Family Income & Childhood Poverty in California

Definition: Estimated percentage of children ages 0-17 in living situations with incomes below their federal poverty threshold, by race/ethnicity (e.g., in 2013-2017, 32.4% of African American/black children in California lived in poverty).

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (Dec. 2018).

What It Is
On kidsdata.org, family income and poverty are measured against a variety of income, resource, and self-sufficiency criteria:
- Federal Poverty Threshold
- Federal Poverty Guideline
- Supplemental Poverty Measure
- California Poverty Measure
- Self-Sufficiency Standard

For each of these measures, kidsdata.org provides estimates of the share of children (or families with children) without the economic means necessary for an adequate standard of living. Depending on the data source, additional measures and breakdowns also are available.

Why This Topic Is Important
Income and well being are intricately linked. Poverty can alter children's developmental trajectories in cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical health. The effects of poverty on child health and well being can begin during pregnancy, as low-income women are more likely to experience malnutrition and stress, and are less likely to receive adequate prenatal care. Children who face economic hardship when they are young, or who experience deep and prolonged poverty, are at greatest risk for poor outcomes. The effects of poverty and the stress associated with it can be lasting, contributing to increased risk of dropping out of school, poor adult health, and poor employment outcomes, among other adverse consequences. The impacts extend beyond individuals, too. For example, it is estimated that the total annual cost of child poverty in the U.S. is more than a trillion dollars, due in part to loss of economic productivity and increased health costs. In addition, for every dollar spent on poverty reduction strategies, the U.S. could save an estimated $7 related to the economic costs of poverty.

How Children Are Faring
In 2017, an estimated 18% of California children lived below the federal poverty threshold ($24,858 annually for a family of two adults and two children). Across counties with data in 2013-2017, official child poverty rates ranged from less than 10% in Placer County and parts of the Bay Area to more than 33% in some regions of the San Joaquin Valley. In Fresno and Del Norte counties, more than one in six children lived in deep poverty—i.e., on annual income lower than half the federal poverty threshold.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Definition:** Estimated percentage of children ages 0-17 living in families with resources below their California Poverty Measure (CPM) poverty threshold, by race/ethnicity (e.g., in 2014-2016, 29.8% of Hispanic/Latino children in California lived in poverty, according to the CPM).

**Data Source:** Public Policy Institute of California, & Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, California Poverty Measure (Nov. 2018).


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety Net Program</th>
<th>Percentage Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CalFresh</td>
<td>Child Deep Poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CalWORKs</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned Income Tax Credit; Child Tax Credit</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or Reduced Price School Meals; WIC</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Subsidies</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplemental Security Income</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Safety Net Programs</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Definition:** Difference between the percentage of children ages 0-17 estimated to be in poverty in the absence of social safety net programs and the percentage of children estimated to be in poverty, according to the California Poverty Measure (CPM), by program type and CPM poverty level (e.g., in the absence of the CalFresh program, the child poverty rate in California would have been 4.0 percentage points higher in 2014-2016, according to the CPM).

**Data Source:** Public Policy Institute of California, & Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, California Poverty Measure (Nov. 2018).

The Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) accounts for expenses (e.g., state-level differences in housing costs) and resources (e.g., government safety net program benefits) not captured in the official poverty measure. According to SPM estimates, 20% of California children lived in poverty in 2017, down from 25% in 2014. California’s SPM child poverty rate consistently exceeds comparable U.S. figures. More than one in four African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino children in California lived below their SPM threshold in 2015-2017, compared with around one in eight of their Asian/Pacific Islander and white peers.

The California Poverty Measure (CPM) builds on the SPM by adjusting for California-specific safety net policies and for regional variation in the cost of living within the state. CPM data from 2014-2016 show that 22% of children statewide lived in poverty and 5% lived in deep poverty. In the absence of social safety net programs, it is estimated that the child poverty rate would have been 14 percentage points higher and the deep poverty rate 12 percentage points higher during this period. CPM child poverty rates vary widely across counties, from 11% in Placer County to 28% in Los Angeles County, among regions with data in 2014-2016. Overall, children whose parents are single, non-U.S. citizens, or who did not finish high school tend to experience higher rates of CPM poverty and deep poverty than children in families with married parents, U.S. citizens, and higher levels of educational attainment.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard (SSS) represents the estimated income a family needs to adequately meet its basic needs without public or private assistance. Across California counties, the SSS for a family of two adults and two school-aged children in 2018 ranged from $52,566 (Modoc) to $114,215 (Marin) annually. In 2016, nearly half (48%) of all families with children statewide lived on incomes below their SSS.

**View references for this text and additional research on this topic:**
https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/38/family-income-and-poverty/summary