

One Million Additional Children in Poverty Since 2009

2010 Data Reveal Nearly One in Four Southern Children Now Live in Poverty

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American Community Survey (ACS) data released on September 22, 2011 allow for a detailed look at child poverty by state and place, adding to the understanding of the economic landscape described by the Current Population Survey (CPS) data released last week. While the CPS data are useful for providing a snapshot of poverty across the nation, the larger sample size of the ACS—three million addresses versus 100,000 addresses in the CPS—makes it better suited for nuanced analyses of poverty. In this brief, we use the ACS data released on September 22 to focus on child poverty.¹

While understanding the overall landscape of national poverty provides a valuable snapshot of economic distress, these overall rates mask dramatic differences in poverty across age groups. In recent years, children have been the most likely citizens to live below the poverty line, with young children being particularly vulnerable. In this brief, we highlight changes in child poverty by region, state, and place type, and in young child poverty by region and place type.² We focus on two time periods—change since 2007, as the nation entered the recession, and change since 2009, as the recession was ending. Our findings show that child poverty persists in the first full year post-recession, continuing to rise significantly in 22 states. These effects are exacerbated among young children (under age 6), who experienced both a higher rate of poverty and larger increase in poverty. It is important to understand young child poverty specifically, as children who are poor before age 6 are at risk for educational deficits and health problems, with effects that span the lifecourse.³

Key Findings

- Between 2009 and 2010 an additional one million children joined the ranks of those in poverty. This brings the total to an estimated 15.7 million poor children in 2010, an increase of 2.6 million since the Great Recession began in 2007.
- Of the 15.7 million poor children in 2010, 5.9 million are young (under age 6), an increase of 220,000 over one year.
- Across the United States, rural, suburban, and central city areas all realized significant increases in child poverty between 2009 and 2010 and since the recent recession began in 2007.
- Twenty-nine percent of children in central cities and 25 percent of children in rural places now live in poverty, significantly higher than the 16 percent in suburban areas.
- Differences are even more striking among young children. Thirty-one percent of children under age 6 in America's central cities are poor, as are 30 percent of young children in rural places. In contrast, 19 percent of young children residing in the suburbs are poor.
- Poverty continues to be highest in the South, where nearly one in four children lives in poverty. Southern child poverty is even higher in rural places and central cities, where rates top 30 percent. Among young children, rural Southern poverty now nears 36 percent.
- Between 2009 and 2010, only two places experienced declines in child poverty rates: suburban Hawaii and rural Illinois. All other places had rates that were unchanged or increased.

TABLE 1. YOUNG CHILD (UNDER AGE 6) POVERTY BY PLACE SIZE IN 2010

	2010 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY															
	ALL PLACE TYPES				RURAL				SUBURBAN				CENTRAL CITY			
	Number below poverty	Percent below poverty	Percent Point Change Since 2009	Percent Point Change Since 2007	Number below poverty	Percent below poverty	Percent Point Change Since 2009	Percent Point Change Since 2007	Number below poverty	Percent below poverty	Percent Point Change Since 2009	Percent Point Change Since 2007	Number below poverty	Percent below poverty	Percent Point Change Since 2009	Percent Point Change Since 2007
United States	5,908,929	24.8	1.9	4.2	1,111,049	30.2	1.6	4.5	2,234,754	18.7	1.5	1.7	2,563,126	31.3	2.7	4.5
Northeast	784,889	20.6	1.7	3.0	77,538	23.2	1.2	4.4	303,706	13.4	0.9	1.4	403,645	33.1	4.0	3.2
Midwest	1,229,897	24.1	1.4	4.7	289,241	25.9	0.5	4.9	405,507	16.6	1.3	1.8	535,149	34.4	2.4	5.8
South	2,522,567	27.9	2.1	4.2	597,320	35.5	2.1	4.4	965,017	21.5	1.7	2.2	960,230	33.2	2.6	3.9
West	1,371,576	23.4	2.1	4.7	146,950	26.8	2.5	4.0	560,524	20.0	1.7	2.3	664,102	26.4	2.4	5.2

1. Levels of urbanization are defined as follows: rural consists of ACS geographic components “Not in metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area” and “in micropolitan statistical area”; suburban includes “In metropolitan statistical area—not in principal city” and central city includes “In metropolitan statistical area—in principal city”.

2. Data are based on 2010 American Community Survey estimates. For corresponding margins of error, refer to the U.S. Census American Community Survey.

3. Percentage point changes are based on unrounded poverty percentages and may differ slightly from those that would be obtained using rounded figures.

4. Bold font indicates statistical significance ($p < 0.05$).

Young Child Poverty

Table 1 shows 2010 poverty estimates for children under age 6, both nationally and regionally. Also included are the percentage point changes since 2007 and 2009, with statistically significant changes indicated in bold.⁴ Nationwide, 24.8 percent of young children were poor in 2010, as compared a 1.9 percentage point increase from 22.9 percent a year before. Young child poverty increased across the South, the region which already had the highest rates of poverty among this age group. Nearly 28 percent of young Southern children were poor in 2010. Rural poverty is particularly striking in this region, where nearly 36 percent of children under age 6 were poor. Rates of young child poverty also increased in the suburban and central city areas of the Midwest and West. The Northeast has the lowest young child poverty rate, at 20.6 percent.

Child Poverty Through Age 18

Table 2 shows national, regional, and state-level child poverty numbers by place type. As with Table 1, we present the percentage point changes since 2007 and 2009, with statistically significant changes indicated in bold. Estimates show that there is wide variation in child poverty rates by state and region, with the highest rates in the South and the lowest rates in the Northeast. The largest increase in child poverty from 2007-2010 was in central cities in the Midwest (up 4.8 percentage points), while the largest one-year increase came in Northeastern central cities (up 3.4 percentage points). Child poverty increased significantly in 38 states between 2007 and 2010. Increases for that period were evident in the rural areas of 19 states, in the suburbs of 29 states and in the central cities of 26 states during these years.

Children under age 18 are least often poor in suburban America, where the rate is 16.1 percent nationally. Suburban rates are even lower in some states, with poverty rates especially low in Connecticut, Nebraska, and New Hampshire. In no rural or central city places are estimated child poverty rates below 10 percent.

In four states, rural child poverty rates exceed those in their central city places (Alaska, Arizona, North Carolina, and South Dakota). In an additional 24 states, rural child poverty rates are similar to central city rates; suburban child poverty did not exceed rural child poverty in any place.

Background

On September 13, 2011 the U.S. Census Bureau released its nationwide estimates of poverty in 2010 from the Current Population Survey (CPS). Poverty determination is based on the U.S. Office of Management and Budget income thresholds, which vary by family size and composition. In 2010, the poverty line for a family of four (two adults, two children) was \$22,113.⁵ The CPS data show the poverty rate at 15.1 percent, rising nearly a full percentage point from 14.3 percent in 2009, and translating into 46.2 million people now living below the poverty line, the greatest number since estimates were first published in 1959.⁶ These numbers, computed for the first full year following the recent recession, show the toll of the economic downturn and its persistent effects. Increases in poverty correspond with unemployment rates that remain dramatically increased from pre-recession levels; in August 2011, unemployment was still at 9.1 percent, a rate that does not include those who are discouraged from finding work, those working fewer than their ideal hours, or those working at jobs for which they are overqualified.⁷ The CPS data also reveal declines in household income (real median incomes fell by 2.3 percent since 2009 and 6.4 percent since 2007), and 0.9 million fewer individuals with health insurance coverage.⁸ These signs of a weak economy have dramatic implications for children, effects that may differ widely based on the state and place of residence, the focus of this brief.

TABLE 2. CHILD POVERTY BY PLACE SIZE IN 2010

2010 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY																
	ALL PLACE TYPES				RURAL				SUBURBAN				CENTRAL CITY			
	Number below poverty	Percent below poverty	Percent Point Change Since 2009	Percent Point Change Since 2007	Number below poverty	Percent below poverty	Percent Point Change Since 2009	Percent Point Change Since 2007	Number below poverty	Percent below poverty	Percent Point Change Since 2009	Percent Point Change Since 2007	Number below poverty	Percent below poverty	Percent Point Change Since 2009	Percent Point Change Since 2007
United States	15,700,000	21.6	1.6	3.5	2,897,034	25.4	1.1	3.5	6,176,042	16.1	1.3	3.2	6,676,053	28.7	2.3	4.1
Northeast	2,161,882	17.8	1.3	2.2	211,138	19.1	1.6	2.7	842,601	11.2	0.5	2.0	1,108,143	31.6	3.4	3.0
Midwest	3,226,591	20.4	1.1	3.7	737,184	21.2	0.9	3.8	1,116,316	14.0	1.1	3.0	1,373,091	31.4	1.7	4.8
South	6,635,689	24.2	1.8	3.6	1,570,924	30.4	1.2	3.7	2,637,999	18.6	1.7	3.5	2,426,766	30.1	2.4	3.7
West	3,724,967	21.1	1.9	4.2	377,788	22.6	1.4	2.5	1,579,126	18.1	1.7	4.0	1,768,053	24.3	2.2	4.7
Alabama	310,590	27.7	3.0	3.4	107,431	33.6	2.3	6.2	109,159	21.5	4.4	1.1	94,000	32.1	1.7	3.8
Alaska	23,773	12.9	0.1	1.4	8,121	17.9	-0.1	-1.7	4,549	11.0	1.0	2.1	9,737	11.7	0.1	2.3
Arizona	392,229	24.4	1.1	4.3	40,017	31.9	-1.9	0.8	124,206	18.7	1.7	3.0	228,006	27.9	0.6	5.6
Arkansas	193,081	27.6	0.5	1.8	81,900	30.8	0.3	1.9	47,285	21.3	-0.3	0.3	63,896	30.2	1.3	3.1
California	2,012,585	22.0	2.1	4.7	39,697	23.4	3.2	5.0	924,301	19.7	1.7	4.5	1,048,587	24.4	2.5	4.8
Colorado	210,532	17.4	0.0	1.0	25,062	16.5	-3.1	-2.3	78,122	12.9	0.8	1.7	107,348	23.5	-0.2	0.9
Connecticut	103,498	12.8	0.7	1.8	7,488	11.4	1.6	3.9	41,205	8.1	-0.2	0.5	54,805	23.6	2.3	3.3
Delaware	36,655	18.1	1.6	3.4	9,768	24.8	7.2	11.2	16,371	11.8	-2.0	0.3	10,516	43.3	12.7	7.9
District of Columbia	30,555	30.4	1.0	7.7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	30,555	30.4	1.0	7.7
Florida	923,963	23.5	2.1	6.4	64,885	31.5	1.8	9.9	565,678	21.0	1.8	5.8	293,400	28.3	3.1	6.9
Georgia	610,722	24.8	2.5	5.1	147,140	33.5	2.2	7.7	320,567	19.5	1.9	4.6	143,015	37.9	5.8	5.3
Hawaii	41,230	13.9	0.1	4.1	18,361	20.3	5.8	9.0	14,896	9.8	-4.6	-0.1	7,973	14.4	2.7	7.3
Idaho	80,316	19.0	0.8	3.1	26,965	19.4	0.5	1.8	26,813	15.7	0.7	2.4	26,538	23.4	2.1	6.3
Illinois	600,045	19.4	0.5	2.8	69,140	19.4	-3.2	2.0	243,470	14.2	1.2	3.2	287,435	28.2	1.1	2.5
Indiana	342,172	21.7	1.8	4.4	76,152	22.5	1.9	4.5	106,446	14.3	1.4	2.8	159,574	32.3	1.8	7.1
Iowa	115,365	16.3	0.6	2.7	51,771	17.1	1.6	2.4	18,287	9.0	0.2	2.7	45,307	22.2	-0.7	2.9
Kansas	131,258	18.4	0.7	3.8	46,996	21.8	2.6	5.0	27,268	10.4	-0.6	1.5	56,994	24.0	0.5	5.7
Kentucky	262,760	26.3	0.7	2.3	125,940	30.8	-1.1	1.5	69,888	19.7	0.9	2.4	66,932	28.3	3.3	3.8
Louisiana	299,779	27.3	3.1	0.5	90,878	31.5	1.7	-2.4	106,260	20.9	2.1	1.3	102,641	34.1	6.3	2.6
Maine	47,727	17.8	0.7	2.4	21,194	19.6	0.0	1.2	16,912	13.8	2.3	1.9	9,621	25.4	-1.1	7.3
Maryland	173,113	13.0	1.4	2.5	9,179	13.1	-1.8	2.1	104,692	10.0	1.2	2.1	59,242	27.8	4.4	6.3
Massachusetts	200,817	14.3	1.2	1.4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	116,903	10.9	1.0	1.8	83,358	26.2	2.0	0.2
Michigan	538,849	23.5	1.0	4.0	90,207	22.9	0.1	3.3	204,999	15.9	0.9	3.3	243,443	39.8	2.7	6.4
Minnesota	192,437	15.2	1.1	3.2	52,098	17.1	1.0	3.7	75,405	11.0	1.9	2.7	64,934	23.5	0.3	3.8
Mississippi	241,595	32.5	1.5	3.2	152,073	37.7	-0.1	2.6	51,990	21.0	2.1	4.0	37,532	40.9	8.1	4.9
Missouri	290,959	20.9	0.2	3.2	85,865	25.0	-1.3	3.4	114,664	15.0	-0.1	2.3	90,430	31.9	3.0	5.9
Montana	43,818	20.1	-1.4	1.7	30,034	21.0	-1.2	0.6	4,048	15.1	4.1	3.7	9,736	20.0	-4.8	3.0
Nebraska	81,952	18.2	2.9	3.3	33,857	18.5	3.4	2.4	8,899	8.1	-0.1	-0.1	39,196	24.9	5.6	6.2
Nevada	144,204	22.0	4.4	6.7	7,868	16.1	5.2	2.2	66,608	20.8	4.5	7.8	68,247	24.9	5.2	7.4
New Hampshire	28,315	10.0	-0.7	1.3	11,507	12.9	1.7	4.1	8,984	6.3	-0.9	1.0	6,594	15.6	-4.7	-2.0
New Jersey	295,346	14.5	1.0	2.9	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	226,943	12.1	0.4	2.6	68,403	40.2	12.5	10.9
New Mexico	153,558	30.0	4.7	4.5	54,848	31.4	7.1	3.6	49,944	31.4	3.4	5.8	48,766	27.4	3.5	4.4
New York	900,626	21.2	1.3	1.8	67,058	20.4	-0.6	1.0	189,807	10.1	-0.1	1.6	643,761	31.5	3.2	2.9
North Carolina	559,875	24.9	2.3	5.3	197,203	30.6	1.9	6.3	169,457	19.0	1.3	5.0	193,215	26.9	3.9	4.7
North Dakota	24,116	16.2	3.2	2.8	14,917	19.1	3.9	3.8	2,712	10.2	4.6	2.3	6,487	14.8	0.7	0.9
Ohio	623,852	23.3	1.5	4.8	125,428	23.9	1.0	5.3	247,642	16.2	1.6	4.1	250,782	40.4	2.3	5.8
Oklahoma	226,679	24.7	2.5	2.2	84,332	26.6	1.3	1.4	64,257	19.1	3.4	3.6	78,090	29.8	2.9	1.9
Oregon	183,859	21.6	2.4	4.6	49,673	27.2	2.8	6.0	68,824	17.4	1.2	3.1	65,362	23.8	3.8	6.0
Pennsylvania	522,189	19.1	1.9	2.7	87,392	21.0	3.6	4.2	213,692	12.3	1.1	2.3	221,105	37.6	3.1	3.0
Rhode Island	42,221	19.0	2.2	1.6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	23,012	15.2	0.0	2.4	19,209	27.1	7.0	0.7
South Carolina	277,722	26.1	1.6	5.1	78,422	32.1	-1.4	6.0	150,469	22.7	2.8	4.8	48,831	30.9	2.0	5.1
South Dakota	35,960	18.2	-0.4	1.4	23,512	22.2	-0.3	0.9	4,445	10.9	2.5	5.0	8,003	15.6	-2.4	-0.4
Tennessee	377,066	25.7	1.8	2.7	106,759	28.2	3.2	1.9	102,677	17.3	1.5	2.3	167,630	33.7	1.4	3.7
Texas	1,751,189	25.7	1.3	2.6	215,372	29.0	2.0	2.3	605,419	20.3	1.7	3.2	930,398	30.2	1.2	2.2
Utah	135,565	15.7	3.5	4.7	18,339	18.6	2.3	1.3	76,364	12.7	3.4	4.6	40,862	25.5	4.1	7.4
Vermont	21,143	16.7	3.4	4.3	14,713	17.5	2.5	2.6	5,143	14.7	5.4	7.9	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Virginia	264,601	14.5	0.5	1.4	53,197	23.4	1.5	4.0	116,739	10.0	0.4	1.1	94,665	21.9	1.0	2.4
Washington	284,045	18.2	2.0	3.2	42,492	23.9	0.7	3.8	138,784	15.4	1.8	3.1	102,769	21.3	2.5	2.6
West Virginia	95,744	25.5	1.9	2.7	46,445	27.9	-1.3	1.6	37,091	22.0	4.8	4.0	12,208	29.9	2.2	1.3
Wisconsin	249,826	19.1	2.4	4.7	67,241	19.9	4.0	5.6	62,079	10.5	0.9	2.4	120,506	31.8	3.0	6.8
Wyoming	19,253	14.3	1.7	2.7	13,464	14.2	1.2	0.5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4,122	14.5	3.7	7.5

N/A = Not applicable.

1. Levels of urbanization are defined as follows: rural consists of ACS geographic components "Not in metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area" and "in micropolitan statistical area"; suburban includes "In metropolitan statistical area—not in principal city" and central city includes "In metropolitan statistical area—in principal city".

2. Data are based on 2010 American Community Survey estimates. For corresponding margins of error, refer to the U.S. Census American Community Survey.

3. Percentage point changes are based on unrounded poverty percentages and may differ slightly from those that would be obtained using rounded figures.

4. Bold font indicates statistical significance (p<0.05).

Policy Implications

That child poverty is continuing to rise in the aftermath of the recession highlights the necessity of policies that can support vulnerable children and families. Congressional concerns over the federal debt have already resulted in an agreement that will force significant cuts to domestic spending, including many programs that serve children and families. In August 2011, Congress passed a law that will cut domestic spending steeply over the next decade, with decisions on which programs to cut being made through the appropriations process. Additionally, as a result of this law, a bipartisan “Super Committee” comprised of six Senators and six Representatives was formed.⁹ This group is charged with developing a proposal to further reduce the debt by \$1.2 trillion over the next decade, with no limitations on the ways to reduce the deficit.¹⁰ Such a proposal would receive “fast-track” consideration in Congress. However, if this plan (or an alternate plan) is not passed by the end of 2011, automatic spending cuts to reach targeted budget reductions will go into effect, cutting 9 percent spending across the board in addition to recent appropriations cuts to reach the \$1.2 trillion target. Although many important programs for low income families, such as tax credits (e.g. EITC and CTC), Medicaid, Children’s Health Insurance Programs, Supplemental Security Income (SSI)—which serves disabled children—and SNAP would be exempt from these automatic 9 percent cuts, such drastic measures would inevitably end up reducing funding for programs that affect all aspects of vulnerable children’s lives including education, nutrition, health, and housing. Though budget cuts are unavoidable, policy makers should carefully consider how cuts are distributed, keeping America’s most vulnerable families in mind as the effects of the recession reverberate, as demonstrated by high child poverty rates.

Data

This analysis is based on U.S. Census Bureau estimates from the 2007, 2009, and 2010 American Community Survey. For more details or information, please refer to the U.S. Census American Community Survey.¹¹ Tables were produced by aggregating information from detailed tables available on American Fact-Finder (<http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>). These estimates are meant to give perspective on child poverty, but since they are based on survey data, caution must be used in comparing across years or places, as the margin of error may indicate that seemingly disparate numbers fall within reasonable sampling error.¹² All differences highlighted in this brief are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

ENDNOTES

1. U.S. Census Bureau, “Differences Between CPS ASEC and ACS,” *Fact Sheet* (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). The Census Bureau recommends using the American Community Survey when comparing states or other geographic areas smaller than the national level. See also U.S. Census Bureau, “Income and Poverty Estimates: Guidance on When to Use Each Survey,” *News Release*, September 13 (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Available at <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/pdf/incpovguidancedoc.pdf>.
2. Throughout this brief, we refer to “states.” It should be noted that our usage here includes Washington, DC.
3. See, for example, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Greg J. Duncan, and Nancy Maritato, “Poor Families, Poor Outcomes: The Well-Being of Children and Youth,” Chapter 1 in *Consequences of Growing Up Poor*, edited by Greg J. Duncan and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997).
4. Although some states/places appear to have percentage point increases in poverty, those not in bold are not statistically distinguishable from zero.
5. See “Poverty Thresholds for 2010.” Available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/threshld/>.
6. U.S. Census Bureau, “Poverty Highlights,” *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage: 2010* (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).
7. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employment Situation Summary: August 2011,” *Economic News Release*, September 2 (Washington, DC: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).
8. U.S. Census Bureau, “Poverty Highlights,” 2011.
9. See Jon Carson, “All About the So-Called ‘Super Committee,’” *The White House Blog*, August 4 (Washington, DC: The White House, 2011).
10. *Ibid.*
11. See U.S. Census Bureau’s American FactFinder. Available at <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>.
12. See U.S. Census Bureau’s American FactFinder. Available at <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank Bruce Mallory, Curt Grimm, Amy Stern-dale, and Laurel Lloyd Earnshaw at the Carsey Institute for their assistance, comments, and suggestions.



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This work was supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, and an anonymous donor.

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