

Basic Facts About Low-Income Children

CHILDREN UNDER AGE 9, 2023

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Among all children under 18 years of age in the US, 35 percent live in low-income families and 16 percent—approximately one in five—are poor. This means that children are overrepresented among our nation’s poor; they represent 22 percent of the population but comprise 28 percent of all people in poverty.¹

Young children—those under age 9—are particularly vulnerable, with 37 percent living in low-income families, including 16 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 experience 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 2023 federal poverty threshold (FPT)?²

- \$30,900 for a family of four with two children
- \$24,526 for a family of three with one child
- \$21,002 for a family of two with one child

Families below 50 percent of the FPT are in “deep poverty.” Below are 2023 income thresholds for families in deep poverty:

- \$15,450 for a family of four with two children
- \$12,263 for a family of three with one child
- \$10,501 for a family of two with one child

Can families above the FPT, who are low-income, meet basic needs?

This fact sheet includes information about low-income families because a high percentage of these families are unable to meet basic needs, even though their income levels are about two times the FPT.³ Below are 2023 income thresholds for low-income families:

- \$61,800 for a family of four with two children
- \$49,052 for a family of three with one child
- \$42,004 for a family of two with one child

How many young children under age 9 live in low-income families in the United States?

There are more than 12 million children under age 9 who live in low-income families in the United States; 37 percent of all children under age 9 live in low-income families (Figure 1).

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

The percentage of low-income young children decreased from 46 percent in 2013 to 37 percent in 2023 (Figure 2).

The number of low-income young children decreased from 16.7 million to 12.4 million, the number of young children who are poor decreased from 8.5 million to 5.5 million, and the number of young children living in deep poverty, defined as less than 50 percent of the federal poverty threshold, decreased from 3.9 million to 2.7 million. (Between 2013 and 2023, the total number of young children (children under age 9) decreased from 36.2 million to 34 million.)

How does the poverty status of young children compare to the rest of the population?

The percentage of young children and children under age 18 in low-income families surpasses that of adults. In addition, young children are more likely to live in poor families than adults (Figure 3).

Figure 1: Young Children by Family Income, 2023

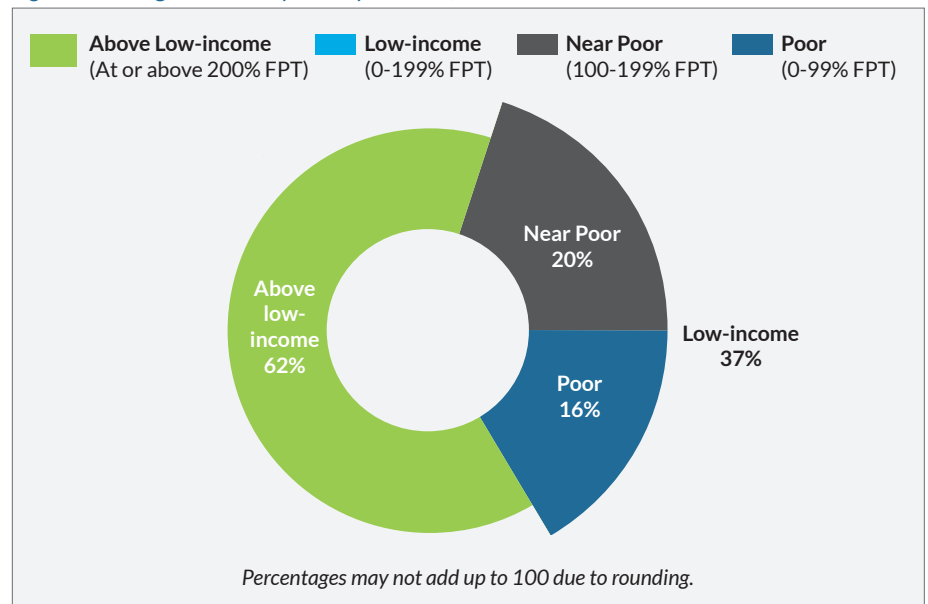


Figure 2: Young Children in Low-Income and Poor Families, 2013 and 2023

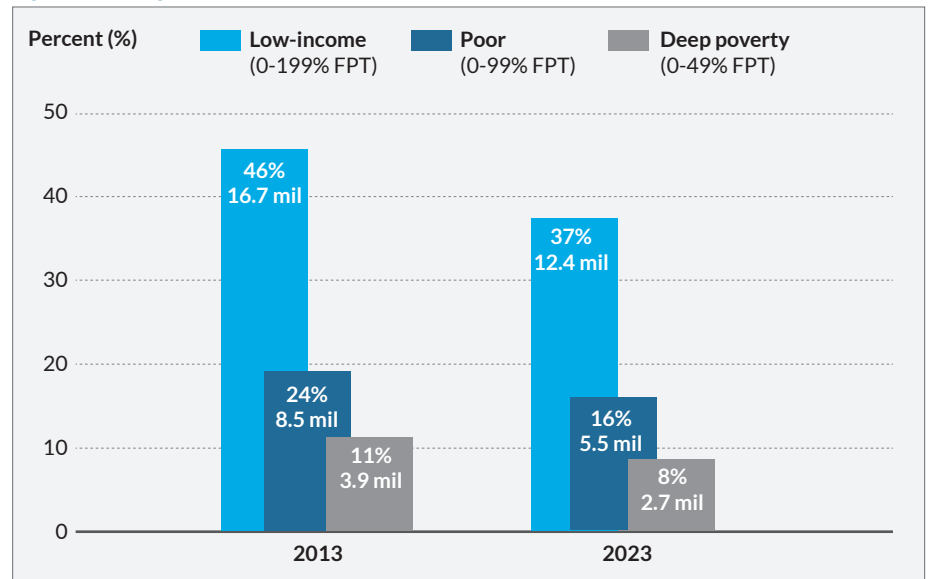
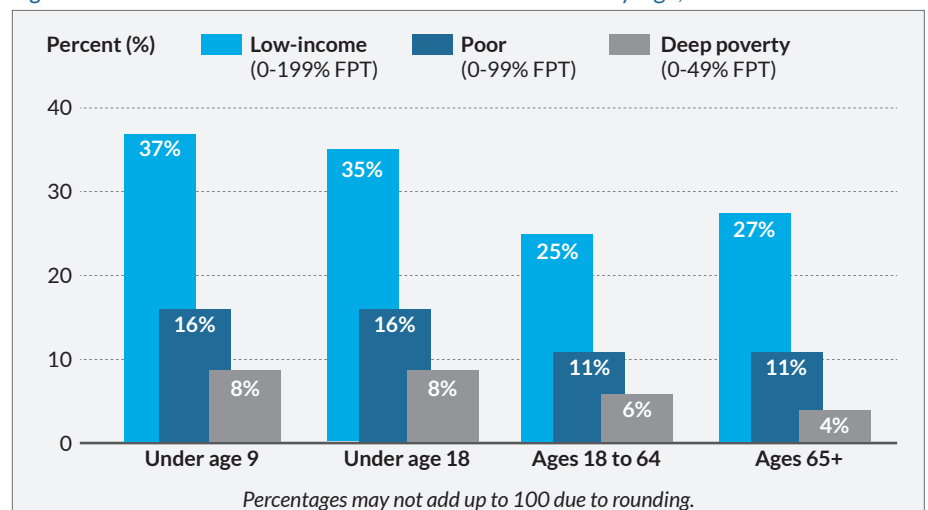


Figure 3: Individuals in Low-Income and Poor Households by Age, 2023



Does the percentage of young children in low-income families vary by race/ethnicity?⁴

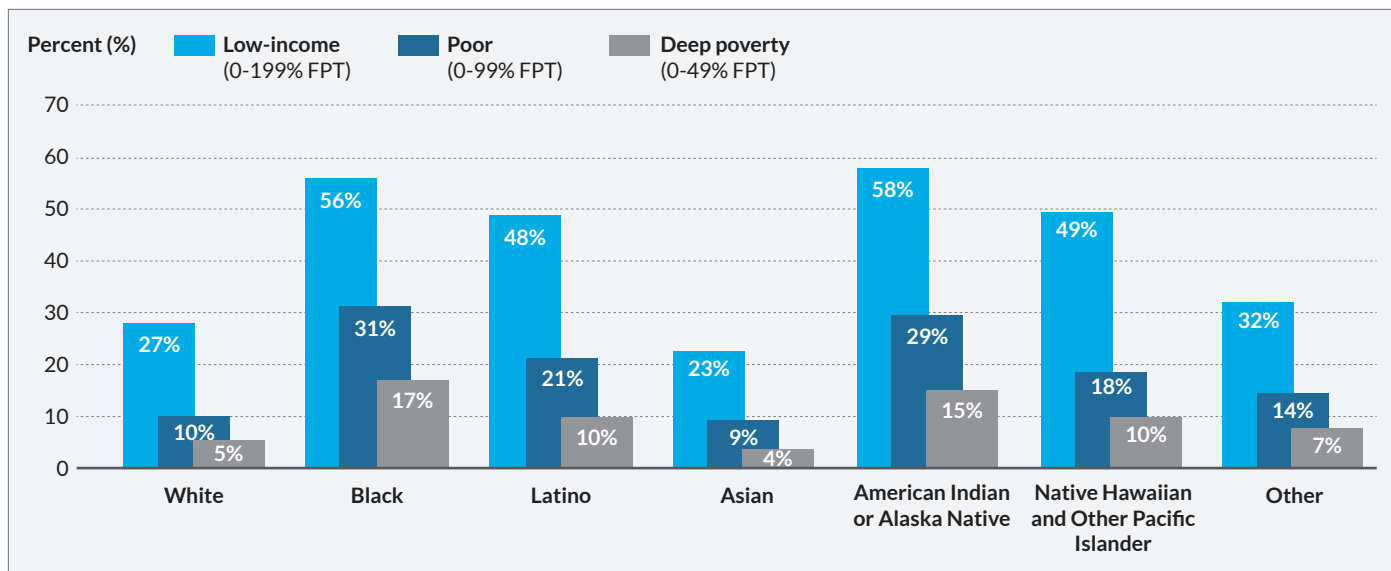
As Figure 4 illustrates, the percentages of young low-income and poor children varies by race and ethnicity. Latino and White children comprise nearly the same share of children living in low-income families (34 and 35 percent, respectively). Latinos comprise the largest share of young children living in poor families in this age group (also 35 percent).

As shown in Figure 5, non-White children (except Asian and Other) are about two to three times more likely to live in families that are low-income or poor. Young Black and American Indian/Alaska Native children are three times more likely to experience deep poverty compared to young White children.

Figure 4: Race/Ethnicity Among Young Children by Family Income, 2023



Figure 5: Percentage of Young Children in Low-Income and Poor Families by Race/Ethnicity, 2023



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

PARENT EMPLOYMENT⁵

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 or part year, or who are not employed (Figure 6). Nevertheless, many low-income and poor young children have parents who work full time; 55 percent of low-income children and 31 percent of poor children under age 9 live with at least one parent who is employed full time, year round (Figure 7).

Figure 6: Percentage of Young Children in Low-Income and Poor Families by Parent Employment, 2023

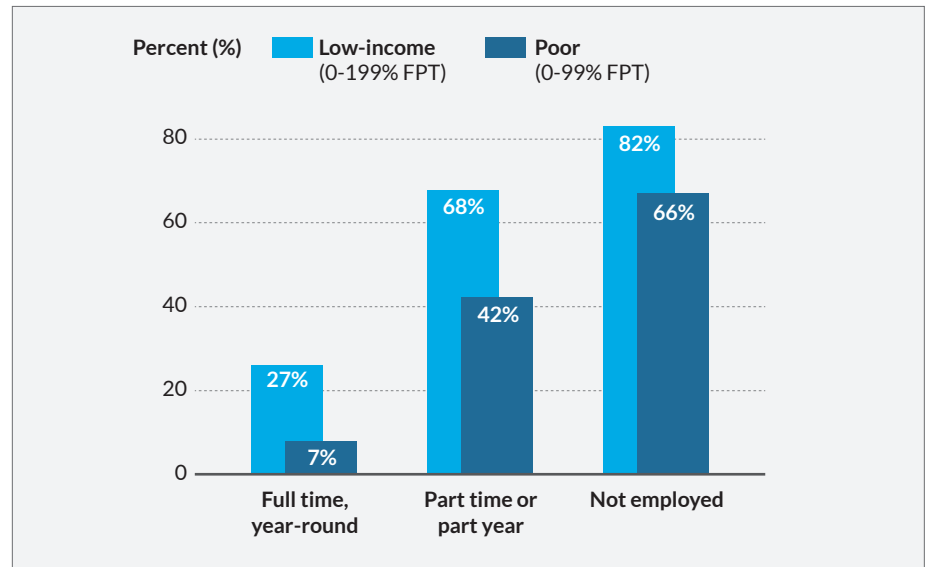
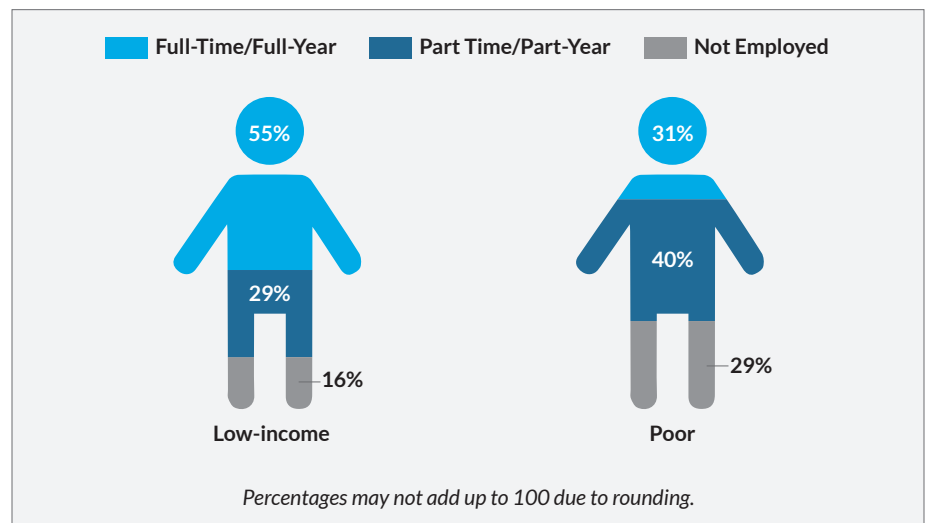


Figure 7: Parent Employment Among Young Children by Family Income, 2023



PARENT EDUCATION⁶

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, 27 percent live in low-income families and 10 percent live in poor families. By contrast, among children in this age group whose parents have less than a high school degree, 77 percent live in low-income families and 44 percent live in poor families (Figure 8).

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 9.

Figure 8: Percentage of Young Children in Low-Income and Poor Families by Parent Education, 2023

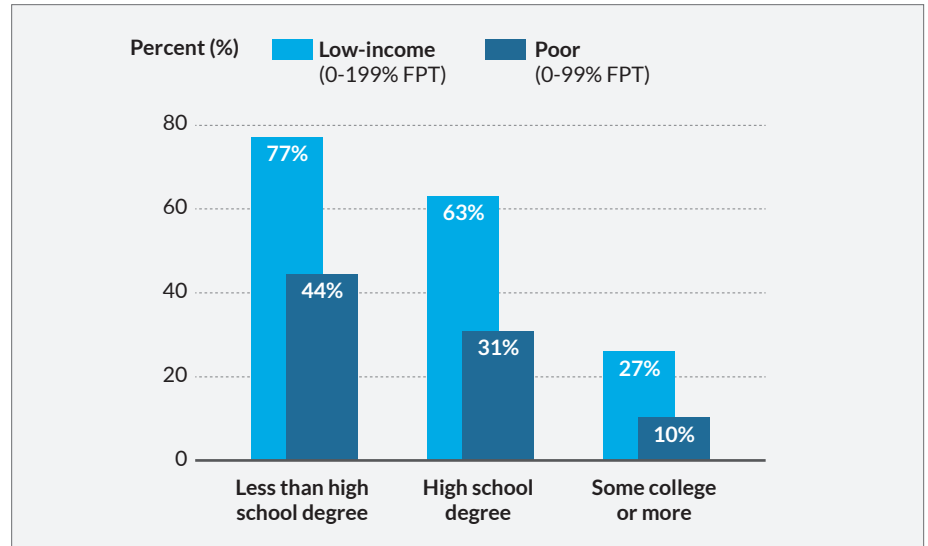
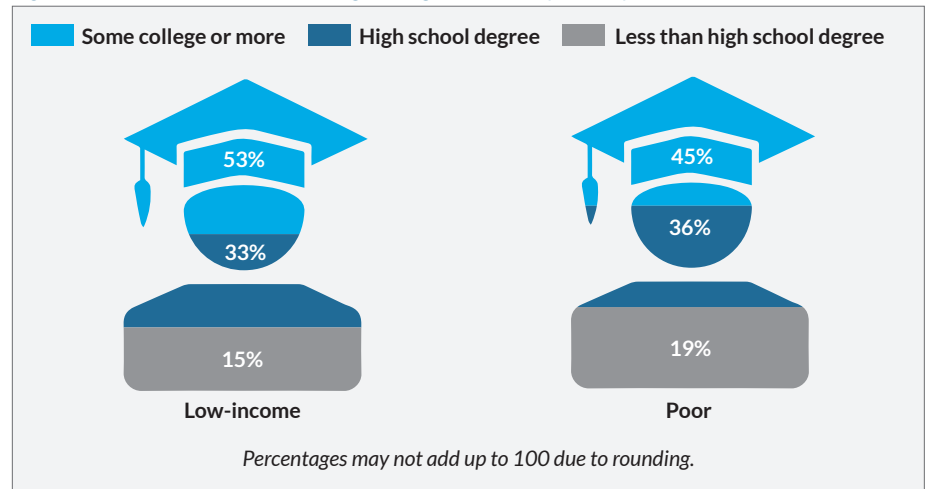


Figure 9: Parent Education Among Young Children by Family Income, 2023

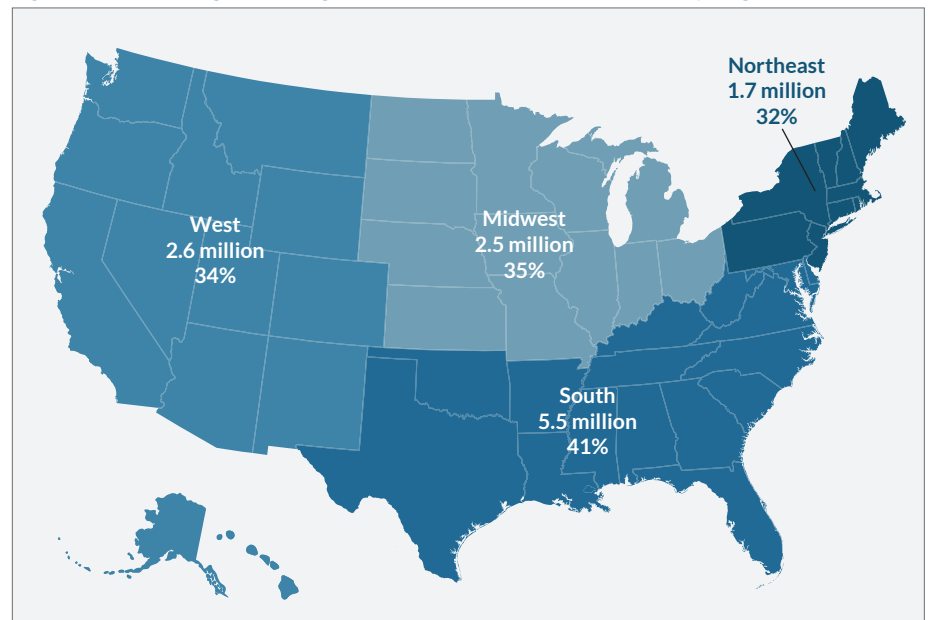


Does the percentage of young children in low-income families vary by where they live?

REGION

The percentage of young low-income children varies substantially by region. Among all young children living in the South, 41 percent are low-income. The percentage of young low-income children in other regions ranges from 32 to 35 percent (Figure 10).

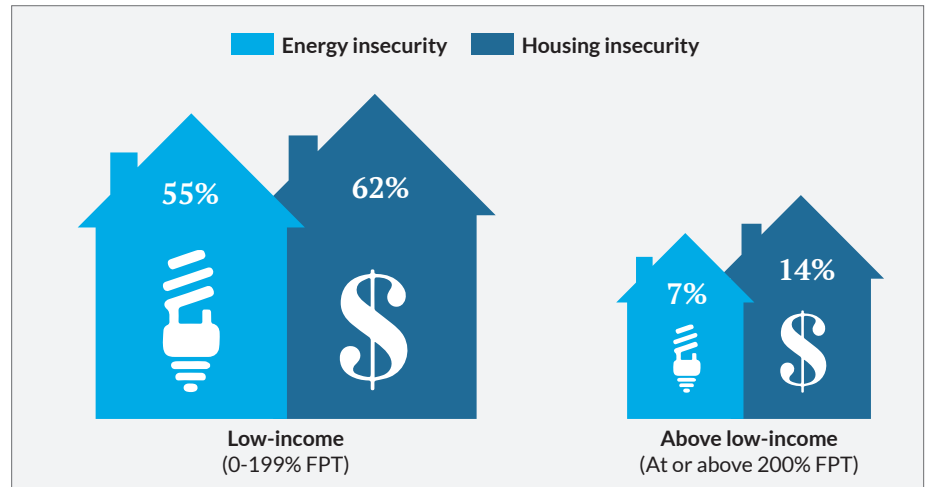
Figure 10: Percentage of Young Children in Low-Income Families by Region, 2023



HOUSING AND ENERGY INSECURITY⁷

Among low-income families with young children over 50 percent experience housing insecurity (62 percent) and energy insecurity (55 percent) (Figure 11). Housing and energy insecurity means that their families have difficulty paying these expenses each month, leading to additional stress in the family.

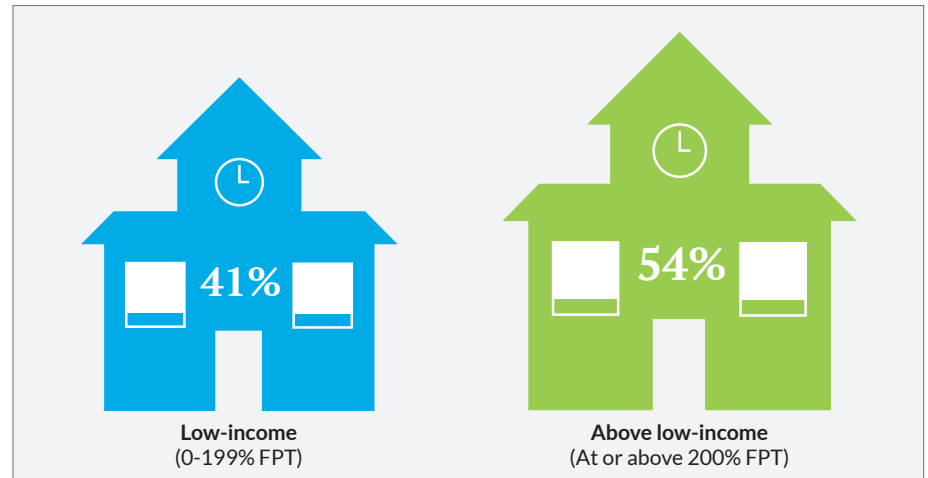
Figure 11: Housing and Energy Insecurity by Family Income, Families with Young Children, 2023



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 12).⁸

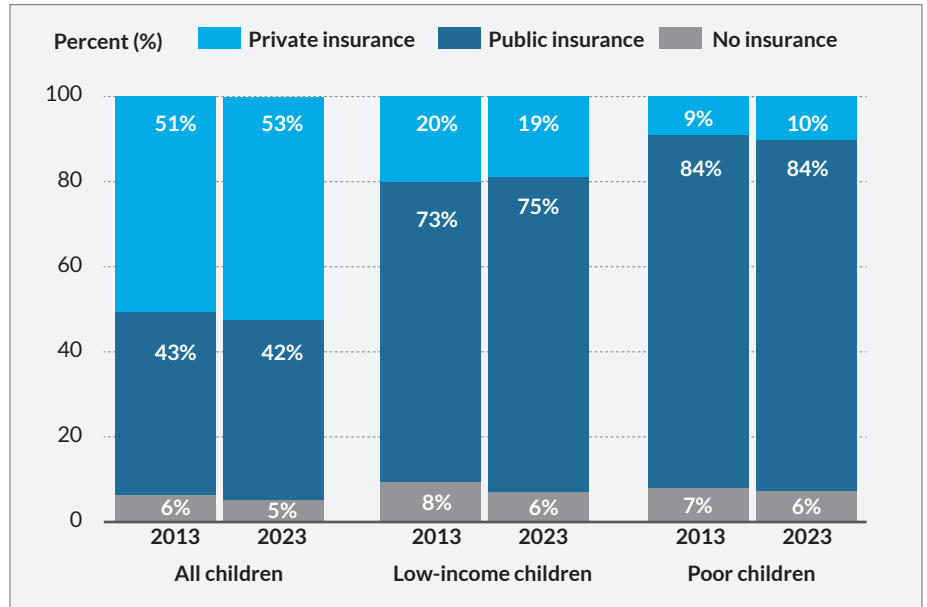
Figure 12: Preschool Enrollment by Family Income, 2023



What proportion of low-income children are covered by health insurance?⁹

Among children under age 9, 6 percent of low-income children and 6 percent of poor children are uninsured.⁹ Public insurance programs cover 42 percent of young children, a slight decrease since 2013 (Figure 13). These programs reach many more economically disadvantaged young children than private plans, covering 75 percent of low-income young children and 84 percent of poor young children.

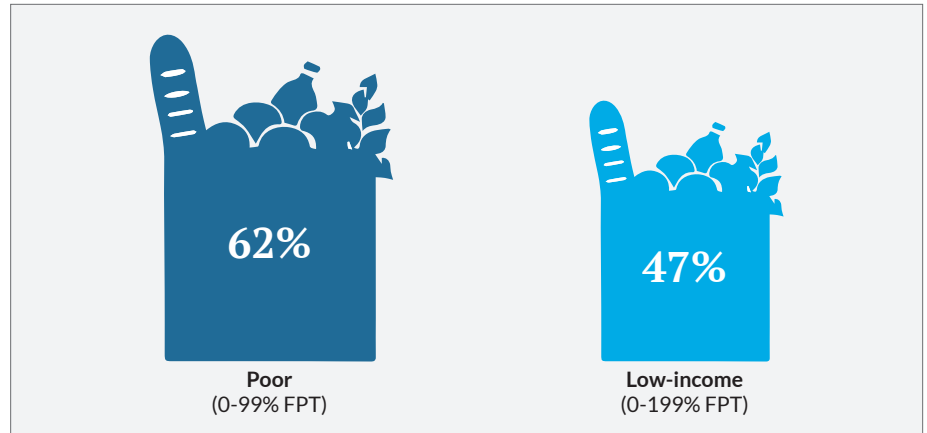
Figure 13: Type of Health Insurance Coverage Among Young Children by Family Income, 2013 and 2023



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

Among children under age 9, 47 percent of low-income children and 62 percent of poor children receive SNAP benefits (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Low-income Young Children Who Receive Support from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, 2023



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please find additional NCCP [resources](#) that can help advocates and policymakers understand options for strengthening key family economic support policies:

- [Profiles of States' Current TANF and SNAP Policies](#) with state-specific options for strengthening these policies
- [A 50-State Comparison of TANF Benefit Amounts](#) using multiple metrics
- [A 50-State Comparison of Restrictions on TANF Access](#) presenting five policy options

ENDNOTES

Estimates from the analysis of the 2023 American Community Survey, (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files include children living in families with at least one parent and children living apart from both parents. For children who do not live with at least one parent (for example, children being raised by grandparents), parental characteristics are calculated based on those of the householder and/or the householder's spouse. Children living independently, living with a spouse, or in group quarters, and children ages 14 years and under living with only unrelated adults, are excluded from analyses of parental characteristics. In this fact sheet, poverty is defined as family income less than 100 percent of the federal poverty threshold, as determined by the U.S. Census Bureau; low-income is defined as family income less than 200 percent of the poverty threshold; deep poverty is defined as family income less than 50 percent of the poverty threshold. Special thanks to Debra Rudick and Mona Rayachoti for layout and production.

- 1 United States Census Bureau, 2023 American community survey 1-Year Estimates. Data for child characteristics were retrieved from the 2023 ACS 1-Year PUMS data using the Microdata Access Tool (MDAT) at data.census.gov/app/mdat/ACSPUMS1Y2023 and data containing parental characteristics were retrieved via NCCP analysis of the 2023 ACS 1-Year PUMS data at www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/pums/2023/1-Year/
- 2 The US Census Bureau issues the poverty thresholds annually. Thresholds vary by family size and composition. See [census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html](https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html) for the complete 2023 poverty thresholds.
- 3 Joshi, P., Walters, A. N., Noelke, C., & Acevedo-Garcia, D. (2022). Families' job characteristics and economic self-sufficiency: Differences by income, race-ethnicity, and nativity. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 8(5), 67-95. [rsfjournal.org/content/rsfjss/8/5/67.full.pdf](https://www.rsfjournal.org/content/rsfjss/8/5/67.full.pdf)
- 4 In the ACS, parents can report children's race as one or more of the following: 1) White, 2) Black or African American, 3) American Indian, 4) Alaska Native, 5) American Indian and Alaska Native tribes, 6) Asian, or 7) Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. In a separate question, parents could report whether their children were of Spanish/Hispanic/Latino origin. For the data reported, children whose parent reported their race as White, Black or African American, American Indian, Alaska Native, American Indian and Alaska Native tribes, Asian, or Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander and their ethnicity as non-Latino were assigned a non-Latino category of their race. Children who were reported to be Black or African American were categorized as Black. Children who were reported to be American Indian, Alaska Native, or American Indian and Alaska Native tribes were grouped together as American Indian or Alaska Native. Children who were reported to be of some other race or of more than one race were assigned as Other. Children whose parent identified them as Spanish/Hispanic/Latino were categorized as Latino, regardless of their reported race. For information on how Census race categories have changed over the years, see [pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/02/25/the-changing-categories-the-u-s-has-used-to-measure-race/](https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/02/25/the-changing-categories-the-u-s-has-used-to-measure-race/)
- 5 Parent employment is defined as the employment level of the parent in the household who maintained the highest level of employment in the previous year. Parents can either have no employment in the previous year, part-year or part-time employment, or full-time, year-round employment. Part-year or part-time employment is defined as either working less than 50 weeks in the previous year or less than 35 hours per week. Full-time, year-round employment is defined as working at least 50 weeks in the previous year and 35 hours or more per week.
- 6 Parent education is defined as the education level of the most highly educated parent(s) living in the household. Parents can either have no high school degree, a high school degree but no college, or some college or more.
- 7 Hernández, D., Jiang, Y., Phillips, D., Carrión D., & Aratani, Y. (2016). Housing hardship and energy insecurity among native born and immigrant low-income families with children in the United States. *Journal of Children and Poverty*. 22(2): 77-92. pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27616875/
Savage, H. (2009). "Who can afford to buy a home in 2004?": Washington, DC: United States Census Bureau. [census.gov/library/publications/2009/demo/h121-09-01.html](https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2009/demo/h121-09-01.html)
Housing insecurity was defined as households where more than 30 percent of the monthly income was spent on rent or mortgage payments. Energy insecurity was defined as households where more than 10 percent of the monthly income was spent on electricity, gas, and fuel payments.
- 8 The ACS does not differentiate whether young children attend preschool or if they are attending kindergarten or higher grades. The numbers cited above assume that children ages 3 or 4 attending school are attending preschool. Some children who are 5 years old may also be attending preschool, but have been excluded from the age range used in determining the preschool statistics cited above.
- 9 People can report more than one type of insurance coverage. Children who were covered by both private and public insurance were categorized as having public insurance. Children not covered by private or public health insurance at the time of the survey are considered uninsured.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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