

NEW ORLEANS BUSINESS NEWS

More than half of New Orleans households are struggling to get by: report

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Rae Jean Carroll, manager of operations, does the Sisyphean task of refolding donated clothes after T-shirt seekers leave the shelves in chaos at the Bishop

Perry Center on Tuesday, July 8, 2014. The center, which opened in August 2013, is an outreach of St. Louis Cathedral. (Photo by Julia Kumari Drapkin, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune archive) *(Julia Kumari Drapkin)*

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More than half of New Orleans' 152,700 households are struggling to get by, with folks either living in poverty or falling into a working class with little cash and even fewer assets to their names.

In 2014, roughly 52 percent of Orleans Parish households -- or nearly 80,000 total -- lived below the federal poverty line or were what the report defines as asset limited, income constrained, and employed, a state United Way calls ALICE. Of the 52 percent of New Orleans households struggling to get by, about 27 percent live in poverty and an additional 25 percent fall below the ALICE threshold.

That compared with 19 percent of households living below the poverty line and 23 percent of ALICE households in all of Louisiana. There are 1.72 million households total statewide.

The report released Thursday (April 6) is an update to a similar ALICE report completed a year ago. It folds in data from 2014, the latest information available for comprehensive national comparisons. United Way will release a state-by-state comparison report later this year.

The report notes that more Louisiana homes were struggling to stay afloat in 2014, even as the regional economy appeared to chug along -- the state's population is increasing, there are more jobs and wages are inching upward.

Why is that? The report points to a rising cost of living throughout the state. Low-wage jobs also continue to dominate the Louisiana economy. About 68 percent of all jobs in the state paid less than \$20 an hour, and two-thirds of those jobs offered wages below \$15 an hour.

The data in the report stops at 2014, but it notes more recent factors, such as severe weather events, including recent tornadoes and the Louisiana Flood of 2016, and job loss related to the oil and gas downturn and other industry fluctuations, will continue to force many Louisiana families to tap into any savings they may have.

Families with children were the most likely to live in poverty, particularly those in single-parent families. That reality is sharpened in Orleans Parish, where nearly half of the city's 29,590 families with children are headed by single women.

Seniors are most likely to live in ALICE households, though those figures appear to be improving. The number of Louisiana households led by someone more than 65 years old is rising, but the share of ALICE households in that group fell from 34 percent in 2007 to 28 percent in 2014.

Here is how the other parishes in the greater New Orleans area stacked up in 2014.

Parish	Total households	Poverty households	ALICE households	Median household income	Unemployment rate
Jefferson Parish	169,033	15%	24%	\$46,961	5.8%
Orleans Parish	152,788	27%	25%	\$35,504	10.3%
Plaquemines Parish	8,772	16%	18%	\$54,835	5.1%
St. Bernard Parish	14,051	16%	31%	\$44,706	12.2%
St. Charles Parish	18,421	12%	22%	\$57,785	8.2%
St. James Parish	7,925	16%	19%	\$53,259	11.0%
St. John the Baptist Parish	15,444	17%	23%	\$50,716	10.8%
St. Tammany Parish	88,123	11%	21%	\$63,210	6.5%
Louisiana	1,722,841	19%	23%	\$47,727	5.4%

Source: Louisiana Association of United Ways