2012 National Child Poverty Rate Stagnates at 22.6 Percent

New Hampshire Child Poverty Jumps 30 Percent Since 2011

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Stubbornly high poverty rates in the wake of the Great Recession suggest we have not yet “turned the corner” three years after its official end. In 2012, the child poverty rate was 22.6 percent, not statistically different from 2011, but roughly 4.6 percentage points higher than in 2007 (see Table 1).¹ 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 regional place increase in child poverty both from 2011 to 2012 and 2007 to 2012 was in central cities in the West (up 0.9 and 6.3 percentage points, respectively). See Figure 1.

Children under age 18 are least often poor in suburban America, where 2012 rates are estimated at 17.2 percent nationally, as compared to 26.2 percent in rural places and 29.7 percent in central cities. However, in absolute numbers, many more poor children live in the central cities and suburbs, as compared to rural places.

Child poverty increased the most in New Hampshire and Mississippi (by 3.6 and 2.9 percentage points, respectively, see Table 1). The significant increase in New Hampshire is particularly surprising given that it has consistently had the lowest rate in the nation.² In 2011, New Hampshire’s child poverty was lower than all other states and Washington, DC. However, in 2012, New Hampshire’s rate was lower than only thirty-five states.³

Within New Hampshire, child poverty was stable in the suburbs but increased in rural places and central cities. Child poverty also increased in Nevada,

KEY FINDINGS

22.6%

According to the American Community Survey, the overall child poverty rate, at 22.6 percent in 2012, was not statistically different than 2011. Nationally, child poverty rates remain more than 4.5 percentage points higher than at the start of the Great Recession in 2007, resulting in an estimated 16.4 million children living in poverty.

Nearly thirty percent (29.7 percent) of children in central cities and 26.2 percent of children in rural places lived in poverty in 2012, significantly higher than the 17.2 percent in suburban areas.

New Hampshire and Mississippi realized the highest increases in child poverty between 2011–2012. New Hampshire rose from 12.0 percent to 15.6 percent and Mississippi rose from 31.8 percent to 34.7 percent. Child poverty also rose in Nevada, California, and New Jersey. Florida and Nevada had the highest rate increases between 2007–2012.

After having the lowest child poverty in the nation for more than a decade, New Hampshire no longer holds this distinction with a 2012 child poverty rate of 15.6 percent (representing more than a 30 percent increase in just one year and more than a 75 percent increase since 2007).

Box 1: Poverty Measurement

Documenting trends using official poverty rates, as in this brief, enables comparisons of child poverty across places, and offers a method for consistently comparing the adequacy of families' incomes for meeting children's needs. However, the official poverty measure has important limitations: for example, the measure is sometimes critiqued as dated, relying on a formula established about fifty years ago to calculate annual poverty rates. It also does not consider how work-related expenses (such as child care), in-kind assistance (for example, food stamps, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), medical costs (such as insurance premiums), post-tax transfers (such as the Earned Income Tax Credit), or geographic differences in the cost of living impact families' resources and expenses. An alternate measure, the Research Supplemental Poverty Measure, has been offered by the Census Bureau as a potentially more nuanced alternative that considers the aforementioned resources and expenses when calculating poverty rates. As more data become available on this measure, we can compare these newly estimated poverty rates to official poverty measurements, and consider how these alternate calculations influence our understanding of the landscape of poverty.

California, and New Jersey. In contrast, child poverty fell in four states: Iowa, Illinois, Texas, and Minnesota, but remains 2.3 to 4.0 percentage points higher than in 2007 in these states.

Young Child Poverty

Poverty among young children is of particular concern because children under age 6 are the age group that typically has the highest poverty rate and because young children who are poor experience the most adverse outcomes later in life.⁴

In 2012, an estimated 25.5 percent of young children in America lived in families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold (see Table 2). Young child poverty rose slightly in the West (by 0.5 percentage point) and Northeast (0.4 percentage point) and

fell slightly in the Midwest (by 0.7 percentage point) between 2011 and 2012. Young child poverty is highest in the South and lowest in the Northeast. Young child poverty is consistently higher in central cities and rural places than in the suburbs.

Conclusion

These new poverty estimates released on September 19, 2013 suggest that child poverty plateaued in the aftermath of the Great Recession, but there is no evidence of any reduction in child poverty even as we enter the fourth year of "recovery." Modest improvements are evident in some places, but in others rates have increased, raising concerns about the well-being of America's children. This is particularly evident in our own state, New Hampshire, where the child poverty rate rose from 12.0 to 15.6 percent. This means that, on average, for every twenty-eight children in New Hampshire, there was an additional child in poverty in 2012 as compared to 2011.

Given the continuing high levels of child poverty, it is imperative to consider the role of the safety net in protecting America's most vulnerable. Programs like the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) provide critical support for poor children. For example, SNAP has been shown to improve young children's health and reduce developmental delays.⁵ The EITC has been shown to improve the health of infants, and young children whose families receive the credit do better in school and earn more as adults.⁶

Data

While the Community Population Survey (CPS) data are useful for providing a snapshot of official poverty across the nation, the larger sample size of the American Community Survey (ACS), which samples three million addresses, versus 100,000 addresses in the CPS, is better suited for nuanced analyses of poverty, particularly by place and demographic subgroups. In this brief, we use the ACS data released on September 19, 2013, to address patterns of poverty among children, exploring variations by state, region, and place type.⁷

FIGURE 1. PERCENT OF CHILDREN IN POVERTY, 2012

Source: Carsey Institute analysis of 2011 & 2012 ACS, U.S. Census Bureau

This analysis is based on estimates from the 2007, 2011, and 2012 American Community Survey.⁸ Tables were produced by aggregating information from detailed tables available on American FactFinder (<http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>). These estimates give perspective on child poverty, but they are based on survey data, so caution must be exercised in comparing across years or places.⁹ All differences highlighted in this brief and bolded in the tables are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Box 2: Definition of the Terms Rural, Suburban, and Central City

Data for this brief are derived from the American Community Survey, which locates each address as being within one of several geographic components. As used here, “central city” designates households in the principal city of a given metropolitan statistical area, and “suburban” includes those in metropolitan areas, but not within the principal city of that area. “Rural” consists of the addresses that are not within a metropolitan area.

TABLE 1. CHILD POVERTY BY STATE AND PLACE TYPE IN 2012

	ALL PLACES				RURAL			
	Number Below Poverty	Percent Below Poverty	Percentage Point Change Since 2011	Percentage Point Change Since 2007	Number Below Poverty	Percent Below Poverty	Percentage Point Change Since 2011	Percentage Point Change Since 2007
United States	16,400,000	22.58	0.08	4.56	2,925,830	26.19	-0.09	4.26
Northeast	2,287,329	19.16	0.38	3.49	221,157	20.74	0.67	4.35
Midwest	3,261,456	20.95	-0.43	4.25	723,741	21.27	-0.72	3.86
South	6,876,496	25.01	-0.07	4.39	1,587,451	31.37	0.28	4.59
West	3,971,582	22.57	0.51	5.68	393,481	24.00	-0.49	3.83
Alabama	305,610	27.48	-0.12	3.17	100,477	32.48	1.34	5.15
Alaska	25,700	13.91	-0.64	2.41	9,510	20.63	0.28	1.08
Arizona	429,486	26.97	-0.26	6.80	41,355	33.76	-4.52	2.70
Arkansas	199,617	28.52	0.43	2.74	89,061	33.82	1.61	4.95
California	2,167,372	23.81	0.97	6.55	41,493	25.33	-0.23	6.91
Colorado	223,970	18.47	0.58	2.15	31,895	21.91	1.17	3.15
Connecticut	116,536	14.85	-0.10	3.78	6,731	10.69	0.61	3.17
Delaware	34,875	17.36	-0.10	2.69	11,262	28.65	9.02	15.02
District of Columbia	28,623	26.53	-3.80	3.82	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Florida	1,000,736	25.39	0.48	8.32	71,107	35.03	0.51	13.52
Georgia	672,040	27.24	0.89	7.54	150,840	35.30	1.18	9.43
Hawaii	51,233	17.11	0.12	7.36	19,467	21.34	-4.07	10.03
Idaho	86,532	20.66	0.23	4.79	31,862	23.33	2.03	5.65
Illinois	624,272	20.67	-0.88	4.04	72,674	20.83	-0.08	3.41
Indiana	349,524	22.37	-0.67	5.11	75,209	22.59	-1.14	4.65
Iowa	112,573	15.85	-1.44	2.26	52,542	17.63	0.43	2.90
Kansas	135,006	19.03	0.22	4.45	46,688	21.87	0.94	5.01
Kentucky	263,819	26.51	-0.92	2.59	129,995	32.71	-0.31	3.42
Louisiana	310,053	28.14	-0.64	1.39	86,537	30.59	-1.43	-3.26
Maine	54,065	20.87	2.03	5.51	24,826	23.69	2.29	5.24
Maryland	183,044	13.82	0.31	3.34	9,290	13.75	-3.59	2.73
Massachusetts	213,206	15.41	0.18	2.48	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Michigan	554,153	24.87	0.04	5.43	90,013	23.84	-1.66	4.23
Minnesota	183,763	14.57	-0.84	2.57	50,893	16.99	-0.89	3.62
Mississippi	255,839	34.69	2.86	5.38	161,171	40.50	3.60	5.37
Missouri	310,229	22.61	0.52	4.89	91,419	27.10	-0.40	5.54
Montana	43,733	20.30	0.60	1.97	29,520	21.00	0.38	0.63
Nebraska	80,839	17.86	-0.28	2.93	30,988	17.48	-1.02	1.41
Nevada	156,523	23.95	1.86	8.67	10,622	21.43	0.63	7.51
New Hampshire	42,069	15.57	3.61	6.82	15,599	18.35	4.81	9.52
New Jersey	310,226	15.45	0.78	3.87	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
New Mexico	149,404	29.33	-1.38	3.87	52,698	30.41	-2.41	2.63
New York	958,610	22.83	0.26	3.41	74,215	23.28	-1.57	3.84
North Carolina	586,104	26.00	0.41	6.46	197,470	31.38	0.41	7.03
North Dakota	19,841	13.15	-1.49	-0.27	12,219	15.34	-2.06	0.04
Ohio	620,921	23.77	-0.42	5.25	123,195	24.25	-0.92	5.64
Oklahoma	221,623	24.12	0.68	1.62	83,994	26.80	0.77	1.60
Oregon	195,093	23.03	-0.61	6.10	47,357	26.55	-1.09	5.41
Pennsylvania	532,166	19.74	0.19	3.43	83,058	20.72	0.77	3.90
Rhode Island	41,635	19.45	-2.42	1.98	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
South Carolina	287,664	26.92	-0.87	6.00	81,813	34.07	-0.16	7.99
South Dakota	34,901	17.49	-0.67	0.70	21,569	20.64	-1.96	-0.63
Tennessee	379,319	25.83	-0.43	2.84	103,070	28.24	-2.10	1.86
Texas	1,776,664	25.76	-0.86	2.57	210,491	28.45	-0.37	1.75
Utah	131,915	15.12	-0.75	4.13	13,227	13.59	-2.58	-3.71
Vermont	18,816	15.47	0.58	3.12	14,256	17.83	1.91	2.95
Virginia	278,899	15.25	-0.06	2.23	54,508	24.53	-2.77	5.15
Washington	288,147	18.52	0.21	3.49	43,460	24.83	1.45	4.75
West Virginia	91,967	24.59	-1.25	1.80	46,365	28.51	1.03	2.22
Wisconsin	235,434	18.24	0.00	3.82	56,332	17.28	-0.96	2.98
Wyoming	22,474	16.91	1.29	5.29	16,212	17.24	1.32	3.55

Note: Percentage point changes are based on unrounded poverty percentages and may differ slightly from those that

TABLE 1. CHILD POVERTY BY STATE AND PLACE TYPE IN 2012, CONTINUED

	SUBURBAN				CENTRAL CITY			
	Number Below Poverty	Percent Below Poverty	Percentage Point Change Since 2011	Percentage Point Change Since 2007	Number Below Poverty	Percent Below Poverty	Percentage Point Change Since 2011	Percentage Point Change Since 2007
United States	6,549,634	17.19	0.05	4.33	6,921,399	29.67	0.17	5.02
Northeast	906,338	12.35	0.37	3.14	1,159,834	32.84	0.00	4.25
Midwest	1,156,813	14.77	-0.40	3.79	1,380,902	31.88	-0.38	5.33
South	2,786,360	19.59	-0.15	4.48	2,502,685	30.48	-0.11	4.10
West	1,700,123	19.53	0.42	5.41	1,877,978	25.89	0.85	6.34
Alabama	107,254	21.01	-0.65	0.64	97,879	33.50	-1.01	5.22
Alaska	3,494	8.29	-5.24	-0.65	10,303	12.52	-0.28	3.14
Arizona	121,049	18.14	-4.19	2.38	267,082	33.27	3.71	10.99
Arkansas	47,206	20.29	-2.13	-0.70	63,350	31.07	1.78	3.99
California	1,038,564	22.23	1.60	7.03	1,087,315	25.47	0.33	5.97
Colorado	81,811	13.54	0.38	2.28	110,264	23.80	0.56	1.18
Connecticut	50,972	10.25	0.32	2.62	58,833	26.18	-1.53	5.85
Delaware	15,334	11.24	-2.80	-0.23	8,279	33.00	0.34	-2.45
District of Columbia	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	28,623	26.53	-3.80	3.82
Florida	625,637	23.25	1.25	8.08	303,992	29.02	-1.57	7.62
Georgia	371,229	22.43	0.02	7.45	149,971	38.94	4.06	6.37
Hawaii	20,284	13.64	1.58	3.67	11,482	19.32	3.02	12.21
Idaho	25,499	15.51	-2.09	2.26	29,171	24.73	1.27	7.60
Illinois	257,160	15.39	-1.01	4.41	294,438	29.45	-1.18	3.72
Indiana	117,587	15.87	1.03	4.36	156,728	32.08	-2.68	6.84
Iowa	20,544	9.82	1.79	3.53	39,487	19.45	-6.94	0.17
Kansas	31,835	12.14	1.26	3.28	56,483	24.18	-1.00	5.85
Kentucky	68,833	19.18	-1.40	1.86	64,991	27.20	-1.12	2.66
Louisiana	116,037	23.04	0.48	3.42	107,479	34.08	-1.59	2.55
Maine	16,608	14.28	0.70	2.32	12,631	33.19	5.19	15.04
Maryland	112,314	10.84	0.85	2.93	61,440	27.84	-1.06	6.32
Massachusetts	124,984	11.88	0.56	2.85	87,508	26.88	-1.35	0.94
Michigan	221,936	17.52	-0.74	4.98	242,204	41.48	2.57	8.06
Minnesota	67,317	10.01	-0.78	1.66	65,553	22.69	-0.90	2.95
Mississippi	56,892	22.15	2.87	5.15	37,776	45.74	3.01	9.77
Missouri	127,031	16.98	0.19	4.29	91,779	32.01	2.03	6.00
Montana	3,255	11.98	2.03	0.57	10,958	22.96	0.30	5.97
Nebraska	13,175	11.67	1.86	3.52	36,676	22.57	-1.17	3.87
Nevada	71,118	22.64	1.65	9.59	72,373	26.01	2.32	8.49
New Hampshire	12,987	9.53	-0.05	4.22	11,725	28.97	12.03	11.42
New Jersey	238,714	13.03	0.82	3.46	71,512	40.67	-1.37	11.30
New Mexico	47,078	30.41	-2.45	4.85	49,628	27.37	0.63	4.37
New York	213,316	11.72	-0.17	3.15	671,079	32.57	0.77	3.93
North Carolina	188,972	21.31	0.39	7.23	199,662	27.04	0.51	4.84
North Dakota	1,909	6.78	1.06	-1.17	5,713	13.27	-1.58	-0.61
Ohio	236,359	15.82	-0.69	3.70	261,367	42.84	0.16	8.33
Oklahoma	56,764	16.83	-0.01	1.37	80,865	30.14	1.62	2.23
Oregon	77,716	20.22	0.17	5.88	70,020	24.63	-1.35	6.77
Pennsylvania	221,761	13.00	0.52	3.01	227,347	38.61	-1.63	4.01
Rhode Island	23,890	16.64	-0.61	3.76	17,745	25.18	-5.73	-1.28
South Carolina	158,135	23.81	-0.81	5.94	47,716	29.05	-2.17	3.17
South Dakota	2,982	7.56	-1.48	1.63	10,350	18.63	2.63	2.64
Tennessee	98,865	16.52	0.09	1.54	177,384	35.11	0.02	5.14
Texas	608,245	20.11	-1.53	2.95	957,928	30.57	-0.29	2.53
Utah	79,326	12.72	0.20	4.66	39,362	25.97	-1.42	7.93
Vermont	3,106	9.25	-2.79	2.41	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Virginia	122,500	10.51	-0.32	1.59	101,891	23.12	1.91	3.58
Washington	129,916	14.57	-1.07	2.28	114,771	23.44	1.98	4.70
West Virginia	32,143	18.99	-3.07	1.00	13,459	31.97	-1.94	3.38
Wisconsin	58,978	10.02	-0.68	1.98	120,124	31.93	1.83	6.99
Wyoming	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	5,249	19.83	7.11	12.86

would be obtained using rounded figures. Bold font indicates a statistically significant change ($p < 0.05$).

TABLE 2. YOUNG CHILD POVERTY BY PLACE TYPE AND REGION IN 2012

	ALL PLACE TYPES				RURAL			
	Number Below Poverty	Percent Below Poverty	Percentage Point Change Since 2011	Percentage Point Change Since 2007	Number Below Poverty	Percent Below Poverty	Percentage Point Change Since 2011	Percentage Point Change Since 2007
United States	6,052,083	25.51	-0.07	4.97	1,077,356	30.09	-0.72	4.39
Northeast	826,374	21.80	0.05	4.22	80,619	24.62	0.46	5.75
Midwest	1,229,088	24.51	-0.69	5.19	272,179	25.28	-1.29	4.23
South	2,560,830	28.21	-0.21	4.50	575,206	35.23	-0.44	4.17
West	1,435,791	24.56	0.60	5.90	149,352	27.51	-1.15	4.72

Note: Percentage point changes are based on unrounded poverty percentages and may differ slightly from those that

Endnotes

1. Although some states/places appear to have percentage point increases in poverty, those not in bold are not statistically distinguishable from zero.
2. See annual state ranking tables available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>.
3. Carsey Institute analysis of ACS data; available upon request.
4. 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). See also "Children at Risk: Consequences for School Readiness and Beyond," Rand Labor and Population Research Brief, retrieved from www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_briefs/2005/RAND_RB9144.pdf (2005).
5. Children's Health Watch, "Federal Programs that Protect Young Children's Health," Policy Action Brief (Boston, MA: Children's Health Watch, 2011).
6. Chuck Marr, Jimmy Charite, and Chye-Ching Huang, "Earned Income Tax Credit Promotes Work, Encourages Children's Success at School, Research Finds," (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2013).
7. See U.S. Census Bureau's American FactFinder, available at <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.

TABLE 2. YOUNG CHILD POVERTY BY PLACE TYPE AND REGION IN 2012, CONTINUED

	SUBURBAN				CENTRAL CITY			
	Number Below Poverty	Percent Below Poverty	Percentage Point Change Since 2010	Percentage Point Change Since 2007	Number Below Poverty	Percent Below Poverty	Percentage Point Change Since 2011	Percentage Point Change Since 2007
United States	2,340,951	19.79	0.10	4.99	2,633,776	31.65	4.85	-0.10
Northeast	324,523	14.72	0.07	4.25	421,232	33.46	3.52	-0.40
Midwest	415,833	17.50	-0.41	4.60	541,076	34.65	6.05	-0.87
South	1,003,197	22.42	0.03	4.97	982,427	33.07	3.70	-0.50
West	597,398	21.54	0.62	5.85	689,041	27.24	6.03	0.95

would be obtained using rounded figures. Bold font indicates a statistically significant change ($p < 0.05$).

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