



WHAT IS A FAIR HOUSING AND EQUITY ASSESSMENT

Developing a Fair Housing and Equity Assessment (FHEA) is a requirement under the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant initiative and a key part of understanding sustainability:

Sustainability includes creating “geographies of opportunity,” places that effectively connect people to jobs, quality public schools, and other amenities. Today, too many families are stuck in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty and segregation, where one’s zip code predicts poor education, employment, and even health outcomes. These neighborhoods are not sustainable in their present state.

The purpose of the FHEA is to identify and address these inequalities in opportunity.

The end result of this regional scale analysis is to understand the historical, current, and future context for equity and opportunity in the region and to integrate the findings into the planning process and the recommendations into the final Plan for Opportunity.

HOW TO USE THIS ASSESSMENT

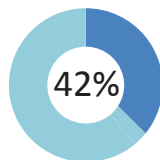
The FHEA focuses on the following five indicators identified and defined by HUD in order to gain a full picture of regional equity and access to opportunity:

1. Segregation and Integration;
2. Racially Concentrated Areas of Poverty;
3. Access to Existing Areas of High Opportunities;
4. Fair Housing Issues, Services, and Activities; and
5. Major Public Investments.

The FHEA is a public document meant to inform recommendations in the Plan for Opportunity and for use by the jurisdictions, organizations and community groups of the Mississippi Gulf Coast Region. It is meant, not only to provide a baseline for how the region is doing in terms of fair housing and equity, but to provoke thoughtful discussion and further research. It is the hope of the partners of the Plan for Opportunity that this FHEA will set a precedent for a more regional approach to future evaluations of fair housing compliance and opportunity planning for the Mississippi Gulf Coast Region.

5 Racially Concentrated Areas of Poverty in the Mississippi Gulf Coast Region

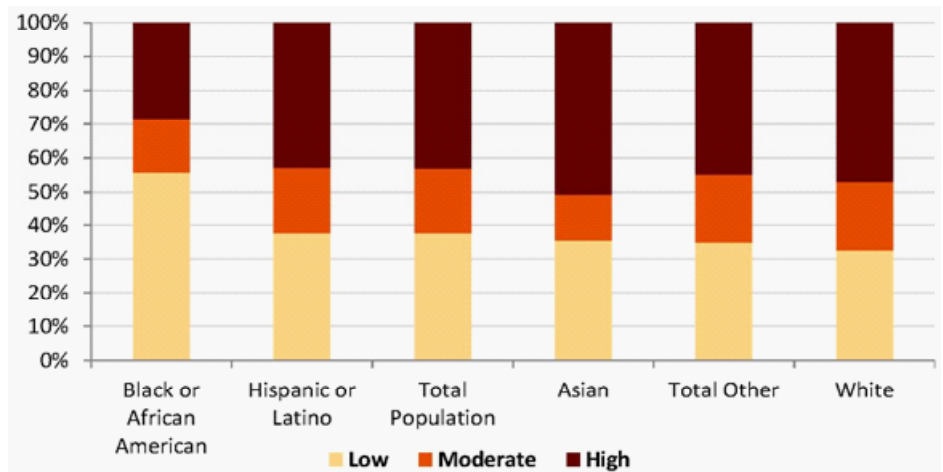
38% of the region’s population live in areas of low or very low opportunity



Of all fair housing complaints within the state were filed in the three coastal counties

11.9

The average number of months it takes to process a fair housing complaint in the 3 coastal counties.



Some of the coast’s minority populations are concentrated in areas of low opportunity, as charted above. Opportunity for the region is based on a series of indicators including public education, economics & mobility, housing, socioeconomics, and public health & security.



STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES



Many stakeholders from across the Mississippi Gulf Coast Region have been involved in the creation of this FHEA. Representatives from housing and social service agencies, advocacy organizations and the various jurisdictions have been instrumental in collecting and analyzing the information used in this report.

The overall response of these stakeholders is that the FHEA is a valuable tool that should be used not only in the Plan for Opportunity, but also by planners and public officials in the region as a basis for discussing future collaboration and investment. In addition, all were interested in continuing to collect data in order to monitor trends and progress over time.

Many agreed that the data analyzed in the FHEA is an excellent starting point for telling the story of fair housing on the coast and could be further enhanced by continued outreach and stakeholder involvement.

KEY FINDINGS & OPPORTUNITIES



Lack of fair housing infrastructure and awareness

- A regional fair housing organization is needed to proactively evaluate local practices and provide needed outreach and education (See Section 6).



Work needs to be done throughout the state to improve Mississippi's service system for persons with mental and physical disabilities.

- Key barriers remain to transitioning persons with disabilities from institutions to a more integrated setting within communities including lack of adequate housing and access to services (See Section 5).



Potential Fair Housing violations in zoning codes have been identified in various jurisdictions on the coast.

- Jurisdictions should review their zoning codes and make revisions to definitions and provisions that may limit access to fair housing (See Section 6).



Some of the coasts' more vulnerable populations are concentrated in areas of lower opportunity

- Topical and geographic priority areas have been identified to focus future investment.
- Programmatic investment and policies aimed to improve opportunity, especially socioeconomic opportunity, throughout the region could greatly benefit underserved populations (See Section 5).



Segregation trends and the effects of new programs, policies and investments need to be aggressively monitored.

- More can and should be done to proactively work towards increased integration across the coast and specifically in those parts of the region where higher segregation levels have been identified (See Section 3).

NEXT STEPS

The Plan for Opportunity partnership will engage residents and communities along the Mississippi Gulf Coast in dialogue about the role fair housing and other elements play in a more vibrant, healthy and prosperous region. You can share your ideas and perspectives by visiting the gulfcoastplan.org and by taking part at festivals and community forums.

"The effort to support more equitable and sustainable housing in the MS Gulf Coast depends on the involvement of many and diverse groups."

Source: Plan For Opportunity, Housing Stakeholder Assessment,



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gulfcoastplan.org



The Plan for Opportunity is a collaborative planning project led by the Gulf Coast Regional Planning Commission that is intended to guide the economic growth and development of the Mississippi Gulf Coast and to improve housing, employment and transportation opportunities throughout the region. The Plan for Opportunity is key to strengthening the economy, improving quality of life for residents, and creating a more sustainable future for the region.

The work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under an award from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The substance and findings of the work are dedicated to the public. The author and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in the publication. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government.