

Affordable Childcare Access a Key Barrier to Employment for Starr County Residents

By Levi Long

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Starr County in Texas has the highest unemployment rate in the state, with 17.3% of individuals aged 16 and over being unemployed.
- Starr County has the highest poverty rate among Texas counties with populations of 50,000-100,000.
- The critical shortage of accessible and affordable childcare options in the region is becoming a pressing issue for employment.

DATA

The data used in this story comes from the U.S. Census Bureau. The analysis focuses on three topics: regions, unemployment and poverty in Starr County. The story mainly examines unemployment in Starr County and its correlation to childcare. In the section focusing on poverty, Starr County is compared with other Texas counties with populations ranging from 50,000 to 100,000.

COUNTY PROFILE

Starr County has a population of 64,032. The county is 98.9% Hispanic and has a median household income of \$30,931, according to the U.S Census Bureau. Out of the three counties that make up “The Valley” it has the lowest median household income for Hispanic residents.

Starr County has the lowest education rates compared to surrounding counties, with 42.39% of residents without high school education. Moreover, the correlation between low education rates

and limited access to healthcare is evident in Starr County, where 67% of hospitals are for-profit and many residents lack a high school education.

Commuting is a problem in the county. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Starr County has the farthest median distance to an urgent care among Texas counties with populations of 60,000-70,000, with a median distance of 33.79 miles.

UNEMPLOYEMENT

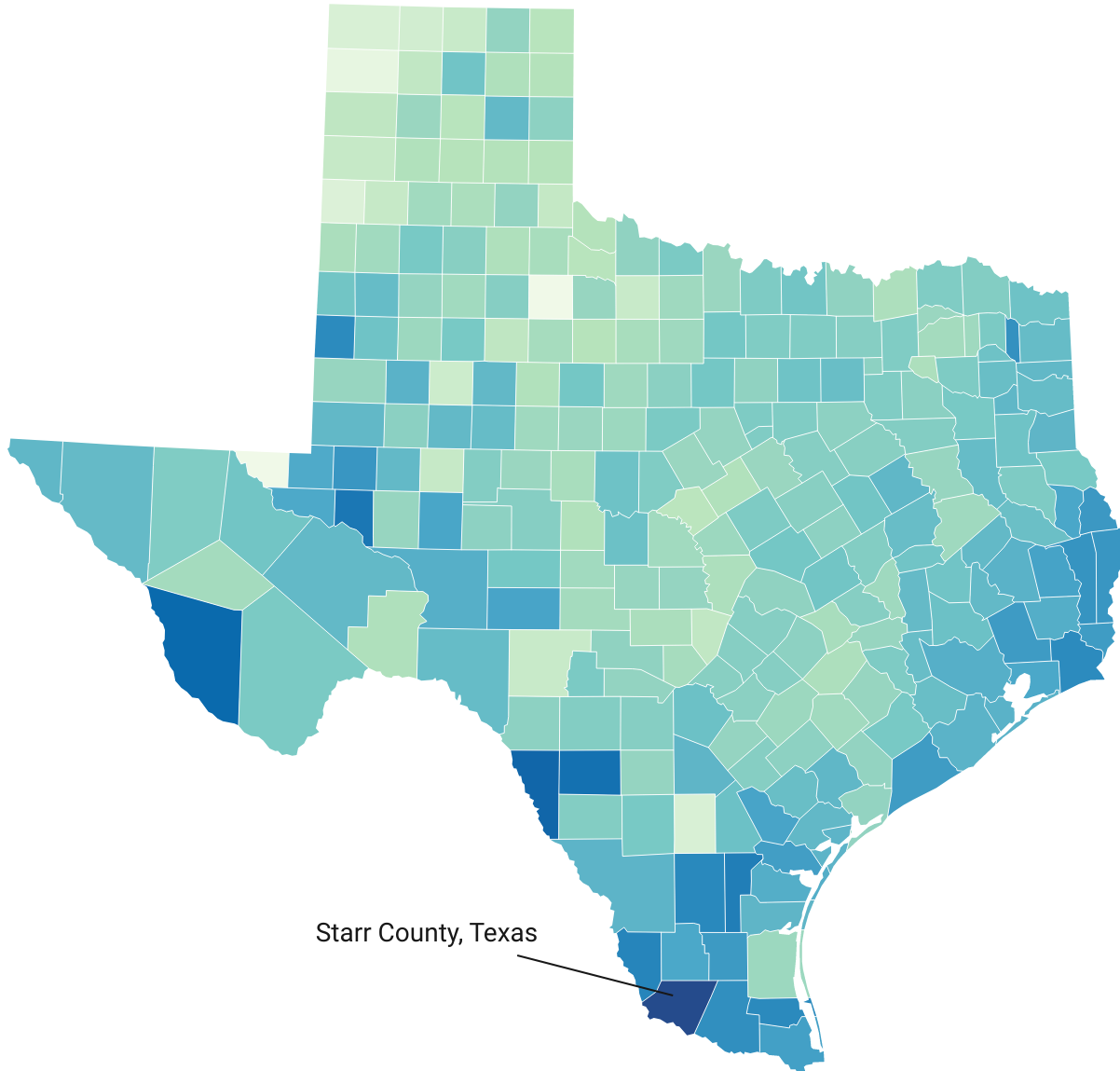
In 2020, Starr County, Texas had the highest unemployment rate in the state.

Unemployment rates have been increasing in southern parts of Texas. Starr County, Texas, has the highest unemployment rate in the state with 17.3%, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Although neighboring counties also have high unemployment rates, none matches the severity of Starr County. This trend highlights the need for solutions to address unemployment in the area.

Starr County has the highest unemployment rate in Texas.

Percent Unemployed



Map: Levi Long • Source: U.S. Census Bureau • Created with Datawrapper

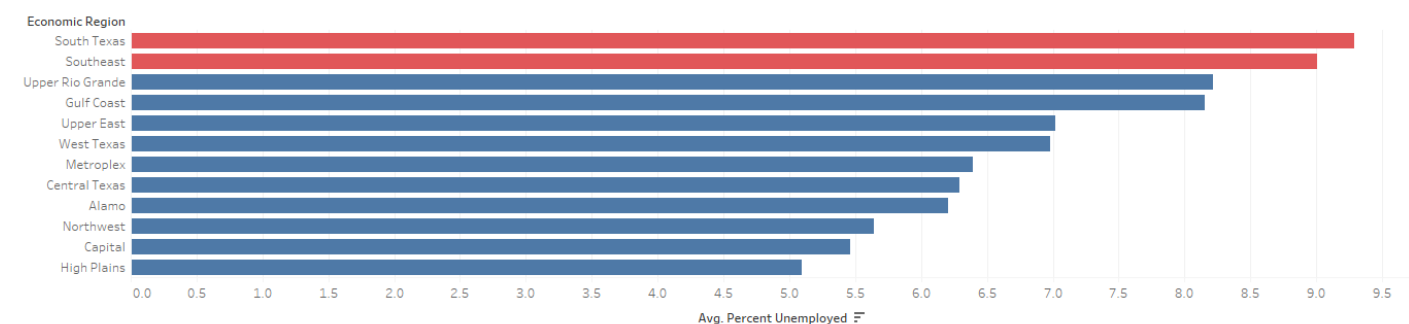
Governor Abbott has announced more than \$5.9 million in Texas Talent Connection grants.

Abbott announces [\\$350,000 for year two of Rio Grande Valley Industry Specialized Training and Workforce Innovation program, serving Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy counties](#). South

Texas College received \$254,167 from the grant for the Maintenance and Repair Program for Automated Technologies providing training and credentials for high school students and unemployed workers.

High levels of unemployment are a problem in south and southeast Texas as well. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, South Texas and Southeast have the highest rates of unemployment in Texas. More comprehensive and sustained efforts are needed to address the root causes of unemployment in Texas.

South and Southeast Texas have the highest unemployment rates in the state.



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau
CREDIT: Levi Long

POVERTY

According to U.S. Census Bureau data, Starr County has the highest poverty rate among Texas counties with populations of 50,000-100,000. The area has met prolonged struggles with systemic poverty and inadequate economic opportunities in employment, resulting in hurdles in fulfilling basic needs and enhancing residents' standard of living. The extreme poverty rate in Starr County highlights the need for long-term solutions that address systemic inequalities and provide residents with opportunities for economic mobility.

Starr County's history of high poverty rates has been highlighted in the news before, with 24/7

Wall St. reporting two years ago that it was the poorest county in Texas. [The county's poverty rate is the highest share in the state, one of the highest of any U.S. County, and well more than double the state poverty rate.](#)

Starr County stands out for high rates of poverty and unemployment.

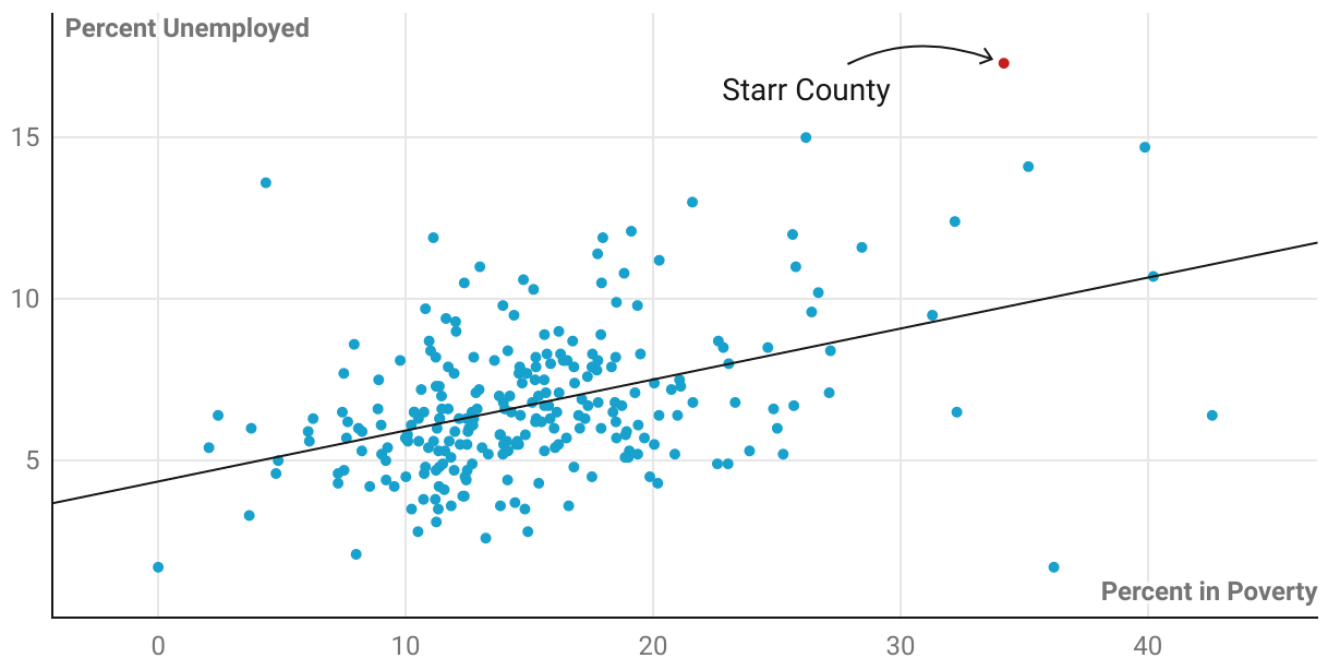


Chart: Levi Long • Source: U.S. Census Bureau • Created with Datawrapper

CHILDCARE

Families in Starr County also face a lack of affordable childcare. Starr County is facing a critical shortage of accessible and affordable childcare options, according to Brittany Rodriguez of Workforce Solutions. Many families in the area are struggling to find adequate resources for their children's care, leaving them with limited options.

According to Rodriguez, a human resources worker at the corporate office of Workforce

Solutions, the childcare situation is a pressing issue. "We have a lot of jobs," Rodriguez said.

"Who is going to watch the children?"

Texas's shortage of affordable childcare services is worsening, according to The Texas Newsroom. [According to the Texas Association for the Education of Young Children, 44% of responding childcare programs said they may close within the next year after federal relief funding runs out.](#)

Rodriguez found the lack of affordable childcare in the area as a contributing factor to the high unemployment rate and poverty rate. "The minimum wage is what in Texas? \$7.25," Rodriguez said. It is hard to pay for childcare services unless you have family or friends to watch them, she noted.

Rodriguez then discussed how Workforce Solutions offers services, but they are currently overwhelmed with the number of families in need. "We have so many families to service," Rodriguez said.

References and further reading

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Governor Abbott announces more than \$5.9 million in Texas Talent Connection Grants.
Office of the Governor | Greg Abbott. (n.d.). <https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-announces-more-than-5.9-million-in-texas-talent-connection-grants>

This is the poorest county in Texas. 24/7 Wall St. (2021, January 27).
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Fogel, B. (2023, April 25). *Texas is facing a child care crisis. More than 30 groups are asking lawmakers to do more.* Houston Public Media.
<https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/2023/04/25/450056/texas-is-facing-a-child-care-crisis-more-than-30-groups-are-asking-lawmakers-to-do-more/>