
Abstract

An historic transition is under way in the make-up of California's children. Rarely have changes been so surprising and significant. After decades of growth, the state faces a protracted decline in the number of children, amounting to losses of 187,771 (3.6%) children under age 10 between 2000 and 2010, with another 101,187 (2.0%) loss expected in the present decade. This stems from a falling birth rate that is now below replacement level in California (1.94), declining since 2000 in every major racial/ethnic group. Especially troublesome is that the loss of children coincides with unprecedented growth expected among retirees whom the children will grow up to replace as new workers, taxpayers, voters and in other capacities.

California's children are highly diverse, with the largest group being of Hispanic or Latino origin (51.2%), with non-Hispanic whites the second largest group (27.4%), followed by Asians and Pacific Islanders (10.7%), African Americans (5.6%), and all others (5.1%). California also is in the midst of a homegrown revolution, in which the majority of future young adults will have been born, educated, and raised in this state, unlike in the past, when most were migrants from other states and nations. About 90% of the state's children are native-born Californians. Poverty rates currently are twice as high among children as adults, which can limit children's access to food, housing, health care and education, thus hindering their development and restricting their potential. Given the ever-rising importance of California's children to the state's future, it is more critical than ever that every child have the necessary support and opportunities to become a maximally contributing member of society.