

An Equity Profile of the Kansas City Region Summary

PolicyLink



Communities of color are driving Kansas City's population growth and their ability to thrive is central to the region's economic success now and into the future. While the region demonstrates overall economic strength and resilience, wide racial gaps in income, health, and opportunity – along with declining wages, a shrinking middle class, and rising inequality – place its economic future at risk.

To secure a prosperous future, the region's leaders must take steps to build a more equitable and sustainable economy by growing good jobs, connecting youth and vulnerable workers to education and training that leads to careers, and increasing access to economic opportunities located throughout the region. These are critical strategies to put all who live in the region on the path toward reaching their full potential.

Overview

Across the country, regional planning organizations, community organizations and residents, funders, and policymakers are striving to put plans, policies, and programs in place that build healthier, more vibrant, more sustainable, and more equitable regions.

Equity – ensuring full inclusion of the entire region's residents in the economic, social, and political life of the region, regardless of race, ethnicity, age, gender, neighborhood of residence, or other characteristic – is essential to the success of these strategies.

This equity profile of the Kansas City region was developed by PolicyLink and the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) to help the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) – the sponsor of the Creating Sustainable Places Initiative (a HUD Sustainable Communities Initiative) – and its local partners effectively address equity issues as they plan for a more integrated and sustainable region. MARC's local partners include Communities Creating Opportunity (CCO), Green Impact Zone, Latino Civic Engagement Collaborative, Metropolitan Organization for Racial and Economic Equity (MORE2), and Urban League of Greater Kansas City. We also hope this will be a useful tool for advocacy groups, elected officials, planners, and others as they work to achieve economic vitality and sustainability for the entire Kansas City region.

This summary document describes the indicators framework used to create the profile, presents the key findings of the equity analysis, and shares implications derived from the analysis.

The Equity Indicators Framework

To plan for more equitable regions, communities first need to know where their region stands in terms of equity. To assist communities with that process, PolicyLink and PERE developed an equity indicators framework that communities can use to

understand and track the state of equity in their regions. This indicators framework relies on a regional equity database maintained by our organizations that incorporates hundreds of data points from public and private data sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, and Woods and Poole Economics.

The equity indicators framework examines four sets of indicators:

- 1) **Demographics:** Who lives in the region and how is this changing?
- 2) **Economic Vitality:** How is the region doing on measures of economic growth, well-being, and inclusion?
- 3) **Readiness:** How prepared are the region’s residents for the 21st century economy?
- 4) **Connectedness:** Are the region’s residents and neighborhoods connected to one another and to the region’s assets and opportunities?

Defining the Kansas City region

For the purposes of the equity profile and data analysis, we define the Kansas City region as the 9-county area served by

the Mid-America Regional Council. All data presented in the profile use this regional boundary. Minor exceptions due to lack of data availability are noted in the “Data and Methods” section of the complete profile.

Equity Profile Highlights

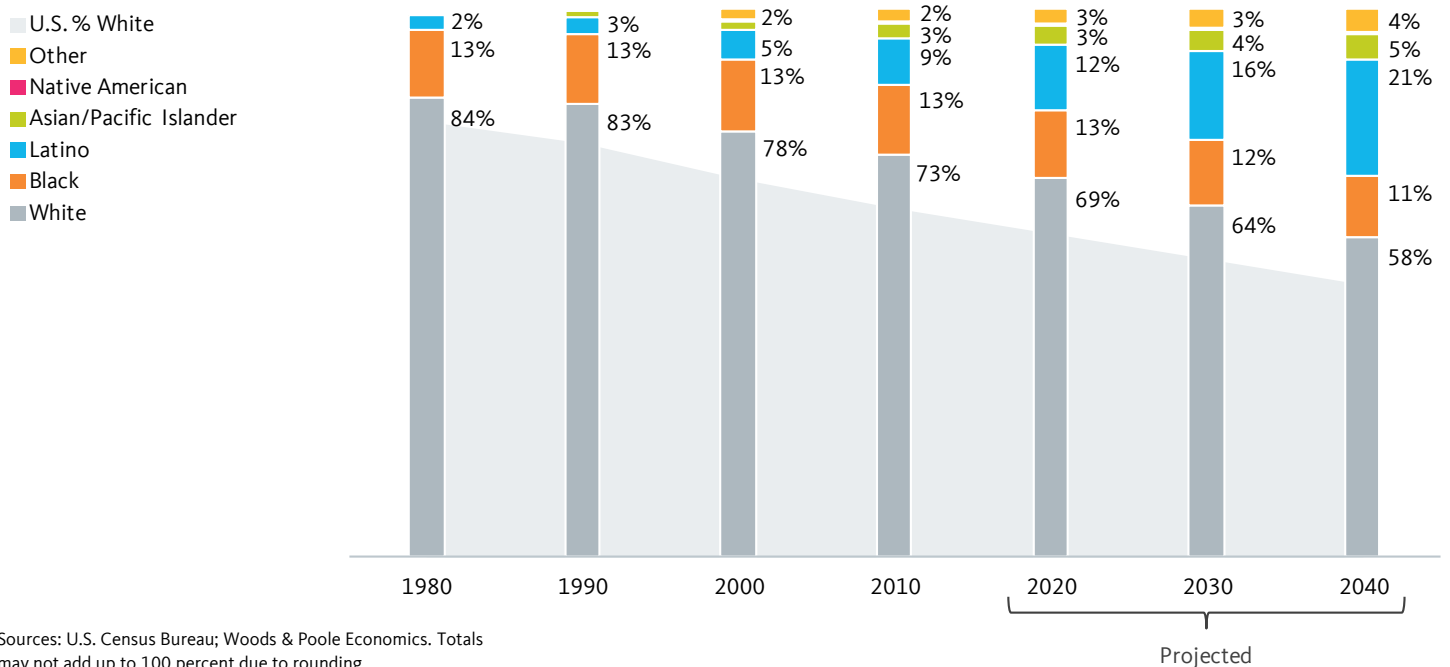
Demographics: Communities of color are driving growth and change in the region

Kansas City is moderately diverse and is experiencing rapid demographic change. The share of the region’s residents who are people of color increased from 16 to 27 percent between 1980 and 2010. By 2040, 42 percent of Kansas City’s population is projected to be people of color.

For the past two decades, communities of color have contributed most of the region’s population growth. Latinos, predominantly of Mexican American ancestry, and a diverse Asian population are leading the region’s growth. The Latino population grew 78 percent in the past decade, primarily from births to residents, and the Asian population grew 61 percent, primarily due to immigration. The region’s white population grew only 5 percent.

The share of people of color is projected to increase through 2040

Racial/ethnic composition, 1980-2040



Youth are at the forefront of the region’s demographic transformation, and the racial/ethnic composition of its youth population is changing much more quickly than that of its senior population. Today, 36 percent of Kansas City’s youth are people of color, compared with 15 percent of its seniors. This 21 percentage point “racial generation gap” could have negative consequences for the region’s future if the predominantly white senior population chooses not to invest in the educational systems and community infrastructure needed to support a youth population that is more racially diverse.

Economic Vitality: Inequality is a threat to the region’s future prosperity

Over the past few decades, the Kansas City region has experienced steady economic growth in terms of jobs and output. Its economy also demonstrated resilience through the downturn, and although unemployment spiked, it never reached the national average and dropped quickly during the recovery.

Despite these positive indicators, growing inequities that began long before the downturn place the region’s economic future at risk. The fact that unemployment is below average overall, for example, masks persistently higher levels of joblessness for the

region’s black, Latino, and Native American communities.

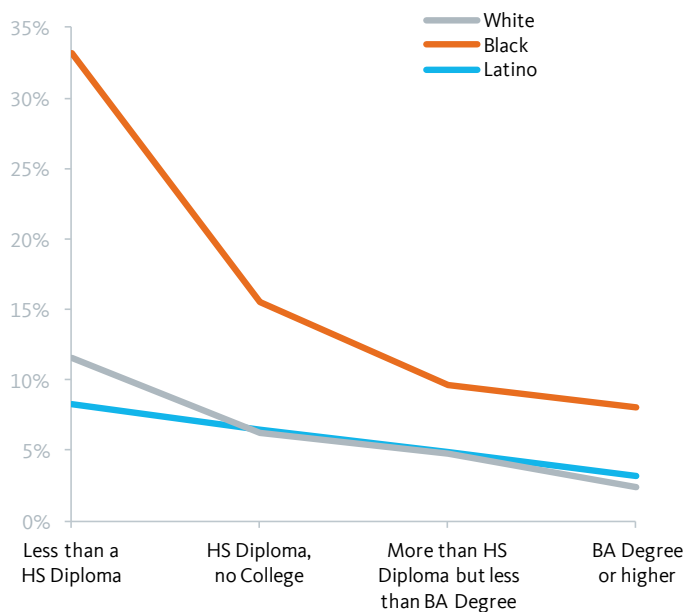
Income inequality is also on the rise in the region, and most workers have seen their wages decline or stagnate over the past several decades after you account for inflation. The bottom half of the region’s full-time workers, for example, have seen their wages fall 6 percent since 1979, while the wages of the top 10 percent of workers rose 13 percent.

As inequality has increased, the region’s middle class has shrunk and poverty and working poverty (defined as working full-time for an income below 150 percent of the poverty level) have grown. More than one out of every four African Americans and Latinos live below the poverty level – more than triple the rates of whites. Latinos are much more likely to be among the working poor compared to other groups. This means the region’s fastest-growing population suffers some of the worst economic conditions.

Although education is a leveler, racial and gender gaps persist in the region’s labor market. At every education level, people of color have higher unemployment and lower wages than whites, and women have lower wages than their male counterparts. For example, among college graduates, white males earn \$30 per

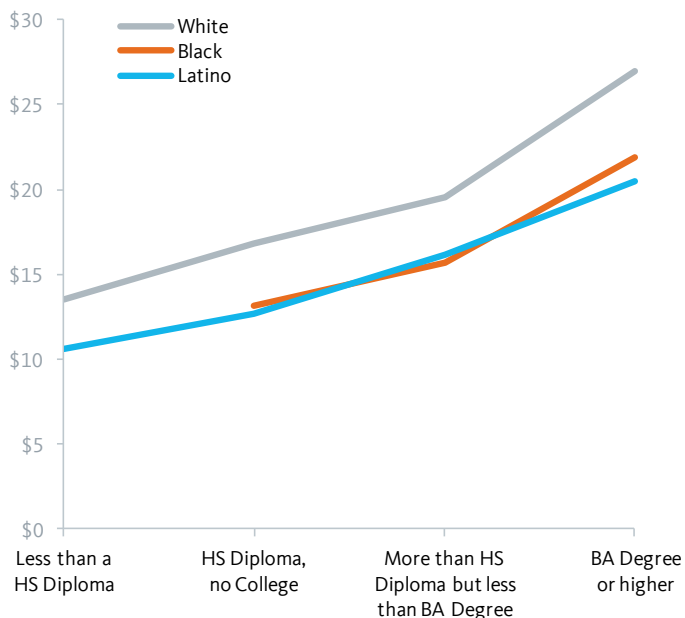
At nearly every education level, blacks and Latinos have higher unemployment and lower wages than whites

Unemployment rate by educational attainment and race/ethnicity, 2006-2010



Source: IPUMS. Universe includes the civilian noninstitutional population ages 25 through 64.

Median hourly wage by educational attainment and race/ethnicity, 2006-2010



Source: IPUMS. Universe includes civilian noninstitutional full-time wage and salary workers ages 25 through 64.

hour on average while average hourly wages for white women, women of color, and men of color are between \$21 to \$26.

Readiness: Educational gaps and health challenges for communities of color

The region faces a potential education and skills gap because its black and Latino communities are not obtaining the postsecondary education and training increasingly demanded by employers. According to the Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce, by 2018 35 percent of Missouri’s jobs and 38 percent of Kansas’ jobs will require an associate’s degree or above. Although 43 percent of the region’s population currently have that level of education, only 29 percent of the region’s U.S.-born Latinos, 26 percent of African Americans, and 11 percent of Latino immigrants do.

In addition, too many of the region’s youth are not finding their way into the job market. Although educational attainment for

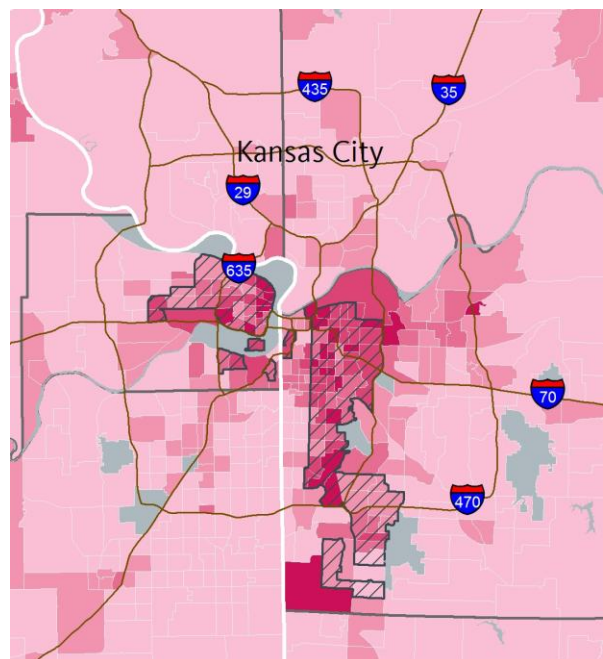
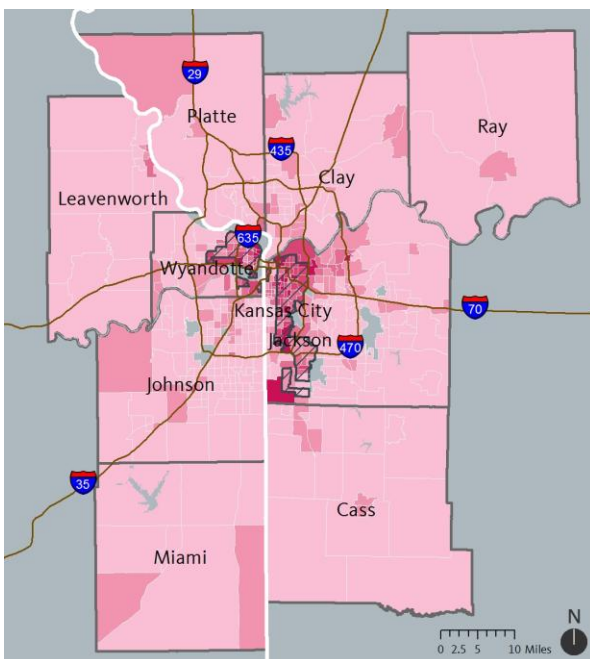
youth of color is on the rise, shrinking racial gaps, the number of “disconnected youth” who are neither in school nor working has increased, and black and Latino youth are disproportionately likely to be disconnected. Kansas City now ranks 78th out of the largest 150 regions in terms of its share of disconnected youth. Twenty percent of black youth and 15 percent of Latino youth are disconnected, compared to 11 percent of white youth.

Communities of color also face major health challenges, including higher incidences of some preventable diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and asthma that are strongly influenced by social and environmental factors in addition to access to medical care. For example, more than seven in 10 of the region’s African Americans are overweight or obese and 16 percent of people of other or mixed racial backgrounds have asthma – almost double the regional average.

Areas of very high poverty (40 percent or higher) are found primarily in the Kansas City urban core, stretching south to Grandview

Percent Population Below the Poverty Level by Census Tract and High People-of-Color Tracts, 2006-2010

- Less than 10%
- 10% to 19%
- 20% to 29%
- 30% to 39%
- 40% or more
- ▨ 60% or more people of color



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Areas in white are missing data.

Connectedness: Less access to affordable housing, transportation, and healthy food for communities of color

On the whole, segregation is decreasing in the region. But when you look specifically at the region's Latino population, you find that while Latinos are more likely to live in the same communities as blacks, Asians, and Native Americans, they are less likely to live in communities with whites now compared to 20 years ago.

Concentrated poverty – an extreme form of economic segregation – is a growing challenge in the region. The share of neighborhoods where 40 percent or more households are poor more than doubled between 1980 and 2010. People of color are nine times more likely to live in these very high poverty neighborhoods than its white population.

While the region has low housing costs overall, communities of color, particularly renters, are more likely to pay too much for housing. The region's people of color are also more likely to be carless and disproportionately live in “food desert” neighborhoods that lack grocery stores.

Implications

As Kansas City continues its rapid demographic transformation, ensuring that all of its residents can participate in and contribute to the regional economy is an economic imperative. To take advantage of its growing, diverse population and build a more equitable and sustainable regional economy, Kansas City must take steps to better connect communities of color to jobs, housing, transportation, healthy neighborhoods, and quality education and training opportunities.

PolicyLink and PERE suggest the following areas of focus:

Bridge the racial generation gap.

Bridging the racial generation gap between youth of color and a predominantly white senior population will be critical to the region's economy, since support for strong public schools for all children and workforce training are needed to prepare the region's emerging workforce for the jobs of tomorrow. One way to build these bridges is to plan for multigenerational communities, which “make cities and neighborhoods accessible, safe, and inclusive for children, youth, families, adults, and the elderly.”¹ This will allow the elderly to age in place at the same time as provide safe and healthy environments for families to raise children. By supporting infrastructure investments in community facilities and public spaces, Kansas City can create

built environments that facilitate social interaction between residents of all ages.

Grow good jobs.

With increasing inequality and a shrinking middle class, Kansas City needs to focus on growing middle-wage jobs and improving the quality of low-wage jobs. To do this, it should focus its economic and workforce development efforts on industry sectors and occupations that show signs of strength and pay living wages. The region should also support strategies that ensure strong and rising wages, especially for low-wage workers.

Connect unemployed and low-wage workers to careers in high-growth industries.

Kansas City is fortunate to have some occupations that show strong growth potential to employ workers without four-year college degrees in middle-skills jobs that pay good wages and offer opportunities for upward mobility. Kansas City should mobilize its economic and workforce development resources to create workforce partnerships between community colleges and employers, ensuring that all workers –including those who face high barriers to employment or who have previously not had success in school – can get the advanced training or education they need to access a good job. These partnerships will be essential for building a workforce that is prepared for jobs in the region's strong and growing industries. Additionally, public infrastructure investments throughout the region present an opportunity to build bridges out of poverty. Construction jobs offer workers without a college degree a career pathway with greater mobility and higher-paying wages.

Help disconnected youth get back on track.

Although a number of regional initiatives aim to integrate youth into educational and work opportunities, the rising number of disconnected youth demonstrates the need to achieve greater scale. The current program operators of these programs, including Prep KC, the KC STEM Alliance, and the Kauffman Foundation, along with the region's civic leaders, should come together develop and execute a strategy to connect all youth in the region, but particularly youth of color, with educational and work opportunities.

Ensure diverse civic participation and leadership.

Given the region's rapid demographic shifts, public sector leaders need to take steps to ensure active and accessible public engagement by all of its racial and ethnic communities in local and regional planning processes. The public, private, and

philanthropic sectors should support leadership development and capacity-building efforts focused on the region's growing, diverse communities to build the region's multicultural and multiracial regional leadership.

Create healthier neighborhoods.

Ensuring that the region's neighborhoods promote health would reduce health gaps for people of color, create more vibrant places, strengthen economic productivity, and reduce healthcare costs. Implementing strategies focused on healthy neighborhoods such as complete streets for all users, access to healthy food, and good community design in low-income communities of color can foster healthy, active living among the groups that are most at-risk for preventable diseases.

Coordinate public investments.

To foster growth and prosperity, Kansas City should coordinate transportation, housing, and economic development investments to address concentrated poverty, segregation, and high housing and transportation burdens – all of which have disproportionately negative effects on communities of color. It is important to focus investments near employment centers for low-wage as well as middle-skill workers to improve job access and reduce commute times. In addition, transportation investments should enhance the mobility of transit-dependent residents, connecting them to jobs and services. And regional plans should incentivize and prioritize the development and preservation of affordable housing that is co-located with multi-modal transportation investments and near employment centers.

Conclusion

To secure a prosperous future, Kansas City needs to implement a growth model that is driven by equity – just and fair inclusion into a society in which everyone can participate and prosper. Concerted investments in and policies for, and developed from within, communities of color will also be essential to ensure the region's fastest-growing populations are ready to lead it into the next economy.

Equity Profiles are products of a partnership between PolicyLink and PERE, the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity at the University of Southern California.

The views expressed in this document are those of PolicyLink and PERE, and do not necessarily represent those of the Mid-America Regional Council or its local partners.

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¹American Planning Association, *Multigenerational Planning: Using smart growth and universal design to link the needs of children and the aging population*, 2011, <http://www.planning.org/research/family/briefingpapers/multigenerational.htm>.