

APPENDIX C: AN OVERVIEW OF APPALACHIAN COUNTIES BY ECONOMIC STATUS DESIGNATION

Comparing Appalachian Counties by Economic Status

Every year, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) applies an [index-based classification system](#) to compare each county in Appalachia with national averages to understand how counties are performing. After analyzing three-year average unemployment rates, per capita market income, and poverty rates, each one of Appalachia's 423 counties is classified within one of five economic status designations: distressed, at-risk, transitional, competitive or attainment. The designations are also used to determine the match requirements for ARC grants, as well as research topics and investment strategies targeting resources to the region's most distressed areas. This appendix uses selected demographic and socioeconomic measures to provide an overview comparing the five economic status designations in Appalachia. See the descriptions below of how the designations are ordered into economic levels.

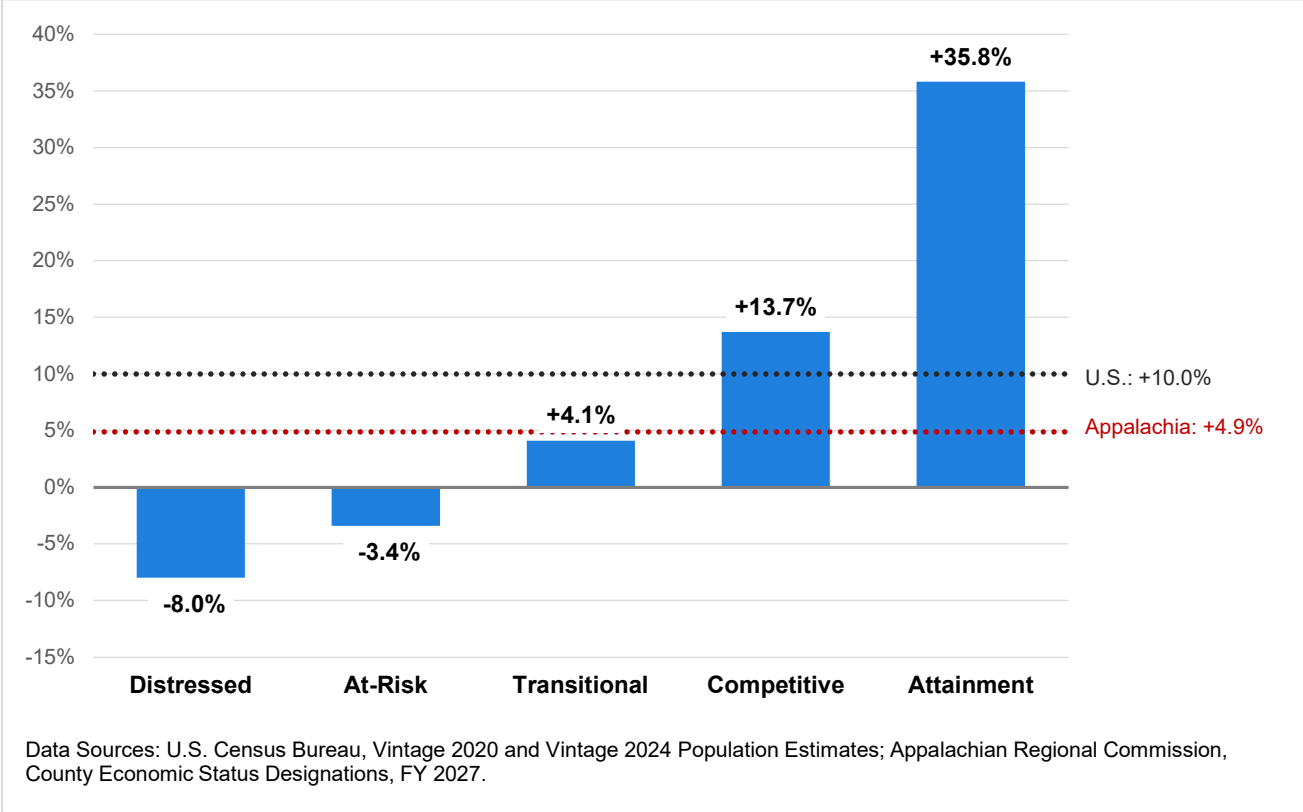
- **Distressed.** Distressed counties are the most economically depressed counties. They rank in the worst 10% of the nation's counties.
- **At-Risk.** At-Risk counties are those at risk of becoming economically distressed. They rank between the worst 10% and the worst 25% of the nation's counties.
- **Transitional.** Transitional counties are those transitioning between strong and weak economies. They make up the largest economic status designation. Transitional counties rank between the worst 25% and the best 25% of the nation's counties.
- **Competitive.** Competitive counties are those that are able to compete in the national economy but are not in the highest 10% of the nation's counties. Counties ranking between the best 10% and the best 25% of the nation's counties are classified competitive.
- **Attainment.** Attainment counties are the economically strongest counties. Counties ranking in the best 10% of the nation's counties are classified attainment.

Among the 423 counties of the Appalachian Region, 76 are considered distressed, 85 are at risk, 240 are transitional, 18 are competitive, and four are attainment.

Demographic and Housing Characteristics

The Appalachian Region's population grew between 2010 and 2024 (4.9 percent), but not at the same magnitude as the U.S. overall (10 percent) (see Table C.1). Looking within the Appalachian Region, distressed and at-risk counties experienced notable population declines between 2010 and 2024 (-8 and -3.4 percents, respectively), while transitional counties had modest population growth over this period (4.1 percent). Meanwhile, population change in the region's competitive (13.7 percent) and attainment counties (35.8 percent) was well above overall U.S. growth (see Figure C.1).

Figure C.1: Population Change by County Economic Status Among Counties in the Appalachian Region, 2010 to 2024



While the median age in the U.S. is 39.1 years, the Appalachian Region overall is slightly older (41.2 years) and varies within the region. In none of the economic status county designation groupings was median age younger than that of the U.S. overall. And only the region's competitive (39.9 years) and attainment counties (40.7 years) were below the region's overall median age. Further, attainment counties stood out for having a higher share of the population younger than 18 (22.7 percent) when compared with the U.S. (21.5 percent) and region as a whole (20.6 percent).

Relative to the nation, the Appalachian Region is less racially and ethnically varied. Overall, 42.5 percent of the population in the U.S. and 22.0 percent of the population of the region identify as people of color. Attainment counties (30.4 percent), competitive counties (25.2 percent), and transitional counties (22.8 percent) are above the region's average. Within attainment counties, the growth in the share of those identifying as a person of color increased by 11.8 percentage points between 2010 and 2024—higher than both the U.S. (6.3 percentage points) and overall Appalachian Region (5.5 percentage points).

Overall, educational attainment levels are lower in the Appalachian Region when compared with the U.S. and this gap is more pronounced among the region's distressed and at-risk counties. While 90.2 percent of the U.S. and region's populations have at least a high school degree, this is 84.4 percent of those in distressed counties and 88.3 percent of those in at-risk counties (see Figure C.2).

On the other hand, bachelor's degree attainment is higher than the U.S. average in Appalachia's competitive and attainment counties, where the share of people ages 25 to 64 with a bachelor's degree is well above shares in the U.S. (37.3 percent) and region (29.5 percent) (see Figure C.3). Half of the working age population in attainment counties (50.4 percent) and over 4 in 10 in competitive counties (41.6 percent) hold at least bachelor's degrees. More people in these counties also hold degrees in science and engineering relative to the Appalachian Region overall. In contrast, those in distressed and at-risk counties have lower educational attainment than the nation and region.

Figure C.2: Percent of Persons Ages 25 to 64 With a High School Diploma or More in the Appalachian Region by County Economic Status, 2020-2024

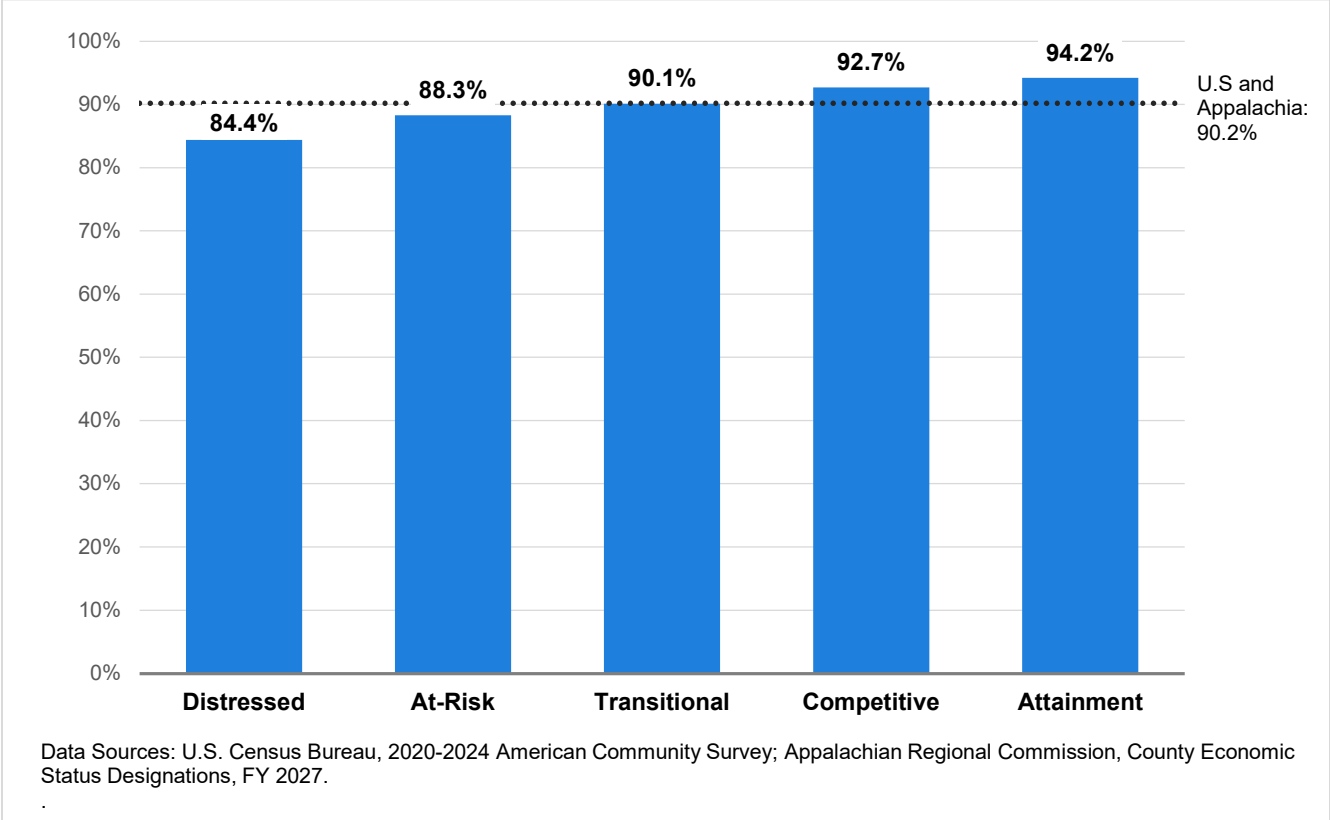
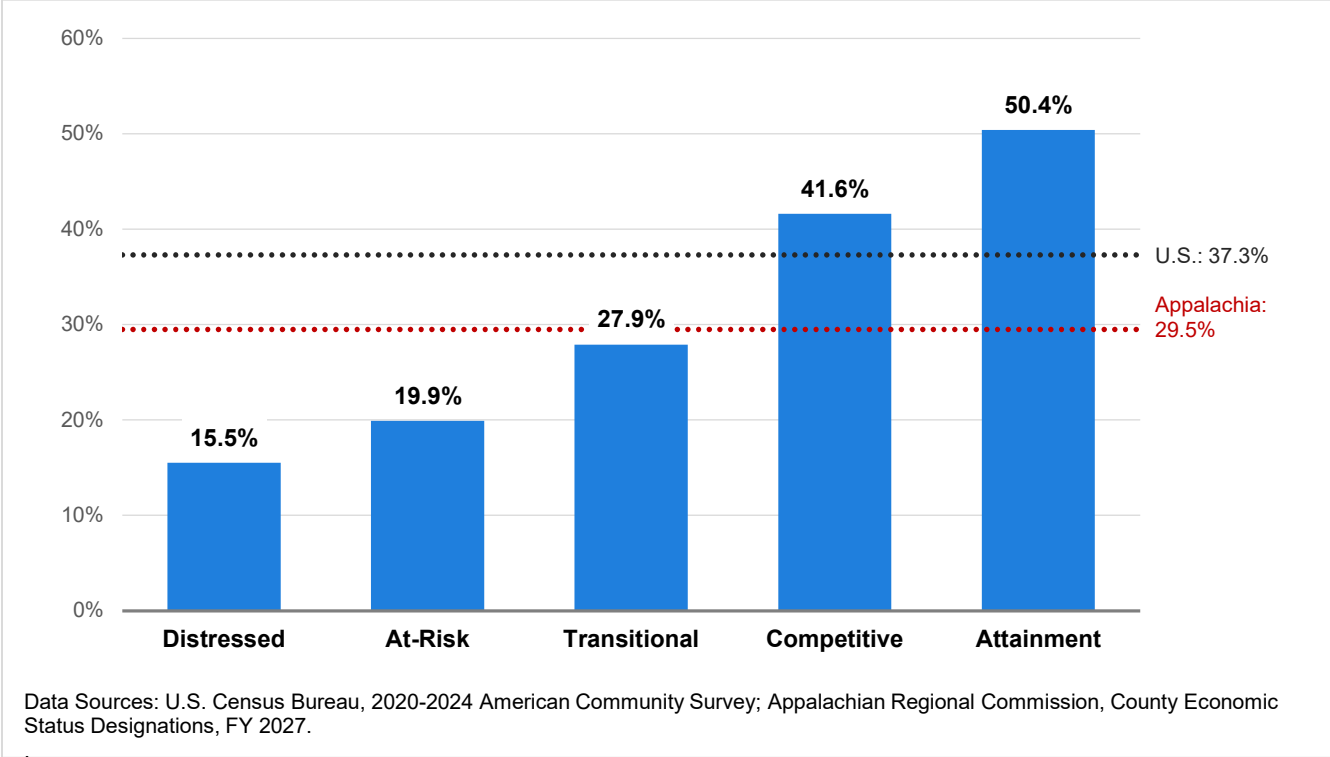


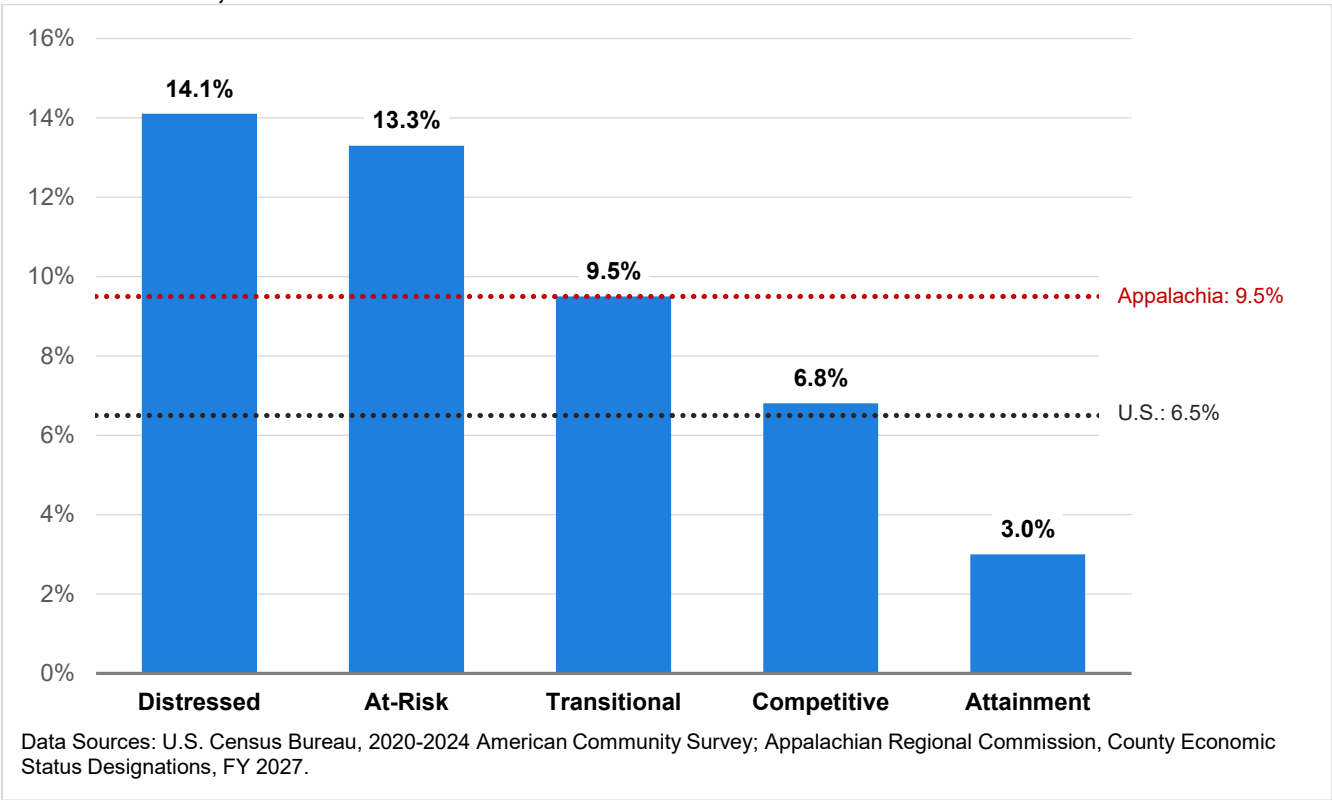
Figure C.3: Percent of Persons Ages 25 to 64 With a Bachelor's Degree or More in the Appalachian Region by County Economic Status, 2020-2024



Housing also varies according to the economic designations of counties. Shares of single-unit dwellings vary among the region’s counties according to their economic status designation, ranging from 66.1 percent in distressed counties to 85.7 percent in attainment counties. Further, distressed counties have a greater share of mobile homes (25.5 percent) and vacant homes (17.4 percent) than the region’s averages (10.6 and 13.0 percent). In attainment counties, just 5 percent of homes are vacant.

Unsurprisingly, there is a digital divide that tracks with the continuum of economic status designations among counties in the region. Nearly all households in attainment counties have one or more computer devices (97.7 percent) which is above both the U.S. (95.5 percent) and Appalachian Region (93.0 percent). While fewer households in distressed counties have such access to computer devices (88.7 percent), this gap closed by 10.9 percentage points between 2015-2019 and 2020-2024. Similarly, gaps in broadband and Internet access between the region’s counties are also closing. Although 82.8 percent of households in distressed counties report having high speed internet—as compared with near total coverage in attainment counties (95.7 percent)—distressed counties improved such access by 15.3 percentage points since 2015-2019. Efforts to continue improving high-speed access will certainly help these communities make digital progress considering a notable share of households in distressed (14.1 percent) and at-risk counties (13.3 percent) still lack any access to the internet (see Figure C.4).

Figure C.4: Percent of Households With No Access to the Internet in the Appalachian Region by County Economic Status, 2020-2024



Labor Force and Commuting

Overall, 74.9 percent of the working age population ages 25 to 64 is in the labor force in the Appalachian Region, slightly lower than the national average of 79.1 percent (see Figure C.5). Unsurprisingly, this varies tremendously within the region according to the economic status designations of counties. In attainment counties, 82.5 percent of the working-age population is in the labor force while just 59.3 percent of those in distressed counties are. Similarly, the unemployment rate in distressed counties (5.5 percent) is double that of attainment counties (2.7 percent) (see Figure C.6).

Figure C.5: Percent of Persons Ages 25 to 64 in the Appalachian Region Who Are In the Civilian Labor Force by County Economic Status, 2020-2024

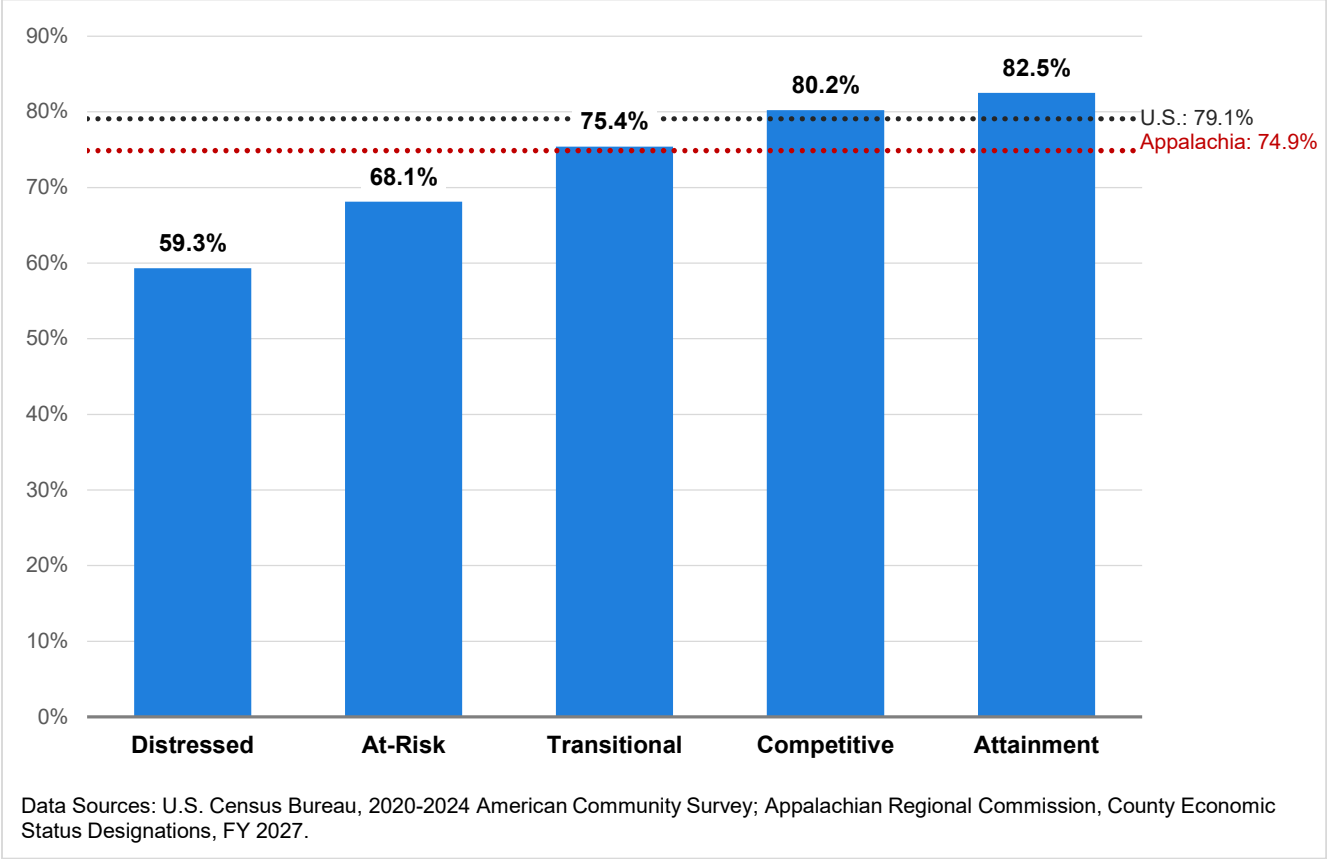
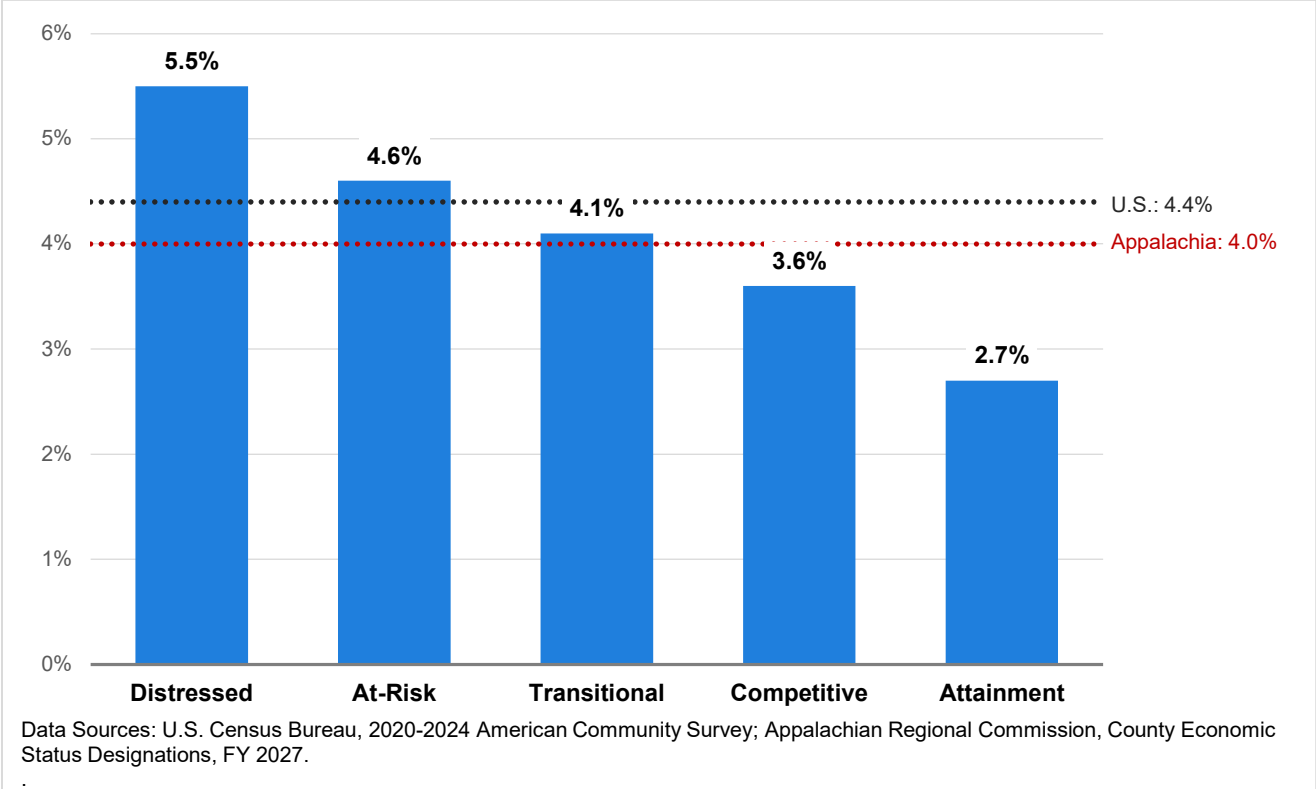


Figure C.6: Unemployment Rate for Civilian Labor Force Participants Ages 25 to 64 in the Appalachian Region by County Economic Status, 2020-2024

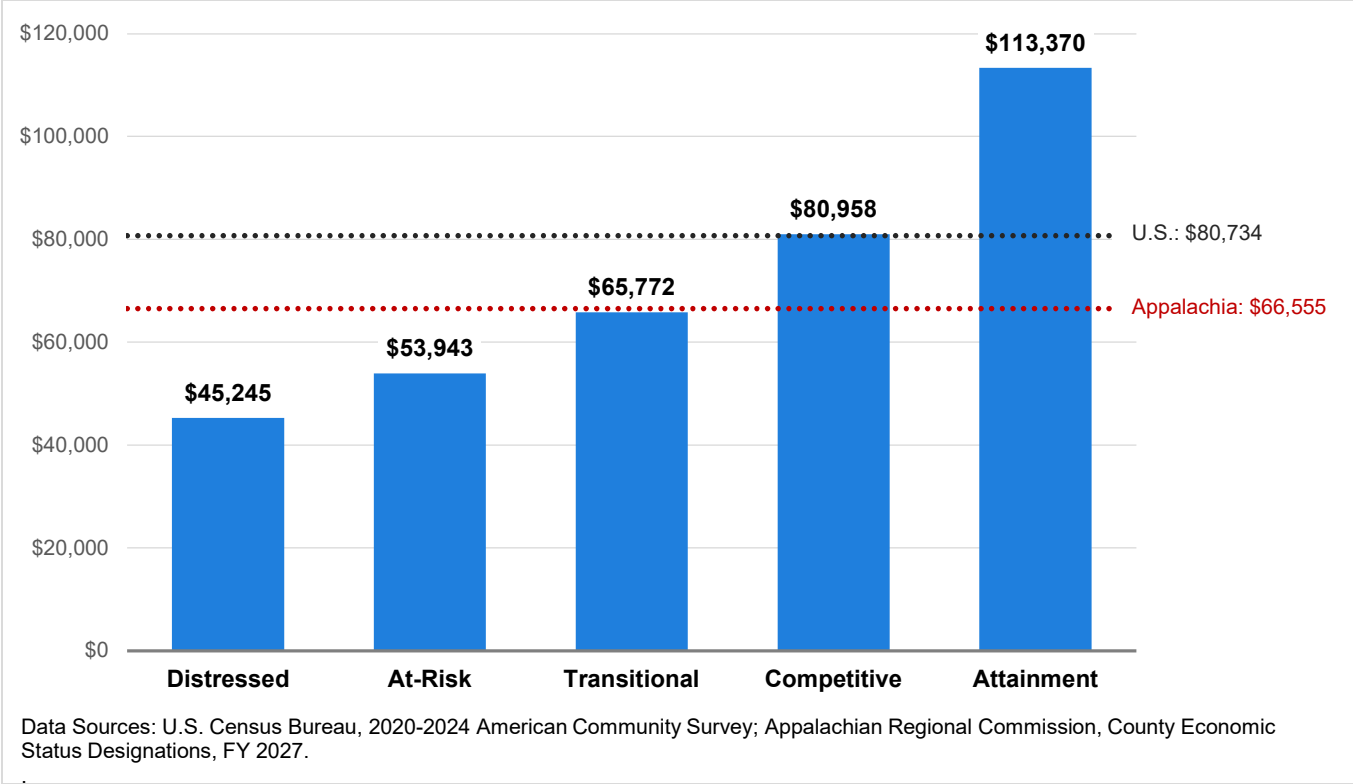


How people get to work also varies across economic status designations of counties. More workers in distressed and at-risk counties drove alone to work (80.3 and 80.4 percents, respectively) compared with those in attainment counties (67.3 percent). Meanwhile, 41.9 percent of those living in attainment counties worked outside their county of residence and many have long commutes—nearly half who worked outside of the home had a commute of 30 minutes or longer—well above both regional and national averages.

Income and Poverty

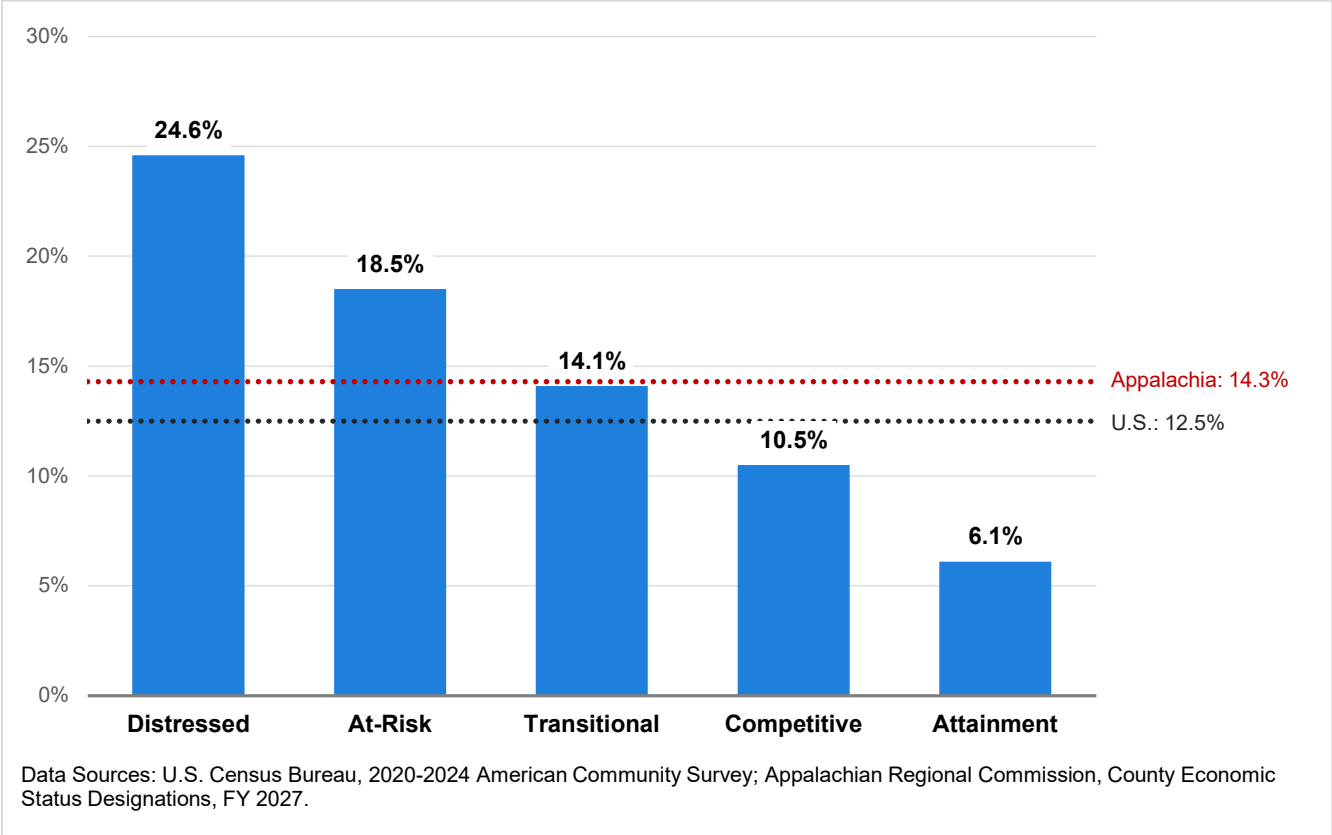
The economic conditions of residents are consistent with those of their counties of residence. The median household income in attainment counties in 2020-2024 (adjusted to 2024 dollars) was \$113,370—2.5 times greater than that of distressed counties (\$45,245) (see Figure C.7).

Figure C.7: Median Household Income in the Appalachian Region (In Adjusted 2024 Dollars) by County Economic Status, 2020-2024



Not surprisingly, poverty rates in distressed counties were 4 times greater than those of attainment counties (24.6 percent versus 6.1 percent) (see Figure C.8). The child poverty rate in distressed counties was especially noteworthy at 32.4 percent—double the national rate (16.1 percent)—and over 4.5 times higher than attainment counties (6.8 percent). The gaps in poverty rates between distressed and attainment counties were also considerable for the working age population (23.9 percent and 5.1 percent respectively). Even among older people, distressed counties had a higher poverty rate (17 percent) than all other counties, and especially when compared with attainment counties (7 percent).

Figure C.8: Percent of Persons in Poverty in the Appalachian Region by County Economic Status, 2020-2024

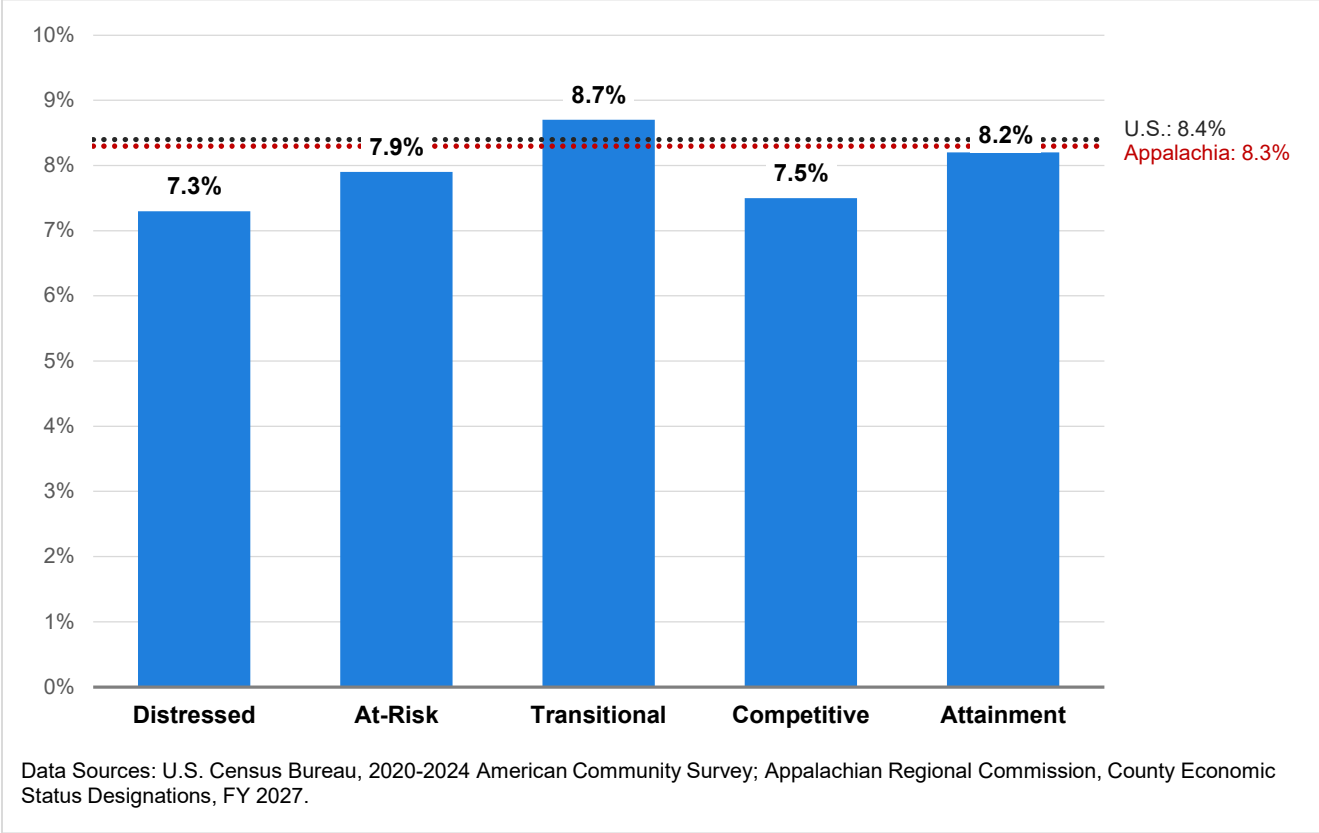


Overall, the share of people in the region with income below 50 percent of the poverty line (6.6 percent) is comparable to the national average, but the share is higher in distressed (10.9 percent) and at-risk counties (8.3 percent). And shares of low-income people, those with income below 200 percent of the poverty level, are higher in the Appalachian Region (32.6 percent) than the nation overall (28.2 percent) and especially in distressed and at-risk counties (48.8 percent and 40.3 percent, respectively). Consistent with these patterns, households in distressed and at-risk counties also had above-average Food Stamp/SNAP use (23.4 percent and 17.4 percent respectively). And households with children receiving Food Stamps/SNAP were accordingly higher in distressed counties (34.8 percent) and at-risk counties (28 percent) when compared with the regional average (21.6 percent).

Health Insurance and Disability

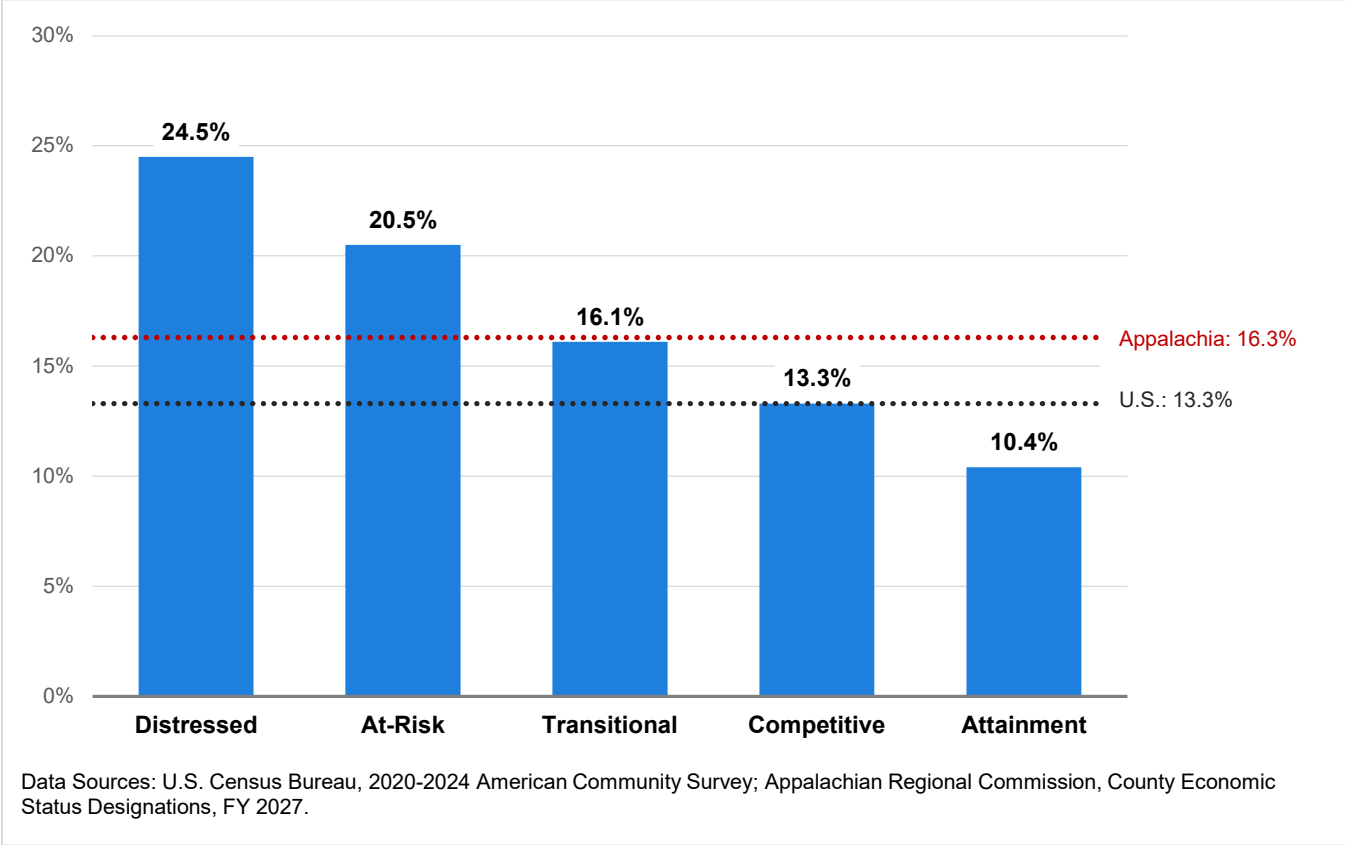
Across the counties, there were very few differences in health insurance coverage, and noncoverage rates were very comparable to the national average (8.4 percent) (see Figure C.9). Further, there were few notable differences in loss of coverage from 2015-2019 to 2020-2024 across the counties. Even across various age groups, noncoverage rates across the economic distress counties were comparable.

Figure C.9: Percent of Persons Without Health Insurance Coverage in the Appalachian Region by County Economic Status, 2020-2024



In contrast, disability levels varied considerably across counties by their economic status designations. While the percentage of people with disabilities in the region is 16.3 percent—3 percentage points higher than the national average—nearly one in four people in distressed counties have a disability (see Figure C.10). For those ages 35 to 64, almost 28 percent of those in distressed counties have a disability compared with just 8.1 percent in attainment counties. Among those 65 and older, nearly half of that population in distressed counties (48.1 percent) has a disability compared with almost 30 percent of those in attainment counties. Higher rates of disability in distressed counties also help to explain why there are fewer people actively in the labor force than in other parts of the region.

Figure C.10: Percent of Persons With a Disability in the Appalachian Region by County Economic Status, 2020-2024



Veteran Status

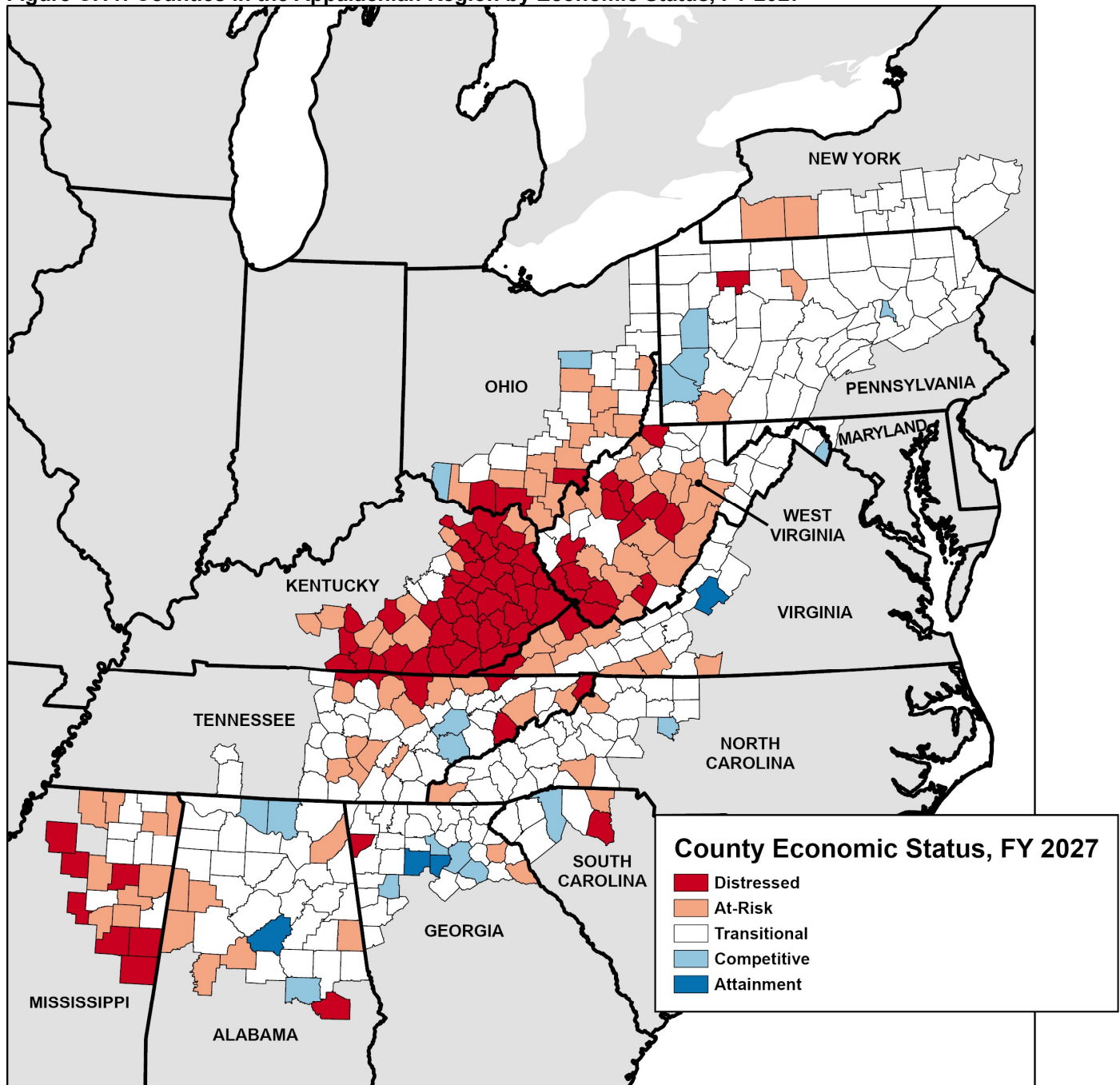
Across the economic status designation areas, there are few differences related to veteran status. The share of veterans age 65 and over in at-risk, transitional, and competitive counties are nearly the same as the regional average (15.0 percent), while those living in distressed counties (13.1 percent) and in attainment counties (14.6 percent) are slightly below this. Similar patterns follow when looking at the percent of the male civilian population ages 18 and over who are veterans—at-risk, transitional, and competitive counties are similar to the regional share (13.1 percent) while the shares are lower in distressed and attainment counties (11.2 and 11.6 percent respectively).

Summary

Perhaps not surprisingly, the economic well-being of those in attainment counties is higher than those in distressed counties. The population in attainment counties has more education, higher income, higher employment rates, lower poverty and food stamp rates, lower disability rates, and fewer vacant homes. These counties have higher shares of computers in their homes and higher rates of internet and broadband connectivity. In contrast, distressed communities exhibit lower rates of employment and economic well-being relative to other areas. In exchange for better economic well-being, people in attainment areas are working farther away from home and spending more time commuting to work.

On a positive note, regardless of economic status, all county groupings show robust health insurance coverage for all populations between 2015-2019 and 2020-2024. Further, distressed counties have improved access to high-speed internet by 15.3 percentage points, signaling progress toward greater economic inclusivity in the future.

Figure C.11: Counties in the Appalachian Region by Economic Status, FY 2027



Map Title: Counties in the Appalachian Region by Economic Status, FY 2027.

Data Source: Appalachian Regional Commission, County Economic Status Designations, FY 2027.

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Table C.1: Selected Measures for Economic Status Designation Groupings in Appalachia, FY 2027

Demographic, Social, or Economic Characteristic	United States	Appalachian Region	Economic Status Designations Among Appalachian Counties				
			Distressed	At-Risk	Transitional	Competitive	Attainment
NUMBER OF COUNTIES	3115	423	76	85	240	18	4
<i>Demographic and Housing Characteristics</i>							
Population, July 1, 2024	340,110,988	26,785,329	1,358,002	2,612,705	17,554,863	4,416,052	843,707
Percent change (2010 to 2024), population	10.0	4.9	-8.0	-3.4	4.1	13.7	35.8
Median age, July 1, 2024	39.1	41.2	42.3	42.6	41.4	39.9	40.7
Percent of population under age 18, July 1, 2024	21.5	20.6	21.3	20.1	20.5	20.7	22.7
Percent of population who are people of color, July 1, 2024	42.5	22.0	11.5	13.6	22.8	25.2	30.4
Percent of population who are black alone, not Hispanic, July 1, 2024	12.6	10.3	7.3	7.3	10.5	12.3	8.5
Percent of population who are Hispanic or Latino, July 1, 2024	20.0	7.0	2.0	3.3	7.7	7.3	10.2
Percent of population who are American Indian or Alaska Native alone, not Hispanic, July 1, 2024	0.7	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.2
Percentage point change (2010 to 2024), Percent of population who are people of color	6.3	5.5	1.8	2.4	5.7	5.6	11.8
Percent of persons ages 25-64 with a high school diploma or more, 2020-24	90.2	90.2	84.4	88.3	90.1	92.7	94.2
Percent of persons ages 25-64 with an associate's degree but without a bachelor's degree, 2020-24	9.2	10.3	9.1	11.3	10.6	9.7	8.2
Percent of persons ages 25-64 with a bachelor's degree or more, 2020-24	37.3	29.5	15.5	19.9	27.9	41.6	50.4
Among persons ages 25 and over with a bachelor's degree or more, percent whose bachelor's degree field (first major) was science and engineering, 2020-24	36.1	31.8	25.2	26.6	31.0	35.6	35.0
Percent of all housing units that are single-unit dwellings, 2020-24	67.5	73.9	66.1	71.6	74.2	74.8	85.7
Percent of all housing units that are mobile homes, 2020-24	5.6	10.6	25.5	17.8	9.9	4.6	4.4
Percent of housing units that are vacant, 2020-24	10.1	13.0	17.4	17.1	13.4	8.5	5.0
Percent of vacant housing units that are for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use, 2020-24	32.6	28.2	20.2	30.4	31.5	9.8	18.6
Percent of households with one or more computer devices (including smartphone and tablet), 2020-24	95.5	93.0	88.7	90.0	93.0	95.0	97.7
Percentage point change in the share of households with a computer device, 2015-19 to 2020-24	5.2	6.9	10.9	8.5	6.8	5.1	2.6
Percent of households with a broadband (high-speed) Internet subscription, 2020-24	91.0	87.8	82.8	83.2	87.7	91.1	95.7
Percentage point change in the share of households with a broadband (high-speed) internet subscription, 2015-19 to 2020-24	8.3	10.0	15.3	11.9	10.0	7.6	4.8
Percent of households with no access to the Internet, 2020-24	6.5	9.5	14.1	13.3	9.5	6.8	3.0
<i>Labor Force and Commuting</i>							
Percent of civilian labor force universe ages 25-64 (excludes Armed Forces personnel) in civilian labor force, 2020-24	79.1	74.9	59.3	68.1	75.4	80.2	82.5
Unemployment rate, persons ages 25-64 (percent of civilian labor force), 2020-24	4.4	4.0	5.5	4.6	4.1	3.6	2.7
Percent of households with no vehicle available, 2020-24	8.4	6.6	8.2	6.7	6.4	7.2	2.3
Percent of workers ages 16 and over who drove alone to work, 2020-24	68.8	76.1	80.3	80.4	77.1	71.4	67.3
Percent of workers ages 16 and over who worked outside their county of residence, 2020-24	24.7	30.2	39.0	37.6	30.1	22.8	41.9
Percent of workers ages 16 and over (not working at home) whose travel time to work was 30 minutes or more, 2020-24	37.4	35.3	39.1	35.9	34.0	36.9	49.6
Mean travel time to work in minutes for all workers ages 16 and over who didn't work at home, 2020-24	26.4	25.8	28.4	26.2	25.4	25.7	30.2

Table C.1: Selected Measures for Economic Status Designation Groupings in Appalachia, FY 2027 (continued)

Demographic, Social, or Economic Characteristic	United States	Appalachian Region	Economic Status Designations Among Appalachian Counties				
			Distressed	At-Risk	Transitional	Competitive	Attainment
Income and Poverty							
Median household income (in adjusted 2024 Dollars), 2020-24	80,734	66,555	45,245	53,943	65,772	80,958	113,370
Percent of persons in poverty, 2020-24	12.5	14.3	24.6	18.5	14.1	10.5	6.1
Percent of persons under age 18 in poverty, 2020-24	16.1	18.8	32.4	23.5	19.1	13.1	6.8
Percent of persons ages 18-24 in poverty, 2020-24	18.7	21.5	27.1	27.0	21.5	18.9	8.9
Percent of persons ages 25-64 in poverty, 2020-24	10.5	12.4	23.9	17.0	12.2	8.5	5.1
Percent of persons ages 65 and over in poverty, 2020-24	10.8	11.1	17.0	14.0	10.7	9.3	7.0
Percent of persons with income below 50 percent of poverty level, 2020-24	6.0	6.6	10.9	8.3	6.5	5.2	3.4
Percent of persons with income below 200 percent of poverty level, 2020-24	28.2	32.6	48.8	40.3	33.0	24.9	15.6
Percent of households receiving Food Stamps/SNAP, 2020-24	12.1	13.6	23.4	17.4	13.6	10.0	3.4
Percent of poor households receiving Food Stamps/SNAP, 2020-24	40.6	44.5	55.6	47.6	43.9	39.2	18.3
Percent of households with children receiving Food Stamps/SNAP, 2020-24	18.9	21.6	34.8	28.0	22.0	15.8	5.0
Health Insurance and Disability							
Percent of persons without health insurance coverage, 2020-24	8.4	8.3	7.3	7.9	8.7	7.5	8.2
Percentage point change (2015-19 to 2020-24), Percent of persons without health insurance coverage	-0.4	-0.2	0.0	-0.7	-0.1	-0.1	-0.3
Percent of persons ages 19-25 without health insurance coverage, 2020-24	13.8	14.1	14.1	13.4	14.5	13.1	14.6
Percent of persons ages 26-34 without health insurance coverage, 2020-24	14.6	15.8	14.6	16.2	16.6	13.0	15.5
Percent of persons ages 35-64 without health insurance coverage, 2020-24	10.3	10.6	9.3	10.5	11.1	9.2	9.6
Percent of persons with a disability, 2020-24	13.3	16.3	24.5	20.5	16.1	13.3	10.4
Percent of persons ages 35-64 with a disability, 2020-24	12.5	16.3	27.9	22.0	16.0	12.4	8.1
Percent of persons ages 65 and over with a disability, 2020-24	32.9	35.8	48.1	41.4	35.0	32.1	29.3
Veteran Status							
Percent of civilian population ages 65 and over who are veterans, 2020-24	13.8	15.0	13.1	15.0	15.1	15.2	14.6
Percent of male civilian population ages 18 and over who are veterans, 2020-24	11.4	13.1	11.2	13.4	13.3	13.1	11.6