest likelihood of good jobs in rural areas are food preparation and serving; healthcare support; personal care and services; building and grounds cleaning and maintenance; and farming, fishing, and forestry.

## States

The likelihood of holding a good job in rural America ranges by state from 41 percent in Florida to 61 percent in North Dakota (Table 13).[74] In urban areas, the likelihood of holding a good job is the highest in the District of Columbia, where 71 percent of workers have good jobs, followed by Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and North Dakota (61 percent each). The state with the lowest likelihood of urban good jobs is Florida, where 44 percent of the jobs are good jobs.

At least half of rural workers in 29 of the 47 states with rural areas have good jobs. In contrast, in 45 states and the District of Columbia, the likelihood of having a good job in urban areas is higher than 50 percent. The only states in which a majority of urban workers do not have a good job are Florida, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, and Hawaii.

Only three states have an equal or higher likelihood of good jobs in rural areas compared to urban areas: Montana, Nevada, and North Dakota. (Seven states have a one-percentage-point difference: Arizona, Connecticut, New Mexico, New York, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wyoming.) Elsewhere, urban areas have higher likelihoods of good jobs than rural areas.

**TABLE 13.** North Dakota has the highest likelihood of good jobs for rural workers; Florida has the lowest likelihood.

| | Urban | Rural | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| North Dakota | 61% | 61% | 61% |
| Connecticut | 61% | 60% | 61% |
| Maryland | 61% | 57% | 61% |
| Wyoming | 57% | 56% | 56% |
| Iowa | 59% | 56% | 57% |
| Minnesota | 61% | 56% | 60% |
| Nevada | 48% | 55% | 48% |
| Wisconsin | 57% | 54% | 57% |
| Alaska | 60% | 54% | 58% |
| New Hampshire | 60% | 53% | 58% |
| Illinois | 56% | 53% | 56% |
| New York | 53% | 52% | 53% |
| Virginia | 59% | 52% | 58% |
| Utah | 54% | 52% | 54% |
| Nebraska | 57% | 52% | 55% |
| South Dakota | 52% | 51% | 52% |

74 States that do not have rural areas are excluded from the rural analysis and rural-urban comparisons. The states that do not have rural areas, according to the US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, are Delaware, the District of Columbia, New Jersey, and Rhode Island.

| | Urban | Rural | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Indiana | 54% | 51% | 53% |
| Ohio | 55% | 51% | 55% |
| Kansas | 58% | 51% | 56% |
| Oklahoma | 53% | 50% | 52% |
| Pennsylvania | 56% | 50% | 55% |
| West Virginia | 51% | 50% | 51% |
| Alabama | 53% | 50% | 52% |
| Massachusetts | 61% | 50% | 61% |
| Louisiana | 52% | 50% | 52% |
| Kentucky | 55% | 50% | 53% |
| Arizona | 51% | 50% | 51% |
| Vermont | 58% | 50% | 53% |
| Montana | 48% | 50% | 49% |
| Maine | 53% | 49% | 52% |
| Colorado | 57% | 49% | 56% |
| Washington | 57% | 48% | 56% |
| Michigan | 54% | 48% | 53% |
| Georgia | 53% | 48% | 53% |
| Texas | 52% | 48% | 52% |
| Tennessee | 52% | 47% | 51% |
| Mississippi | 50% | 47% | 49% |
| North Carolina | 54% | 47% | 52% |
| New Mexico | 48% | 47% | 48% |
| Idaho | 50% | 46% | 49% |
| Arkansas | 51% | 46% | 49% |
| Missouri | 56% | 45% | 53% |
| South Carolina | 51% | 45% | 50% |
| California | 51% | 45% | 50% |
| Oregon | 50% | 44% | 49% |
| Hawaii | 48% | 43% | 47% |
| Florida | 44% | 41% | 44% |
| Delaware | 55% | N/A | 55% |
| District of Columbia | 71% | N/A | 71% |
| New Jersey | 57% | N/A | 57% |
| Rhode Island | 56% | N/A | 56% |
| **Total** | **54%** | **50%** | **53%** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living. Delaware, the District of Columbia, New Jersey, and Rhode Island are not included in the analysis of rural areas because these states do not have any rural counties, as defined by the US Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service.

At least half of rural workers in 29 of the 47 states with rural areas have good jobs. In contrast, in 45 states and the District of Columbia, the likelihood of having a good job in urban areas is higher than 50 percent. The only states in which a majority of urban workers do not have a good job are Florida, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, and Hawaii.

PART 2.

# Non-Working Rural America: Low Labor-Force Participation and High Rates of Disability Leading to Poverty and Despair

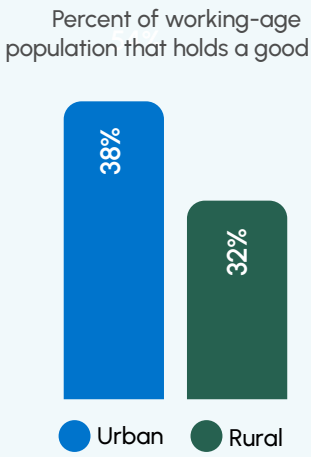
In order to fully examine economic opportunities in rural America, we need to understand the non-working population in addition to the employed population that is the focus of our good jobs analysis. When we consider the entire population ages 25–64,[75] we find that rural Americans are less likely to participate in the labor force than urban Americans.

The overall labor-force participation rate has been in decline since 2007. The decline is greatest among prime-age men (ages 25–54). Among those who are not in the rural labor force, the most frequent reason is disability or illness, and the proportion of residents who cite this reason is significantly higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Overall, about half of prime-age men who are not working take pain medication daily.[76]

This context is important because many of the more positive stories about the rural workforce that surfaced in our good jobs analysis are weakened when we consider the entire population ages 25–64, working and non-working (Figure 10). As noted earlier in this report, we found that among workers, the likelihood of having a good job is similar in urban versus rural areas: 54 percent versus 50 percent, respectively. But when we consider all residents, both in and out of the labor force, urban areas have a slightly larger advantage in the share with good jobs: 38 percent versus 32 percent.

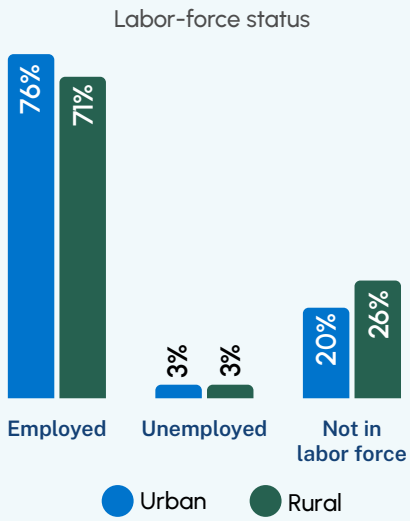
75 The sample is restricted to all 25-to-64-year-old individuals excluding those living in group quarters. Group quarters include state prisons, local jails, institutional halfway houses, barracks at military posts, and correctional institutions.
76 Krueger, "Where Have All the Workers Gone?," 2017.

**FIGURE 10.** The likelihood of holding a good job is about 6 percentage points higher for urban residents than for rural residents when all people ages 25–64, both in and out of the labor force, are considered.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.

**FIGURE 11.** Rural areas have a high share of people who are not in the labor force.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include adults ages 25–64. Values may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

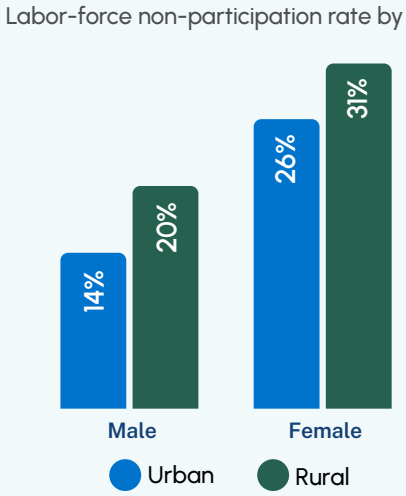
## One-quarter of working-age rural Americans are not in the labor force.

Urban America has a higher employment rate (76 percent) than rural America (71 percent), but unemployment differentials account for very little of this difference (Figure 11). Workers in rural America are actually as likely to be unemployed as workers in urban America (3 percent). This seemingly rosy unemployment statistic for rural America obscures its high proportion of adults who are not in the labor force (26 percent), which is 6 percentage points higher than the rate in urban areas (20 percent).

## Men and women in rural areas trail their urban counterparts in labor-force participation.

Men and women in rural areas are both less likely to be in the labor force than their urban counterparts (Figure 12). Twenty percent of rural men and 31 percent of rural women are not in the labor force, compared to 14 percent of urban men and 26 percent of urban women.

**FIGURE 12.** Rural men and women are more likely not to be in the labor force than their urban counterparts.



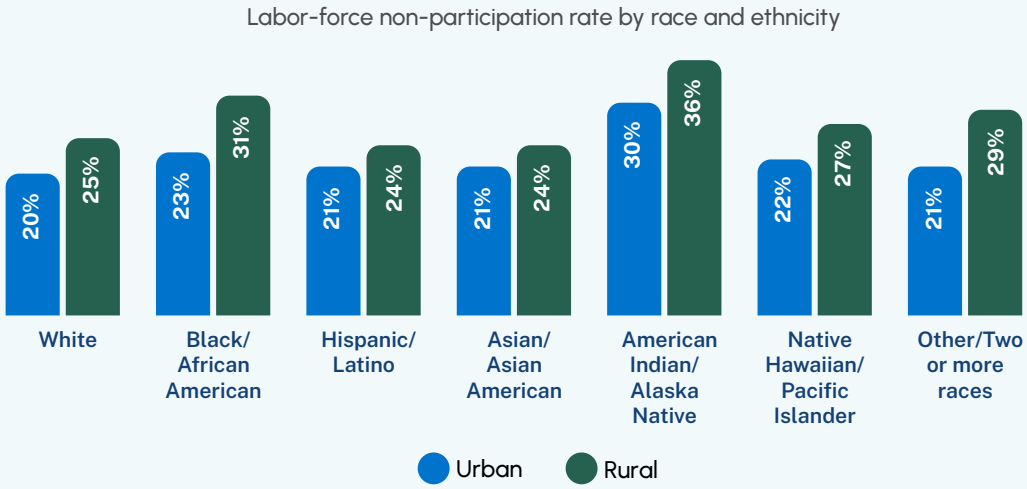

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include adults ages 25–64.

Labor-force participation rates vary for numerous reasons, but some overall trends are clear. Men have higher participation rates than women. In 2015, for example, 53 percent of the US labor force was male, and 47 percent was female. Among non-participants in the labor force, 40 percent were male and 60 percent were female.[77] However, the share of men in the labor force has been declining slowly for decades: 98 percent of prime-age men were in the labor force in 1954, compared to 88 percent in 2015.[78] Workers with higher levels of educational attainment have higher participation rates than those with lower levels of educational attainment, and workers have lower participation rates as they age.[79] Since at least 1990, men are most likely to leave the labor force because they are ill or disabled, and women are most likely to leave the labor force to care for children or other family members.[80]

Labor-force participation rates have been lower in rural areas for decades, and they have fallen off rapidly in recent years. From 2007–19, labor-force participation rates fell by 2.6 percentage points in rural areas among adults ages 25–64, while they fell by just 0.7 percentage points among the same population in urban areas.[81] These changes occurred during a decade that witnessed the first-ever decline in America's rural population. Workers were increasingly faced with the choice of moving to urban areas to find work or staying in rural areas where jobs were less plentiful.[82]

77 Arias and Restrepo-Echavarría, "Demographics Help Explain the Fall in the Labor Force Participation Rate," 2016.
78 Council of Economic Advisers, *The Long-Term Decline in Prime-Age Male Labor Force Participation*, 2016.
79 Congressional Budget Office, "Factors Affecting the Labor Force Participation of People Ages 25 to 54," 2018.
80 Congressional Budget Office, "Factors Affecting the Labor Force Participation of People Ages 25 to 54," 2018.
81 US Department of Agriculture, "Rural Employment and Unemployment," 2022.
82 US Department of Agriculture, "Rural Employment and Unemployment," 2022.

**FIGURE 13.** Close to one-third of rural American Indian/Alaska Native and Black/African American adults are not in the labor force. The non-participation rate is higher in rural areas than urban areas across all racial/ethnic groups.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include adults ages 25–64.

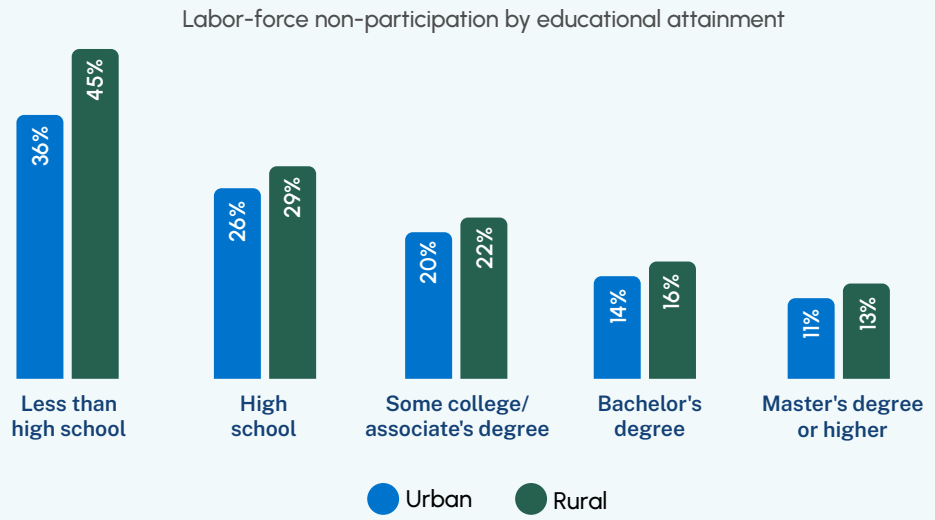
## About one-third of American Indian/Alaska Native and Black/African American adults in rural areas are not in the labor force.

Members of all racial/ethnic groups are less likely to participate in the labor force in rural areas than in urban areas (Figure 13). Around one-third of American Indian/Alaska Native (36 percent) and Black/African American adults (31 percent) are not in the labor force in rural areas. Hispanic/Latino and Asian/Asian American adults have the lowest non-participation rate in rural areas (24 percent). About 25 percent of white workers in rural areas are not participating in the labor force.

## The highest rate of non-participation in the labor force is among those with less than a high school diploma.

Close to half of adults with less than a high school diploma (45 percent) are not in the labor force in rural America (Figure 14). Labor-force non-participation decreases with each additional level of educational attainment. Among those with a high school diploma, 29 percent of rural adults are not participating in the labor force, but the same is true of only 16 percent of rural adults with a bachelor's degree. The pattern is similar in urban America, although urban adults across all education levels are more likely to be in the labor force. For example, 36 percent of adults with less than a high school diploma in urban America are not in the labor force, 9 percentage points lower than the non-participation rate for adults at the same education level in rural areas.

**FIGURE 14.** Close to half of rural adults with less than a high school diploma are not in the labor force.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include adults ages 25–64.

## The South has the lowest rate of labor-force participation in rural areas.

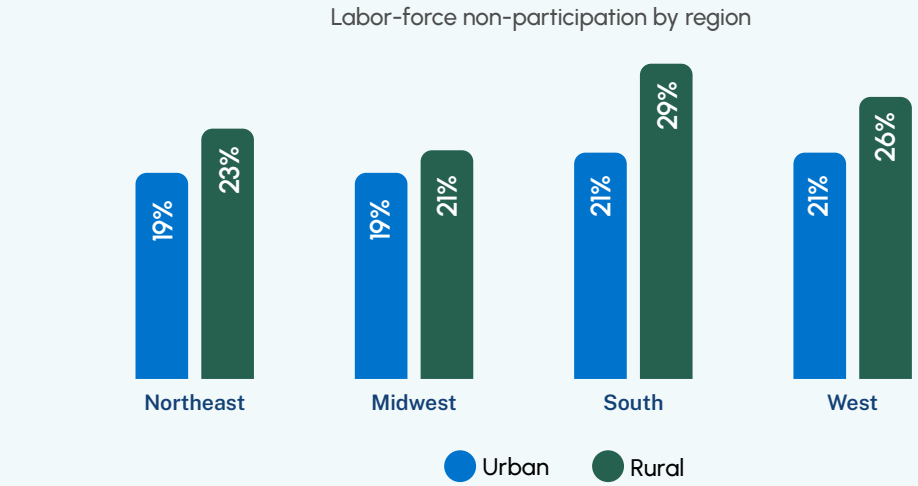
In rural areas, the South has the highest rate of non-participation in the labor force, at 29 percent, followed by the West at 26 percent (Figure 15). The Midwest has the lowest rural non-participation rate at 21 percent. The South and the West also have the highest non-participation rates in urban America, tied at 21 percent, but in the South, that figure is 8 percentage points lower than the rural non-participation rate. There is more regional variation in labor-force non-participation in rural areas than in urban areas, with an 8-percentage-point difference between the rural South and the rural Midwest, compared to a 2-percentage-point spread in urban areas.

## Among those with an associate's degree or less, American Indian/Alaska Native and Black/African American adults have the highest rates of labor-force non-participation in rural areas.

Among rural adults with an associate's degree or less, American Indian/Alaska Native (38 percent) and Black/African American adults (33 percent) have the highest non-participation rates (Figure 16).[83] In contrast, Hispanic/Latino adults have the lowest rate of non-participation in rural areas among those with an associate's degree or less (25 percent).

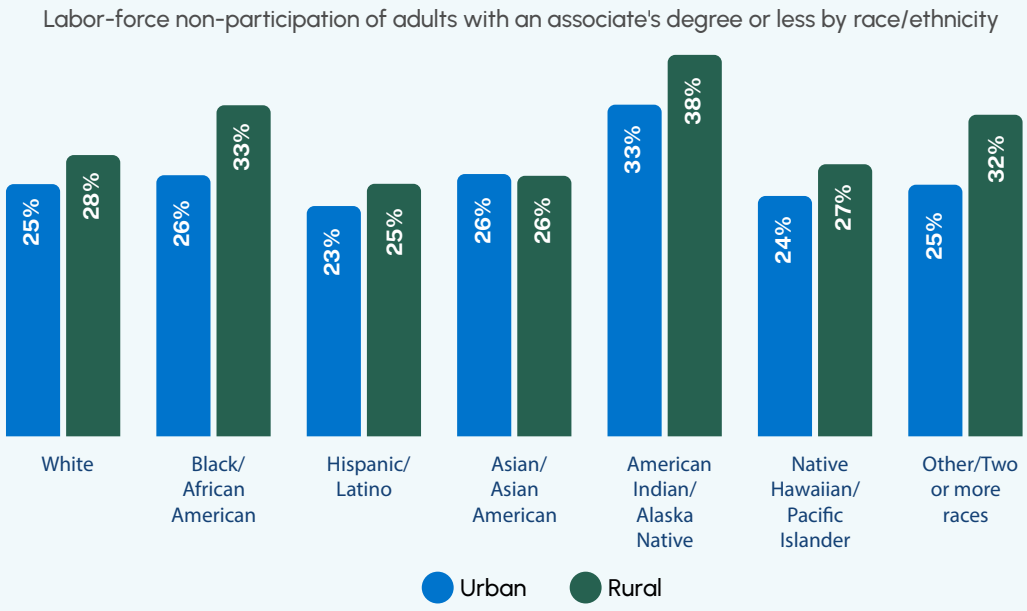
83 Because of small sample sizes, we aggregated educational attainment by race or ethnicity into two categories: associate's degree or less and bachelor's degree or higher.

**FIGURE 15.** Across all regions, adults in rural areas are less likely to be in the labor force than adults in urban areas, and the highest rural labor-force non-participation rate is in the South.



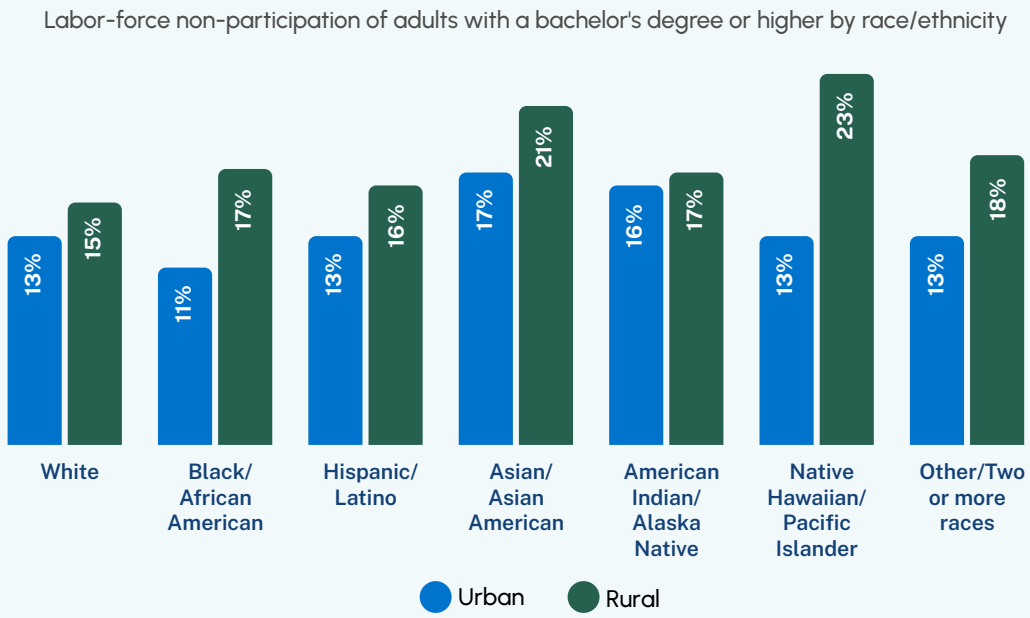

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include adults ages 25–64.

**FIGURE 16.** Across almost all races and ethnicities, rural adults with an associate's degree or less are less likely to be in the labor force than their urban counterparts.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include adults ages 25–64.

**FIGURE 17.** Among all racial/ethnic groups, rural rates of labor-force non-participation are higher than urban rates for those with a bachelor's degree or higher.



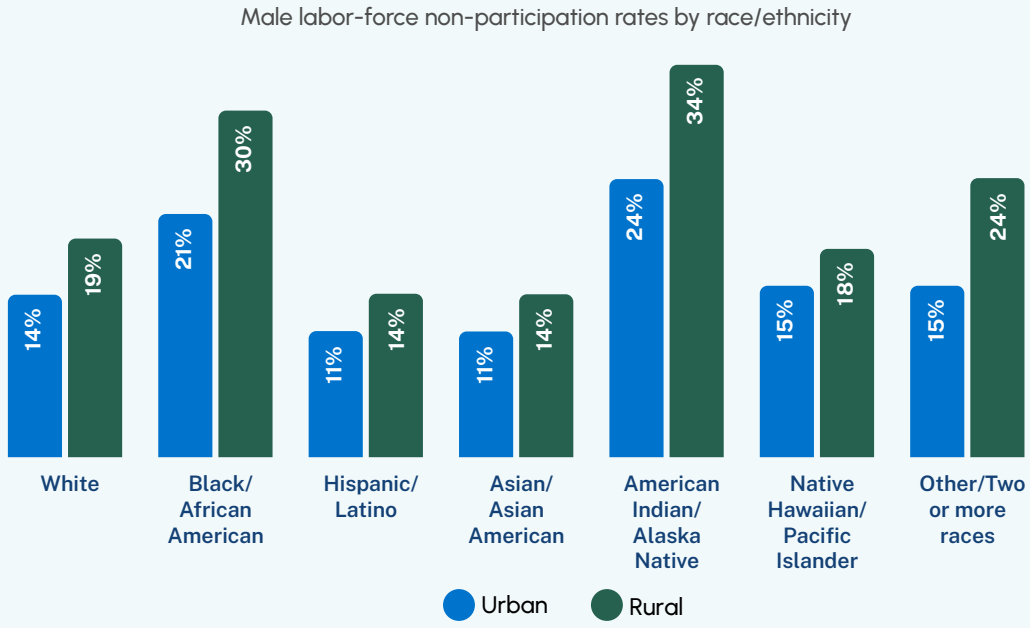

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include adults ages 25–64.

Among the urban 25-to-64-year-old population with an associate's degree or less, American Indian/Alaska Native adults have the highest non-participation rate (33 percent), followed by Black/African American and Asian/Asian American adults (both 26 percent). The non-participation rate is higher in rural areas than in urban areas for every racial/ethnic group except Asian/American adults, among whom it is the same (26 percent).

Among adults with a bachelor's degree or higher, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (23 percent) and Asian/Asian American (21 percent) adults in rural areas are the most likely not to be in the labor force (Figure 17). White adults (15 percent) have the lowest non-participation rate in the rural labor force.

Among the highly educated in urban areas, Asian/Asian American (17 percent) and American Indian/Alaska Native (16 percent) adults are most likely to be on the sidelines of the labor force. In contrast to rural areas, Black/African American adults with a bachelor's degree fare quite well in the labor market in urban areas: their non-participation rate is 11 percent, the lowest among all racial/ethnic groups. In general, there is less variation by race/ethnicity in non-participation rates among highly educated rural workers than there is among their counterparts with lower levels of educational attainment.

**FIGURE 18.** Rural men of all races/ethnicities are less likely to be in the labor force than urban men.



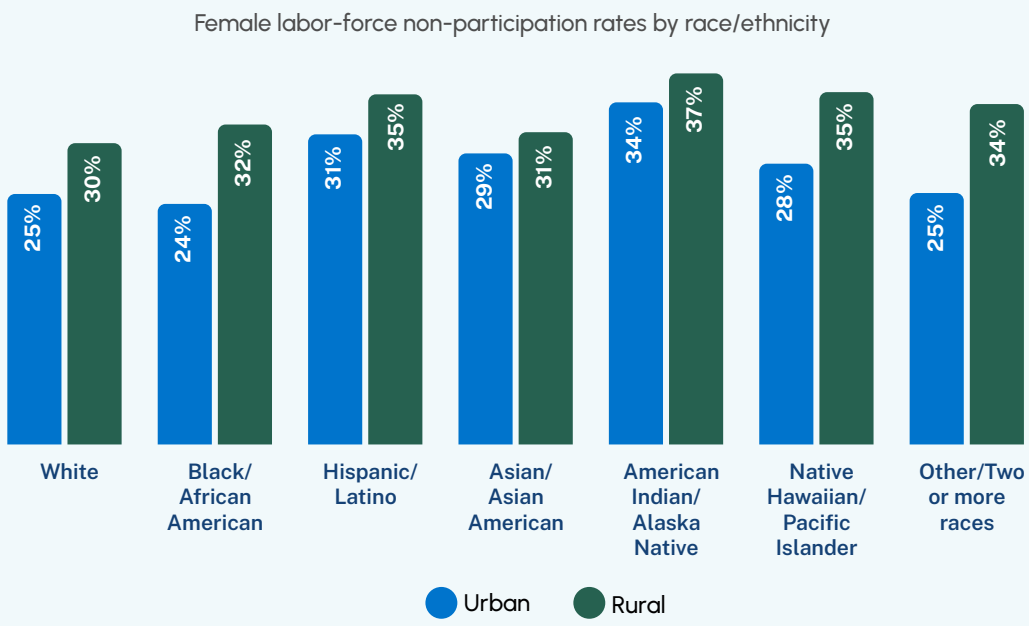

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include adults ages 25–64.

For men, labor-force non-participation rates are higher in rural areas than in urban areas across all races/ethnicities (Figure 18). In rural areas, American Indian/Alaska Native and Black/African American men have the highest rates of non-participation. About three out of ten men in both groups in rural areas are not in the labor force. Hispanic/Latino and Asian/Asian American men have the lowest non-participation rates: 14 percent of men in these racial/ethnic groups are not in the labor market in rural areas.

In urban areas, American Indian/Alaska Native and Black/African American men have the highest rates of non-participation: more than 20 percent of urban men in these racial/ethnic groups are not in the labor force. The rural-urban difference in labor-force participation is greatest (10 percentage points) for American Indian/Alaska Native men.

Labor-force non-participation rates are significantly higher among women (Figure 19). In rural areas, American Indian/Alaska Native women have the highest non-participation rate at 37 percent, and white women have the lowest at 30 percent. In urban areas, American Indian/Alaska Native women have the highest non-participation rate at 34 percent, and Black/African American women have the lowest at 24 percent. The non-participation rates for Black/African-American women are 8 percentage points lower in urban areas (24 percent) than in rural areas (32 percent).

**FIGURE 19.** Rural women are more likely not to be in the labor force than urban women across all races/ethnicities.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include adults ages 25–64.

## Rural Americans are more likely to be disabled, possibly because of physically demanding working conditions and chronic pain.

Why does living in a rural area make it more difficult for people with disabilities to work? Much has been written about the barriers to healthcare access for rural Americans.[84] Rural healthcare is scarce, expensive, and non-specialized. Injured rural workers are thus less likely to receive adequate care, face long trips to see specialists, and frequently decline to receive some forms of care because of limitations in their insurance coverage.[85]

The work in rural America is more likely to require physical labor. Jobs that require a higher level of physical labor are more likely to result in workplace injuries. Studies show that rural workers' occupations have a 25 percent higher incidence of workplace injuries than urban workers' occupations.[86]

84 Warshaw, "Health Disparities Affect Millions in Rural U.S. Communities," 2017; Iezzoni et al., "Rural Residents with Disabilities Confront Substantial Barriers to Obtaining Primary Care," 2006.
85 Iezzoni et al., "Rural Residents with Disabilities Confront Substantial Barriers to Obtaining Primary Care," 2006.
86 Myers et al., "America at a Glance: Occupational Injuries among Rural Workers," 2022. The incidence of workplace injuries is measured by counting injuries per 10,000 full-time-equivalent employees.

This higher incidence of workplace injuries frequently results in higher use of painkilling drugs. The wide distribution of prescription opioid painkillers is one possible explanation for declining labor-force participation. Studies show that death and injury from misuse of opioids were concentrated from 2000 to 2010 in states that are largely rural, such as Kentucky, West Virginia, Alaska, and Oklahoma.[87] Opioid misuse alone could explain as much as one-fifth of the national decline in labor-force participation by men from 1999 to 2015 and as much as one-quarter of the decline in labor-force participation among women.[88] Those declines in the labor force were heightened in rural areas, where misuse of opioid painkillers was most widespread.

With rural America's higher percentage of workplace injuries and aging population, it is perhaps not surprising that rural residents are much more likely to have a disability than urban residents. While rural residents make up 13 percent of the population, they make up 19 percent of all US residents who have disabilities (Table 14). The disability rate in rural areas (15 percent) is 5 percentage points higher than the urban disability rate (10 percent).

**TABLE 14.** Adults living in rural areas have a higher likelihood of disability than those in urban areas.

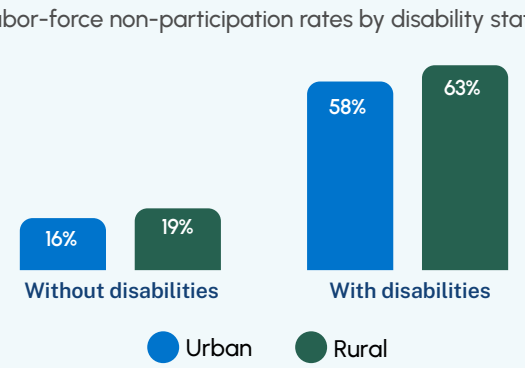
| | Population distribution | Disability distribution | Disability rate |
|---|---|---|---|
| Urban | 87% | 81% | 10% |
| Rural | 13% | 19% | 15% |
| **Total** | **100%** | **100%** | |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include adults ages 25–64.

Both those without disabilities and those with disabilities are more likely not to be in the labor force in rural areas than in urban areas (Figure 20). In rural areas, 63 percent of individuals with disabilities are not in the labor force, compared to 58 percent of those in urban areas. Among individuals without disabilities, 19 percent are not in the labor force in rural areas, compared to 16 percent of those in urban areas. The difference in labor-force non-participation rates is greater among those with disabilities (5 percentage points) than among those without disabilities (3 percentage points). The difference in non-participation rates between those with and without disabilities is smaller within the urban population (42 percentage points) than within the rural population (44 percentage points), suggesting a disability effect that is greater in rural areas. Together, these differences suggest that disability is a greater challenge for labor-force participation in rural areas than in urban areas.

87 Keyes et al., "Understanding the Rural–Urban Differences in Nonmedical Prescription Opioid Use and Abuse in the United States," 2014. Opioid painkillers were first widely prescribed in the 1990s. Overdose deaths from misuse of opioids quadrupled from 1999 to 2014.
88 Krueger, "Where Have All the Workers Gone?," 2017.

**FIGURE 20.** Living in a rural area exacerbates labor-force non-participation rates for those with disabilities.




Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include adults ages 25–64.

How much impact does this divide in disability rates between urban and rural areas have on relative engagement with the labor market?[89] While we might expect a greater lack of economic opportunity in rural areas to be driving those areas' lower labor-force participation rates, equal shares (2 percent) of urban and rural Americans indicate not being able to find work as their reason for not being in the labor force in the past year (Figure 21).

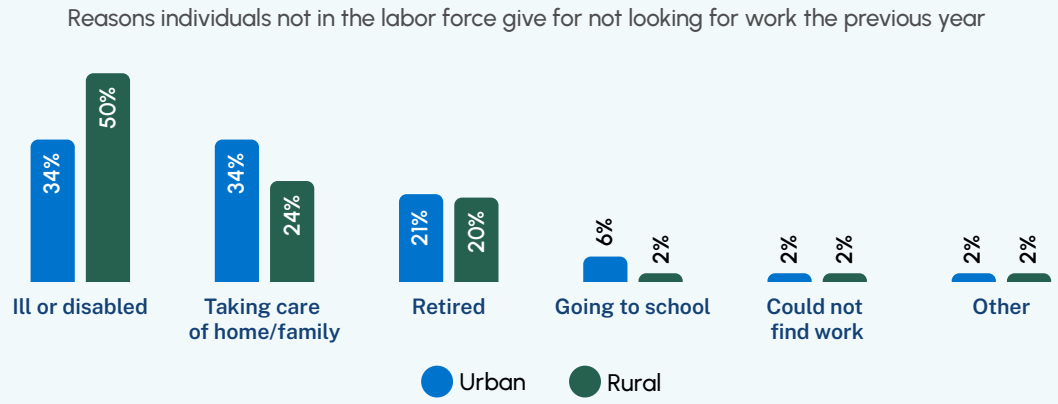
However, half of rural adults who are not in the labor force indicate illness or disability as their reason for not looking for work in the previous year. Of the stated reasons, this is the most-often reported reason among rural adults, and the only reason that is more likely to be reported by rural adults than urban adults.

A smaller share of rural Americans (24 percent) than urban Americans (34 percent) indicate caregiving as a reason for being out of the labor force. These findings are consistent when limited to women, with 48 percent of urban women, compared to 36 percent of rural women, stating family reasons for not participating in the labor force (Table 15). These findings cast doubt on the assumption that rural areas might have lower female labor-force participation rates due to a higher prevalence of traditional female caregiving gender norms in rural America.

About 64 percent of rural men list disability or illness as their reason for not working, compared to 51 percent of urban men. A smaller proportion of rural women list disability or illness as their reason for not working (41 percent), but this is still much higher than the proportion of urban women who list disability or illness as their reason for not working (26 percent).

89 We draw from the 2015–19 Current Population Survey's (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC), sometimes referred to as the March Supplement, to examine the reasons rural Americans are not in the labor force. For confidentiality reasons, only about 45 percent of the counties in the CPS can be identified, and the CPS does not include Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA) information. For these reasons, this analysis utilizes the IPUMS METRO variable, in which 0.77 percent of areas are not identified as either rural or urban. Because of the missing data from the areas that are not identified, these rural and urban categories may not be representative of the populations the categories represent.

**FIGURE 21.** Half of rural adults who are not in the labor force say it is because of illness or disability.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include adults ages 25–64.

Based on these data, the story may be not that there is no work in rural America, but that many rural Americans *cannot* work. Over time, with the increased availability of disability insurance, some adults may have been reclassified from unemployed to disabled.[90] Repeated and prolonged unemployment in rural areas might also drive some residents to apply for disability,[91] muddying the distinction between *cannot work* and *cannot find work.*

**TABLE 15.** More rural men and women report illness or disability as their primary reason for not working than urban men and women.

| | REASONS GIVEN BY INDIVIDUALS NOT IN THE LABOR FORCE FOR NOT LOOKING FOR WORK THE PREVIOUS YEAR | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Urban | | Rural | |
| | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Could not find work | 3% | 1% | 3% | 1% |
| Ill or disabled | 51% | 26% | 64% | 41% |
| Taking care of home/family | 8% | 48% | 6% | 36% |
| Going to school | 9% | 5% | 2% | 3% |
| Retired | 27% | 19% | 23% | 18% |
| Other | 3% | 2% | 3% | 1% |
| **Total** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include adults ages 25–64. Columns may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

90 Autor and Duggan, "The Rise in the Disability Rolls and the Decline in Unemployment," 2003.
91 Economist David Autor has indicated that some individuals apply for disability after losing work and struggling to find a new job. McCoy, "Disabled, or Just Desperate?," 2017.

In both rural and urban areas, workers with disabilities who have lower levels of educational attainment have higher rates of non-participation in the labor force than those who have higher levels of educational attainment (Table 16).

**TABLE 16.** More than 60 percent of workers with disabilities who have lower levels of educational attainment are not in the labor force in both urban and rural areas.

| | LIKELIHOOD OF WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES BEING OUT OF THE LABOR FORCE | |
|---|---|---|
| | Urban | Rural |
| Associate's degree or lower | 62% | 65% |
| Bachelor's degree or higher | 38% | 45% |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: The data include adults ages 25–64.

However, the rural-urban difference in non-participation rates among those with disabilities is only about 3 percentage points for those with an associate's degree or less, compared to the 7-percentage-point difference for those with a bachelor's degree or higher. Among those with disabilities, those with higher levels of educational attainment in urban areas are significantly more likely to work than their rural counterparts.

The fact that rural adults with lower levels of educational attainment are much closer to their urban counterparts in non-participation rates does not mean they are faring well, however. Among adults with an associate's degree or less, more than 60 percent of both rural and urban adults with disabilities are not in the labor force. This may be because jobs that do not require higher levels of education are generally physically demanding. To earn higher pay, workers with low levels of educational attainment in rural areas must generally take on jobs that have a higher level of physical risk. But there can be a price to pay: the highest-earning quintile of rural workers has an incidence of occupational injury or illness that is more than 1.5 times higher than that for the highest-earning quintile of urban workers.[92] Having disabilities prevents adults with lower levels of education from working, regardless of whether they are in rural or urban areas.

92 Myers et al., "America at a Glance: Occupational Injuries among Rural Workers," 2022.

PART 3.

# Conclusion and Recommendations

Rural America is not a monolith of poverty and poor job prospects. While rural areas do lag behind urban areas by several metrics, the proportion of their jobs that are good is nearly as high as that in urban areas.

In some instances, rural areas provide even better access to good jobs than urban areas. But the question of whether rural America's jobs are *competitive* remains. Workers are more likely to find good blue-collar jobs in rural areas, but blue-collar occupations pay lower wages than white-collar occupations. Workers without bachelor's degrees also have better economic outcomes in rural areas than in urban areas—but similarly educated workers in urban areas may not be the best reference point for good jobs. The plight of urban workers without a postsecondary education in the new economy has been well-documented. Rural workers without bachelor's degrees may fare better than equivalently educated urban workers, but that does not mean that their economic situations are objectively good.

Income inequality between rural and urban workers grows with higher levels of education. Urban workers with bachelor's degrees have significantly higher earnings than rural workers with the same level of educational attainment. So, while rural America has good jobs for the well-educated, American cities are still engines of economic growth and labor-force opportunities for those with high levels of education. While the highly educated have the highest likelihood of holding good jobs in rural areas, if these workers want to maximize their economic returns to education, cities are still the place to be. But that fact makes the task of rural economic development even more difficult, as rural America struggles to keep its highly educated workers when higher earnings and more professional connections in the city beckon.

Rural America's economic landscape is divided into those who are working and those who are not. Upon employment, rural Americans fare reasonably well. Finding adequate employment, though, often requires education and training. Economic conditions are the most tenuous in rural areas for those with lower levels of education. Education uplifts, and this holds true for rural as well as urban Americans.

Rural America has good jobs but the benefits are not uniform. For example:

1. Rural good jobs are less accessible to women and members of underrepresented racial/ethnic groups.
2. Many good jobs in rural areas are in blue-collar occupations. The majority of rural blue-collar workers have good jobs. The likelihood of finding a good job in a blue-collar occupation is much higher in rural than in urban areas.
3. Workers without a bachelor's degree are more likely to hold a good job in rural areas than in urban areas. Even so, the majority of rural workers without a bachelor's degree do not have good jobs.
4. Postsecondary education increases the likelihood of holding a good job for rural workers; the majority of rural workers with college degrees have good jobs.

Against this backdrop, we make the following recommendations to expand access to rural opportunity and to increase labor-force participation in rural areas. The recommendations are grouped under three broad goals:

1. Build rural human capital.
2. Utilize existing rural human capital.
3. Stimulate rural economic growth.

## Build rural human capital.

Education is key to economic security and mobility. The majority of rural workers with at least a bachelor's degree have good jobs. However, only 25 percent of the rural population has a bachelor's degree or higher. Those without a bachelor's degree are less likely to participate in the labor force, especially in rural areas.

Negative perceptions of the benefits of college discourage the pursuit of higher education. When faced with choosing between continuing their education or entering the workforce, individuals may opt not to continue with their schooling. Based on the jobs that are available to them that do not require postsecondary education, rural youth often perceive education not only as lost earnings in the present, but also as an unnecessary investment. These perceptions of returns to education vary by socioeconomic status. Rural youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely than rural youth from higher socioeconomic backgrounds to report employment or vocational/technical training as their postsecondary plan.[93]

1. To help rural youth make more informed decisions with accurate information and supportive guidance, we need **more comprehensive and accessible counseling services in schools, colleges, and communities.** We need individualized career counseling that begins with each student's career interests, values, and aptitudes, and then seamlessly links those characteristics to educational and career pathways, work-based learning experiences, and concrete jobs available in local labor markets. Counseling about postsecondary options should include information sessions

93 Ali and McWhirter, "Rural Appalachian Youth's Vocational/Educational Postsecondary Aspirations," 2006.

on financial aid; the educational opportunities that best align with a student's qualifications and goals; the local availability of appropriate programs; job projections for the local area and programs that provide the training to fill those jobs; and the benefits of attaining postsecondary credentials, including the earnings outcomes of specific programs. Counseling professionals should build ongoing relationships with students, provide concrete and actionable guidance at critical decision points, and follow up to ensure any barriers on students' pathways are addressed and education and career plans are appropriately modified as students' intentions about their future change. Since the pursuit of higher education is often a family-level decision, greater family engagement on postsecondary awareness[94] could change both parental and student perceptions of the value and accessibility of higher education.

2. **We need the US Department of Education to enforce and enhance two new regulations that are designed to bolster program-level transparency and accountability.** First, a new version of the Gainful Employment rule will apply to certificate programs and all programs at for-profit colleges. In addition, the Financial Value Transparency regulatory framework will apply to all degree programs at public and nonprofit institutions. Together, these regulations will result in new financial outcomes metrics: the earnings premium for program graduates relative to high school graduates, and the debt-to-earnings ratio.[95] Career training programs that fail on these metrics can lose access to Title IV funds. Education leaders in rural areas should identify career programs that may be at risk of losing Title IV funding and develop contingency plans to ensure that access to training in the related fields remains available. The second set of regulations seeks to increase oversight of postsecondary institutions and improve consumer protection for student borrowers. Among other things, the regulations, which will take effect in July 2024, will require that colleges provide required externship or clinical experience opportunities that are "geographically accessible" within 45 days of students completing their other coursework. The regulations also clarify that students who did not graduate from high school but want to pursue "eligible career pathway programs" will be able to access federal financial aid. The regulations also require all colleges to provide "adequate career services."[96]
3. Rural children experience especially high rates of poverty.[97] To address the barriers that students who live in poverty face, **we need to bolster holistic wraparound support services across all levels of education.** This should include ensuring that all students have basic nutrition, shelter, transportation, and access to public health services and medical care; mental health counseling; one-on-one coaching and advising, peer support, and career and job placement services; as well as access to reliable broadband internet in locations that are properly equipped for studying and academic work. Moreover, with proper coordination among different local government and nonprofit entities, colleges and schools can become hubs for all community services, providing easy access to these services for students.

94 Fikes, "Leveraging the Rural Context to Build Family Engagement," 2018.
95 US Department of Education, "Fact Sheet: Holding Colleges Accountable for Delivering Financial Value for Students," 2023.
96 US Department of Education, "Fact Sheet: Protecting Students through Final Regulations That Strengthen Department of Education Oversight and Monitoring of Colleges and Universities," 2023.
97 Lichter and Johnson, "The Changing Spatial Concentration of America's Rural Poor Population," 2007.

4. Many rural areas are education deserts with no postsecondary institutions nearby. For rural youth to have access to higher education, educational opportunities need to expand in the community. Some potential solutions include the following:
    a. **Free community college**. In many parts of the country, community colleges are the most accessible venue for higher education in rural areas. Free community college programs already exist in some form in 32 states.[98] For the lowest-income students, costs, no matter how low, are the biggest barrier to increasing their education. In rural America, where poverty levels are particularly high and postsecondary attainment is particularly low, free community college is perhaps the most important step governments could take to incentivize higher levels of educational attainment.
    b. **Allowing community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees**. Rural youth are far less likely (27 percent) than youth from urban areas (37 percent) to go to college.[99] It makes particular sense in areas where students have especially strong local ties to allow community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees. With this option, students would not have to transfer from the colleges where they are already comfortable in order to pursue a higher degree. Already, at least 24 states have versions of the community college bachelor's degree.[100]
    c. **Expanding early-college high school programs**. These programs allow students to begin earning college credits while in high school. In some programs, students earn both a high school diploma and an associate's degree at graduation. In a North Carolina study, 27 percent of students in an early-college high school program graduated high school with an associate's degree or technical credential. Another 47 percent of students in the program graduated high school with at least some college credits.[101]
5. For students living in areas that cannot be served by physical institutions, we need to seek alternative modes of instruction, such as online learning. To ensure that all who are ready for postsecondary education have the opportunity to learn, we need **to continue building and expanding high-speed broadband access in rural areas to support online learning**. The work to expand reliable broadband internet access to all corners of the country is already underway following the passage of the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act in 2021. This law establishes $65 million to provide broadband access to every American and extend affordable access to more Americans.[102] The lack of broadband internet access disproportionately affects rural communities, and with the expansion of access through the provisions of the infrastructure bill, more Americans in rural areas will have access to online resources and opportunities to learn.

98 Campaign for Free College Tuition, "Our Momentum," 2023.
99 Provasnik et al., *Status of Education in Rural America*, 2007.
100 Weissman, "Two-Year Institutions, Four-Year Degrees," 2021.
101 Edmunds et al., "How Early Colleges Can Make Us Rethink the Separation of High School and Postsecondary Systems," 2020.
102 White House, "President Joe Biden: Investing in America — Build.Gov," 2022.

## Utilize existing rural human capital.

We need both more education and more training in rural areas to tap into the existing skills of current residents, as well as to impart new skills. There are many steps rural officials can take to educate and train current residents even as they try to attract newcomers.

1. Not all good jobs require formal degrees, and workers often already have the general skills for the job. When degree attainment in the form of baccalaureate education is not required, we need **programs that train the local workforce specifically to fill local jobs**.[103] These programs include work-based learning as early as high school,[104] apprenticeships,[105] and educational credits for prior work experience.
2. We need to involve employers much earlier in the pipeline to good jobs by building **relationships between educators and employers.** These connections should go beyond linking employment and earnings data; they should incorporate personal and collaborative relationships. These relationships should result in the joint design of curricula, internships, and apprenticeships, where appropriate.
3. When workers have the requisite skills for a job but are blocked from work because of credentialing barriers, **micro-credentialing and non-degree credentials can provide opportunities for workers to gain recognition for their skills**.[106] Micro-credentials are awarded after short, time-saving courses and are meant to verify workers' skill sets. Micro-credentialing programs would help to make clear that more rural adults are work-ready by building skills and awarding credit for the skill sets they already possess.
4. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passed in 2021 promises to create many more blue-collar jobs in rural areas. To support and increase the blue-collar workforce in rural areas, **we need more programs that offer skills-based certifications and that draw from within the rural population to fulfill these needs.**
5. Because women and members of underrepresented racial/ethnic groups bear the brunt of economic inequality in rural areas, and because access to training is not evenly distributed across society, we need **programs specifically geared toward women and underrepresented racial/ethnic groups that offer credentials for good jobs available in the rural economy**. Women in rural areas are more highly educated than men: among working adults, 29 percent of women in rural areas have at least a bachelor's degree, while only 21 percent of men in rural areas do.[107] Still, rural women are less likely than rural men to have a good job. New programs should be geared toward unlocking the learning, skills, and talents of rural women.

103 Hutchins and Akos, "Rural High School Youth's Access to and Use of School-to-Work Programs," 2013.
104 Boven, "Delivering Work-Based Learning in Rural Schools," 2019.
105 Boren et al., *Rural Apprenticeships for Young People,* 2021.
106 Tinsley et al., *Micro-Credentials for Social Mobility in Rural Postsecondary Communities,* 2022.
107 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2015–19 (pooled).

## Stimulate rural economic growth.

The blue-collar rural workforce is strong, but it cannot be solely depended upon to expand the rural economy. To build a vibrant and diverse rural economy that supports blue-collar workers while also expanding opportunity for those with higher levels of education, the rural economy has to grow. Our recommendations for expanding higher education will produce more highly educated workers — but to accommodate this surge, we need more rural white-collar jobs, especially in science and technology.[108]

Several developments are already in place to facilitate this growth. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly altered the workplace as we know it. After the closure of urban offices and the loosening of rules around remote work in white-collar jobs, a growing number of highly educated workers have been leaving the sky-high housing costs in cities and moving to rural areas.[109] These workers' higher earnings lead to higher consumption levels and higher tax revenue — which in turn pours more money into rural schools and amenities, thus attracting more white-collar workers and building local prosperity.[110] The increase in the white-collar population coupled with the expansion of white-collar occupations in rural areas could narrow regional economic disparities and spur continued growth of the rural economy and rural wealth.[111] The following recommendations could encourage more economic growth in rural areas:

1. **Use funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to improve the quality of life in rural America — either directly or indirectly.** Initiatives funded by the law will expand and repair existing infrastructure (e.g., roads and bridges, high-speed internet, and the power grid); provide clean water to rural areas; and guard against weather hazards and disasters.[112] These infrastructure initiatives require workers and will stimulate rural job growth. The bill also directly sets aside funds to create jobs that clean up pollution in rural areas.
2. As infrastructure is bolstered in rural areas, there will be spillover effects. With increased accessibility through better roads and high-speed internet connectivity, white-collar businesses and workers may find rural areas more attractive because of the lower cost of living and lower rents. As telework becomes a more common feature of the post-pandemic economy, **rural leaders should seek to attract more remote workers.**[113]
3. It will likely take a number of years for workers to relocate in substantial numbers. In the meantime, **local leaders can collaborate with major employers across the country to establish satellite offices that serve as local hubs for those employers** in locations with access to high-quality, high-speed broadband networks.

108 Douglas et al., *Rural America's Tech Employment Landscape*, 2022.
109 Hong and Haag, "The Flight of New York City's Wealthy Was a Once-in-a-Century Shock," 2022; Marema, "Rural Population Bounces Back in 2021," 2022.
110 Nitschke et al., *Rural's Rise,* 2022.
111 Douglas et al., *Rural America's Tech Employment Landscape*, 2022.
112 White House, "Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Rural Playbook," 2022.
113 Rembert et al., *The Rise of Remote Work in Rural America*, 2021.

4. Rural areas, with their history of blue-collar work, seem well situated to house and grow the emerging renewable energy sector.[114] Renewable energy sources, such as solar arrays and wind farms, require a lot of space, and rural America is the only place with the capacity for this infrastructure. Renewable energy is profitable, even more so than traditional energy: every dollar invested in renewable energy creates three times more jobs than a dollar invested in the fossil fuel industry.[115] The emergence of new energy sources is also creating new work; solar photovoltaic installers and wind turbine technicians are expected to be among the fastest-growing occupations over the next decade.[116] **The development of renewable and clean energy in rural areas creates good jobs for the local population and sets in motion future economic and population growth.** Rural America has the potential to be a renewable energy powerhouse, and, as a result, to attract a more diverse workforce, more revenue, and more wealth.

While rural areas are often stigmatized as left behind by the modern economy, they have strengths that can be built upon. Rural workers have many good jobs, but to make sure that continues, we should make education and training more available to rural residents while simultaneously investing more in the skills that rural residents already possess. We should also plan ahead for rural growth. Technology is allowing a larger segment of the public to work from wherever they want, and the less-crowded, less-expensive rural lifestyle is attractive to many high-paid white-collar workers. Rural areas will need sustained investment in infrastructure, healthcare, and job growth, but the seeds of further development have already been planted.

114 Yale Center for Business and the Environment, *Career Pathways in Clean Energy*, 2020.
115 United Nations, "Renewable Energy–Powering a Safer Future," 2022.
116 US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employment Projections," 2022.

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APPENDIX A.

# Data Sources and Methodology

## Data sources

The primary data set for this analysis is five-year pooled data (2015–19) from the American Community Survey (ACS), conducted by the US Census Bureau. The secondary data set for this analysis is five-year pooled data (2015–19) from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC), sometimes referred to as the March Supplement, of the Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS is administered by the US Census Bureau on behalf of the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Our analysis of both data sets includes only 25-to-64-year-old adults.

## Defining rural areas in the ACS and CPS

ACS records identify whether an individual lives and works in a metropolitan area, but almost 10 percent of the records are missing a metropolitan status, and records for which the metropolitan status can be identified are biased toward more densely populated areas.[1] The ACS also provides the county of residence and the county of work. For the analysis in this report, we use the county of residence as the geographic unit of interest because we believe it better captures the physical and geographic constraints that rural Americans face in their access to job opportunities. Unfortunately, counties are only identified in two-thirds of the ACS data.

We used a separate geographic identifier in the ACS to identify urban/rural location. This identifier is the Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA) geography type. PUMAs are non-overlapping, statistical geographic areas containing no fewer than 100,000 people each.

We link PUMAs in the ACS to counties using the Geographic Correspondence Engine (Geocorr) from the University of Missouri Census Data Center. However, not all PUMAs map to counties with a one-to-one correspondence. Some PUMAs span multiple counties, resulting in a many-to-one merge. We duplicate each observation so that when it is expanded, the number of resulting records equals the number of counties in a particular PUMA.

In order to offset the impact of the additional records, we adjusted the statistical weight in the ACS by an allocation factor measured by the proportion of the county's population in a given PUMA. We multiplied this allocation factor by the person-level weight in the American Community Survey and created an adjusted weight for our analysis.

1 IPUMS USA, "METAREA," n.d.

In order to determine if a county is rural, we use the county-based 2013 rural-urban continuum codes (RUCC) from the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS). The continuum codes are a nine-category "classification scheme that distinguishes metropolitan counties by the population size of their metro area, and non-metropolitan counties by degree of urbanization and adjacency to a metro area." The first three categories (codes 1–3) are designated metropolitan (urban) and the last six (codes 4–9) are designated non-metropolitan (rural).[2]

**TABLE A1.** Rural-urban continuum codes

| Code | Description |
|---|---|
| Metro counties | |
| 1 | Counties in metro areas of 1 million population or more |
| 2 | Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population |
| 3 | Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population |
| Non-metro counties | |
| 4 | Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area |
| 5 | Urban population of 20,000 or more, not adjacent to a metro area |
| 6 | Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area |
| 7 | Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area |
| 8 | Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area |
| 9 | Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to a metro area |

Source: US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, "Rural-Urban Continuum Codes: Documentation," 2020.

The CPS does not provide any geographic identifiers, so we were unable to make a similar adjustment for CPS data. The CPS data were used only in the analyses of non-labor-force participation and disability. In these cases, we used the metro status of the individual.

## Regional price adjustments

To account for regional cost-of-living differences,[3] we used regional price parities (RPP) estimated by the US Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) in 2019. The BEA sets the national price level to 100. Regions with higher costs of living have a price index higher than 100, while regions with lower costs of living have a price index lower than 100. Each metropolitan and non-metropolitan area in each state has a price index that reflects different prices vis-à-vis the national index of 100.[4]

2 US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, "Rural-Urban Continuum Codes: Documentation," 2020.
3 Even though we refer to this adjustment as a cost-of-living adjustment, the US Bureau of Economic Analysis does not claim that the indices reflect a "consumption basket" in the same way that the consumer price index does.
4 US Bureau of Economic Analysis, "PARPP Regional Price Parities by Portion," 2022.

We multiplied reported earnings by the RPP and divided by 100. We then determined whether a job was defined as "good" by comparing these adjusted earnings to our good jobs threshold—at least $37,288 for 25-to-44-year-old workers, and at least $47,941 for 45-to-64-year-old workers (in 2019 dollars). In the text, we report all dollar figures as adjusted to 2022 dollars.[5]

Our approach is the mathematical equivalent of comparing reported earnings to an adjusted good jobs threshold. For context, we include adjusted earnings thresholds in Table A2.

**TABLE A2.** Earnings thresholds for good jobs after adjusting for price level differences

| | Good jobs threshold (25-to-44-year-old workers, 2022$) | | Good jobs threshold (45-to-64-year-old workers, 2022$) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural |
| Alabama | $38,800 | $35,800 | $47,800 | $44,100 |
| Alaska | $44,600 | $43,500 | $55,000 | $53,600 |
| Arizona | $42,400 | $35,300 | $52,300 | $43,400 |
| Arkansas | $38,700 | $36,300 | $47,700 | $44,700 |
| California | $47,100 | $43,200 | $58,100 | $53,300 |
| Colorado | $43,900 | $41,700 | $54,100 | $51,400 |
| Connecticut | $44,100 | $43,700 | $54,300 | $53,800 |
| Delaware | $42,400 | N/A | $52,200 | N/A |
| District of Columbia | $46,700 | N/A | $57,500 | N/A |
| Florida | $42,900 | $39,600 | $52,800 | $48,800 |
| Georgia | $41,200 | $36,800 | $50,800 | $45,400 |
| Hawaii | $48,100 | $45,800 | $59,300 | $56,400 |
| Idaho | $40,200 | $38,600 | $49,500 | $47,600 |
| Illinois | $43,300 | $37,700 | $53,300 | $46,400 |
| Indiana | $40,500 | $38,200 | $49,900 | $47,000 |
| Iowa | $40,300 | $37,800 | $49,600 | $46,600 |
| Kansas | $40,600 | $37,900 | $50,100 | $46,700 |
| Kentucky | $39,400 | $36,900 | $48,600 | $45,500 |
| Louisiana | $39,800 | $36,600 | $49,000 | $45,100 |
| Maine | $42,400 | $39,600 | $52,200 | $48,700 |
| Maryland | $45,100 | $39,100 | $55,500 | $48,100 |
| Massachusetts | $45,700 | $46,000 | $56,300 | $56,700 |
| Michigan | $41,200 | $38,300 | $50,800 | $47,100 |

5 The original thresholds in Carnevale et al., *Good Jobs That Pay Without a BA*, 2017 were $35,000 in 2016 dollars for workers under age 45 and $45,000 for workers ages 45 and older. Expressed in 2022 dollars, a good job is one that has earnings of at least $43,000 for workers in the younger age group and at least $55,000 for workers in the older age group.

| | Good jobs threshold (25-to-44-year-old workers, 2022$) | | Good jobs threshold (45-to-64-year-old workers, 2022$) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural |
| Minnesota | $43,300 | $38,400 | $53,300 | $47,300 |
| Mississippi | $38,700 | $36,200 | $47,700 | $44,600 |
| Missouri | $40,500 | $37,200 | $49,900 | $45,800 |
| Montana | $40,200 | $40,300 | $49,600 | $49,700 |
| Nebraska | $40,900 | $38,300 | $50,300 | $47,100 |
| Nevada | $42,500 | $40,600 | $52,400 | $50,100 |
| New Hampshire | $45,000 | $42,900 | $55,400 | $52,800 |
| New Jersey | $47,500 | N/A | $58,500 | N/A |
| New Mexico | $40,600 | $38,200 | $50,100 | $47,000 |
| New York | $47,300 | $39,400 | $58,300 | $48,500 |
| North Carolina | $39,900 | $37,200 | $49,200 | $45,900 |
| North Dakota | $40,400 | $38,600 | $49,800 | $47,600 |
| Ohio | $40,300 | $38,200 | $49,600 | $47,100 |
| Oklahoma | $39,500 | $37,000 | $48,600 | $45,600 |
| Oregon | $44,700 | $41,700 | $55,100 | $51,400 |
| Pennsylvania | $42,300 | $38,400 | $52,100 | $47,300 |
| Rhode Island | $43,500 | N/A | $53,600 | N/A |
| South Carolina | $39,900 | $36,200 | $49,100 | $44,600 |
| South Dakota | $40,500 | $38,600 | $49,900 | $47,600 |
| Tennessee | $39,900 | $36,900 | $49,200 | $45,400 |
| Texas | $42,800 | $38,700 | $52,800 | $47,700 |
| Utah | $42,100 | $38,500 | $51,900 | $47,400 |
| Vermont | $43,600 | $41,700 | $53,700 | $51,400 |
| Virginia | $43,600 | $37,100 | $53,700 | $45,700 |
| Washington | $46,200 | $41,900 | $57,000 | $51,700 |
| West Virginia | $38,500 | $36,500 | $47,400 | $45,000 |
| Wisconsin | $41,100 | $38,700 | $50,600 | $47,600 |
| Wyoming | $40,100 | $39,900 | $49,500 | $49,200 |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis "PARPP Regional Price Parities by Portion," 2022.

## How the likelihood of having a good job changes when the definition of rural changes

Our definition of rural uses the rural-urban continuum codes (RUCCs) of four through nine (Table A1). Our findings are relatively stable when we use alternative groupings of the continuum codes (Table A3).

**TABLE A3.** Likelihood of a good job under different classifications of rural

| | Likelihood of a good job |
|---|---|
| Urban | 53.7% |
| Rural (RUCC 4–9) | 49.8% |
| Rurality by population and adjacency | |
| RUCC 4–6 | 50.0% |
| RUCC 7–9 | 49.3% |
| Rurality by adjacency | |
| RUCC 4,6,8 | 50.1% |
| RUCC 5,7,9 | 49.1% |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled), adjusted for geographical differences in cost of living.
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars).


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APPENDIX B.

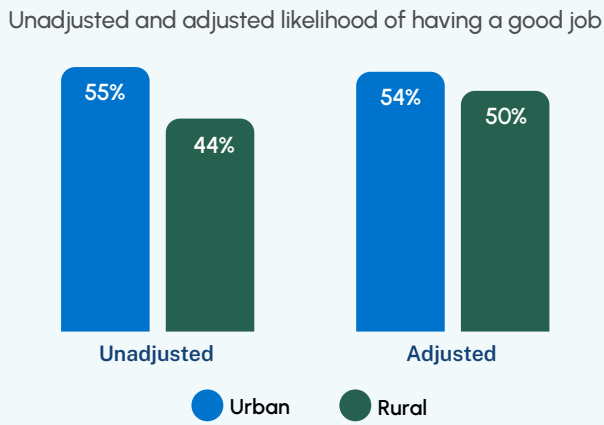
# The Impact of the Cost-of-Living Adjustment

One of the challenges of this report was to account for differences in earnings levels between urban and rural areas, and how they related to our threshold for what constitutes a good job. On the surface, inequality between rural and urban areas is stark: comparing our national good jobs threshold to reported earnings (unadjusted for cost-of-living differences), only 44 percent of rural workers have good jobs, compared to 55 percent of urban workers (Figure B1) — an 11-percentage-point difference.

However, to more fairly compare economic opportunity in different geographic areas, we need to account for differences in cost of living. When we apply cost-of-living adjustments, the likelihood of holding a good job is 50 percent for rural workers and 54 percent for urban workers — a 4-percentage-point difference.

To provide additional context, the following tables show the median earnings among workers with good jobs in rural and in urban areas, disaggregated by different factors: (1) level of educational attainment, (2) bachelor's or associate's degree and state of residence, and (3) race/ethnicity. We include unadjusted values and values that are adjusted by cost-of-living for comparison (Tables B1 through B6).

**FIGURE B1.** With cost-of-living adjustments, half of the jobs in rural America are good jobs, an almost equal proportion to urban America.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled).
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars). The unadjusted shares are based on calculations comparing reported earnings to this threshold, while the adjusted shares are based on calculations comparing earnings adjusted for the cost-of-living to this threshold.

**TABLE B1.** Median earnings among rural and urban workers with good jobs, by level of educational attainment (2022$, unadjusted for differences in cost of living)

| | MEDIAN EARNINGS (2022$) AMONG WORKERS WITH A GOOD JOB (UNADJUSTED) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Educational attainment | Urban | Rural | Urban-rural difference |
| Less than high school | $66,000 | $60,000 | $6,000 |
| High school | $69,000 | $62,000 | $7,000 |
| Some college/associate's degree | $73,000 | $64,000 | $9,000 |
| Bachelor's degree | $89,000 | $70,000 | $19,000 |
| Master's degree or higher | $105,000 | $79,000 | $26,000 |
| **All** | **$82,000** | **$67,000** | **$15,000** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled), unadjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars).

**TABLE B2.** Median earnings among rural and urban workers with good jobs, by level of educational attainment (2022$, adjusted for differences in cost of living)

| | MEDIAN EARNINGS (2022$) AMONG WORKERS WITH A GOOD JOB (ADJUSTED) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Educational attainment | Urban | Rural | Urban-rural difference |
| Less than high school | $64,000 | $67,000 | ($3,000) |
| High school | $68,000 | $70,000 | ($2,000) |
| Some college/associate's degree | $73,000 | $72,000 | $1,000 |
| Bachelor's degree | $88,000 | $78,000 | $10,000 |
| Master's degree or higher | $103,000 | $87,000 | $16,000 |
| **All** | **$81,000** | **$74,000** | **$7,000** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars).

**TABLE B3.** Median earnings among rural and urban workers with good jobs, by level of educational attainment and by state (2022$, unadjusted for differences in cost of living)

| | MEDIAN EARNINGS (2022$) AMONG WORKERS WITH A GOOD JOB (UNADJUSTED) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Associate's degree or lower | | | Bachelor's degree or higher | | |
| State | Urban | Rural | Urban-rural difference | Urban | Rural | Urban-rural difference |
| Alabama | $64,000 | $60,000 | $4,000 | $81,000 | $69,000 | $12,000 |
| Alaska | $77,000 | $78,000 | ($1,000) | $96,000 | $90,000 | $6,000 |
| Arizona | $68,000 | $61,000 | $7,000 | $90,000 | $72,000 | $18,000 |
| Arkansas | $62,000 | $59,000 | $3,000 | $79,000 | $67,000 | $12,000 |
| California | $78,000 | $72,000 | $6,000 | $112,000 | $88,000 | $24,000 |
| Colorado | $72,000 | $68,000 | $4,000 | $94,000 | $75,000 | $19,000 |
| Connecticut | $74,000 | $78,000 | ($4,000) | $105,000 | $95,000 | $10,000 |
| Delaware | $71,000 | N/A | N/A | $92,000 | N/A | N/A |
| District of Columbia | $78,000 | N/A | N/A | $111,000 | N/A | N/A |
| Florida | $68,000 | $62,000 | $6,000 | $86,000 | $73,000 | $13,000 |
| Georgia | $67,000 | $60,000 | $7,000 | $90,000 | $73,000 | $17,000 |
| Hawaii | $78,000 | $74,000 | $4,000 | $92,000 | $86,000 | $6,000 |
| Idaho | $65,000 | $63,000 | $2,000 | $82,000 | $75,000 | $7,000 |
| Illinois | $72,000 | $63,000 | $9,000 | $98,000 | $74,000 | $24,000 |
| Indiana | $67,000 | $62,000 | $5,000 | $83,000 | $74,000 | $9,000 |
| Iowa | $64,000 | $61,000 | $3,000 | $84,000 | $73,000 | $11,000 |
| Kansas | $67,000 | $61,000 | $6,000 | $84,000 | $67,000 | $17,000 |
| Kentucky | $64,000 | $61,000 | $3,000 | $80,000 | $69,000 | $11,000 |
| Louisiana | $70,000 | $67,000 | $3,000 | $79,000 | $70,000 | $9,000 |
| Maine | $67,000 | $62,000 | $5,000 | $83,000 | $71,000 | $12,000 |
| Maryland | $76,000 | $68,000 | $8,000 | $105,000 | $88,000 | $17,000 |
| Massachusetts | $77,000 | $73,000 | $4,000 | $104,000 | $89,000 | $15,000 |
| Michigan | $69,000 | $62,000 | $7,000 | $92,000 | $78,000 | $14,000 |
| Minnesota | $70,000 | $62,000 | $8,000 | $93,000 | $75,000 | $18,000 |
| Mississippi | $63,000 | $59,000 | $4,000 | $75,000 | $67,000 | $8,000 |
| Missouri | $65,000 | $60,000 | $5,000 | $84,000 | $66,000 | $18,000 |
| Montana | $67,000 | $68,000 | ($1,000) | $75,000 | $76,000 | ($1,000) |
| Nebraska | $64,000 | $62,000 | $2,000 | $80,000 | $70,000 | $10,000 |
| Nevada | $69,000 | $73,000 | ($4,000) | $86,000 | $86,000 | $0 |
| New Hampshire | $76,000 | $69,000 | $7,000 | $99,000 | $86,000 | $13,000 |
| New Jersey | $82,000 | N/A | N/A | $111,000 | N/A | N/A |
| New Mexico | $66,000 | $69,000 | ($3,000) | $83,000 | $75,000 | $8,000 |
| New York | $78,000 | $64,000 | $14,000 | $103,000 | $78,000 | $25,000 |

| | MEDIAN EARNINGS (2022$) AMONG WORKERS WITH A GOOD JOB (UNADJUSTED) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Associate's degree or lower | | | Bachelor's degree or higher | | |
| State | Urban | Rural | Urban-rural difference | Urban | Rural | Urban-rural difference |
| North Carolina | $63,000 | $60,000 | $3,000 | $85,000 | $69,000 | $16,000 |
| North Dakota | $66,000 | $70,000 | ($4,000) | $75,000 | $73,000 | $2,000 |
| Ohio | $66,000 | $62,000 | $4,000 | $87,000 | $74,000 | $13,000 |
| Oklahoma | $65,000 | $62,000 | $3,000 | $81,000 | $67,000 | $14,000 |
| Oregon | $72,000 | $66,000 | $6,000 | $94,000 | $78,000 | $16,000 |
| Pennsylvania | $69,000 | $62,000 | $7,000 | $92,000 | $75,000 | $17,000 |
| Rhode Island | $70,000 | N/A | N/A | $92,000 | N/A | N/A |
| South Carolina | $63,000 | $59,000 | $4,000 | $80,000 | $69,000 | $11,000 |
| South Dakota | $62,000 | $60,000 | $2,000 | $72,000 | $68,000 | $4,000 |
| Tennessee | $64,000 | $60,000 | $4,000 | $81,000 | $69,000 | $12,000 |
| Texas | $71,000 | $67,000 | $4,000 | $92,000 | $71,000 | $21,000 |
| Utah | $68,000 | $69,000 | ($1,000) | $90,000 | $78,000 | $12,000 |
| Vermont | $69,000 | $67,000 | $2,000 | $83,000 | $78,000 | $5,000 |
| Virginia | $72,000 | $61,000 | $11,000 | $105,000 | $74,000 | $31,000 |
| Washington | $78,000 | $69,000 | $9,000 | $105,000 | $84,000 | $21,000 |
| West Virginia | $67,000 | $65,000 | $2,000 | $77,000 | $67,000 | $10,000 |
| Wisconsin | $67,000 | $63,000 | $4,000 | $84,000 | $75,000 | $9,000 |
| Wyoming | $70,000 | $75,000 | ($5,000) | $75,000 | $76,000 | ($1,000) |
| **All** | **$71,000** | **$62,000** | **$9,000** | **$96,000** | **$73,000** | **$23,000** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled), unadjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.
Note: Delaware, the District of Columbia, New Jersey, and Rhode Island are not included in the analysis of rural states because the states do not have any rural counties, as defined by the US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars).

**TABLE B4.** Median earnings among rural and urban workers with good jobs, by level of educational attainment and by state (2022$, adjusted for differences in cost of living)

| | MEDIAN EARNINGS (2022$) AMONG WORKERS WITH A GOOD JOB (ADJUSTED) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Associate's degree or lower | | | Bachelor's degree or higher | | |
| State | Urban | Rural | Urban-rural difference | Urban | Rural | Urban-rural difference |
| Alabama | $71,000 | $72,000 | ($1,000) | $89,000 | $82,000 | $7,000 |
| Alaska | $74,000 | $77,000 | ($3,000) | $92,000 | $89,000 | $3,000 |
| Arizona | $68,000 | $74,000 | ($6,000) | $91,000 | $87,000 | $4,000 |
| Arkansas | $69,000 | $70,000 | ($1,000) | $88,000 | $79,000 | $9,000 |
| California | $71,000 | $71,000 | $0 | $101,000 | $87,000 | $14,000 |
| Colorado | $70,000 | $70,000 | $0 | $92,000 | $77,000 | $15,000 |
| Connecticut | $72,000 | $76,000 | ($4,000) | $102,000 | $93,000 | $9,000 |
| Delaware | $71,000 | N/A | N/A | $93,000 | N/A | N/A |
| District of Columbia | $71,000 | N/A | N/A | $102,000 | N/A | N/A |
| Florida | $68,000 | $67,000 | $1,000 | $86,000 | $79,000 | $7,000 |
| Georgia | $69,000 | $70,000 | ($1,000) | $93,000 | $85,000 | $8,000 |
| Hawaii | $69,000 | $70,000 | ($1,000) | $82,000 | $80,000 | $2,000 |
| Idaho | $70,000 | $70,000 | $0 | $87,000 | $83,000 | $4,000 |
| Illinois | $71,000 | $72,000 | ($1,000) | $97,000 | $85,000 | $12,000 |
| Indiana | $71,000 | $70,000 | $1,000 | $88,000 | $83,000 | $5,000 |
| Iowa | $69,000 | $69,000 | $0 | $89,000 | $83,000 | $6,000 |
| Kansas | $70,000 | $69,000 | $1,000 | $89,000 | $76,000 | $13,000 |
| Kentucky | $69,000 | $71,000 | ($2,000) | $87,000 | $80,000 | $7,000 |
| Louisiana | $76,000 | $79,000 | ($3,000) | $85,000 | $82,000 | $3,000 |
| Maine | $68,000 | $67,000 | $1,000 | $84,000 | $77,000 | $7,000 |
| Maryland | $72,000 | $75,000 | ($3,000) | $100,000 | $96,000 | $4,000 |
| Massachusetts | $72,000 | $68,000 | $4,000 | $97,000 | $83,000 | $14,000 |
| Michigan | $72,000 | $69,000 | $3,000 | $95,000 | $87,000 | $8,000 |
| Minnesota | $69,000 | $69,000 | $0 | $92,000 | $83,000 | $9,000 |
| Mississippi | $70,000 | $70,000 | $0 | $83,000 | $79,000 | $4,000 |
| Missouri | $69,000 | $69,000 | $0 | $89,000 | $76,000 | $13,000 |
| Montana | $71,000 | $72,000 | ($1,000) | $79,000 | $81,000 | ($2,000) |
| Nebraska | $68,000 | $69,000 | ($1,000) | $84,000 | $78,000 | $6,000 |
| Nevada | $69,000 | $77,000 | ($8,000) | $86,000 | $90,000 | ($4,000) |
| New Hampshire | $72,000 | $69,000 | $3,000 | $95,000 | $86,000 | $9,000 |
| New Jersey | $74,000 | N/A | N/A | $100,000 | N/A | N/A |
| New Mexico | $69,000 | $77,000 | ($8,000) | $87,000 | $84,000 | $3,000 |
| New York | $71,000 | $70,000 | $1,000 | $93,000 | $85,000 | $8,000 |

| State | MEDIAN EARNINGS (2022$) AMONG WORKERS WITH A GOOD JOB (ADJUSTED) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Associate's degree or lower | | | Bachelor's degree or higher | | |
| | Urban | Rural | Urban-rural difference | Urban | Rural | Urban-rural difference |
| North Carolina | $68,000 | $69,000 | ($1,000) | $91,000 | $79,000 | $12,000 |
| North Dakota | $70,000 | $78,000 | ($8,000) | $79,000 | $81,000 | ($2,000) |
| Ohio | $70,000 | $70,000 | $0 | $92,000 | $83,000 | $9,000 |
| Oklahoma | $70,000 | $72,000 | ($2,000) | $88,000 | $78,000 | $10,000 |
| Oregon | $69,000 | $68,000 | $1,000 | $89,000 | $80,000 | $9,000 |
| Pennsylvania | $70,000 | $70,000 | $0 | $93,000 | $83,000 | $10,000 |
| Rhode Island | $69,000 | N/A | N/A | $90,000 | N/A | N/A |
| South Carolina | $68,000 | $69,000 | ($1,000) | $86,000 | $81,000 | $5,000 |
| South Dakota | $66,000 | $66,000 | $0 | $76,000 | $76,000 | $0 |
| Tennessee | $68,000 | $70,000 | ($2,000) | $86,000 | $80,000 | $6,000 |
| Texas | $71,000 | $74,000 | ($3,000) | $92,000 | $79,000 | $13,000 |
| Utah | $69,000 | $77,000 | ($8,000) | $91,000 | $87,000 | $4,000 |
| Vermont | $67,000 | $68,000 | ($1,000) | $81,000 | $80,000 | $1,000 |
| Virginia | $71,000 | $70,000 | $1,000 | $103,000 | $86,000 | $17,000 |
| Washington | $72,000 | $70,000 | $2,000 | $97,000 | $86,000 | $11,000 |
| West Virginia | $75,000 | $76,000 | ($1,000) | $86,000 | $79,000 | $7,000 |
| Wisconsin | $69,000 | $70,000 | ($1,000) | $87,000 | $83,000 | $4,000 |
| Wyoming | $75,000 | $80,000 | ($5,000) | $80,000 | $81,000 | ($1,000) |
| **All** | **$70,000** | **$70,000** | **$0** | **$93,000** | **$82,000** | **$11,000** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.
Note: Delaware, the District of Columbia, New Jersey, and Rhode Island are not included in the analysis of rural states because the states do not have any rural counties, as defined by the US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars).

**TABLE B5.** Median earnings among rural and urban workers with good jobs, by race/ethnicity (2022$, unadjusted for differences in cost of living)

| | MEDIAN EARNINGS (2022$) AMONG WORKERS WITH A GOOD JOB (UNADJUSTED) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Urban | Rural | Urban-rural difference |
| White | $85,000 | $67,000 | $18,000 |
| Black/African American | $72,000 | $57,000 | $15,000 |
| Hispanic/Latino | $72,000 | $61,000 | $11,000 |
| Asian/Asian American | $100,000 | $74,000 | $26,000 |
| American Indian/Alaska Native | $71,000 | $61,000 | $10,000 |
| Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | $74,000 | $68,000 | $6,000 |
| Other/Two or more races | $81,000 | $64,000 | $17,000 |
| **All** | **$82,000** | **$67,000** | **$15,000** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled), unadjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars).

**TABLE B6.** Median earnings among rural and urban workers with good jobs, by race/ethnicity (2022$, adjusted for differences in cost of living)

| | MEDIAN EARNINGS (2022$) AMONG WORKERS WITH A GOOD JOB (ADJUSTED) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Race/ethnicity | Urban | Rural | Urban-rural difference |
| White | $84,000 | $75,000 | $9,000 |
| Black/African American | $71,000 | $67,000 | $4,000 |
| Hispanic/Latino | $69,000 | $67,000 | $2,000 |
| Asian/Asian American | $96,000 | $80,000 | $16,000 |
| American Indian/Alaska Native | $72,000 | $69,000 | $3,000 |
| Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | $70,000 | $68,000 | $2,000 |
| Other/Two or more races | $79,000 | $70,000 | $9,000 |
| **All** | **$81,000** | **$74,000** | **$7,000** |

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–19 (pooled), adjusted for geographic differences in cost of living.
Note: A good job is one that pays a minimum of approximately $43,000 for workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of approximately $55,000 for workers ages 45–64 (in 2022 dollars).

***Small Towns, Big Opportunities:*** *Many Workers in Rural Areas Have Good Jobs, but These Areas Need Greater Investment in Education, Training, and Career Counseling* can be accessed online at cew.georgetown.edu/ruralgoodjobs.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