



STATE OF GEORGIA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
ATLANTA 30334-0090

Brian P. Kemp  
GOVERNOR

January 20, 2023

Dr. Jennifer Clyburn Reed  
Federal Co-Chair  
Southeast Crescent Regional Commission  
1901 Assembly St Suite 370  
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Dr. Reed

I am pleased to submit Georgia's 2023-2027 Southeast Crescent Regional Commission State Strategic Plan. This document identifies Georgia's priorities for the use of SCRC funds. We believe this document fulfills the requirements of the SCRC Strategic Plan.

Thank you for the continued assistance you and your staff have provided. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my Alternate to the SCRC, Georgia Department of Community Affairs Commissioner Christopher Nunn or Brittany Pittman at (706) 508 -7381.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B.Kemp".

Brian Kemp  
Governor



**State of Georgia Strategic Plan**

**2023-2027**

**For**

**Southeast Crescent Regional Commission**



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## Governor Brian Kemp

Governor Brian Kemp will direct SCRC resources to assist communities in meeting their community and economic goals, as well as the goals of the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission. The governor aims to lead Georgia in pursuit of the following strategies:

- Preparing a ready workforce and removing barriers to employment
- Strengthening rural Georgia
- Providing critical infrastructure
- Improving the quality of and access to healthcare options in rural Georgia



This plan will help Georgia's SCRC region meet its diverse and evolving needs. Georgia is still a national leader in agricultural output, and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is gaining recognition as a manufacturing, technology, and film/entertainment center as well. This plan identifies investment strategies that will support these emerging sectors as well as continue to support the community development needs of the region.

**Governor Kemp's Alternate, Commissioner Christopher Nunn, leads the state's Department of Community Affairs,** working to coordinate community development activities and funding to pursue its mission to help build strong, vibrant communities. DCA has a broad reach that includes comprehensive planning, safe and affordable housing, downtown development, community infrastructure and economic development finance. DCA manages the SCRC program for the State of Georgia.

## **Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Overview**

The Southeast Crescent Regional Commission is an economic development partnership agency of the federal government and seven state governments. The SCRC's mission is to build sustainable communities and strengthen economic growth across the Southeast Crescent region.

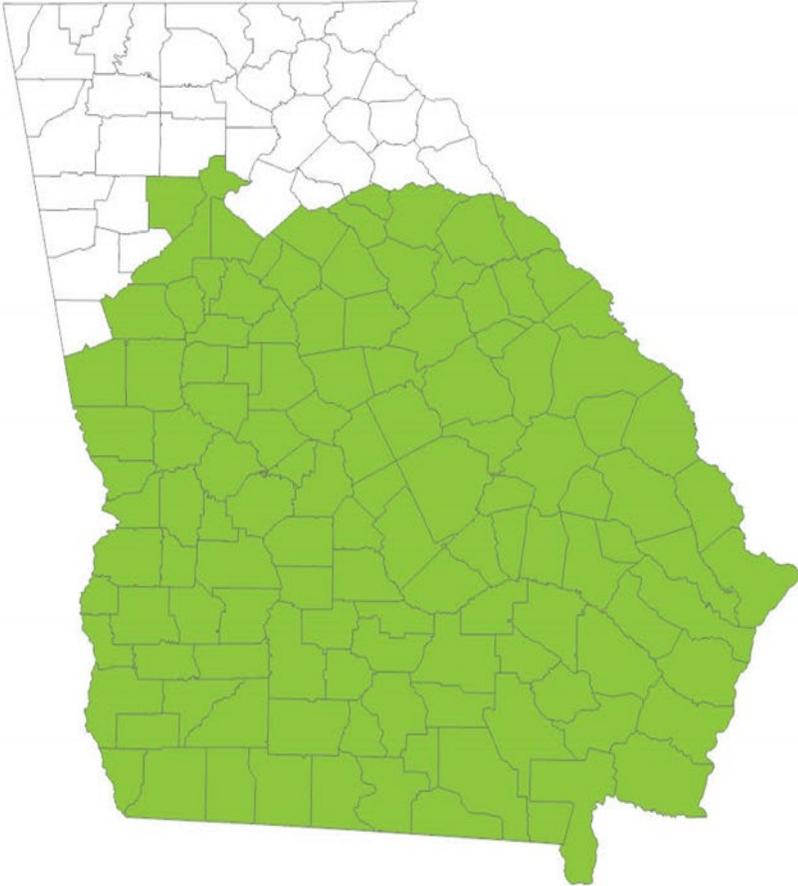
Established in the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 ("The Farm Bill")<sup>1</sup>, the SCRC's focus is on addressing issues related to economic development and poverty in its 428 counties across Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. Of the 428 counties, a stunning 39% experience persistent poverty. Georgia's SCRC region represents 122 counties.

### **State-Federal Partnership**

The foundation of this state-federal partnership is a mutually agreed-upon SCRC strategic plan along with each state's unique strategies for implementation. This partnership serves to create opportunities for self-sustaining economic development and improved quality of life for the people of the region. While the seven states share many similar issues; their strategies to address these SCRC goals vary based on regional differences, local needs, state policies and administration priorities. The partnership allows individual states the flexibility to invest effectively to meet needs identified at the local, regional and state levels.

Governor Brian Kemp serves as the Georgia commission member, and Georgia Department of Community Affairs Commissioner Christopher Nunn serves as the governor's alternate and Brittany Pittman oversees Georgia's SCRC program.

**Georgia's Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Region**



## **An Assessment of Georgia's Southeast Crescent Region**

**Natural Environment:** Georgia's Southeast Crescent region is rich in cultural, natural and historic resources that contribute to the overall economy and well-being of the state and the larger 7-state region. The region is mostly rural, offering natural beauty, a distinct cultural heritage and relative proximity to metropolitan Atlanta, which is the leading economic driver of the state. Ranking tenth in the nation economically with a GDP of \$276 billion, greater Atlanta influences the SCRC region significantly.

**Built Environment:** The growth of the metropolitan Atlanta area, combined with the highway improvements through Georgia's 122 county region has had a profound effect on community growth and development. Much of the commercial, industrial and institutional construction of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and first part of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have been auto oriented; and built with proximity to highways in mind, resulting in linear development following highway footprints. In many communities, these patterns have resulted in underused, underdeveloped, or even abandoned former shopping centers and big box stores. Even some of our most rural communities are dealing with the aftereffects of this low-density construction.

While this type of construction has been quite popular in the past and remains popular today, Georgia is undergoing a shift in its community development policies; and has begun to invest more heavily in communities that have a demonstrated plan to create live-work-play environments that will meet the needs of its citizens. Because transit is non-existent or extremely limited across the region, this type of development can be useful in terms of providing access to work and educational opportunities across a range of income levels. The more robust economies of Valdosta, Augusta, Columbus, Macon, Savannah and Athens are all attracting private in-town housing and retail development options and are planning to expand their city footprints to extend these development patterns. Our smaller communities will need technical and financial resources to maximize their live-work-play potential.

Finally, the housing stock across the region is overwhelmingly single-family. As Georgia continues to grow at a pace faster than the national average, many of our communities are beginning to explore additional housing options to meet the needs of low-to-moderate wage individuals and families, new graduates, single people, and our ever-growing elderly population. We anticipate a need for a wide spectrum of housing options integral to the existing, redeveloping and newly developing communities across the region.

**Economy:** Georgia's Agricultural industry plays a significant role in the state's economy, contributing billions of dollars annually. Agricultural labor, while no longer the largest source of work for Georgians today, has nevertheless shaped the culture and identity of the state. Georgia has 9.9 million acres of land devoted to farms, with an average farm size of 235 acres. In 2019, Georgia had more than 42,000 individual farms, and the state's farmers sold more than \$9.5 billion worth of agricultural products.

Once viewed primarily as a cotton state, Georgia now consistently ranks first in the nation's production of poultry and eggs and is also top producers of peanuts, pecans, tobacco, blueberries, and peaches. Overall, the state accounts for 2 percent of the total US agriculture sales.

**Population:** In 2020, more than 6.5 million people or 68 percent of the total Georgia population resided in the 122 counties of the Southeast Crescent Region. Most of Georgia's landmass is rural, but less than a quarter of the population live in a rural area. Georgia's rural population for 2021 was 1.48 million, a 1.41 percent decline from 2020. Although much of our SCRC region is rural it is projected that the population of the region will increase 8.4 percent from 2020 to 2030.

**Poverty in the SCRC Region:** Poverty rates vary widely across the region. In 2021, 100 counties in the Region had poverty rates above the state average of 14.0 percent, while only 22 counties in the region were below the state rate. Oconee County had the lowest rate of 4.7 percent while Lanier County had the highest rate of 34.1 percent. Of particular concern, 61 counties in the region had poverty rates of 20 percent or higher.

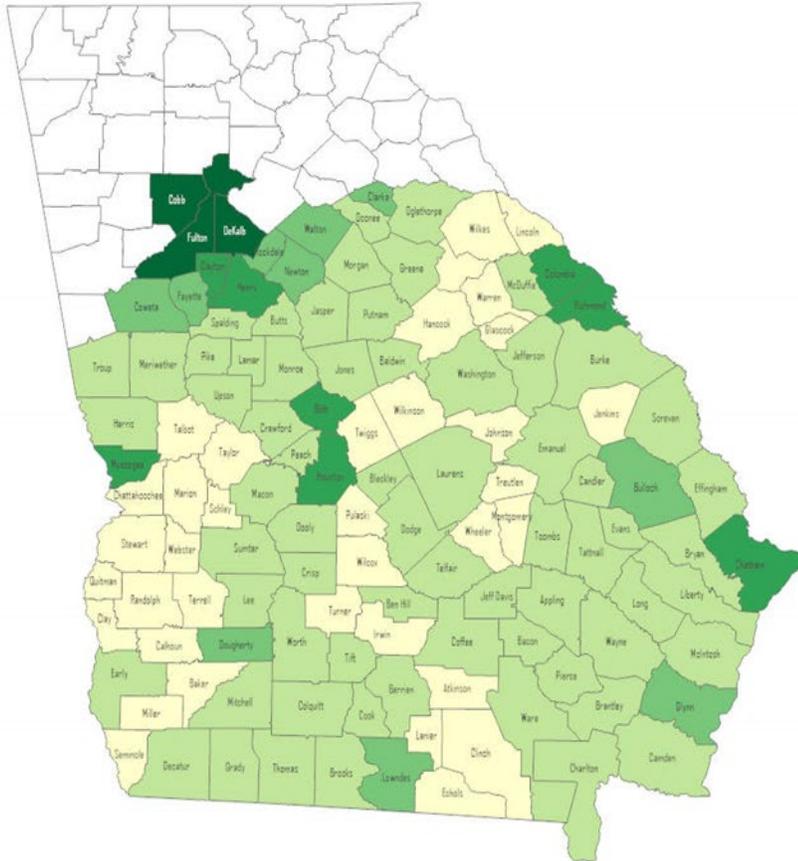
**Per Capita Income:** Per capita income (PCI) and per capita market income is a standard measures of community wealth. Georgia's SCRC region lags behind the nation in PCI. Jenkins and Telfair have the lowest PCI in the SCRC region. As Georgia's population ages, these disparities may become more dramatic, as a high percentage of the population will depend on Social Security benefits as an income source.

**Median Household Income:** In 2021, Georgia's median household income was below the national average. The median household income in the SCRC region was lower than the state average in most counties. Oconee has the highest median household income followed by Fayette. On the other end of the spectrum Wheeler had the lowest median household income followed by Randolph.

**Unemployment Rate:** Based on data from December 2022, Georgia's unemployment rate was 3 percent which is five-tenths of a percent lower than the national December 2022 unemployment rate of 3.5 percent. Although our state unemployment rate is lower than the national average, many counties within our SCRC region have unemployment rates over 4 percent.

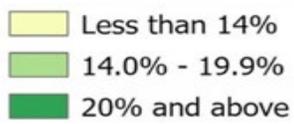
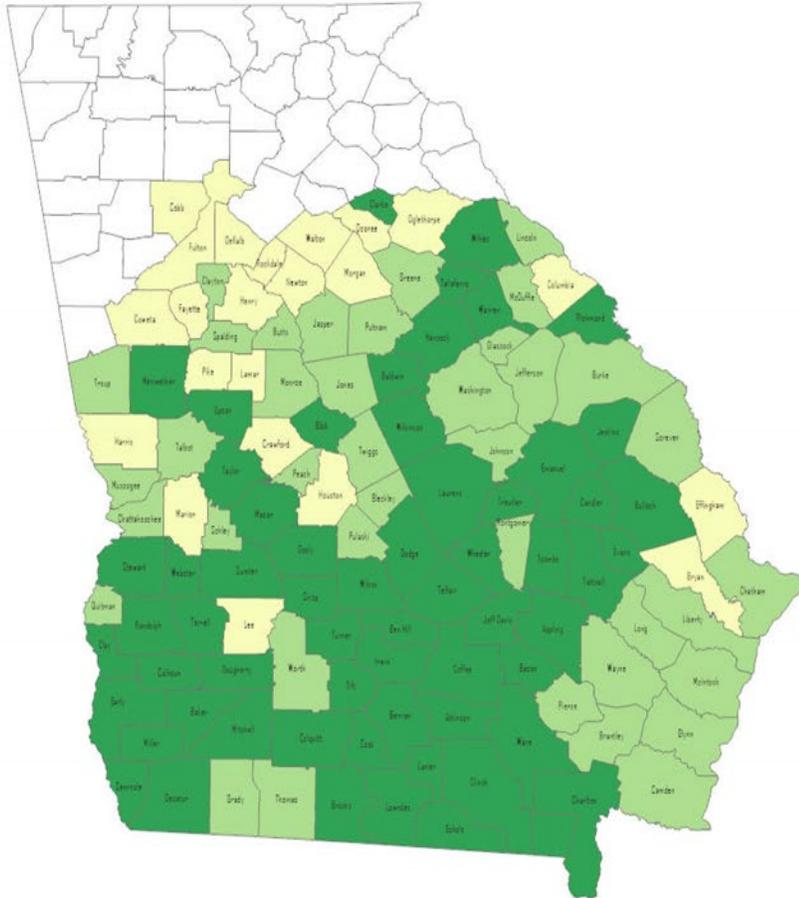
**Educational Attainment:** There is a direct link between education and income. Those with greater educational attainment earn more income over their life. Studies show that higher income provides increased access to health care, proper diet, quality housing, consistent employment and a healthy lifestyle. In Georgia's SCRC region only 8 counties are at or above the national average of educational attainment leaving 114 counties below the national average. Most of the counties in the region are at or below 15 percent educational attainment. The region is served by twelve public state universities, as well as 24 Technical Colleges and numerous private liberal arts colleges.

# Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Region – Population

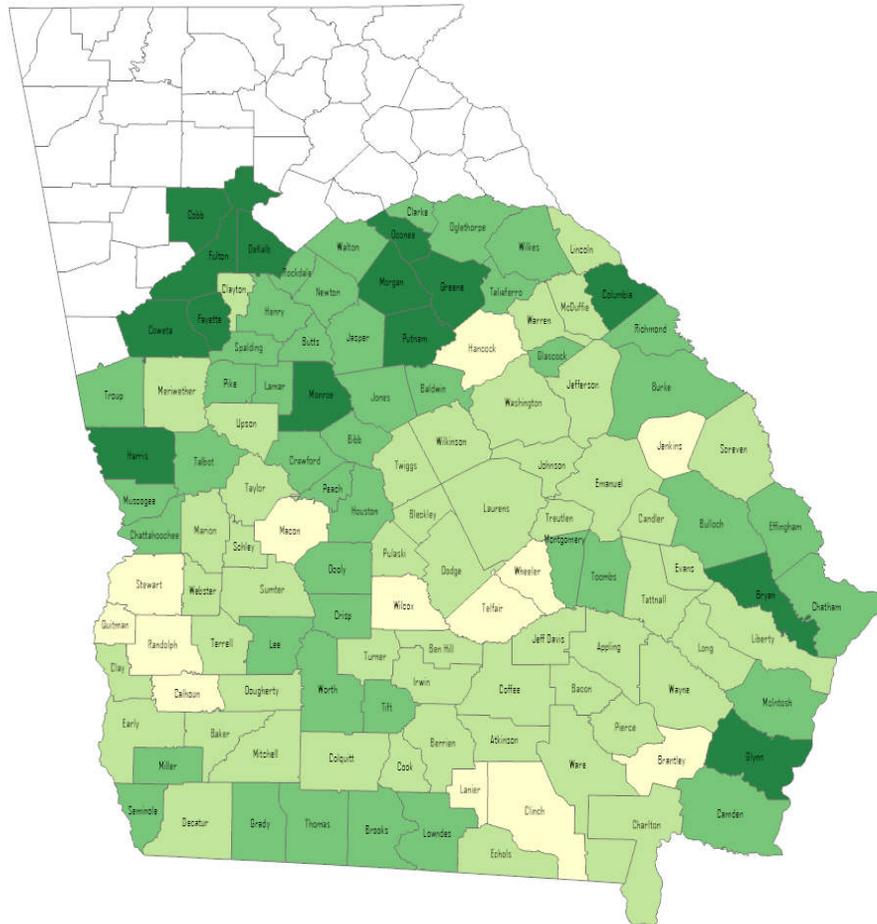


- Less than 10,000
- 10,000 - 75,000
- 75,001 - 150,000
- 150,001 - 300,000
- Greater than 300,000

## Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Region – Poverty Rates



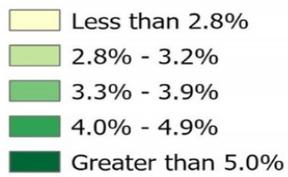
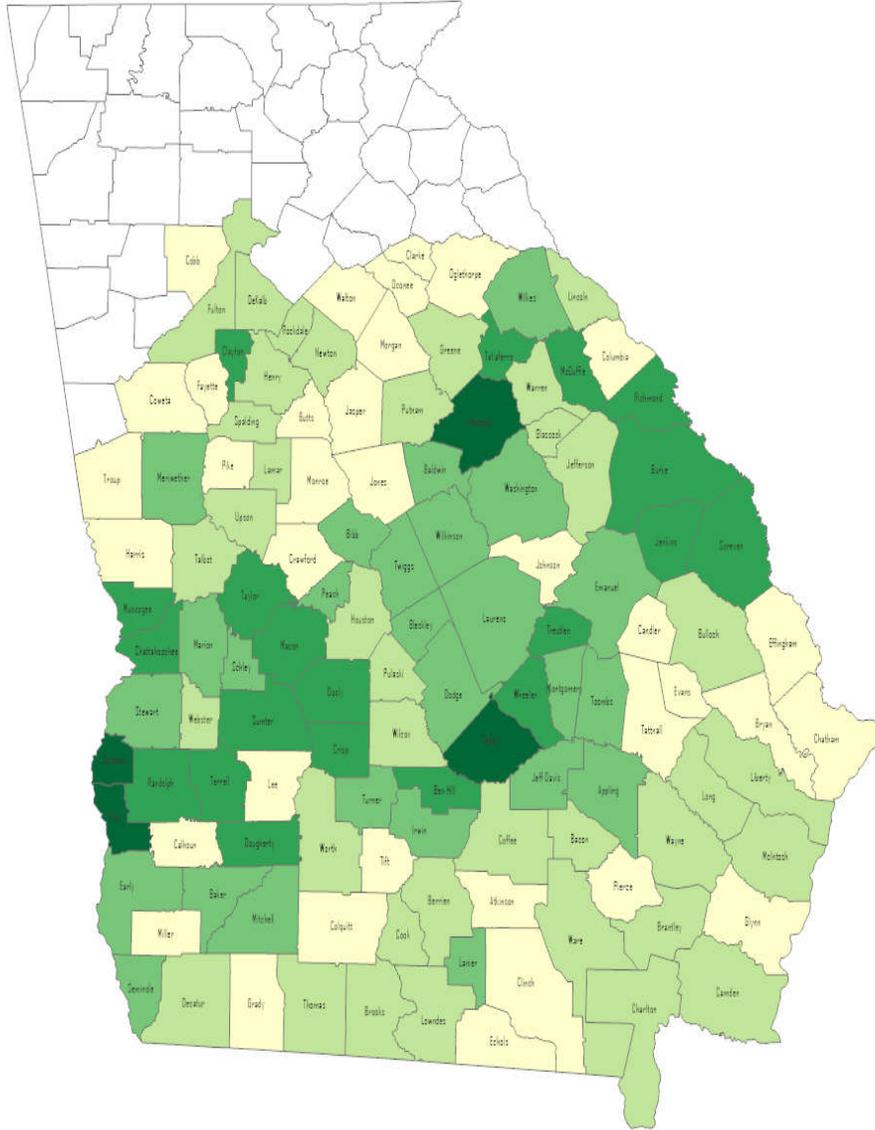
## Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Region – Per Capita Income



- Less than \$20,000
- \$20,001 - \$25,000
- \$25,001 - \$35,086 Georgia's PCI
- Greater than \$35,087

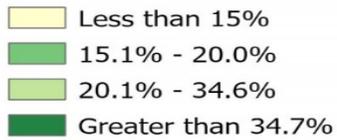
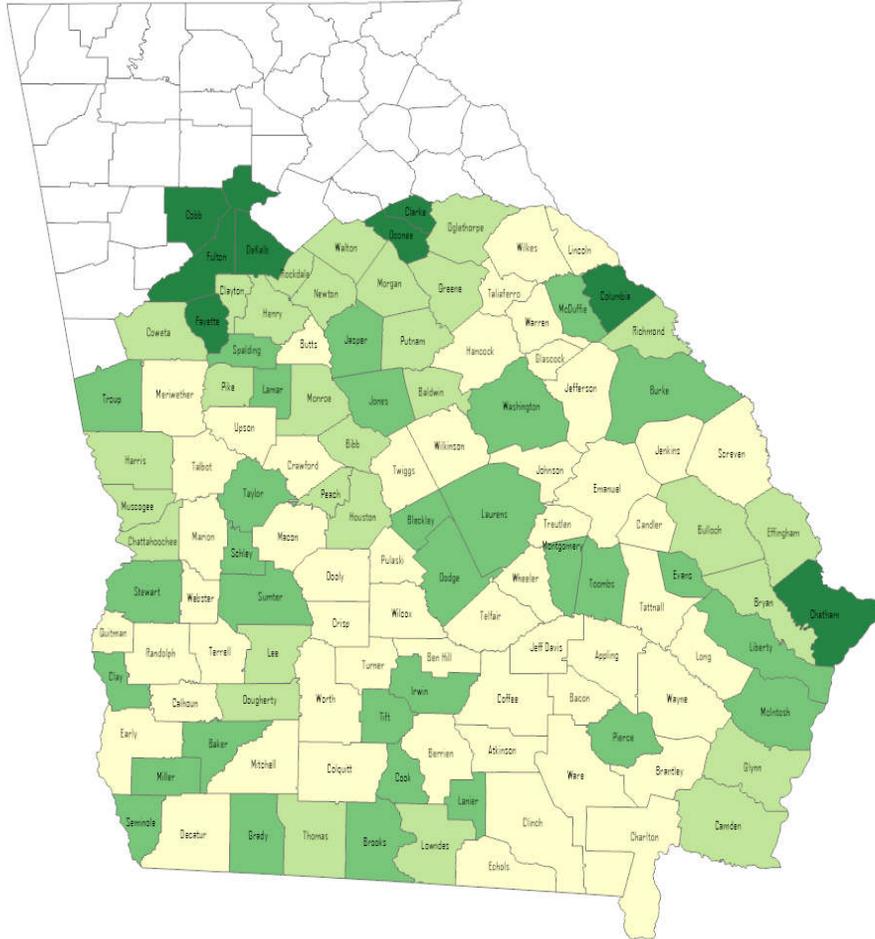


# Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Region – Unemployment Rates



# Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Region – Educational Attainment

## Percent who have a Bachelor's degree or higher



## Looking Forward in Georgia

As the SCRC Region and Georgia continue to change and grow, we plan to address the challenges and opportunities on the horizon. The continuing expansion of metropolitan Atlanta, while a catalyst for industrial, commercial and residential development, may also threaten the natural amenities that have attracted so many new residents and tourists to the region. The continued changing demographics of the region, ranging from high-growth areas to those that are losing population, must be considered when developing strategies for the region as a whole. Following are brief synopses of trends facing Georgia's SCRC region:

### Opportunities

**Agriculture and Agribusiness:** The Georgia Grown program is a marketing and economic development program of the Georgia Department of Agriculture whose goal is to aid our agricultural economies by bringing together producers, processors, suppliers, distributors, retailers, agritourism and consumers into one powerful, statewide community. Created to help new agribusinesses grow, and established agribusinesses thrive, the Georgia Grown program has expanded significantly since it started in 2011.

Georgia Grown is a brand with deep roots in sustainability, quality and integrity. The Georgia Grown brand is desired by business and consumers who want to buy and promote Georgia's locally grown products. With designations for restaurants, processed food, produce and meat products, the Georgia Grown label has helped the region's agribusinesses gain recognition in the state and across the southeastern region.

Georgia remains a strong agricultural presence nationwide. Supporting our agricultural economy and heritage will remain an important component of our state's economic strategies.

**Automotive and Advanced Manufacturing:** In 2022, \$21.2 billion was invested and 51,132 jobs were created in Georgia of which eighty five percent of the investments and more than 30,000 new jobs came from outside the ten-county metro Atlanta region. Many of these jobs were concentrated in the automotive and advanced manufacturing industries and located in the SCRC region.

**Transportation and Logistics System:** Georgia's SCRC region is supported by some of the most state-of-the-art transportation and logistics hubs. Hartsfield Jackson International airport, the busiest and most efficient airport in the world; the Port of Savannah, the single largest and fastest-growing container terminal in America; and a robust network of highways and rail lines, the logistics and distribution industry itself remain and economic engine for Georgia.

**Georgia's Film Industry:** In 2008, the Georgia General Assembly passed a 30% tax credit for productions shot in Georgia, and since then the film industry has grown exponentially and in 2018 Georgia was the number one location for films and TV series in the United States. Pre-production, stage and on-location sets and postproduction businesses in Georgia have grown as well, although many of these larger businesses are in the metropolitan Atlanta area. The natural beauty and small-town charm of the region, however, has attracted the interest of many artists as on-site locations.

As members of the new world-leader in the film industry, the region's communities have immense opportunity to attract both production and post-production activities. Many communities are working to position themselves as Camera-Ready, certified by the Georgia Department of Economic Development. For many across the region, working to bring post-production businesses and jobs to their communities is the next logical step.

## Challenges

**Broadband Service:** Broadband has become essential to business, education, healthcare, agriculture, and overall quality of life. Unfortunately, high-speed internet access remains out of reach for Georgians in many rural communities.

**Population Changes – An Aging Population:** According to the Georgia Department of Human Services, Aging Division, Georgia has the 11<sup>th</sup> fastest-growing 60+ population in the US between 2010-2030. Due to retirement trends in the last ten years, the 60+ population of Georgia's SCRC region is growing at a rate faster than the state as a whole. These changes will have significant impact on community services and needs, including healthcare, an adequate workforce supply, and significant changes in housing needs.

**Attracting and Retaining Talent to the Region:** As the US economy and the traditional workplace continues to shift, communities across the SCRC region will need to adapt to remain competitive. As Georgia works to train and educate its citizenry to work in high-technology, advanced manufacturing and film industries, our rural communities may seem less appealing to younger workers and their families. Building strong local economies with live-work-play options will be an important component of competitive, livable communities.

## Gaps

**Wages lower than national averages:** According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Georgia's rural counties continue to lag behind (in many instances, far behind) national averages. SCRC communities will need to employ a variety of strategies to provide opportunities for existing residents to increase job skills; as well as work to attract a range of employment options that include higher-paying jobs.

**Low educational attainment:** Although Georgia has made great strides in improving high school graduation rates, the state still lags behind national averages. In addition, Georgia's percentage of citizens with some level of higher education is below national averages. Since educational attainment is directly linked to income, working to improve these outcomes will remain a high priority in Georgia.

**Changing demographics in rural communities:** As Baby Boomers continue to retire, many have chosen to move to the northern counties of the state or out of the state. These rural counties have historically higher poverty rates than the nation and the metropolitan Atlanta area. Georgia policies and investments to address these disparities among communities (and reflected in the data) are necessary to ensure that all region residents have opportunities to prosper.

**Limited Housing Options:** Rural communities have fewer housing opportunities than more urban ones. Housing options tend to be single family, and in most rural communities, housing is not near employment, educational or other community opportunities. In order to help these smaller communities, remain viable; attract new residents and business, and succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Georgia will work to improve the number and variety of housing opportunities available.



### ***Local Development District Priorities***

- Providing reasonable access to medical care and services in rural areas
- Ensuring a capable and ready workforce through education, training opportunities and apprenticeship options
- Support the agriculture and timber industry in the SCRC region
- Breaking down barriers to employment across all income sectors, including addressing:
  - Limited access to child and senior care options
  - Limited access to transportation options
  - Increasing access to and stock of safe, decent and affordable housing, especially in rural areas
- Supporting the building and expansion of water and sewer systems to promote and support economic development opportunities

### ***State Priorities***

Governor Brian Kemp has outlined the following SCRC priorities for his administration in order to focus Georgia's resources responsibly. Georgia will use its SCRC resources to further the goals of the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission as well as those of our local communities, our regions, and our state.

1. Prepare a Ready Workforce
2. Strengthen and Support the Agriculture Industry
3. Support Economic Development Efforts to Attract and Retain Jobs and Investments
4. Improve Quality of and Access to Healthcare in Rural Georgia
5. Support Critical Infrastructure Needs

### ***Southeast Crescent Commission Strategic Plan 2023-2027***

In December 2022, the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission approved a strategic plan to guide the Commission's economic and community development efforts in the region through the end of Fiscal Year 2027 (September 30, 2027). The plan outlines six strategic goals supporting SCRC's vision and mission.

1. Invest in Critical Infrastructure
2. Improve Health and Public Service Access and Outcomes
3. Strengthen workforce capacity
4. Foster Entrepreneurial and Business Development Activities
5. Expand Affordable Housing Stock and Access
6. Promote Environmental Conservation, Preservation and Access

## **SCRC Funding Designations**

The SCRC funding designations for its 428 counties in 7 states are a product of comparisons made among each county and the United States as a whole. Each year, SCRC adjusts these designations according to the most recently available data to determine the total amount of funding available to each state.

**Distressed Counties** are the most economically depressed counties. They rank in the lowest 25 percent of the nation's counties. Distressed counties are eligible to receive up to 80% of a total project cost in funding.

**Transitional Counties** are those transitioning between weak and strong economies. They make up the largest economic status designation. Transitional counties rank between the lowest 25 percent and the highest 25 percent of the nation's counties. Transitional counties are eligible to receive 50% of a total project cost.

**Attainment Counties** are the economically strongest in the nation, ranking in the top 25 percent. These counties are not eligible for SCRC funding.



## Georgia's Operating Policies for Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Funds

Georgia's SCRC program operates on the following program guidelines:

- Maximum SCRC investment is \$350,000. The maximum investment may be waived by the Governor at his discretion.
- Priority is given to projects that are "ready-to-go," meaning that projects are encouraged to secure other necessary funding before applying.
- Eligible applicants include:
  - Local governments
  - Development Authorities
  - Non-profit organizations (must provide adequate certification of status)
  - Educational institutions
  - Public healthcare institutions
  - Public-private partnerships are eligible, but applicant must be a public entity or non-profit entity
- Each proposal is scored according to the following criteria:
  - Consistency with Southeast Crescent Regional Commission goals and strategies
  - Consistency with Georgia's goals and strategies
  - Economic impact within the community and the region

### Construction and Non-Construction Projects

- Construction projects should have preliminary commitment of jobs and a preliminary engineering report prior to request for funding.
- In the case of tourism-related construction projects, credible forecasts for increased commercial activity must be included.
- Construction projects must obtain all reviews and approvals pertaining to federal financing PRIOR to project start dates. These include, but are not limited to:
  - Environmental assessments
  - Wage and labor rate approvals
  - Procurement approvals
  - Contractor approvals
- Projects requesting start-up funds should identify sources of funding to continue the project upon cessation of SCRC investment or indicate a plan for cultivating future funding.

### General Information

Pre-applications for funding are required and may be submitted at any time. All application materials are available at: [www.dca.ga.gov/scrc](http://www.dca.ga.gov/scrc).

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<sup>1</sup> United States Government Publishing Office, et al. "Public Law 110 - 246 - Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008: An Act to Provide for the Continuation of Agricultural and Other Programs of the Department of Agriculture Through Fiscal Year 2012, and for Other Purposes. [contains Amendments to the Animal Welfare Act]." <https://naldc.nal.usda.gov/download/7690562/pdf>