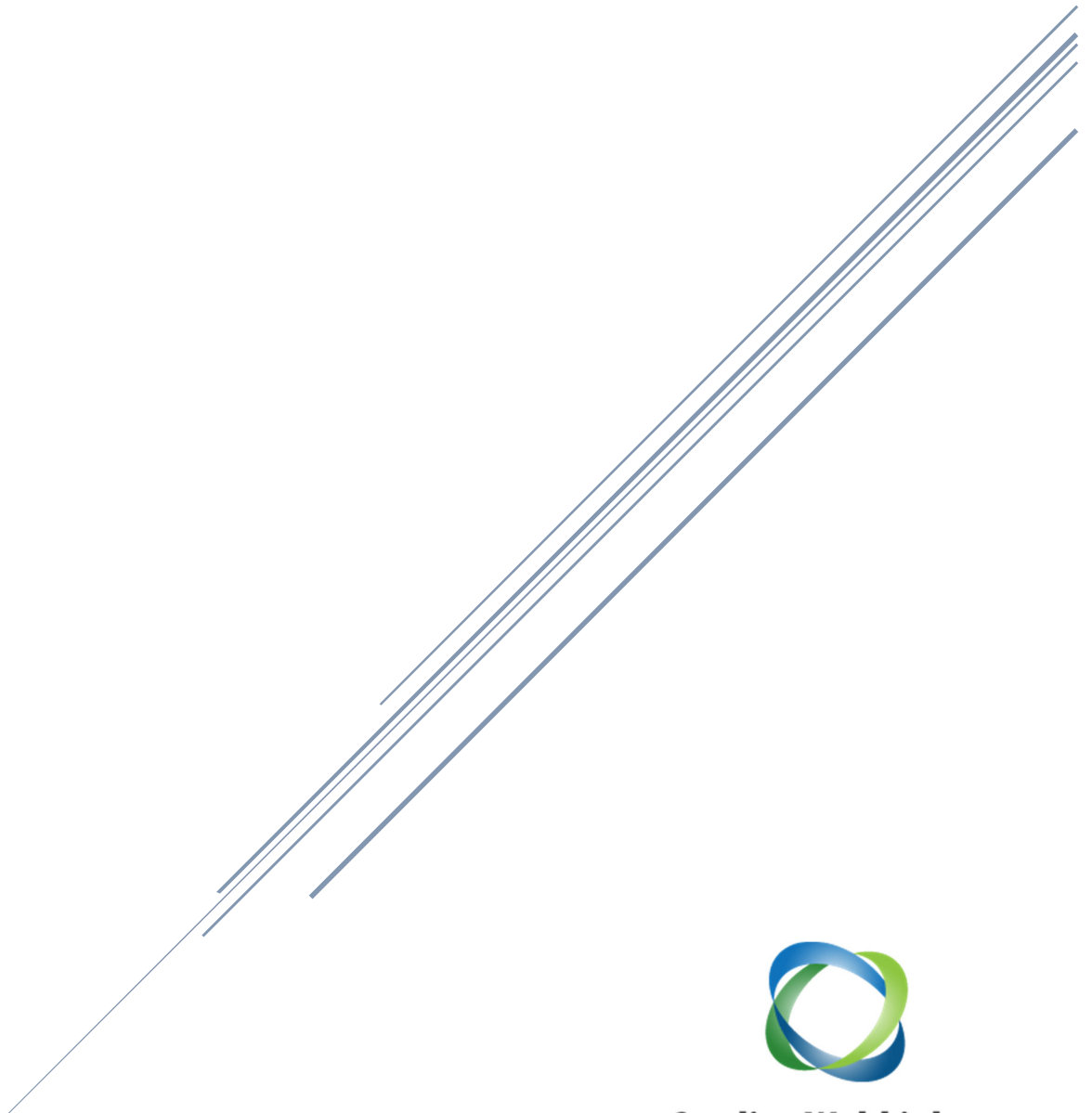


INDEX OF DEEP DISADVANTAGE

Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties Comparisons

March 2024



Cowlitz-Wahkiakum
Council of Governments
TRANSPORTATION

Introduction

A team of researchers set out to find what disadvantage looks like in America and created a multifaceted ranking system to determine the deeply impacted areas in the U.S. This team of researchers from the University of Michigan and Princeton University developed the Index of Deep Disadvantage through funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The CWCOG has developed this report to provide insights into the relative disadvantage of the Southwest Washington region based on the research provided. We focused on Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties but have included information on the counties included in the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization operated by the CWCOG as well as some adjacent counties for reference.

To understand disadvantages across the U.S, researchers developed an Index of Deep Disadvantage using the same data for both counties and cities, which allows for direct comparison. The index represents a holistic look at disadvantage, using health indicators (life expectancy, low infant birth weight), poverty metrics (rates of poverty and deep poverty), and social mobility data (Opportunity Insights Mobility Metrics). Discussions on these topics happen regularly in the region and continue to be of concern. However, it is positive to learn that the region is not among the most disadvantaged.

Local perspectives complement these measures of disadvantage to provide a deeper understanding of America's most vulnerable communities. By painting a vivid portrait of the conditions in the nation's most disadvantaged communities, the index not only uncovers what factors drive disparities, but it can help pinpoint where policymakers, state and local leaders, and residents can take action to improve health, well-being, and opportunity for all.

Although no county or city on the west coast falls into the top 200 places of most disadvantage, the data collected and indexed creates an opportunity to examine the weak points within the two primary counties served by the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments (CWCOG). We also include the three additional counties included in the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SWRTPO). The CWCOG sifted through this data and highlighted areas in which the region is doing well and areas that could be improved.

Overall, most metrics throughout Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, Pacific, Lewis, and Grays Harbor Counties performed satisfactory often hovering around the national average. All five counties within the SWRTPO region fall below the national average and within the threshold of the 200 places of most disadvantage in labor participation rate and percentage of college graduates. A multitude of factors influence performance across these metrics. Examining the region's weaknesses allows the region to assess the process for improvement.

Category Measures

The Index of Disadvantage uses a wealth of variables to help create its ranking system. Only the variables published alongside national averages appear in this report. Below is a description for each category.

Gini: This is a measurement of the distribution of wealth. A zero on the scale indicates perfect equity in the distribution of wealth, and a one on the scale indicates perfect inequity in the distribution of wealth. It provides context when examining the other metrics.

Life Expectancy: The average period that a person may expect to live.

Labor Participation Rate: “The labor force participation rate represents the number of people in the labor force as a percentage of the civilian noninstitutional population. In other words, the participation rate is the percentage of the population that is either working or actively looking for work.”¹This includes anyone age 16 and over in the population including students, retired workers, and seasonal workers that are not actively looking for work would count as well.

Percentage of College Graduates: This is the percentage of the population that is 25 years and over with at least a bachelor’s degree.

Percentage of Social Mobility: This metric indicates the mean household income rank for children, whose parents were at the 25th percentile (lowest quarter) of the national income distribution. The number indicates the degree to which a person’s socio-economic situation can change in comparison to their parents.

Percentage that Owns Home: The percentage of the population that owns their home.

Percentage Below the Poverty Level: The percentage of the population that is living in poverty.

Percentage in Deep Poverty: The percentage of the population that is living 50% below the Federal Poverty Line.

Low Infant Birth Weight: This is the percentage of live births that weigh less than 2500 grams or about 5.5 pounds.

Percentage Less than High School Education: This is the percentage of the population that is twenty-five years and over with less than a high school diploma. This would not include individuals who earned a GED or equivalent.

Unemployment Rate: The percentage of unemployed people over sixteen as a percentage of the labor force.

Percentage of Severe Housing Burden: This is the percentage of households paying more than 50% of income toward housing costs. Including rent/mortgage and utilities.

Analysis

Table 1 and Table 2 are organized based off how to interpret the data. Table 1 contains categories where the lower percentage means a better performance in that category. While Table 2 uses categories where a higher percentage indicates better performance. Each table

¹ U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Concepts and Definitions (CPS)*; <https://www.bls.gov/cps/definitions.htm#lfpr>

highlights performance in comparison to the national average and places of most disadvantage and greatest advantage.

Table 1: Index of Deep Disadvantage for SWRTPO Region Counties Part A

Area Analyzed	% Below Poverty Level	% Below Deep Poverty	Low Infant Birth Weight (% of Share)	% Less Than High School Education	Unemployment Rate	% of Severe Housing Burden
National Average	13.7	6.2	8.2	12.7	5.5	15
200 Places of Most Disadvantage	26.8	13.2	12.2	16.7	9.5	17.8
200 Places of Greatest Advantage	5.6	2.6	6.6	3.7	3.2	10.9
Cowlitz County, WA	14.14	6.54	6.35	10.74	6.61	12.59
Wahkiakum County, WA	7.48	4.15	6.38	7.89	7.54	11.33
Grays Harbor County, WA	14	6.62	7.19	10.32	7.08	11.81
Lewis County, WA	12.78	5.36	6.52	12.47	7.12	11.66
Pacific County, WA	15.81	6.9	7.6	11.74	6.3	11.38


Table 2: Index of Deep Disadvantage for SWRTPO Region Counties Part B

Area Analyzed	Gini	Life Expectancy (Years)	% Labor Participation Rate	% College Graduates	% Of Social Mobility	% That Own Home
National Average	0.465	79.1	63.6	32.7	43.1	60.7
200 Places of Most Disadvantage	0.428	74.2	57	22.8	36.5	51.9
200 Places of Greatest Disadvantage	0.507	83.1	69.6	48.6	49.8	72
Cowlitz County, WA	0.4429	76.8	56.26	17	43.04	66.07
Wahkiakum County, WA	0.4427	82.9	38.98	19.39	44.74	86.72
Grays Harbor County, WA	0.4463	76.7	51.24	16.46	44.53	67.04
Lewis County, WA	0.4252	77.6	53.27	17.72	46.02	70.64
Pacific County, WA	0.4295	76.4	42.49	18.92	45.89	79.97


Cowlitz and Wahkiakum County

Cowlitz County performs within three points of the national average for most of the categories. Some areas of concern for the county are its performance in labor participation rate and the percentage of college graduates. In these categories the county is performing worse than the national average and within the range of the 200 Places of Most Disadvantage. In labor participation rate, Cowlitz county is performing one percent below the average of the 200 Places of Most Disadvantage. One contributor towards this percentage could be due to the increased population with a disability. According to the Census Quick Facts 14.5% of those


Cowlitz County Highlights




43.04% of Social Mobility



12.59 % are Severely Housing Burdened



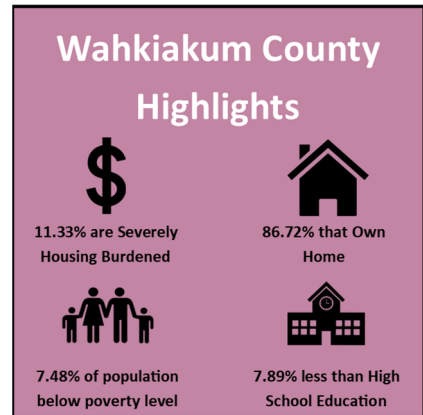
66.07% that Own Home



10.74% less than High School Education

under age sixty-five in Cowlitz County have a disability as compared to the national average of 8.9% with a disability. Whether due to injuries or pre-existing conditions, if these individuals do not have an opportunity to work somewhere that accommodates their needs they cannot continue to work. The County is within the average range of the most advantaged communities relating to low infant birth weight. At 6.36% of the national share, the region compares well nationally. Homeownership in the county is well above the national average of 60% at 66% of the population.

Wahkiakum County tends to trend on the positive side of the national average. Like the other counties, Wahkiakum is low in labor participation rate at 20% lower than the national average. Since labor participation rate includes those over the age of sixty-five, the high percentage of the resident population over that age could be an influence. As of 2022, the population sixty-five years and older made up 33.5% of the total population. Another area in which the county is underperforming compared to the national average is in the percentage of college graduates. However, when it comes to high school graduates, the county is performing quite well. Wahkiakum is particularly excelling in the percentage of homeowners at 86.72%, exceeding the national average by 26% and above the average of the 200 Places of Greatest Advantage. Which could be due to the aging population as previously discussed.

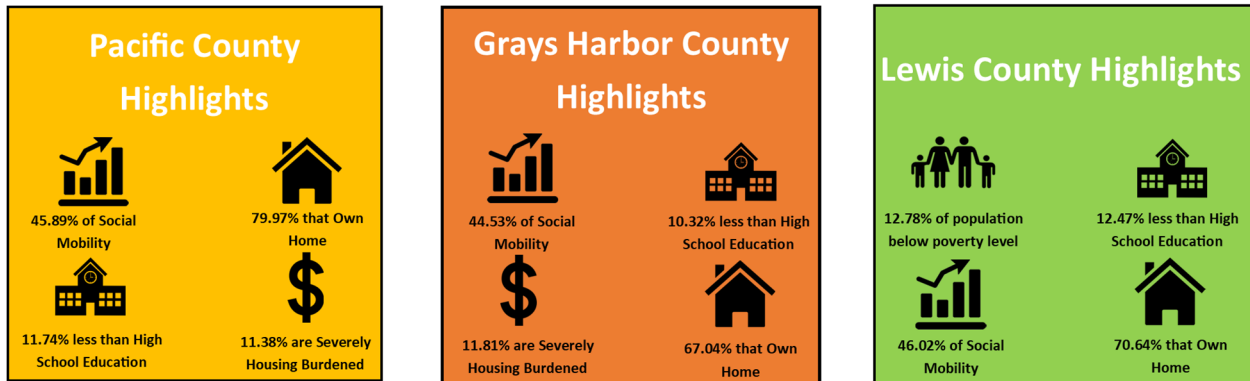


Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Organization Region

Pacific, Grays Harbor, and Lewis County all share similar characteristics to Cowlitz and Wahkiakum County. Usually being within three points above or below the national average across most of the categories. All three counties exceed the national average in the percentage of the population with less than a high school education, percentage of homeowners, and social mobility. Particularly in homeownership Pacific County also exceeds the 200 Places of Greatest Advantage. This is potentially due to similar reasons as Wahkiakum County as they also have a large aging population. Out of Pacific County’s total population 33.8% are over the age of sixty-five. In Lewis County, both its percentage of poverty and deep poverty are below the national average. This low poverty percentage would also contribute towards Lewis County having the highest percentage of social mobility within the five-county region. Grays Harbor County has one of the lowest percentages of the population with less than a high school education within the SWRTPO.

The three counties also feature a similar pattern of performance as compared to Cowlitz and Wahkiakum County when it comes to lower performing areas. They have quite low labor participation rates and percentages of college graduates. Dipping below both the national average and the average of the 200 Places of Most Disadvantage. A potential contributor to this

cause could be both the aging population and population with a disability in all counties, these populations compare higher than the national averages.



In Comparison to Surrounding Counties

Through adding the data for the surrounding regions, it is possible to see how others are performing in comparison to the SWRTPO region. Table 3 and Table 4 add Thurston and Clark Counties in Washington for a perspective on larger urban areas, and a similar rural perspective through Columbia and Clatsop Counties in Oregon. Across most of the categories they perform differently to the five counties in the SWRTPO region. Besides Clark County, every county performs under the national average for labor participation rate, except the surrounding counties do not drop below the 200 Places of Most Disadvantage in this metric.

Homeownership is higher within the SWRTPO region as compared to other counties. Columbia County is the only surrounding county that performs similar to the SWRTPO region in that category. All the counties have around the same percentage of the population that is housing burdened, with all counties performing better than the national average.

Table 3: CWCOCG Region and Adjacent County Statistics Part A

Area Analyzed	% Below Poverty Level	% Below Deep Poverty	% Social Mobility	Low Infant Birth Weight (% of Share)	% Less Than High School Education	Unemployment Rate
National Average	13.7	6.2	43.1	8.2	12.7	15
200 Places of Most Disadvantage	26.8	13.2	36.5	12.2	16.7	17.8
200 Places of Greatest Advantage	5.6	2.6	49.8	6.6	3.7	10.9
Cowlitz County, WA	14.14	6.54	43.04	6.36	10.74	12.59
Wahkiakum County, WA	7.48	4.15	44.74	6.38	7.89	11.33
Grays Harbor County, WA	14	6.62	44.53	7.19	10.32	11.81
Lewis County, WA	12.78	5.36	46.02	6.5	12.47	11.66
Pacific County, WA	15.81	6.9	45.89	7.62	11.74	11.38
Columbia County, OR	11.41	5.16	45.96	6.05	8.68	11.22
Clatsop County, OR	10.12	5.02	44.66	6.36	7.93	12.51
Thurston County, WA	10.25	4.98	44.66	6.09	6.26	13.58
Clark County, WA	9.07	4.16	45.25	6.09	7.33	12.2

Table 4: CWCOG Region and Adjacent County Statistics Part B

Area Analyzed	% of Severe Housing Burden	Own Home (%)	Gini	Life Expectancy (Years)	Labor Participation Rate	% College Graduates
National Average	15	60.7	0.465	79.1	63.6	32.7
200 Places of Most Disadvantage	17.8	51.9	0.428	74.2	57	22.8
200 Places of Greatest Advantage	10.9	72	0.507	83.1	69.6	48.6
Cowlitz County, WA	12.59	66.07	0.4429	76.79	56.26	17
Wahkiakum County, WA	11.33	86.72	0.4427	82.87	38.98	19.39
Grays Harbor County, WA	11.81	67.04	0.4463	76.75	51.24	16.46
Lewis County, WA	11.66	70.64	0.4252	77.56	53.27	17.72
Pacific County, WA	11.38	79.97	0.4295	76.43	42.49	18.92
Columbia County, OR	11.22	75.4	0.4357	79.42	57.86	18.47
Clatsop County, OR	12.51	62.19	0.4121	78.25	57.8	24.39
Thurston County, WA	13.58	65.38	0.4136	80.28	60.69	35.72
Clark County, WA	12.2	66.97	0.4237	80.25	64.12	30.61

Conclusion

Although the original purpose of the Index of Deep Disadvantage was to locate and interpret the reason behind why many places in the U.S face disadvantages, its database paved a path to create direct comparisons between different counties and cities. The Index of Deep Disadvantage is valuable in providing key insights about how counties are performing. As concerns continue to be discussed, reviewing with a database like this can help paint the overall picture. The Counties across most categories hover around the national average, continuing to excel in areas like homeownership and social mobility. The region can utilize this data to holistically look at the challenges facing each county. Monitoring these metrics creates a good gauge on the progress the counties are making.



Cowlitz-Wahkiakum
Council of Governments

TRANSPORTATION

Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments

PO Box 128

Kelso, WA 98626