Access to Credit and Financial Services

A BRIDGE TO FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

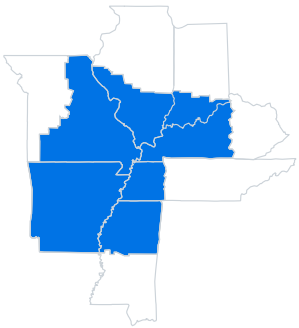
Access to financial services—including bank accounts and traditional credit like credit cards or student loans—is a cornerstone of financial well-being. Such access can improve economic mobility and resilience and help households participate more fully in the economy.

How is access to credit measured?

1. **Whether you have a credit score**
2. **The quality of that credit score**

No credit score or a subprime credit score can mean credit denials and higher interest rates.

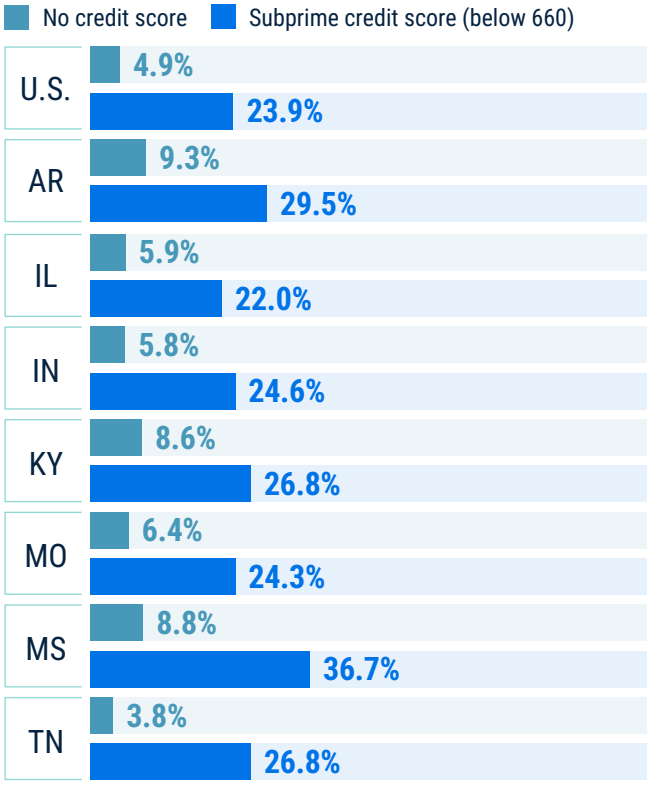
NOTE: This measure of credit access was used for purposes of the analysis in an accompanying report, "Access to Credit and Financial Services: A Bridge to Financial Well-being."



66.8 million
U.S. adults have a **subprime credit score**.

9.2 million
adults in Eighth District states have a **subprime credit score**.

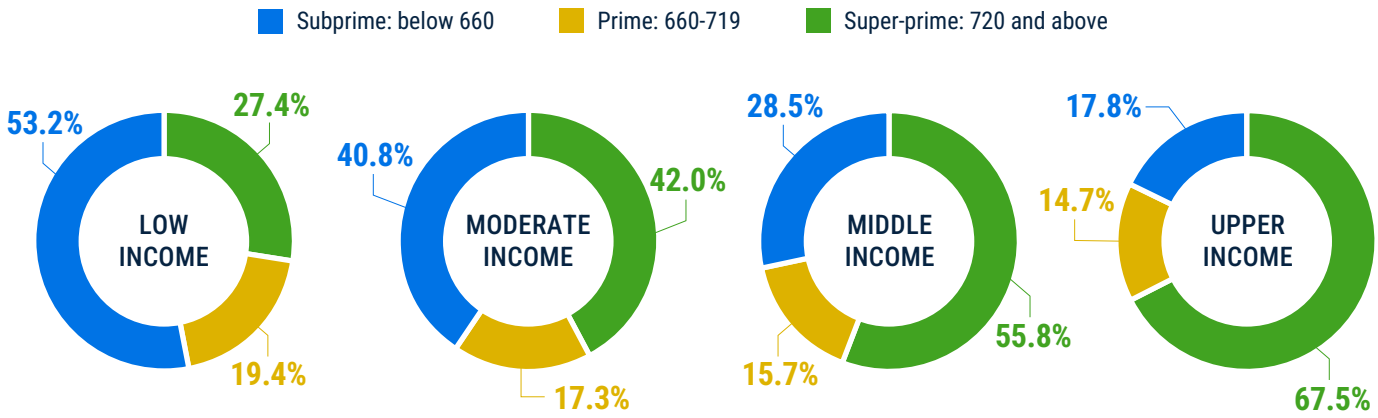
Access to Credit: U.S. and Eighth District States



SOURCES: New York Fed Consumer Credit Panel/Equifax and St. Louis Fed calculations.

NOTES: Data are from the first quarter of 2025. No credit score calculation is based on the number of adults (18 and older) in a geography; subprime credit score is based on total adults with a credit record in a geography.

Credit Score Distribution across Income Levels in Eighth District States



SOURCES: New York Fed Consumer Credit Panel/Equifax, Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council 2024 U.S. Census Flat File, and St. Louis Fed calculations.

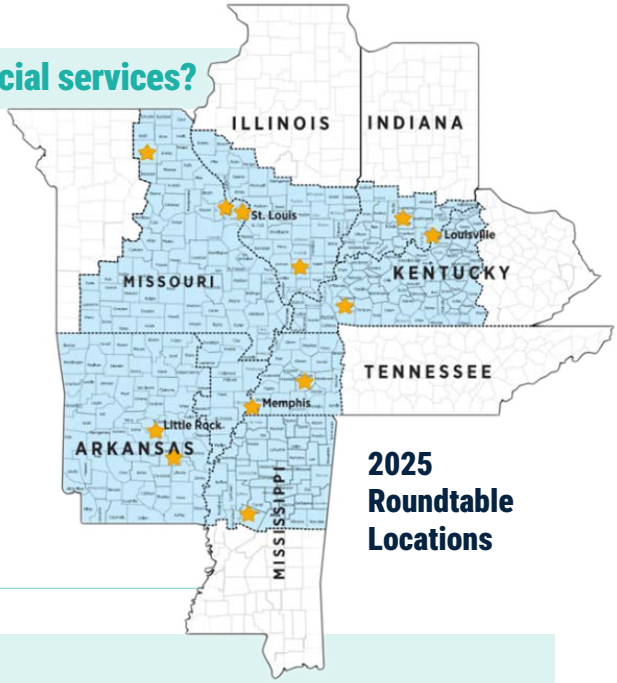
NOTES: Data are from the first quarter of 2025. Income levels are census tract income levels. Percentages may not add up to 100 exactly due to rounding.

What Communities Tell Us

How do low- and moderate-income individuals access financial services?

In 2025, St. Louis Fed Community Development staff convened 12 roundtable discussions about financial well-being in communities across the Eighth Federal Reserve District. Representatives from banks, nonprofits, small business development centers, community development corporations and chambers of commerce participated in the conversations.

Findings from a qualitative analysis of participant contributions at these roundtables provide nuanced, on-the-ground insights about how low- and moderate-income individuals interact with institutions to access financial services.



2025 Roundtable Locations

Top Themes

Individual Backgrounds

- Financial literacy and trust in banks are key to accessing bank accounts and credit.
- The biggest gaps in financial literacy involve banks and credit, including how to apply for products and services.
- When accessing financial services, common sentiments are frustration, confusion, low confidence and feeling overwhelmed.

Financial Institutions

- Individuals struggle with document requirements, technical language and speed of accessing traditional credit.
- Nonbank financial institutions, like payday lenders, are convenient but come with a higher cost of borrowing that can be unaffordable.
- A relationship with a bank may improve an individual's confidence, trust and access to financial services.

Community Approaches to Addressing Access

- Expand high-quality financial education.
- Ensure financial services address the needs of individuals and households.
- Create institutional partnerships and networks.
- Meet with individuals in their communities.
- Strengthen regulation of interest rates, fees and disclosures.

READ THE FULL REPORT.

FEDERAL RESERVE BANK of ST. LOUIS