

# Nearly one quarter of US children in poverty

Andre Damon  
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Nearly one in four children in the United States lives in a family below the federal poverty line, according to figures presented in a new report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

A total of 16.3 million children live in poverty, and 45 percent of children in the US live in households whose incomes fall below 200 percent of the federal poverty line.

The annual report, titled the *Kids Count Data Book*, compiles data on children's economic well-being, education, health, and family support. It concludes that, "inequities among children remain deep and stubbornly persistent."

The report is an indictment of the state of American society nearly six years after the onset of the financial crisis in 2008. While the Obama administration and the media have proclaimed an economic "recovery," conditions of life for the vast majority of the population continue to deteriorate.

The report notes that the percentage of children in poverty hit 23 percent in 2012, up sharply from 16 percent in 2000. Some states are much worse. For almost the entire American South, the share of children in poverty is higher than 25 percent.

These conditions are the product of a ruthless class policy pursued at all levels of government. While trillions of dollars have been made available to Wall Street, sending both the stock markets and corporate profits to record highs, economic growth has stagnated, social programs have been slashed, and public services decimated, while prices of many basic items are on the rise. Jobs that have been "created" are overwhelmingly part-time or low-wage.

"We've yet to see the recovery from the economic recession," said Laura Speer, associate director for policy reform and advocacy at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, who helped produce the report. "The child poverty rate is connected to parents' employment and

how much they are getting paid," added Ms. Speer in a telephone interview Tuesday.

"The jobs that are being created in this economy, including temporary and low-wage jobs, are not good enough to keep children out of poverty," she added.

The *Kids Count* report notes, "Declining economic opportunity for parents without a college degree in the context of growing inequality has meant that children's life chances are increasingly constrained by the socioeconomic status of their parents." The percentage of children who live in high-poverty communities has likewise increased significantly, with 13 percent of children growing up in communities where more than 30 percent of residents are poor, up from 9 percent in 2000.

Speer added that, given the significant run-up in home prices over the previous two decades, "the housing cost burden has gotten worse." She noted that the share of children who live in households that spend more than one third of their annual income on housing has hit 38 percent, up from 28 percent in 1990. In states such as California, these figures are significantly higher.

"In many cases families are living doubled up and sleeping on couches to afford very expensive places like New York City," she added. "Paying such a large share of your income for rent means that parents have to decide between whether or not to pay the rent or to pay the utility bills. It's not a matter of making choices over things that are luxuries, it's choosing between necessities."

The report concludes, "As both poverty and wealth have become more concentrated residentially, evidence suggests that school districts and individual schools are becoming increasingly segregated by socioeconomic status."

In most of the United States, K-12 education is funded through property taxes, and there are significant

differences in education funding based on local income levels. “Kids who grow up in low-income neighborhoods have much less access to education: that’s only been exacerbated over the last 25 years,” Speer said.

The *Kids Count* survey follows the publication in April of Feeding America’s annual report, which showed that one in five children live in households that do not regularly get enough to eat. The percentage of households that are “food insecure” rose from 11.1 percent in 2007 to 16.0 percent in 2012. Sixteen million children, or 21.6 percent, do not get enough to eat. The rate of food insecurity in the United States is nearly twice that of the European Union.

According to the US government’s supplemental poverty measure, 16.1 percent of the US population—nearly 50 million people—is in poverty, up from 12.2 percent of the population in 2000.

The Kids Count report notes that the ability of single mothers to get a job is particularly sensitive to the state of the economy, and that the employment rate of single mothers with children under 6 years old has fallen from 69 percent in 2000 to 60 percent ten years later. This has taken place even as anti-poverty measures such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) have been made conditional on parents finding work.

The report noted that enrollment in the federal Head Start program, which serves 3- and 4-year-olds dropped off when the “recession decimated state budgets and halted progress.” It added that cutbacks to federal and state anti-poverty programs, as well as health programs such as Medicare and Medicaid, are contributing to the growth of poverty and inequality.

With the “sequester” budget cuts signed by the Obama administration in early 2013, most federal anti-poverty programs are being slashed by five percent each year for a decade. “Programs like head start, LIHEAP [Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program], and other federal programs are really a lifeline in a lot of families,” Speer said.

Since the implementation of the sequester cuts, Congress and the Obama administration have slashed food stamp spending on two separate occasions and put an end to federal extended jobless benefits for more than three million long-term unemployed people and their families. These measures can be expected to throw hundreds of thousands more children into poverty.



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