Among all children under 18 years in the US, 38 percent live in low-income families and 17 percent—approximately one in five—are poor. This means that children are overrepresented among our nation’s poor; they represent 23 percent of the population but comprise 32 percent of all people in poverty. Many more children live in families with incomes just above the poverty threshold.

Young children—those under age 9 years—appear to be particularly vulnerable, with 40 percent living in low-income families, including 18 percent living in poor families. Being a child in a low-income or poor family does not happen by chance. Parental education and employment, race/ethnicity, and other factors are associated with children’s experiences of economic insecurity. This fact sheet highlights disparities in young children’s experiences of economic insecurity by race, geography, and other factors.

What is the 2019 federal poverty threshold (FPT)?

- $25,926 for a family of four with two children
- $20,578 for a family of three with one child
- $17,622 for a family of two with one child

Is a poverty-level income enough to support a family?

Research suggests that, on average, families need an income equal to about two times the federal poverty threshold to meet their most basic needs. Families with incomes below this level are referred to as low income:

- $51,852 for a family of four with two children
- $41,156 for a family of three with one child
- $35,244 for a family of two with one child

These dollar amounts approximate the average minimum income families need to make ends meet, but actual expenses vary greatly by locality.
How many young children under age 9 years live in low-income families in the United States?

There are more than 13 million children under age 9 years who live in low-income families in the United States. 40 percent of those children live in low-income families.

Has the percentage of young children living in low-income and poor families changed over time?

The percentage of low-income young children (both poor and near poor) decreased from 48 percent in 2010 to 40 percent in 2019, and has decreased from a high of 49 percent in 2012 (Figure 2).

Between 2010 and 2019, the overall number of young children (children under age 9) decreased from 36.4 million to 34.2 million. The number of low-income young children decreased from 17.4 million to 13.6 million, the number of poor, young children decreased from 9.1 million to 6.1 million, and the number of young children living in deep poverty, defined as less than 50 percent of the federal poverty threshold, decreased from 4.5 million to 2.7 million (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of Young Children Living in Low-Income and Poor Families, 2010–2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low income</td>
<td>17,397,604</td>
<td>13,607,837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>9,111,181</td>
<td>6,086,503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep poverty</td>
<td>4,514,966</td>
<td>2,732,990</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How does the poverty status of young children compare to the rest of the population?

The percentage of young children in low-income families surpasses that of adults. In addition, young children are more than twice as likely as adults 65 years and older to live in poor families (Figure 3).

Does the percentage of young children in low-income families vary by age group?

The percentage of deep-poor, poor, or low-income young children is relatively stable when comparing across age groups (Figure 4).

Does the percentage of young children in low-income families vary by race/ethnicity? As Figure 5 illustrates, the percentages of low-income and poor young children varies by race and ethnicity. Latino and White children comprise the same share of children living in low-income families (35 percent). Latinos comprise the largest share of young children living in poor families in this age group (also 35 percent). However, Black, Native American, and Latino children are disproportionately low income and poor. Further, Black and Native American children are over three times as likely to experience deep poverty compared to White children (Figure 6).
Does the percentage of young children in low-income families differ by their parents’ immigration status?\textsuperscript{6}

Children of immigrants are more likely to be low-income than children of US-born parents (Figure 7).

What are the family characteristics of low-income and poor young children?

**PARENT EMPLOYMENT\textsuperscript{6}**

Young children with a full-time, year-round employed parent are less likely to live in a low-income family compared to young children with parents who work part time/part year or who are not employed (Figure 8). Nevertheless, many low-income and poor young children have parents who work full time. About 56 percent of low-income children and 33 percent of poor children under age 9 live with at least one parent who is employed full time, year round (Figure 9).
PARENT EDUCATION

Higher levels of parental education decrease the likelihood that a child will live in a low-income or poor family. Among young children with at least one parent with some college or additional education, 28 percent live in low-income families and 11 percent live in poor families. By contrast, among children in this age group whose parents have less than a high school degree, 80 percent live in low-income and 47 percent live in poor families (Figure 10).

At the same time, significant shares of low-income and poor families with young children are headed by parents with at least some college education, as shown in Figure 11.
Does the percentage of young children in low-income families vary by where they live?

REGION
The percentage of low-income young children varies substantially by region (Figure 12).

RESIDENTIAL INSTABILITY AND HOME OWNERSHIP
Research suggests that stable housing is important for healthy child development. However, young children living in low-income families are more likely than other young children to have moved in the past year and to live with families who rent, rather than own, their homes (Figure 13).

HOUSING AND ENERGY INSECURITY
A much larger percent of low-income children experience housing and energy insecurity (Figure 14). Housing and energy insecurity means that their families have difficulty paying these expenses each month, leading to additional stress in the family.

Figure 12: Percentage of Young Children in Low-Income Families by Region, 2019

Figure 13: Residential Instability and Home Ownership by Family Income, Families With Young Children, 2019

Figure 14: Housing and Energy Insecurity by Family Income, Families With Young Children, 2019
Does preschool enrollment vary by family income for very young children?

Very young children (ages 3-4) in low-income families are less likely to attend preschool compared to children in higher income families (Figure 15).\textsuperscript{10}

What proportion of low-income children are covered by health insurance?\textsuperscript{11}

Among children under age 9, 6 percent of low-income children and 6 percent of poor children are uninsured.\textsuperscript{11} Public insurance programs cover 41 percent of young children, a slight increase since 2010 (Figure 16). They reach many more economically disadvantaged young children than private plans, covering 74 percent of low-income young children and 84 percent of poor young children.

What proportion of children in low-income families receive support from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)?

Among low-income children under age 9, less than half (45 percent) receive SNAP benefits (Figure 17). This percentage is slightly lower than the 51 percent of young children who received SNAP benefits in 2010, but represents a significant decline from the 55 percent of young children who received SNAP benefits in 2012 and 2013.
SUGGESTED CITATION