America's child poverty rate remains stubbornly high despite important progress

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While many American families have experienced economic gains in recent years, children are still most likely to live in households too poor to cover their basic needs, according to new research from the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health. Using the latest available data from the American Community Survey, NCCP researchers found that children make up around a quarter of the U.S. population, but represent more than a third of the nation's poorest residents. According to Basic Facts about Low-Income Children, the center's annual profiles on child poverty in America, some 41 percent (29.8 million) of America's children were living on the brink of poverty in 2016—including more than 5 million infants and toddlers under age three.

"Overall, we've made important strides when it comes to alleviating poverty in America, but our data show that those gains have been slow to reach society's youngest members," said Renée Wilson-Simmons, DrPH, NCCP director. "Right now, the child poverty rate is heading in the right direction—down—but children still make up an outsized share of our nation's poor. Anti-poverty efforts like food assistance, public health insurance, and other programs are helping millions of children and families to thrive. But that also means our beliefs about what poverty looks like in America—about who deserves access to those programs and supports—have the power to help or harm their chances for success."

Available online at http://www.nccp.org/publications/fact_sheets.html,

the Basic Facts about Low-Income Children fact sheets illustrate the severity of economic instability faced by low-income and poor children throughout the United States. NCCP defines a poor household as one where incomes are below the federal poverty threshold (i.e., $24,339 for a family of four with two children in 2016). Families with earnings less than twice the poverty threshold are considered low income and include poor families (i.e., $48,678 for a family of four with two children in 2016).

According to NCCP researchers, the number of children in low-income families decreased from 33.2 million (44.9 percent) in 2010 to 29.8 million (41.2 percent) in 2016, and the number of poor children in the U.S. decreased by nearly 2 million (3 percentage points). Their report also showed that 2 million fewer children lived in deep poverty in 2016 compared to 2010. NCCP defines deep poverty as earning less than 50 percent of the poverty threshold (e.g.,, $12,170 for a family of four with two children).

"We're seeing promising movements in the year-to-year measurements of child poverty and economic stability," added NCCP director of Family Economic Security Heather Koball, PhD. "But while the number of children experiencing poverty is on the decline, the rate of poverty for kids still remains stubbornly high, compared to the size of the population. Children are also more likely to suffer the material hardships associated with living in poverty; the anxiety, depression, and constant stress of being financially vulnerable leaves a lasting mark on children as they grow to adulthood, affecting earnings potential and health outcomes as adults."

Published annually since 2009, Basic Facts about Low-Income Children presents demographic characteristics and socioeconomic conditions of poor and low-income children in fact sheets for children under age 18 and for those age 9 and younger. Fact sheet data are widely cited by

policymakers, researchers, advocates, and the media. NCCP's annual fact sheets on [child poverty](link) in the United States are available online at http://www.nccp.org/publications/fact_sheets.html.

These are some of the findings in the 2018 edition of Basic Facts about Low-Income Children:

- In the U.S.,the younger a child is, the more likely he or she is to experience poverty. The report showed that percentages of low-income and poor children under 18 hovered around 41 percent and 19 percent, respectively. But America's youngest children stood a greater chance of living below the poverty line: 44 percent (5 million) of children under age 3 were considered low income and 21 percent (2.4 million) lived in poor households.
- Childhood poverty was not randomly distributed across the population. Children of color are nearly three times as likely to live in a poor family compared to white children. Around one in three black, Hispanic, and Native-American children lives below the poverty line, compared to just over one in ten white children.
- While children whose parents had higher education or full-time employment were less likely to live below the [poverty line](link), neither was a guarantee of financial security in 2016. More than half (53.5 percent) of low-income children and 32 percent of poor children live with at least one parent employed full time, throughout the year. Among children with at least one parent with some college or additional education, 28 percent live in low-income households and 11 percent were considered poor.

Koball added, "If anything is clear from these statistics, it's that a rising tide does not lift all boats when it comes to our young people. That's why we simply cannot afford to be anything less than intentional with the policies that shape the resources available to these families and, by extension, their chances for success in the long run."

NCCP researchers also announced the launch of an updated online tool—the 50-State Policy Tracker—for comparing state economic assistance programs. Available online at http://www.nccp.org/tools/policy, the policy tracker can help identify best practices to alleviate poverty by comparing safety net policies, revealing variation among states, and modeling how policy choices can help low-income working parents succeed in making ends meet.

The NCCP 50-State Policy Tracker makes it easy for policymakers, journalists, social researchers, and advocates to quickly and accurately compare state policies and programs vital to the well-being of low-income families. It includes key state data for 10 important social programs:

- Child care subsidies
- Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit
- Earned Income Tax Credit
- Family and medical leave
- Income tax policy
- Medicaid/Children's Health Insurance Program
- Minimum wage
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
- Unemployment insurance

The 2018 update to the tracker revealed wide variations across several states in areas known to promote family economic well-being:

- In certain areas, families can now claim a state-level Earned Income Tax Credit modeled after the federal EITC. While this credit has been shown to incentivize work and provide a crucial support to needy families, several states have no credit or have no income tax at all.

- An increasing number of states have adopted family medical and leave policies—including sick day policies—that can help working poor parents take time off to care for themselves or a family member without fear of losing their jobs or much-needed income. The online tool shows the different approaches states have taken to leave policies.

Users can select from more than 40 other policies for comparison in a single state, across states in the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West, or across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. A glossary provides users with additional information on how the ten programs work and defines the categories used to compare programs across states.

Provided by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health