

# Black Audit Project: Chicago



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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Why Chicago? .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Sustainable Development Goals</b>	
<b>Goal 1 .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Goal 2.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Goal 3.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Goal 4.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Goal 5.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Goal 6.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Goal 7.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Goal 8.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Goal 9.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Goal 10.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Goal 11.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Goal 12.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Goal 13.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Goal 14.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Goal 15.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Goal 16.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Goal 17.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Building A Better Chicago .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Reflection .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Organizations to Contact .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Power Point Presentation .....</b>	<b>45</b>

## Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations launched the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of a global effort to promote long-term prosperity and equality for all people, both now and in the future.<sup>1</sup> The SDGs aim to build a global partnership that advances fundamental human rights by eradicating poverty, improving healthcare and education systems, addressing racial and gender inequalities, and tackling urgent environmental challenges related to land, climate, and water.<sup>2</sup> The UN tracks progress through an annual report using a global indicator framework and data collected at the regional level by national statistics systems. Far from being abstract, the SDGs are a practical framework for action, with clear targets designed to foster peace, prosperity, and sustainability for individuals and the planet.

[The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), adopted by all UN Member countries in 2015, serves as a shared blueprint for achieving peace and prosperity for people and the planet.<sup>3</sup>

The 2030 Agenda represents a comprehensive vision for sustainable development that:

- Unlike the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which focused primarily on “developing” countries, it applies universally.
- It is grounded in principles of equity and human rights.
- Relies on strategies such as sustainable financing, scientific research, innovation, and robust monitoring and evaluation.
- It requires cross-sector collaboration involving a wide range of stakeholders.
- It aims to strengthen health systems globally, with the ultimate goal of achieving universal health coverage (UHC).<sup>4</sup>

The UN Secretary-General presents a detailed SDG progress report each year, evaluating the global effort to meet the goals.<sup>5</sup> This report uses a global indicator framework, and data gathered at regional and national levels to assess progress. In this context, this report focuses on the United States' progress on the SDGs, particularly how these goals impact Black residents in Chicago, offering insights into local and national challenges and opportunities.

Based on my research and town hall, the priority SDGs in Chicago are No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Quality Education, Climate Action, Reduced Inequalities, and Gender Equality. Chicago has made progress in tackling complex challenges to improve the lives of Black residents. However, significant changes, including a substantial increase in financial resources, are still needed to align with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda. This report highlights the current issues facing the city, the impact on residents, and the actions being taken by the city and local partners to address these problems.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

## Why Chicago?

I chose Chicago as the city where I wanted to do the Black Audit Project because I am interested in potentially living there. I thought that this would be an excellent opportunity to find out more about the city and what ways the Movement Lawyering Clinic might be able to assist. Before the Black Audit Project, I had only been to Chicago once, when I was younger, so I didn't have a lot of memories of it. But I knew that this city deserved to have a different kind of light shown on it.

Chicago has a rich history and a lot of culture, and coming from New York, that is something that I value in a city. The music, food, people, fashion, and museums all showed me the city has much to offer. I love that people love Chicago. While residents had many critiques, they also exhibited a sense of pride in their town. I had no shortage of recommendations for places to see and eat, and some residents even wanted to take me there. I received hospitality in Chicago that made me feel warm even in the windy city, and for that, it has a place in my heart.



## Goal 1: No Poverty

### *End Poverty in All its Forms Everywhere*

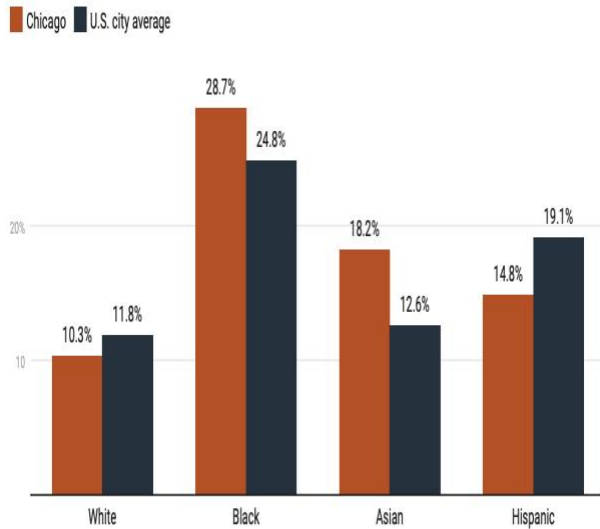
Every day, almost 500,000 Chicagoans are forced to suffer through poverty.<sup>6</sup> Neighborhoods in the South Side and West Side of Chicago, where the majority of the Black residents live, have poverty rates that are almost three times the city average of 17.2%.<sup>7</sup> In Riverdale, located on Chicago’s far South Side, more than half of residents, 51%, live below the poverty line, the highest rate of any neighborhood in the city.<sup>8</sup> Other areas with similarly high poverty rates include Fuller Park (48.8%), Washington Park (46.9%), East Garfield Park (45.5%), and Englewood (40%).<sup>9</sup> These neighborhoods are predominantly home to Black and Brown populations, highlighting a stark inequity.

The high poverty rates in densely populated minority neighborhoods are a major contributing factor to the significant racial disparities in poverty levels across Chicago. Black residents in the city face poverty at a rate of 28.7%, a figure that is nearly three times higher than the poverty rate for white Chicagoans, which stands at 10.3%.<sup>10</sup> This stark difference underscores the deep-rooted economic inequities between racial groups in the city. The concentration of poverty in neighborhoods predominantly inhabited by Black residents exacerbates these disparities, limiting access to opportunities and resources that could help break the cycle of poverty. This racial gap in poverty rates highlights the need for targeted policies and interventions

to address the structural and systemic issues that disproportionately impact Black communities in Chicago.

### **Black poverty rates are nearly triple white rates in Chicago**

Poverty rates by race and ethnicity for Chicago and U.S. city average, 2022



This phenomenon is likely a result of segregation. Chicago is one of the most segregated cities in the United States. Between 1915 and 1930, over 50,000 Black migrants moved to Chicago during the Great Migration, driven by the hope of finding better educational opportunities and employment prospects.<sup>11</sup> While Chicago was not as overtly segregated as the Jim Crow South, it was still deeply divided along racial lines. Newly arrived Black residents were restricted mainly to the expanding "Black Belt" on the city's South Side, a smaller area on the West Side, and a few isolated enclaves in other regions.<sup>12</sup> This system of racial segregation,

<sup>6</sup> Bryce Hill, *Black, Brown Chicago Neighbors Endure Highest Poverty Rates*, <https://www.illinoispolicy.org/black-brown-chicago-neighborhoods-endure-highest-poverty-rates/>

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Early Chicago: The Great Migration*, <https://interactive.wttw.com/dusable-to-obama/the-great-migration>

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

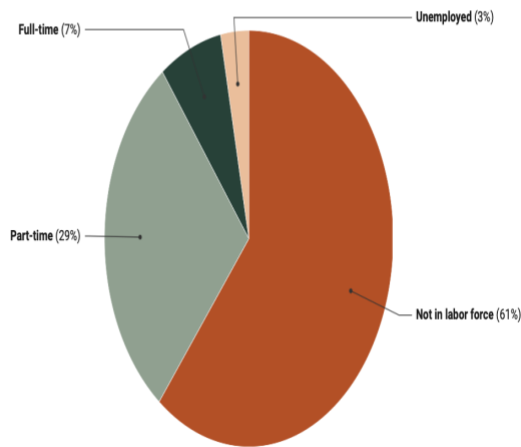
although not as formalized as in the South, effectively confined Black residents to specific neighborhoods, limiting their access to resources and opportunities.<sup>13</sup> This pattern of segregation persisted throughout the 20th century, continuing to shape the city's racial and geographic divisions, which remain a defining characteristic of Chicago to this day.<sup>14</sup>

“Nearly 60 years after the U.S. began the War on Poverty, the rate of Chicagoans living in poverty is higher than it was before the effort.”<sup>15</sup> In 1960, there were fewer than 110,000 Chicagoans estimated to be living in poverty, which was about a 12% poverty rate.<sup>16</sup> Chicago’s poverty rate has fluctuated in response to economic cycles, similar to the national trend, but it consistently remains higher than the average for other major U.S. cities. Chicago’s poverty rate exceeds those of Los Angeles and San Francisco.<sup>17</sup> Compared to other U.S. cities with populations above 1 million, Chicago ranks sixth in terms of the highest poverty rate, following Philadelphia, Houston, San Antonio, New York, and Dallas.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, despite the considerable media attention on homelessness issues in cities like San Francisco and Austin, Texas, both cities have lower overall poverty rates than Chicago, highlighting a significant disparity in economic conditions.

The Center for Policy Solutions report highlights several key findings about poverty in Chicago:

**Most Chicagoans in poverty are totally out of workforce**

Share of the Chicago poverty population by work status, 2022



(1) Chicago’s poverty rate is significantly higher than the U.S. city average of 15.9%.

(2) Employment plays a critical role in poverty levels, with nearly 202,000 Chicagoans—61% of those living in poverty—not participating in the labor force, meaning they are neither working nor actively seeking work. The majority of these individuals are of working age. In contrast, full-time employees have a very low poverty rate of just 2.3%.

(3) The highest poverty rate is among children under 18, with 1 in 4 experiencing poverty, a rate higher than the national average for U.S. cities.

<sup>13</sup> Zachary Leifer, *Chicago’s 250 Year History of Segregation*, <https://www.chicagoreporter.com/chicagos-250-year-history-of-segregation/>

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> Illinois Policy, *Poverty in Chicago Higher in 2022 Than Before War on Poverty*, <https://www.illinoispolicy.org/poverty-in-chicago-higher-in-2022-than-before-war-on-poverty/>

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> Dylan Sharkey, *Chicago Poverty Higher Than San Francisco, and Los Angeles*, <https://www.illinoispolicy.org/chicago-poverty-higher-than-san-francisco-los-angeles/>

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

- (4) There is a stark racial disparity in poverty rates: 28.7% of Black Chicagoans live in poverty, nearly three times the 10.3% rate among white residents. The poverty rate for the Hispanic and Latino population is 14.8%, while the Asian population faces a rate of 18.2%.
- (5) Women are disproportionately affected by poverty, representing 56% of those living in poverty. Single mothers face particularly high poverty rates, at 27.1%.
- (6) Education is strongly correlated with poverty levels in Chicago. Those without a high school diploma face a poverty rate of 26.5%, while high school graduates have a 21.5% rate. In comparison, those with bachelor's degrees experience a significantly lower poverty rate of 6.5%.<sup>19</sup>

One in four youth in Chicago currently live in poverty. Within the city's public schools, 76% of students rely on school meals, and more than 16,400 students are homeless. Growing up in one of the most segregated major cities in the U.S., Chicago's low-income youth, particularly those from Black and Latinx communities, often find themselves trapped in a cycle of intergenerational poverty. While traditional philanthropies typically focus on established nonprofits, A Better Chicago takes a different approach by identifying and supporting promising early-stage initiatives on the verge of expansion.<sup>20</sup> These initiatives are often led by local leaders who deeply connect to the communities they serve. The organization operates with a venture capital model: raising funds from donors eager to maximize their impact and investing in innovative youth-focused nonprofits with significant growth potential.

Each organization is carefully vetted before receiving investment, and continued support is contingent on meeting pre-agreed milestones. Like a venture capital fund, A Better Chicago aims for its investments to thrive independently over time.<sup>21</sup> It provides unrestricted funding, renewed annually based on performance, and ongoing guidance and resources to help nonprofits scale. This support may include funding or in-kind services for specific needs such as strategic planning, marketing, executive development, and staffing.<sup>22</sup> To ensure that all donor dollars directly support the nonprofits, the organization's administrative costs are covered by its board. To date, A Better Chicago has invested more than \$65 million in unrestricted funding and management support to help nonprofits in its portfolio grow and expand.<sup>23</sup>

Chicago would likely receive a "D" for the "No Poverty" Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) due to its persistently high poverty rates and significant economic disparities. A large portion of the city's population, especially within Black and Latinx communities, continues to live below the poverty line. Contributing factors include high unemployment, low wages, and challenges such as housing instability, food insecurity, and limited access to quality education. Additionally, the city remains highly segregated, with impoverished neighborhoods often lacking crucial resources and opportunities. These systemic issues make it difficult for many Chicagoans

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<sup>19</sup>Illinois Policy Institute Launches the Center for Poverty Solutions to Reduce Poverty in Chicago, <https://www.illinoispolicy.org/press-releases/illinois-policy-institute-launches-the-center-for-poverty-solutions-to-reduce-poverty-in-chicago/>

<sup>20</sup> A Better Chicago, <https://www.abetterchicago.org>

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> A Better Chicago, *Our Model*, <https://www.abetterchicago.org/model>

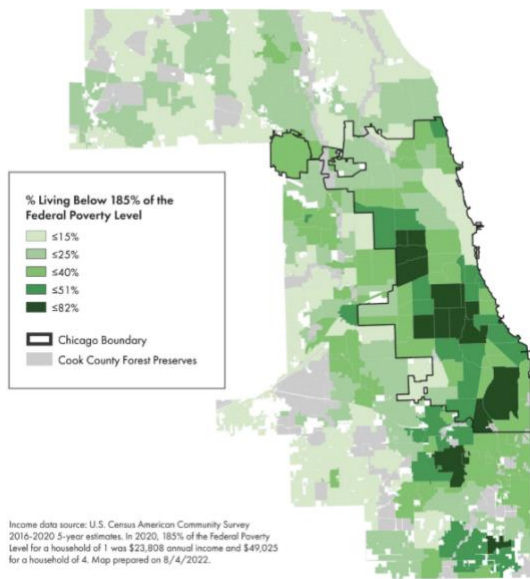
<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

to break the cycle of poverty, hindering the city's progress toward achieving the SDG of ending poverty.

## Goal 2: Zero Hunger

### *End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and Improved Nutrition and Promote Sustainable Agriculture*

A lack of access to adequate nutrition, known as food insecurity, is a key factor in the development and worsening of chronic illnesses, particularly for those facing economic hardship and limited opportunities. Food insecurity is not just an isolated issue; it is a direct consequence of poverty and reflects broader systemic issues, including structural racism and social inequities.<sup>24</sup> In the United States, these systemic problems disproportionately affect low-income communities, particularly communities of color, creating barriers to essential resources like healthy food. As a result, food insecurity contributes to the persistence of health disparities, trapping individuals in a cycle of poor health and financial instability.<sup>25</sup>



Food insecurity became a significant focus during the COVID-19 pandemic, as images of long lines at emergency food distributions highlighted the scale of the crisis.<sup>26</sup> However, the issue of hunger was already prevalent long before the pandemic, and the need for support continues to exceed pre-pandemic levels. Addressing food insecurity often requires straightforward solutions: providing access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food for all.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, pairing this access with education and innovative programs encouraging healthy eating can help make a lasting impact.<sup>28</sup>

The Greater Chicago Food Depository is dedicated to ending hunger by partnering with community organizations and individuals. Through these collaborations, they connect people to healthy food, advocate for change, and address the root causes of hunger, including poverty, systemic inequity, and structural racism.<sup>29</sup> They believe that working together can achieve a more significant impact in the fight to end hunger.

In 2017, the Food Depository launched the Nourish Project, an ambitious initiative to expand its facilities and programs to better fulfill its mission.<sup>30</sup> Thanks to the support of generous

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<sup>24</sup> Monica Peek, John Jay Shannon, *Food Insecurity is a Public Health Crisis, but Solutions are in Reach*, <https://www.chicagobusiness.com/equity/food-insecurity-public-health-crisis>

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> John Mazzeo, *Ending Hunger and Food Insecurity in Chicago Requires a Plan and Data*, Monica Peek, John Jay Shannon, *Food Insecurity is a Public Health Crisis, but Solutions are in Reach*, <https://www.chicagobusiness.com/equity/food-insecurity-public-health-crisis>

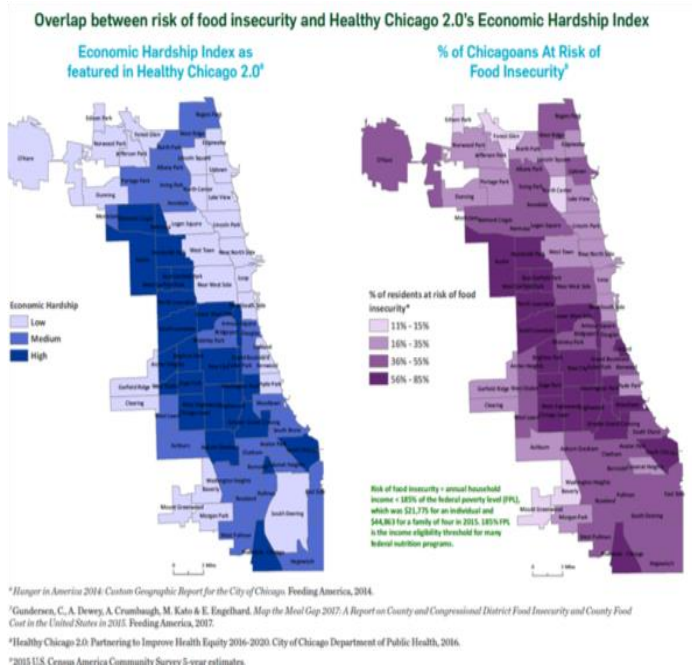
<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> *Supra note 23.*

<sup>29</sup> Greater Chicago Food Depository, *Our Mission*, <https://www.chicagosfoodbank.org/about/>

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

donors and a \$75 million campaign, Phase II of the Nourish Project was completed in 2024.<sup>31</sup> This expansion significantly increased the organization's capacity to distribute fresh, nutritious food and introduced new spaces to engage volunteers and the public in the mission. One of the key developments was the creation of Chicago's Community Kitchens, a prepared meal center that can produce up to 10,000 scratch-made meals daily for those at higher risk of food insecurity.<sup>32</sup> The project also contributed to job creation and economic growth for communities historically impacted by inequity and disinvestment, further advancing the goal of addressing hunger and its root causes.<sup>33</sup>



The grade Chicago should receive for the "Zero Hunger" SDG is open to interpretation, depending on the criteria and perspective used for evaluation. Although the city has taken steps to address food insecurity through community programs, food banks, and nonprofit organizations, deeper systemic issues—such as food deserts, limited access to healthy food in low-income areas, and racial inequities—remain persistent. These factors contribute to high levels of food insecurity, particularly in Black and Latinx communities, limiting the city's progress toward achieving the SDG of ending hunger.

Given these ongoing challenges, a "D" grade appears fitting, as hunger and food insecurity remain significant problems. While initiatives are working to alleviate hunger, they have not yet sufficiently addressed the underlying systemic causes. To improve this grade, Chicago would need to expand access to nutritious food in underserved neighborhoods and tackle the broader social and economic disparities that fuel food insecurity.

<sup>31</sup> Greater Chicago Food Depository, *Nourish Project*, <https://www.chicagosfoodbank.org/about/history/nourish/>

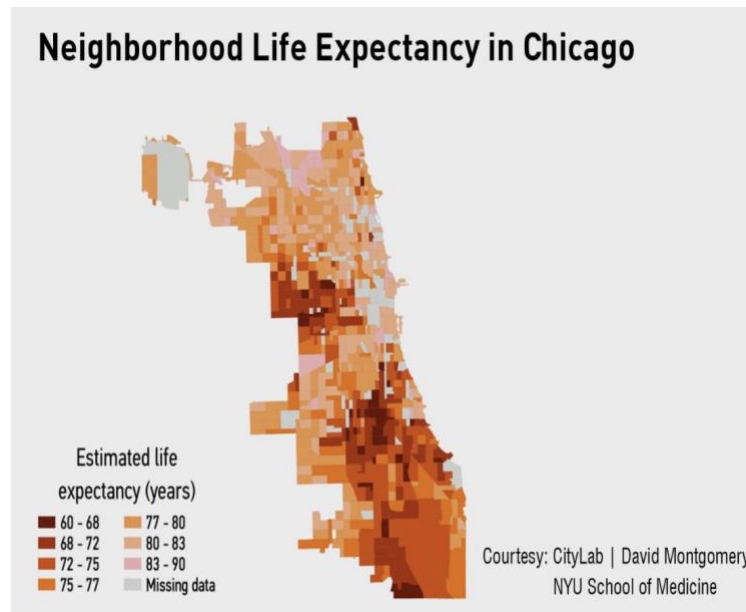
<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

## Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being

### *Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Well-Being for All at All Ages*

Life expectancy in Chicago dropped by nearly two years from 2019 to 2020, a sharp decline driven by the pandemic, according to the Chicago Department of Public Health.<sup>34</sup> The most significant decreases were among Black and Latinx residents.<sup>35</sup> While COVID-19 was a major contributor, it ranked second in causes of death, with heart disease taking the lead, alongside increases in chronic conditions like diabetes.<sup>36</sup> The city also saw an uptick in deaths from accidents, including overdoses, car crashes, and homicides. The decline in life expectancy affected all racial groups and nearly every neighborhood in Chicago.<sup>37</sup>



A recent Northwestern Medicine study highlights the significant impact of residential segregation on life expectancy for Black residents. The study found that people living in highly segregated neighborhoods, predominantly Black, have life expectancies four years shorter than those in less segregated, predominantly white areas.<sup>38</sup> This disparity underscores the role of segregation in racial health inequities, linking shorter life spans to factors like lower education levels, higher poverty rates, and higher unemployment, which are key social determinants of health.<sup>39</sup> The study,

published in JAMA Health Forum, is the first to examine life expectancy differences at the neighborhood level, revealing the lasting effects of discriminatory housing practices like redlining.<sup>40</sup> It also shows how local conditions, rather than broader state or county trends, can significantly impact life expectancy.<sup>41</sup> Researchers stress that understanding these disparities is

<sup>34</sup> City of Chicago, *Life Expectancy in Chicago Declined During the Pandemic's First Year with the Biggest Drops Among Black and Latinx Chicagoans*, [https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mayor/press\\_room/press\\_releases/2022/april/LifeExpectancyDrops.html](https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mayor/press_room/press_releases/2022/april/LifeExpectancyDrops.html)

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> Kristin Samuelson, *Neighborhood Racial Segregation Linked to Shorter Life Spans*, <https://news.northwestern.edu/stories/2023/07/neighborhood-racial-segregation-linked-to-shorter-life-spans-by-four-years/>

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

crucial for addressing health inequities in segregated communities, such as those found in Chicago, where life expectancy varies widely between neighborhoods like Streeterville and the South Side.<sup>42</sup>

The Chicago Lives Healthy Wellness Program is designed to support individuals in improving their health, managing conditions, and making choices that promote overall wellness. The program includes the Well On Target program by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois and the Health Improvement Programs (HIP) by Telligent.<sup>43</sup> Participants are chosen for HIP based on factors such as biometric screening results and for Blue Choice PPO members, pharmacy, and medical claims data.<sup>44</sup> Participation typically involves an enrollment session followed by coaching calls throughout the quarter.<sup>45</sup> While members are encouraged to engage with health professionals, no specific physical performance goals, such as reducing blood pressure, weight, or cholesterol, are required to participate.<sup>46</sup>

Healthy Hood is a nonprofit organization based in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago, dedicated to narrowing the 20-year life expectancy gap between underprivileged and wealthier areas. The organization was founded in collaboration with the Youth Health Service Corps. This youth-focused initiative educates and empowers local youth to combat the five most prevalent diseases that disproportionately affect communities of color.<sup>47</sup> These diseases, including diabetes and heart disease, are seen as preventable through early detection, healthy eating, and consistent physical activity.<sup>48</sup> Healthy Hood quickly learned that reducing health disparities required more than physical exercise.<sup>49</sup> The organization expanded its mission to include educational initiatives to raise awareness and foster a deeper understanding of health.<sup>50</sup> Through this expanded focus, Healthy Hood strives to inspire lasting change in the community and create a "healthy hood" where physical and mental well-being are prioritized.<sup>51</sup>

Chicago should receive a "C" grade for the Good Health and Well-Being SDG. While the city has several strong health initiatives, such as Healthy Hood, BUILD, and CDPH, which focus on improving health outcomes in vulnerable communities, there are significant challenges. Health disparities are prevalent, with notable gaps in life expectancy and health outcomes between affluent and underprivileged neighborhoods, particularly for Black and Latinx residents. Chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension are prevalent, especially in low-income areas. Additionally, violence and trauma in specific neighborhoods contribute to both physical and mental health struggles. Access to healthy food remains an issue as food deserts continue to limit access to nutritious options in many communities. Environmental factors, such as pollution and limited green spaces, also impact health, particularly in underserved neighborhoods. While

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<sup>42</sup> *Id.*

<sup>43</sup> City of Chicago, *The Chicago Lives Healthy Wellness Program*, <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/fin/provdrs/ben/svcs/TheChicagoLivesHealthyWellnessProgram.html>

<sup>44</sup> *Supra note 42.*

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*

<sup>46</sup> *Id.*

<sup>47</sup> Healthy Hood, *Our Story*, <http://www.healthyhoodchi.com/about>

<sup>48</sup> *Id.*

<sup>49</sup> *Id.*

<sup>50</sup> *Id.*

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*

valuable efforts are in place to improve health, these systemic barriers and disparities hinder the city's ability to fully meet the SDG.

## Goal 4: Quality Education

### *Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All*

Black student enrollment in Chicago Public Schools has steadily decreased since the 1990s, mirroring the overall decline in the city's Black population.<sup>52</sup> Black students face disproportionate disciplinary actions, are underrepresented in top schools, and endure long commutes to school.<sup>53</sup> Dar'tavous Dorsey, from the University of Chicago Crime and Education Labs, attributes this trend to a sense of disengagement and disconnection from the district, citing safety concerns and an education system that often lacks cultural relevance as key barriers to improvement.<sup>54</sup>



Chicago Public Schools (CPS) has a long history of segregation, beginning with an 1863 ordinance requiring separate schools for Black and White students.<sup>55</sup> This deepened in the 20th century, especially with the influx of Black residents.<sup>56</sup> In 2013, CPS closed 50 schools, mainly on the South and West sides, disproportionately affecting Black students.<sup>57</sup> Despite claims of improved resources for receiving schools, the closures led to a steady decline in CPS enrollment

and further disinvestment in these neighborhoods.<sup>58</sup> CPS's Student-Based Budgeting (SBB) model tied funding to enrollment, causing schools in predominantly Black areas to lose funding and resources, worsening the cycle of decline.<sup>59</sup> Policies like charter expansion and selective enrollment schools also diverted attention from neighborhood schools, deepening educational

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<sup>52</sup> Erica Gunderson, *Black Students Face Continuing Challenges in Chicago Public Schools*, <https://news.wttw.com/2023/08/19/black-students-face-continuing-challenges-chicago-public-schools>

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*

<sup>54</sup> *Id.*

<sup>55</sup> Chima Ikoro and Madeline Parrish, *Chicago Public Schools and Segregation*, <https://southsideweekly.com/chicago-public-schools-and-segregation/>

<sup>56</sup> *Id.*

<sup>57</sup> *Id.*

<sup>58</sup> *Id.*

<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

inequality.<sup>60</sup> The result is a perpetuating cycle of segregation, underfunding, and inequality for Black students in Chicago.<sup>61</sup>

CPS labels schools as “underutilized” if enrollment falls below 70%, making them vulnerable to closure, especially in underfunded neighborhoods.<sup>62</sup> In 2018, CPS closed Robeson High School and three others in Englewood, citing low enrollment, but these schools lacked resources.<sup>63</sup> Magnet and selective-enrollment schools were designed to promote integration, but a 2019 study found only 20% met the racial diversity goals set by the desegregation consent decree.<sup>64</sup> Selective-enrollment schools like Jones College Prep (11.6% Black), Lane Tech (6.7%), Northside College Prep (6%), Payton (9.7%), and Whitney Young (17.7%) have much lower Black student representation than the district’s 35.8% Black population.<sup>65</sup> The socioeconomic tier system aims to give low-income students better access to these schools. Still, they remain inaccessible to many due to location and limited seats, with students on the south and west sides facing longer commutes.<sup>66</sup>

I would give the Quality Education SDG for the city of Chicago a C+. Chicago offers high-quality education in some of its selective enrollment and magnet schools, often ranked among the best in the nation. These schools, however, are not equally accessible to all students. Segregation persists, particularly for Black and Latinx students, who are more likely to attend underfunded neighborhood schools with fewer resources. The closure of schools in predominantly Black and low-income areas, especially the 2013 mass closures, worsened educational disparities. Although programs like the socioeconomic tier system aim to create more equitable access to top schools, the system struggles to overcome the challenges posed by long commute times, limited spots in selective schools, and a lack of resources in specific neighborhoods. While efforts have been made to address these issues, such as providing some preferential access to lower-income students in selective schools, disparities in educational quality and access remain significant, especially for Black and Latinx students in the South and West sides of Chicago. The city has made some progress but still has considerable work to do to ensure quality student education.

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<sup>60</sup> *Supra* note 54.

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*

<sup>62</sup> *Id.*

<sup>63</sup> *Id.*

<sup>64</sup> *Id.*

<sup>65</sup> *Id.*

<sup>66</sup> *Id.*

## Goal 5: Gender Equality

### *Achieving Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls*

Black cisgender women are disproportionately affected by HIV, with infection rates over 10 times higher than white women and four times higher than Hispanic women.<sup>67</sup> While they represent 37% of the city's population, Black women account for 79% of HIV infections among women.<sup>68</sup> Addressing this inequality is crucial to reducing new infections by 90% by 2030.<sup>69</sup> Most current HIV prevention programs focus on men who have sex with men (MSM) or transgender women, with few specifically designed for Black cisgender women.<sup>70</sup>

The project aims to:

- (1) Emphasize the effectiveness of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) in preventing HIV.
- (2) Adapt the Centering Healthcare model to deliver community-driven PrEP care for Black women.
- (3) Use the ADAPT-ITT framework to tailor the model to the needs of Black women collaboratively.
- (4) Lay the groundwork for a more extensive study to assess the feasibility and acceptance of C-PrEP+ among Black women.<sup>71</sup>

PrEP is an effective HIV prevention method, mainly because it is user-controlled and does not require partner consent, making it well-suited for high-risk Black women.<sup>72</sup> However, barriers such as HIV-related stigma, racial disparities, and financial difficulties prevent many Black women from accessing PrEP.<sup>73</sup> This study will adapt a community-driven care model, Centering Healthcare, to better serve Black women using the ADAPT-ITT framework.<sup>74</sup> The goal is to create an inclusive and practical approach to engaging Black women in PrEP care and addressing the barriers that hinder access.<sup>75</sup>

In November 2024, Black women saw a significant rise in unemployment, with their jobless rate increasing from 4.9% to 6%.<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile, the overall unemployment rate increased from 4.1% to 4.2%.<sup>77</sup> In contrast, the unemployment rate for white women only slightly increased, rising from 3.3% to 3.4%.<sup>78</sup> In the last month, Black workers faced the highest unemployment rate,

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<sup>67</sup> Centering Black Women, *Study at a Glance*, <https://healthstudy.uic.edu/about/>

<sup>68</sup> *Id.*

<sup>69</sup> *Id.*

<sup>70</sup> *Id.*

<sup>71</sup> Centering Black Women, *Development of a Group PrEP Care Model*, <https://healthstudy.uic.edu>

<sup>72</sup> *Id.*

<sup>73</sup> *Id.*

<sup>74</sup> *Id.*

<sup>75</sup> *Id.*

<sup>76</sup> Samantha Subin, *Unemployment Rate Jumps More Than a Percentage Point for Black Women in November*, <https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/business/money-report/unemployment-rate-jumps-more-than-a-percentage-point-for-black-women-in-november/3617798/>

<sup>77</sup> *Id.*

<sup>78</sup> *Id.*

which rose from 5.7% to 6.4%.<sup>79</sup> Black men experienced a jobless rate of 6%, while the rate for white men remained unchanged at 3.5%.<sup>80</sup>

As of 2016, Chicago has become a symbol of the national crisis affecting Black boys, particularly in urban school systems.<sup>81</sup> The statistics are striking: almost 60% of young Black men in Chicago don't graduate high school, only 6% of Black ninth graders go on to earn a college degree by age 25, and nearly half of Black males aged 20 to 24 are neither employed nor in school.<sup>82</sup> These figures underscore the deep educational and economic disparities facing Black youth in the city.<sup>83</sup> Additionally, young men of color face higher rates of disengagement in both education and employment compared to other racial and gender groups.<sup>84</sup> Compounding this issue is the negative public narrative surrounding men of color, which influences both how they are perceived and how they view their challenges.<sup>85</sup>

Black women in Chicago face significant maternal health disparities. They experience severe maternal morbidity at twice the rate of white women, and their maternal mortality rate is three times higher.<sup>86</sup> In Illinois, an average of 88 women die each year from pregnancy-related causes, most of which are preventable.<sup>87</sup> One in every 115 deliveries is complicated by severe maternal morbidity, with excessive bleeding being the most common cause.<sup>88</sup> Discrimination in healthcare contributes to 40% of Black women's deaths, and Black mothers are more likely to undergo C-sections, increasing the risk of complications like postpartum hemorrhage.<sup>89</sup> They are also less likely to be screened for anemia and are at higher risk for maternal mental health disorders due to lifetime trauma, including racism.<sup>90</sup>

Black infants face similarly high risks, with infant mortality rates twice as high as for white infants.<sup>91</sup> Preterm birth is a major contributor to this disparity.<sup>92</sup>

Chicago's progress toward achieving the Gender Equality SDG is mixed, warranting a C+ grade. The city has made some strides in supporting women's economic opportunities, enhancing leadership roles, and addressing gender-based violence through community programs and city

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<sup>79</sup> *Id.*

<sup>80</sup> *Id.*

<sup>81</sup> Tim King, *Urban Prep and the Fight for Black Boys*, <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/swords-shields-urban-prep-tim-king#>

<sup>82</sup> *Id.*

<sup>83</sup> *Id.*

<sup>84</sup> Chicago Scholars, *Young Men of Color Initiatives*, <https://chicagoscholars.org/young-men-of-color-initiatives/>

<sup>85</sup> *Id.*

<sup>86</sup> Shawn M. Smith, *Partnering to Save Lives: Lowering Black Maternal and Infant Death in Chicago*, <https://www.luriechildrens.org/en/news-stories/partnering-to-save-lives-lowering-black-maternal-and-infant-death-in-chicago/>

<sup>87</sup> *Id.*

<sup>88</sup> *Id.*

<sup>89</sup> *Id.*

<sup>90</sup> *Id.*

<sup>91</sup> *Id.*

<sup>92</sup> *Id.*

initiatives. There have also been improvements in access to maternal and reproductive health services. However, Black women in Chicago face disproportionately high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity, and women of color continue to experience a persistent gender wage gap. Gender-based violence remains a critical issue, particularly in marginalized communities, and young women of color face higher rates of educational disengagement and limited access to workforce opportunities. While positive efforts are underway, these disparities highlight the need for further action to achieve gender equality in Chicago.

## **Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation**

### *Ensure Availability and Sustainable Management of Water & Sanitation for All*

Water affordability has become an increasing issue in Chicago, with utility bills rising by 80% over the past decade.<sup>93</sup> Black and Latinx communities, in particular, are more likely to face disproportionate water costs, with predominantly Black neighborhoods spending an average of 19% of their income on water bills.<sup>94</sup> Many minority families struggle to afford their water bills, and infrastructure problems can further restrict access to clean water.<sup>95</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened these challenges, forcing families to make difficult choices about maintaining access to safe, clean water.<sup>96</sup>

In Chicago, approximately 400,000 homes still receive water through lead service lines, which connect homes to the main water supply.<sup>97</sup> Studies show that nearly 70% of young children are exposed to lead from tap water, with Black and Hispanic neighborhoods disproportionately affected.<sup>98</sup> However, these communities are less likely to have lead testing.<sup>99</sup> Despite being banned in 1986, lead pipes remain prevalent in Chicago, which has the highest number of lead service lines of any U.S. city due to historical building codes.<sup>100</sup> Even low levels of lead exposure can cause significant health issues, especially for children, leading to brain damage, learning difficulties, and developmental problems.<sup>101</sup> In adults, lead exposure is linked to kidney damage, high blood pressure, and heart disease.<sup>102</sup>

In 2011 and 2012, the EPA Region 5 and Chicago's Department of Water Management conducted a study to assess how lead levels in drinking water are monitored.<sup>103</sup> The study aimed to evaluate existing sampling methods and inform future revisions to the Lead and Copper Rule.<sup>104</sup>

Key findings include:

- (1) The current sampling protocol underestimates lead corrosion and levels in water from lead service lines.
- (2) Disturbed lead service lines have the highest lead levels.
- (3) Homes with disturbed lead pipes and low water use may face high lead levels for years.

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<sup>93</sup> Elevate, *City of Chicago Water Affordability Analysis*, <https://www.elevatenp.org/wp-content/uploads/City-of-Chicago-Water-Affordability-Analysis-1.pdf>

<sup>94</sup> *Id.*

<sup>95</sup> *Id.*

<sup>96</sup> *Id.*

<sup>97</sup> Pien Huang, *Lead in Drinking Water is Still a Problem in the U.S – Especially in Chicago*, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2024/04/01/1241470280/lead-pipes-plumbing-water-contamination>

<sup>98</sup> *Id.*

<sup>99</sup> *Id.*

<sup>100</sup> *Id.*

<sup>101</sup> *Id.*

<sup>102</sup> *Id.*

<sup>103</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, *Chicago Lead in Drinking Water Study*, <https://www.epa.gov/il/chicago-lead-drinking-water-study>

<sup>104</sup> *Id.*

(4) Flushing lead-contaminated water from taps often takes longer than recommended.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *Id.*

## Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

*Ensure Access to Affordable, Reliable, Sustainable and Modern Energy for All*

Chicago has made significant progress in adopting renewable energy, particularly wind and solar power, benefiting from Illinois' leadership in wind energy.<sup>106</sup> The city has ramped up solar panel installations across residential, commercial, and municipal buildings, with initiatives like the Chicago Solar Express simplifying and lowering the cost of solar panel installations.<sup>107</sup> Compared to other urban centers, Chicago is actively transitioning to cleaner energy, aligning with the state's goal to achieve 25% renewable energy by 2025.<sup>108</sup> These efforts position Chicago as a key player in the state's broader push toward sustainable energy.<sup>109</sup>

Chicago's dependence on natural gas for heating and cooking is costly, inefficient, and harmful to residents' health.<sup>110</sup> Gas usage contributes to high energy bills and indoor pollution, which are linked to respiratory issues like asthma.<sup>111</sup> Switching to electric appliances, such as heat pumps and induction cooktops, can save residents thousands of dollars while using significantly less energy.<sup>112</sup> A 2021 study found replacing a gas furnace with a heat pump could save up to \$47,000 over its lifetime.<sup>113</sup> Electrification also improves indoor air quality, especially in communities of color, disproportionately affected by gas-related pollution.<sup>114</sup> As Illinois transitions to renewable energy, electrifying buildings will reduce emissions and enhance environmental outcomes.<sup>115</sup> By implementing policies that promote electrification, Chicago can lower energy costs, create jobs, and improve public health while advancing its sustainability goals.<sup>116</sup>

Elevated Chicago is a coalition of residents, community groups, artists, developers, nonprofits, policymakers, activists, and funders.<sup>117</sup> Focused on collaboration, the initiative aims to break down barriers, shift power dynamics, and challenge harmful aspects of white supremacy culture, such as perfectionism, conflict avoidance, and competitive individualism, that hinder community development.<sup>118</sup> Since 2013, Chicago has promoted transit-oriented development (TOD). Still, the % of this growth, 90%, has been concentrated in the North and Northwest sides or near the Loop, with minimal focus on affordability or community engagement.<sup>119</sup> As a result, the South and West sides have seen only 10% of the city's TOD.<sup>120</sup> Elevated Chicago worked

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<sup>106</sup> Clean Choice Energy, *Renewable Energy in Chicago [2024 Guide]*, <https://cleancoiceenergy.com/news/renewable-energy-in-chicago#>

<sup>107</sup> *Id.*

<sup>108</sup> *Id.*

<sup>109</sup> *Id.*

<sup>110</sup> Meghan Hassett, *Better Energy Options for Chicago: Clean and Affordable Buildings*, <https://www.nrdc.org/bio/meghan-hassett/better-energy-options-chicago-clean-and-affordable-buildings>

<sup>111</sup> *Id.*

<sup>112</sup> *Id.*

<sup>113</sup> *Id.*

<sup>114</sup> *Id.*

<sup>115</sup> *Id.*

<sup>116</sup> *Id.*

<sup>117</sup> Elevate Chicago, *About Us*, <https://elevatedchicago.org/about-us/>

<sup>118</sup> *Id.*

<sup>119</sup> Elevate Chicago, *Our Impact*, <https://elevatedchicago.org/our-impact/>

<sup>120</sup> *Id.*

alongside the city to address these inequities to co-create the 2020 Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD) Policy Plan, which aims to ensure that TOD benefits all neighborhoods, especially those on the South and West sides.<sup>121</sup>

I would give Chicago a B for the Affordable and Clean Energy SDG. The city has made solid progress, with goals to reach 100% renewable energy for municipal operations by 2035 and citywide by 2040. Programs like Retrofit Chicago and community solar initiatives have improved energy efficiency and expanded clean energy access, particularly for low-income residents. Chicago has also adopted green building standards, with many LEED-certified buildings. However, challenges remain. Low-income communities still face high energy burdens, and the electric grid needs upgrades to distribute renewable energy better. Fossil fuels remain a significant part of the city's energy mix, especially in transportation and industry. More public awareness is also needed to ensure all residents benefit from clean energy programs. Overall, Chicago has made good progress but requires more work on equity, infrastructure, and reducing fossil fuel dependence.

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<sup>121</sup> *Id.*

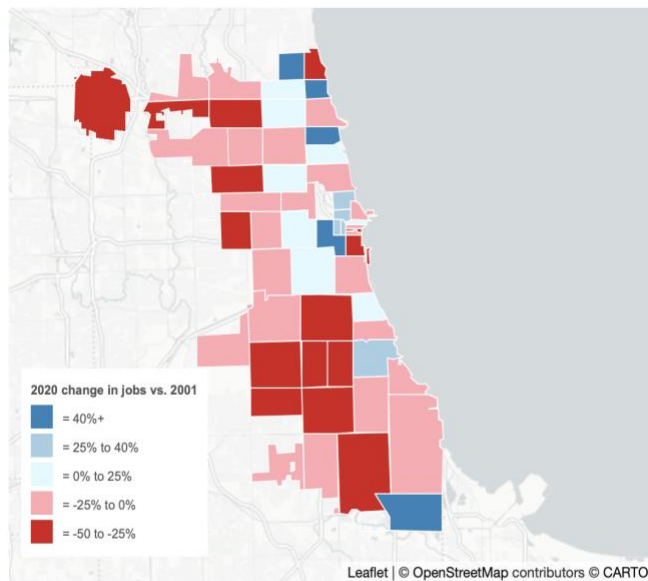
## Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

### *Promote Sustained, Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth, Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for All*

In 2020, Chicago's job market was down 4.3% compared to 2001, but the job losses were not evenly distributed across the city.<sup>122</sup> Some areas saw significant growth, with job increases of up to 40%, while others—particularly neighborhoods with large communities of color—faced dramatic losses.<sup>123</sup> For instance, the Austin neighborhood, located in the 60644 ZIP code on Chicago's West Side, experienced the most significant decline, with private-sector employment dropping by 45.1% between March 2001 and September 2020.<sup>124</sup> In 2019, Austin had a population that was 88.8% African American.<sup>125</sup> Similarly, West Englewood, which is 88% African American,

saw a 40.1% job loss during the same period.<sup>126</sup>

CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF JOBS WITHIN A ZIP CODE



Note: 60606 and 60661 use the same data. In 2001, the data for both ZIP codes was combined. For mapping purposes, the 2020 figures were added together to make a similar comparison. In both 2001 and 2020, the IDES combined the data for 60610 and 60654. Thus, those ZIP codes on the map use the same figure. Riverdale data was removed from the map because the Chicago portion of the ZIP code had too few people.

These job losses have contributed to an alarming unemployment rate in these neighborhoods.<sup>127</sup> ZIP code 60636, which includes West Englewood, had the highest unemployment rate in Chicago at 27.2% in 2019, far exceeding the city average.<sup>128</sup> Low wages compound the economic challenges in these areas.<sup>129</sup> For example, the average annual household income in 60636 was just \$26,724, ranking as the third-lowest in the city.<sup>130</sup> Limited job opportunities and low income have led to significant population declines.<sup>131</sup> Many residents have left these neighborhoods in search of better economic prospects, further deepening the cycle of economic disinvestment.<sup>132</sup> This pattern highlights the intersection of job loss, racial inequities, and the broader challenges facing

<sup>122</sup> Alby Gallun, *Bringing A Jobs Desert Back to Life*, <https://www.chicagobusiness.com/craains-forum-jobs/what-will-it-take-increase-employment-south-and-west-sides>

<sup>123</sup> *Id.*

<sup>124</sup> *Id.*

<sup>125</sup> *Id.*

<sup>126</sup> *Id.*

<sup>127</sup> *Id.*

<sup>128</sup> Crain's Chicago Business, *Geography of Chicago's Job Gains and Losses*, <https://www.chicagobusiness.com/craains-forum-jobs/chicago-job-gains-and-losses-mapped>

<sup>129</sup> *Id.*

<sup>130</sup> *Id.*

<sup>131</sup> *Id.*

<sup>132</sup> *Id.*

these historically marginalized communities.<sup>133</sup>

Bridges to Brighter Futures is dedicated to building a supportive community by connecting students, workers, educational institutions, employers, and various organizations.<sup>134</sup> The initiative focuses on helping Black and Latine adults, mainly graduates of Chicago public high schools, access pathways to promising careers.<sup>135</sup> It also serves students currently enrolled in workforce education programs through City Colleges of Chicago or other institutions that offer opportunities for earning a living wage.<sup>136</sup> The program explicitly supports those facing financial hardships, including those struggling with the cost of public transportation, groceries, healthcare, technology, and tuition.<sup>137</sup> Additionally, it assists students who are parents or caregivers and those juggling multiple low-wage jobs while pursuing education.<sup>138</sup>

Chicago would likely receive a C or C+ for the Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8). While the city is a central economic hub, it faces significant challenges, particularly in communities of color. Neighborhoods like Austin and West Englewood have seen severe job losses—45.1% and 40.1%, respectively—leading to high unemployment rates and low incomes. For example, the 60636 ZIP code has the highest unemployment rate in the city at 27.2%, with an average annual household income of just \$26,724. These disparities in job loss and income are concentrated in predominantly Black and Latino areas, limiting economic mobility and stability. Although Chicago has strong industries, like finance and tech, these benefits aren't equally distributed, and marginalized communities continue to struggle with low-wage jobs and a lack of opportunities. This inequitable economic growth leads to population declines in the hardest-hit areas. The C or C+ grade reflects Chicago's economic potential but also its ongoing difficulties in ensuring decent work and equitable growth across all neighborhoods.

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<sup>133</sup> *Id.*

<sup>134</sup> Bridges to Brighter Futures, *Our Impact*, [https://bridgestobrighterfutures.org/?page\\_id=101](https://bridgestobrighterfutures.org/?page_id=101)

<sup>135</sup> *Id.*

<sup>136</sup> *Id.*

<sup>137</sup> Bridges to Brighter Futures, *Why Bridges?*, [https://bridgestobrighterfutures.org/?page\\_id=145](https://bridgestobrighterfutures.org/?page_id=145)

<sup>138</sup> *Id.*

## Goal 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

### *Resilient Infrastructure, Promote Inclusive and Sustainable Industrialization and Foster Innovation*

Chicago has developed a multiyear, needs-based Capital Plan to optimize infrastructure investments and enhance efficiency across the city.<sup>139</sup> This data-driven approach prioritizes safety, equity, and cost-effectiveness to spur local economic development and job creation and improve the maintenance of public assets.<sup>140</sup> The plan balances asset condition and equity when selecting projects, ensuring that resources are allocated to areas that need them most.<sup>141</sup> One key tool in this effort is the Mobility and Economic Hardship (MOBEC) Index, which helps identify neighborhoods with the greatest need for investment.<sup>142</sup>

The Chicago Works capital improvement plan includes various infrastructure projects:

- (1) **Complete Streets:** These projects aim to create safer, more accessible travel options for all—whether walking, biking, or using public transit. They incorporate bike lanes, pedestrian safety features, and green spaces to promote sustainability and community development.
- (2) **Sidewalks & Curbs:** Investments in sidewalk repairs, curb replacements, and ADA-compliant ramps help ensure safe, continuous pathways for pedestrians throughout the city.
- (3) **Bridges & Viaducts:** The plan includes repairs and upgrades to bridges and underpasses to improve structural integrity and accommodate modern vehicle sizes.
- (4) **Street Resurfacing:** Over 4,000 miles of streets are maintained through regular resurfacing, focusing on both significant thoroughfares and residential streets to ensure safe, smooth travel.
- (5) **Street Lighting:** Chicago’s extensive street lighting infrastructure is maintained and upgraded, ensuring safety with pole repairs and rewiring circuits as needed.<sup>143</sup>

Chicago aims to improve infrastructure through this plan while promoting equity, community engagement, and long-term sustainability.

I would give Chicago a B- for the Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure SDG. The city has made notable progress in fostering a thriving tech ecosystem, particularly in fintech and health tech. It has invested in infrastructure improvements like the Chicago Infrastructure Trust and public transportation upgrades. However, challenges remain, including inequality in access to innovation, with underserved neighborhoods lagging in tech and economic opportunities. Additionally, the city’s aging infrastructure, especially in public transportation and roads, requires significant modernization to meet future needs. While progress is evident, more inclusive and

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<sup>139</sup> City of Chicago, *Chicago Works*, [https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/cdot/supp\\_info/chicagoworks.html](https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/cdot/supp_info/chicagoworks.html)

<sup>140</sup> *Id.*

<sup>141</sup> City of Chicago, *2023 – 2027 The Chicago Works Program*, <https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/cdot/CDOT%20Projects/ChicagoWorks/ChicagoWorksProgram/2023-2027%20Chicago%20Works%20Program.pdf>

<sup>142</sup> *Id.*

<sup>143</sup> *Id.*

comprehensive strategies are needed to ensure that innovation benefits all communities and that infrastructure can support sustainable growth across the city.

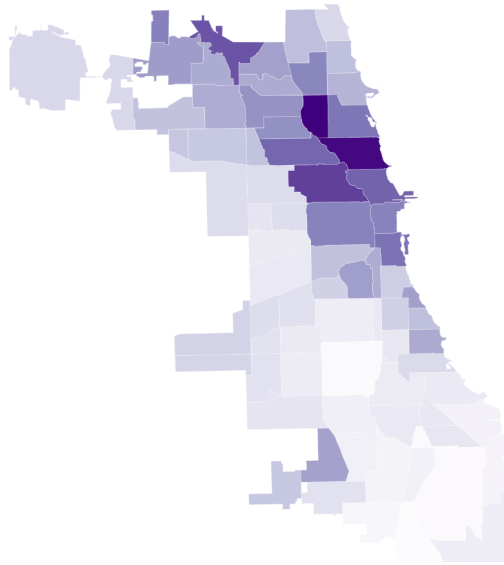
## Goal 10: Reduced Inequality

### *Reduce Inequality Within and Among Countries*

#### Mapping Chicago's Inequality Across Several Indicators

From homicides to home ownership to healthy food access, inequality is pervasive among Chicago's 77 community areas

2020 median home value \$92,873.56 — \$591,968.65



Sources: City of Chicago; U.S. Census Bureau; Great Cities Institute, University of Illinois Chicago; Chicago Police Department; Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning; Chicago Department of Public Health; Illinois Department of Public Health; Consumer Financial Protection Bureau; Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council

Visualization: Alden Loury/WBEZ

A recurring map of Chicago highlights the city's urban challenges, with a consistent pattern of issues appearing in the same neighborhoods. This map represents areas plagued by food deserts, violence, under-resourced schools, and low educational attainment, which reflect a history of disinvestment in these communities, particularly in the South and West Sides.<sup>144</sup> Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle describes this as “the same map,” showing how segregation, poverty, and systemic inequality are intertwined.<sup>145</sup> Alden Loury, who has extensively documented Chicago's demographics, notes that this map is nearly identical across numerous social issues, from crime and police violence to school expulsions, housing discrimination, and public health disparities like COVID-19 death rates.<sup>146</sup> Neighborhoods such as West Pullman, Englewood, and Austin are consistently highlighted, illustrating how long-standing segregation and economic neglect contribute to a cycle of disadvantage that perpetuates inequality and shorter life expectancies.<sup>147</sup>

*We Will Chicago* is a comprehensive planning initiative with over 40 goals and 150 objectives to guide the city's development over the next decade. It comprises eight key pillars: Housing & Neighborhoods, Arts & Culture, Environment, Climate & Energy, Lifelong Learning, Public Health & Safety, Transportation & Infrastructure, Civic & Community Engagement, and Economic Development.<sup>148</sup> These goals and objectives were informed by research teams that assessed Chicago's most urgent challenges since the last city plan in 1966, including issues like urban renewal, public housing loss, school closures, and vacant properties.<sup>149</sup> The teams included over 115 resident volunteers, 25 community organizations, and 100 city staff, all selected through an open application process in 2021.<sup>150</sup> Each goal is accompanied by specific objectives and baseline data to track progress and address social, health, and economic disparities throughout implementation.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Edward Robert McClelland, *There is One Map of Chicago*, <https://www.chicagomag.com/news/there-is-one-map-of-chicago/>

<sup>145</sup> *Id.*

<sup>146</sup> *Id.*

<sup>147</sup> *Id.*

<sup>148</sup> City of Chicago, *We Will Chicago*, <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/dpd-plan-archive/home/we-will-chicago.html>

<sup>149</sup> *Id.*

<sup>150</sup> *Id.*

<sup>151</sup> *Id.*

For the Reduced Inequality SDG, Chicago should receive a C. The city has made some progress in tackling inequality through initiatives to improve economic opportunity, education access, and healthcare for underserved communities. Programs like Chicago Connected have worked to close the digital divide for low-income families, and transit-oriented development policies aim to address geographic disparities. However, deep-rooted racial and economic inequalities remain entrenched. Black and Latinx communities continue to face higher unemployment rates, lower educational attainment, and limited access to quality healthcare. Wealth gaps persist, particularly in South and West Side neighborhoods, which still struggle with poverty, violence, and underinvestment. Racial segregation continues to drive much of this inequality. Although initiatives like the "We Will Chicago" plan hold potential for progress, the overall impact has been limited.

## Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

### *Make Cities and Human Settlements Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable*

Less than 10% of Chicago's waste is recycled, according to the city's Streets and Sanitation Department.<sup>152</sup> That's despite a goal to keep 50% of waste out of landfills by 2025 and as other cities boast even higher rates.<sup>153</sup>

The Chicago Sustainability Task Force is a collaborative group of large facility operators, event organizers, and various stakeholders, all united by a shared goal to enhance Chicago's environmental practices and public image. The Task Force works towards improving the city's sustainability initiatives by documenting and cataloging current sustainability efforts, collaborating to influence local policies, and strengthening the city's infrastructure for environmental practices. They aim to create unified, consistent programs and messaging that can be implemented citywide to drive more significant ecological impact.

The Task Force is guided and facilitated by Bright Beat, a project management and sustainability consultancy, which helps steer the group toward actionable outcomes. The mission of the Task Force is built on two core pillars:

- (1) **Enhancing Chicago's Image & Environmental Initiatives:** The group works to bolster the city's reputation as a leader in sustainability through innovative practices and a more visible commitment to environmental stewardship.
- (2) **Strategizing for Immediate Impact and Long-term Success:** The Task Force focuses on identifying practical, near-term actions that can bring about immediate improvements while also laying the groundwork for broader, long-lasting strategies that will drive sustainable change in the city for years to come.<sup>154</sup>

Through these efforts, the Task Force aims to transform Chicago into a model of urban sustainability in terms of policy and practice, ensuring that its environmental initiatives are forward-thinking, inclusive, and impactful.<sup>155</sup>

I would give Chicago a B- for the Sustainable Cities and Communities SDG. The city has progressed with initiatives like its Climate Action Plan, green spaces, and projects like The 606 to improve livability and resilience. The Chicago Sustainability Task Force helps align sustainability efforts across sectors. However, challenges like gentrification, environmental justice issues, and limited public transit access in underserved areas remain. While strides have been made, equity concerns and climate impacts still pose significant obstacles, justifying a B- grade.

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<sup>152</sup> City Cast Chicago, *Why Aren't Chicagoans Recycling Enough*, <https://chicago.citycast.fm/podcasts/why-chicagoans-arent-recycling-enough>

<sup>153</sup> *Id.*

<sup>154</sup> Steve's Weave, *The Chicago Sustainability Task Force*, <https://www.stevesweave.net/classifieds/26610-chicago-sustainability-task-force>

<sup>155</sup> *Id.*

## Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

### *Ensure Responsible Consumption and Production Patterns*

Chicago generates over 4 million tons of waste annually, but only 9% is recycled.<sup>156</sup> This is starkly lower than cities like Los Angeles, where recycling rates are at least 76.4%, or the national average of 35%.<sup>157</sup> The city's recycling challenges stem partly from its contract with a private waste management company, which has not effectively addressed the city's waste diversion needs.<sup>158</sup>

As part of Chicago's Climate Action Plan (CAP), the city is building a circular economy to reduce waste, cut consumption, and create jobs. The CAP outlines several key strategies to improve the city's waste management and sustainability efforts:

- (1) **Expanding Community Composting:** The CAP will introduce citywide organic waste collection and composting by 2024. This effort is expected to reduce methane emissions, significantly contributing to climate change, and help create a more resilient local food system. By making composting more accessible to residents, Chicago hopes to decrease landfill waste and encourage environmentally friendly practices.
- (2) **Crafting Consumer Messaging:** Chicago aims for a 90% diversion rate of residential waste by 2030 to support waste reduction. This ambitious goal will be achieved by promoting equitable waste prevention strategies, such as better education about recycling, composting, and waste reduction practices for residents. The city also plans to improve communication on the importance of sustainable consumption.
- (3) **Identifying Gaps in Food Rescue and Redistribution:** The CAP emphasizes the importance of addressing food waste, an environmental and social issue. By identifying opportunities to recover and redistribute food, the city aims to ensure that surplus food is directed to those in need rather than wasted. This initiative seeks to create a more equitable food system while reducing waste.
- (4) **Cross-Agency Alignment and Collaboration:** A central component of the Food Matters Regional Initiative, part of the CAP, is promoting collaboration across various city departments. By creating coordinated teams across agencies, Chicago can address food waste and other waste-related issues more effectively and with a unified approach.<sup>159</sup>

Through these initiatives, Chicago is working toward a more sustainable and responsible approach to waste management.<sup>160</sup> The goal is not only to reduce waste and lower consumption

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<sup>156</sup> City of Chicago, *Chicago Sustainable Industries*,

[https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dcd/supp\\_info/chicago\\_sustainableindustries.html](https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dcd/supp_info/chicago_sustainableindustries.html)

<sup>157</sup> *Id.*

<sup>158</sup> *Id.*

<sup>159</sup> City of Chicago, *2022 Climate Action Plan*, <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/climate-action-plan/home.html>

<sup>160</sup> *Id.*

rates but also to create a system that promotes equity, environmental sustainability, and resilience across the city.<sup>161</sup>

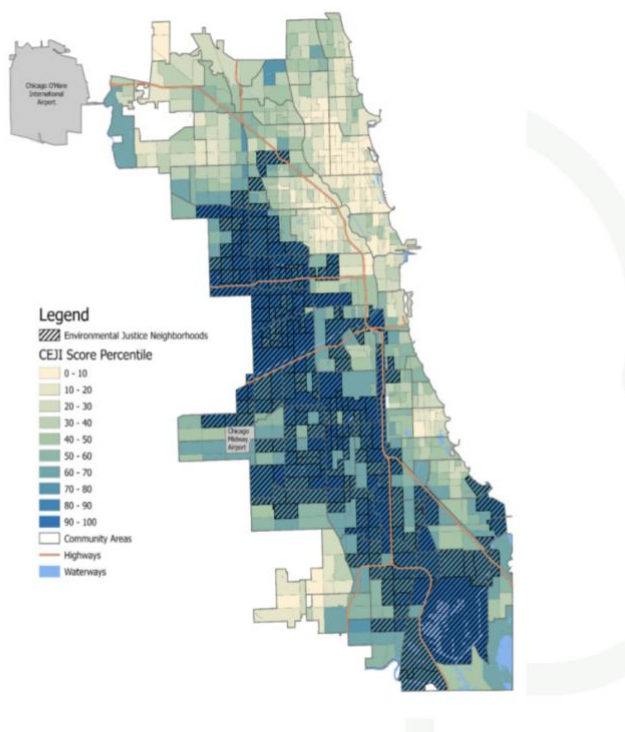
I would give Chicago's Responsible Consumption and Production efforts a C. While Chicago has made strides with its Climate Action Plan (CAP) and the Food Matters Initiative, its low recycling rate (9%) compared to other cities highlights significant gaps. The city is working to expand composting, improve food redistribution, and create a circular economy, but these efforts are still in the early stages. Strong infrastructure, more widespread awareness, and better enforcement are needed to meet ambitious goals. Progress is being made, but Chicago still has a long way to go.

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<sup>161</sup> *Id.*

## Goal 13: Climate Action

### *Take Urgent Action to Combat Climate Change and its Impacts*



The Chicago EJ Index map illustrates the varying levels of environmental pollution and vulnerability across the city.<sup>162</sup> Neighborhoods shaded in blue face the highest pollution burdens, while areas in yellow and green have lower pollution levels.<sup>163</sup> Crosshatched regions are identified as environmental justice neighborhoods, where ecological hazards disproportionately impact residents.<sup>164</sup>

The Chicago Cumulative Impact Assessment released last year highlighted that neighborhoods like Austin, East Garfield Park, West Garfield Park, and North Lawndale are severely affected by a combination of environmental challenges.<sup>165</sup> These include heat-related illnesses, industrial pollution, high ozone and particulate

levels, flooding, limited green spaces, and overdevelopment—all compounded by historical disinvestment.<sup>166</sup> These environmental factors contribute to the life expectancy gap between Black and white Chicagoans, with studies showing that, on average, Black Chicagoans live 8.8 years less than their white counterparts.<sup>167</sup>

People for Community Recovery works to improve the quality of life for residents in communities impacted by environmental pollution.<sup>168</sup> The organization focuses on advocacy, education, and organizing around issues identified by the community, such as environmental and climate justice, affordable housing, economic equity, and public health.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Maxwell Evans, *These South and West Side Neighborhoods Have Been Hardest Hit By Pollution, Study Shows*, <https://blockclubchicago.org/2023/09/18/these-south-and-west-side-neighborhoods-have-been-hardest-hit-by-pollution-study-shows/>

<sup>163</sup> *Id.*

<sup>164</sup> *Id.*

<sup>165</sup> Deborah Bayliss, *How the City is Addressing Chicago's Environmental Injustice Issues*, <https://www.oakpark.com/2024/05/16/how-the-city-is-addressing-chicagos-environmental-injustice-issues/>

<sup>166</sup> *Id.*

<sup>167</sup> *Id.*

<sup>168</sup> People for Community Recovery, *Our Mission*, <https://www.peopleforcommunityrecovery.org/our-story/mission-and-people>

<sup>169</sup> *Id.*

Hazel Johnson, the founder of People for Community Recovery (PCR), is recognized as the mother of the environmental justice movement.<sup>170</sup> She identified the link between poor health in her community and the surrounding pollution.<sup>171</sup> Committed to change, Hazel spent years educating herself on urban environmental issues and worked tirelessly to address them.<sup>172</sup>

PCR is also dedicated to ensuring that South Side residents are included in the clean energy transition, a critical part of building a sustainable and equitable future.<sup>173</sup> As a key Ready for 100 Coalition member, PCR played a leadership role in a campaign that successfully pushed for the City of Chicago to commit to a 100% clean energy future by 2035.<sup>174</sup> This initiative was officially endorsed in April 2019 when the city council passed a resolution to power all buildings with renewable energy by that year, emphasizing the role of environmental justice communities in this monumental achievement.<sup>175</sup> The resolution also recognized the pioneering work of PCR founder Hazel Johnson, whose advocacy has long been foundational in Chicago's environmental justice movement.<sup>176</sup> In 2020 and 2021, PCR hosted a series of events and listening sessions, engaging hundreds of residents to gather feedback and ensure that the voices of the community are central to shaping the city's path toward a clean energy future.<sup>177</sup> Through these efforts, PCR continues to build a more inclusive and sustainable energy landscape for the South Side.<sup>178</sup>

For the Climate Action SDG, I would give Chicago a B-. While the city has made notable strides, especially with the Climate Action Plan (CAP), including efforts to reduce emissions, increase green infrastructure, and support clean energy initiatives (like the city's goal of 100% clean energy by 2035), there are still significant challenges. These include high levels of pollution in predominantly Black and brown neighborhoods, ongoing environmental justice issues, and inadequate resources allocated to specific vulnerable communities. Chicago's ecological justice initiatives, such as those led by organizations like People for Community Recovery, show a strong commitment to addressing these disparities. However, progress is slow, and certain groups still bear a disproportionate burden from climate-related risks.

The city's ambitious emissions reductions and resilience targets are commendable, but without addressing these systemic inequities, its overall progress on climate action may be limited. Improved investments in green infrastructure, greater community engagement, and faster implementation of climate policies would push the city's grade higher.

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<sup>170</sup> People for Community Recovery, *Our Team*, <https://www.peopleforcommunityrecovery.org/our-story/mission-and-people>

<sup>171</sup> *Id.*

<sup>172</sup> *Id.*

<sup>173</sup> People for Community Recovery, *Clean Energy Chicago*, <https://www.peopleforcommunityrecovery.org/our-work/priority-programs/clean-energy-chicago>

<sup>174</sup> *Id.*

<sup>175</sup> *Id.*

<sup>176</sup> *Id.*

<sup>177</sup> *Id.*

<sup>178</sup> *Id.*

## Goal 14: Life Below Water

### *Conserve and Sustainable Use the Oceans, Sea, and Marine Resources for Sustainable Development*

In early 2018, the Chicago Tribune investigated the city's drinking water, revealing troubling findings: 30% of 2,797 homes sampled had lead concentrations exceeding 5 parts per billion (ppb), the highest level permitted in bottled water by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration.<sup>179</sup> Nearly 70% of the homes tested contained some level of lead. The Environmental Protection Agency sets a limit of 15 ppb for lead in tap water, but there is no known "safe" level for lead exposure.<sup>180</sup>

The issue of lead contamination extends to city parks as well. Testing of Chicago's 1,250 outdoor drinking fountains found dangerously high lead levels, with some fountains, such as those at Gompers Park, registering 75 and 50 ppb.<sup>181</sup> In response, the Chicago Park District initially attempted to flush out the lead by running the fountains continuously. However, they later decided to turn off about half of the fountains and plan for their removal.<sup>182</sup>

Friends of the Chicago River has been dedicated to protecting and restoring the Chicago-Calumet River system, aiming to benefit people, wildlife, and water alike. Their efforts have helped create a foundation for the river to become a scenic, continuous, and accessible open-space corridor throughout the Chicago area.<sup>183</sup> The organization's work covers the entire 156-mile stretch of the Chicago-Calumet River system and its surrounding watershed.<sup>184</sup> Friends focuses on creating a healthier, greener river with thriving habitats, improving people's access to the river, and fostering a vast community support network to ensure its ongoing care.

Several environmental issues affect the Chicago River, including:

- **Combined Sewer Overflows:** During heavy storms, untreated sewage is released into the river.
- **Stormwater Runoff:** Rain events cause pollutants from roofs and pavement to flow into the river.
- **Nutrient Pollution:** Excess phosphorus and nitrogen in the water negatively impact aquatic life.
- **Lack of Dissolved Oxygen:** Poor water quality reduces the oxygen levels essential for aquatic organisms.
- **Excessive Chlorides:** Overuse of road salts contaminates water and harms wildlife.
- **Inconsistent Water Quality Monitoring:** Regular monitoring is essential for tracking water quality, which organizations like Friends of the Chicago River undertake.

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<sup>179</sup> RUSH, *Chicago's Drinking Water Safe?*, <https://www.rush.edu/news/chicagos-drinking-water-safe>

<sup>180</sup> *Id.*

<sup>181</sup> Friends of the Chicago River, *Advocacy*, <https://www.chicagoriver.org/issues>

<sup>182</sup> *Id.*

<sup>183</sup> Friends of the Chicago River, *About Us*, <https://www.chicagoriver.org/about-us>

<sup>184</sup> *Id.*

- **Litter and Floaties:** Trash, including plastics, enters the river system during rainfall, further polluting the water.<sup>185</sup>

Rising sea levels are also a significant concern for coastal cities like Miami, Tokyo, London, and New York. However, Dan Egan, author of *The Death and Life of the Great Lakes*, argues that Chicago, despite its inland location, faces even more significant risks from climate change.<sup>186</sup> The Great Lakes are especially vulnerable, with Chicago facing rising and falling water levels in Lake Michigan.<sup>187</sup> Historically, Lake Michigan's water levels fluctuated within a 6-foot range, but the new norm could be a 10-foot swing.<sup>188</sup> Lake Michigan went from a near-record low to a near-record high in just five years. There should be a call for greater "Great Lakes literacy" to help communities make informed decisions, pointing to past mistakes like the Saint Lawrence Seaway, where decisions without long-term planning have had negative consequences.

Chicago would likely receive a C or C- for the "Life Below Water" SDG. While the city is inland, its environmental impact on freshwater resources like Lake Michigan remains significant. Key challenges include water pollution, nutrient overload, stormwater runoff, and plastic waste, all threatening aquatic life. Efforts to address combined sewer overflows and habitat restoration are ongoing, but progress is slow. Though improving, public awareness and conservation initiatives are still limited in scope. While Chicago is making strides, more work is needed to protect its freshwater ecosystems fully.

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<sup>185</sup> *Supra* note 35.

<sup>186</sup> Patty Wetli, *Chicago More Vulnerable to Climate Change than Miami, Says 'Death and Life of Great Lakes' Author*, <https://news.wttw.com/2020/01/16/chicago-more-vulnerable-climate-change-miami-says-death-and-life-great-lakes-author>

<sup>187</sup> *Id.*

<sup>188</sup> *Id.*

## Goal 15: Life on Land

*Protect, Restore and Promote Sustainable use of Terrestrial Ecosystems, Sustainable Manage Forests, Combat Desertification, and Halt and Reverse Land Degradation and Halt Biodiversity Loss.*

Chicago is home to vibrant, culturally rich neighborhoods and some of Illinois's most biodiverse plants and animals. While climate change affects coastal cities, it also impacts Chicago, exacerbating existing challenges and health disparities, particularly in low-income, Black, Latine, and other communities of color.<sup>189</sup> As these issues grow more urgent, community-led solutions that strengthen connections to nature and promote health and well-being are crucial.<sup>190</sup>

Across the city, Black community members and leaders are driving change through urban farming, park conservation, and youth programs. By implementing solutions shaped by local experiences, they are fostering a healthier, greener city and encouraging widespread advocacy for environmental justice.

The Chicago Wilderness Alliance is a regional coalition of organizations and individuals working to implement large-scale conservation efforts around the southern shores of Lake Michigan, spanning Southeast Wisconsin, Northeast Illinois, Northwest Indiana, and Southwest Michigan. The Alliance brings together leaders, conservation experts, and professionals from diverse backgrounds to collaborate on a shared goal: creating a vibrant, accessible region where both people and nature can thrive.<sup>191</sup> The region is home to unique ecosystems and diverse wildlife, and the Alliance uses science-based methods to restore, manage, and protect these natural areas, making the region more resilient to climate change.<sup>192</sup>

The Alliance's work is increasingly urgent, with climate change threatening human health, food security, economies, and biodiversity. The Green Vision Initiatives provide a framework for guiding and tracking progress toward a sustainable future for nature and communities.<sup>193</sup> This work is further supported by President Biden's executive order to conserve 30% of land and water by 2030, which has sparked renewed momentum for conservation efforts.<sup>194</sup>

Chicago should receive a B- for the "Life on Land" SDG. While the city has made progress in creating green spaces, urban forestry, and community-driven conservation efforts, challenges remain. Strengths include a strong park system, initiatives like the Chicago Urban Forestry Plan, and growing community engagement in environmental projects. However, biodiversity loss, habitat fragmentation, and pollution threaten ecosystems, particularly along the Chicago River. Low-income and minority communities also face ecological justice issues, such as limited access to green spaces and the disproportionate impacts of pollution.

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<sup>189</sup> The Nature Conservancy, *Six Black Leaders Making a Difference for People and Nature in Chicago*, <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/illinois/stories-in-illinois/six-black-leaders-making-a-difference-in-chicago/>

<sup>190</sup> *Id.*

<sup>191</sup> Chicago Wilderness Alliance, <https://www.chicagowilderness.org>

<sup>192</sup> *Id.*

<sup>193</sup> *Id.*

<sup>194</sup> *Id.*

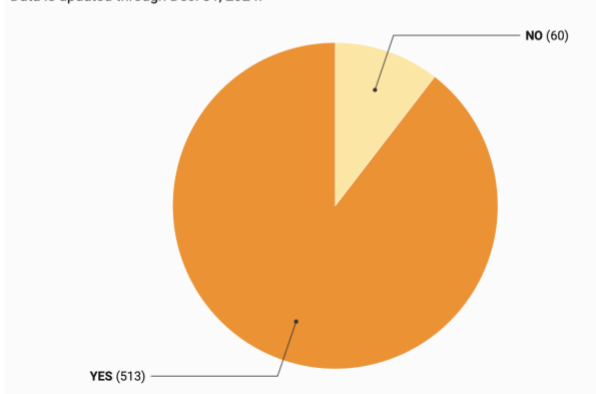
While Chicago is advancing in some areas, more work is needed to address environmental disparities and protect natural habitats to meet the SDG fully.

## Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

*Promote Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development, Provide Access to Justice for All and Build Effective, Accountable and Inclusive Institutions at All Levels.*

### Was the homicide victim's cause of death due to gunfire?

Data is updated through Dec. 31, 2024.



The Chicago Alliance is part of the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression. It is committed to defending the rights of Black people and all marginalized communities in their fight for freedom, justice, and equality.<sup>195</sup> Established in 1973, it evolved from the National United Committees to Free Angela Davis and All Political Prisoners.<sup>196</sup> Today, the Alliance focuses on addressing the police occupation of communities and the issue of mass incarceration, which it sees as significant barriers to true democracy and liberation.<sup>197</sup> Every Monday at 6 PM, the

organization hosts an open meeting on Zoom called Stop Police Crimes, where participants discuss the progress of all ongoing campaigns. Joining this meeting is an excellent first step for anyone looking to get involved.

In 1973, BUILD introduced its Gang Prevention program, empowering older teens to influence younger peers and provide alternatives to gangs, violence, and drugs. By combining classroom lessons with sports, homework support, and mentoring, the program created safe spaces and equipped youth with tools to resist negative influences.<sup>198</sup> BUILD's success in these efforts earned it a spot as one of the first outside organizations invited into Chicago Public Schools.<sup>199</sup> Today, BUILD operates in 15 schools across six of Chicago's most challenged neighborhoods, offering support at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center and its Austin campus.<sup>200</sup> Through these programs, BUILD continues to provide at-risk youth with guidance and opportunities to break the cycle of violence and poverty.

In 2012, BUILD launched *BUILDing Healthy Futures* to promote healthy lifestyles through nutrition, physical activity, and social-emotional learning in response to rising violence. As the situation worsened, BUILD focused on high-need neighborhoods, expanding its presence in Austin, Humboldt Park, and the South and West Sides.<sup>201</sup> Since 2016, BUILD has grown its impact, introducing trauma-informed therapy through its Clinical Health & Wellness department and expanding Enrichment programs in art, technology, and leadership.<sup>202</sup> Currently, the Iris,

<sup>195</sup> Chicago Alliance Against Racism and Political Repression, *About Us*, <https://www.caarpr.org/about-us>

<sup>196</sup> *Id.*

<sup>197</sup> *Id.*

<sup>198</sup> Build Chicago, *Meet Build*, <https://www.buildchicago.org/who-we-are-2-2/#our-story>

<sup>199</sup> *Id.*

<sup>200</sup> *Id.*

<sup>201</sup> Build Chicago, *Prevention*, <https://www.buildchicago.org/growing-hope-prevention/>

<sup>202</sup> *Id.*

BUILD's campus farm, provides the community fresh food, job training, and educational opportunities.<sup>203</sup>

To tackle crime, Chicago has introduced the *Our City, Our Safety* initiative, which is built around five core strategies:

### Race/ethnicity of Chicago's homicide victims in 2024

Data is updated through Dec. 31, 2024.

Race/ethnicity ▲	Total
Asian Pacific Islander	4
Black	428
Black Hispanic	5
UNKNOWN	2
White	23
White Hispanic	111

(1) **Empower and Support Individuals:** Offer prevention and intervention services to help residents of all ages and risk levels access opportunities without the threat of violence.

(2) **Enhance Community Safety:** Bridge the gap between safer and more violent areas by revitalizing public spaces, ensuring stable housing, and creating access to amenities and economic opportunities.

(3) **Reform Policing Practices:** Strengthen police legitimacy in communities by ensuring fair and constitutional law enforcement and fully implementing reforms outlined in the consent decree.

(4) **Advocate for Policy Change:** Work with local, state, and federal stakeholders to ensure policies reflect the safety and needs of residents, focusing on criminal justice reform, gun control, and improving quality of life.

(5) **Promote Strategic Collaboration:** Coordinate efforts across public, private, and community sectors to create actionable, citywide plans that reduce violence and ensure ongoing collaboration and planning.<sup>204</sup>

Chicago should earn a C or C- for the Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions SDG. Although the city has made strides in addressing violence, police reform, and justice system issues, significant challenges persist. High levels of gun violence continue to impact many neighborhoods, particularly communities of color.<sup>205</sup> The city also faces ongoing concerns regarding police misconduct, strained police-community relations, and unequal access to justice. Initiatives like *Our City, Our Safety* and the efforts of organizations such as BUILD and the Chicago Alliance Against Racism are essential. However, these deep-rooted issues still require more comprehensive and long-term solutions. Despite some progress, the city struggles with high crime rates, mistrust between law enforcement and residents, and inequities in legal and social outcomes, preventing it from fully meeting the SDG's objectives.

<sup>203</sup> *Id.*

<sup>204</sup> *Our City, Our Safety: A Comprehensive Plan to Reduce Violence in Chicago*, <https://news.wttw.com/sites/default/files/article/file-attachments/OurCityOurSafety.pdf>

<sup>205</sup> Kori Rumore, *Chicago Homicides in 2024: 572 People Slain. Here's how that Compares With Previous Years*, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/2025/01/03/chicago-homicides-2024/>

## Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals

### *Strengthen the Means of Implementation and Revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development*

Chicago's South and West Side neighborhoods have long struggled with limited access to reliable, affordable internet.<sup>206</sup> This digital divide exacerbates disparities in education, employment opportunities, and overall quality of life, particularly for low-income families and communities of color.<sup>207</sup> Despite a few initiatives aimed at improving access, substantial gaps remain, and many residents still face prohibitively high costs for internet service, unreliable connections, and a lack of devices to connect to the web.<sup>208</sup>

In 2020, a report from Kids First Chicago, in collaboration with the Metropolitan Planning Council, revealed alarming data about broadband access, showing that one in five children in Chicago lacked internet access at home.<sup>209</sup> This lack of connectivity disproportionately affected families in neighborhoods on the South and West Sides, further compounding educational inequities.<sup>210</sup> The report highlighted that many students could not learn online during the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation illustrated how crucial internet access is for education and day-to-day living in the digital age.<sup>211</sup> In response to this issue, the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system launched the Chicago Connected program to provide free, high-speed internet access to eligible families, particularly those in underserved neighborhoods.<sup>212</sup> By the end of its first year, Chicago Connected had enrolled 64,000 students across 42,000 households, significantly improving access for low-income families.<sup>213</sup>

Chicago should earn a B for the Partnerships for the Goals SDG because significant progress is still needed despite these efforts. The digital divide in Chicago remains a persistent barrier to equity, with many South and West Sides residents still lacking reliable, affordable internet. To truly meet the SDG goals, Chicago must significantly expand its investments in broadband infrastructure, ensure more households have access to cheap devices, and provide greater support for digital literacy training. While steps are being taken, more work must be done to close the digital gap and ensure that all Chicagoans can fully participate in the digital economy.

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<sup>206</sup> NaBeela Washington, *Narrowing the Digital Divide on Chicago's South and West Sides*, <https://southsideweekly.com/narrowing-the-digital-divide-on-chicagos-south-and-west-sides/>

<sup>207</sup> *Id.*

<sup>208</sup> *Id.*

<sup>209</sup> Kids First, *Digital Equity in Education: In the Coronavirus Era*, <https://kidsfirstchicago.org/publications/digital-equity-in-education-in-the-coronavirus-era>

<sup>210</sup> *Id.*

<sup>211</sup> *Id.*

<sup>212</sup> *Id.*

<sup>213</sup> *Id.*

## A Better Chicago

*During the town hall, I asked participants to use the gift of radical imagination and describe what they needed for a better Chicago.*

- More Black Teachers
- More people getting involved
  - Prioritize education
- Have residents participate in drama
- Don't forget low-income communities
  - Provide seniors with more help
  - More community involvement
  - Having sustainable housing
  - Give communities more funding
  - Give the children more to do
- Do something about homelessness in the city
  - Clean water
  - Fresh foods
  - A shuttle that runs often
- Fix the roads, so it doesn't effect our tires
  - Clean air
- Teaching kids and youth about positive affirmations
  - No more vacant lots and houses
  - Getting local officials to give us results
    - Green spaces
- Speaking up putting funds behind community efforts
  - More stores
  - Better housing
  - Grocery stores
  - Better roads
  - Better leadership
  - Better water supply

## Conclusion

In conclusion, while Chicago has made notable progress in several areas related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it still faces significant challenges that prevent it from fully aligning with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda. On the one hand, initiatives like the city's renewable energy efforts, investment in infrastructure, and policies supporting equitable transit-oriented development show a growing commitment to sustainability and inclusivity. These actions reflect a forward-thinking approach, especially in areas like clean energy, affordable housing, and climate resilience.

However, the city also grapples with deep-seated issues such as income inequality, racial disparities, and lack of access to quality education and healthcare, which disproportionately impact Black and brown communities. Despite policy efforts, these groups continue to face the brunt of environmental injustices, including exposure to pollution and the effects of climate change. For example, areas like Austin, West Englewood, and North Lawndale, already economically disadvantaged, suffer from job losses, inadequate housing, and poor health outcomes. Additionally, Chicago's reliance on outdated and inefficient energy systems, particularly in low-income neighborhoods, exacerbates financial and health burdens on residents.

Moreover, though progressing, the city's approach to social equity needs to be more robust. Disparities in job opportunities, educational outcomes, and public services remain prevalent. While efforts like the ETOD policy plan are steps in the right direction, they must be complemented by more significant financial investments and a more substantial commitment to community-driven solutions. To fully meet the SDGs by 2030, Chicago must prioritize actions that bridge these gaps. This includes increasing resources to underserved neighborhoods, ensuring equitable economic growth, and implementing policies that center on environmental justice and health equity. Additionally, Chicago must strengthen collaborations between city officials, community organizations, businesses, and residents to build a more resilient and sustainable urban future.

Given the progress made so far, but recognizing the gaps that still need attention, Chicago's current performance concerning the SDGs would be best rated as C+. This grade reflects the city's successes and the significant work that remains to ensure that the benefits of sustainability and development reach all residents, particularly the most vulnerable communities.

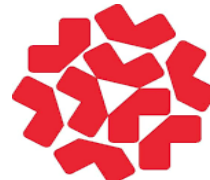
A special thank you to the organizations listed below:



**PEOPLE FOR  
COMMUNITY  
RECOVERY**



**CHICAGO COMMUNITY  
BOND FUND**



**CHICAGO  
FREEDOM  
SCHOOL**

## Reflection

Reflecting on the Black Audit Project has been an eye-opening experience that has deepened my understanding of Chicago's complex challenges and the critical role the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) play in fostering a better future for the city. Throughout this project, I gained a profound insight into the systemic barriers faced by Black communities in Chicago—whether it's in healthcare, education, employment, or housing—and how these disparities are rooted in long-standing historical inequities. The more I explored these issues, the more it became clear that addressing them requires awareness and a collective, sustainable effort across various sectors of society.

Learning about the SDGs and how they connect to the lived realities of marginalized communities has been incredibly impactful. The SDGs are not just abstract goals; they represent concrete actions and policies that uplift communities, improve quality of life, and reduce inequality. As a city rich in diversity and history, Chicago stands at a crossroads where the SDGs offer a roadmap to address the city's most pressing challenges, particularly those impacting Black residents. From reducing inequalities (SDG 10) to promoting good health and well-being (SDG 3), these goals provide a framework for tangible, lasting change.

However, despite the rich dialogue and insights from organizations I contacted who confirmed their participation—some could not follow through. This was disheartening but highlighted a significant reality: change requires sustained commitment, and the challenges we're trying to address are not easily overcome. It was a reminder of the complexity of community organizing and the persistence required to drive fundamental transformation.

That said, I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to participate in this project. The journey has expanded my perspective on building a more equitable city and has made me even more committed to contributing to these efforts. Thank you, Professor Hansford, for providing such a meaningful learning experience. The insights I've gained will guide me in my continued work toward making Chicago a city where all residents, especially Black communities, can thrive.

## Organizations to Contact

- (1) No Poverty
  - a. A Better Chicago
  - b. The Night Ministry
- (2) Zero Hunger
  - a. Task Force Chicago
  - b. Fight 2 Feed
- (3) Good Health and Well-Being
  - a. Healthy Hood Chicago
  - b. Council on Black Health
- (4) Quality Education
  - a. The Chicago Public Education Fund
  - b. Chicago Freedom School
- (5) Gender Equality
  - a. Brave Space Alliance
  - b. Lighthouse Foundation
- (6) Clean Water and Sanitation
  - a. LVEJOS Water Justice Program
  - b. Current
- (7) Affordable and Clean Energy
  - a. Blacks in Green
  - b. Chicago Urban League
- (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth
  - a. Bridges to Brighter Futures
  - b. People for Community Recovery
- (9) Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure
  - a. Elevated Chicago
  - b. Griffin Museum of Science and Industry
- (10) Reduced Inequality
  - a. Chicago Community Bond Fund
  - b. The #LetUsBreathe Collective
- (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities
  - a. GoodKids MadCity
  - b. Breakthrough
- (12) Responsible Consumption and Production
  - a. Green Era Campus: Chicago
  - b. City of Chicago
- (13) Climate Action
  - a. People for Community Recovery
  - b. Faith in Place
- (14) Life Below Water
  - a. Chicago Marine Heritage Society
  - b. UChicago's College at the Marine Biological Laboratory
- (15) Life on Land
  - a. Chicago Wilderness Alliance
  - b. Brookfield Zoo Chicago
- (16) Peace and Justice Strong Institutions
  - a. My Block, My Hood, My City
  - b. Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression
- (17) Partnership for the Goals
  - a. ONE Northside
  - b. We Will Chicago