KidsData

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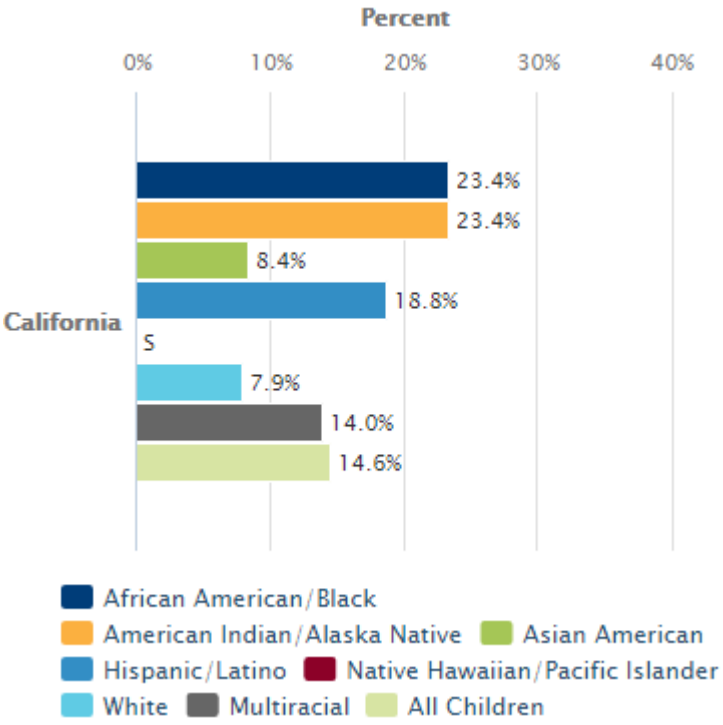
Family Income & Childhood Poverty in California

Children Living in Poverty - California Poverty Measure: Early 2023

Locations	Percent
California	13.8%
Alameda County	12.9%
Contra Costa County	13.6%
Fresno County	13.1%
Los Angeles County	16.4%
Orange County	17.7%
Riverside County	10.6%
Sacramento County	11.1%
San Bernardino County	11.4%
San Diego County	16.4%
Santa Clara County	12.5%

Definition: Estimated percentage of children ages 0-17 living in families with resources below their California Poverty Measure (CPM) threshold (e.g., in the first quarter of 2023, among California children in families, 13.8% lived in poverty, according to the CPM).
Data Source: Public Policy Institute of California & Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, California Poverty Measure (Aug. 2024).

Children Living in Poverty - Official Poverty Measure, by Race/Ethnicity: 2024



Definition: Estimated percentage of children ages 0-17 in living situations with incomes below their federal poverty threshold, by race/ethnicity (e.g., in 2024, 18.8% of Hispanic/Latino children in California lived in poverty).
Data Source: Population Reference Bureau, analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey summary files and public use microdata (Aug. 2026).

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

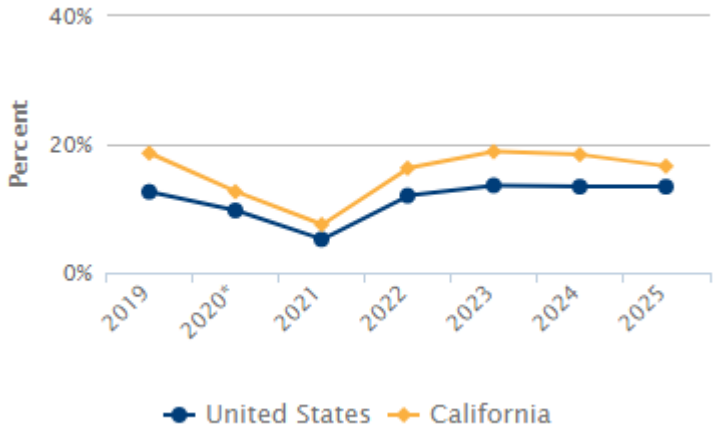
Income and well being are intricately linked. Poverty can alter children's developmental trajectories in cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical health. The effects of poverty on child health and well being can begin even before pregnancy, as low-income women are more likely to experience malnutrition and stress, and are less likely to receive adequate preconception and prenatal care. Children who face economic hardship when they are young, or who experience deep and prolonged poverty, are at greatest risk for adverse outcomes. The effects of poverty and the stress associated with it can be lasting, contributing to increased risk of poor academic, health, and employment outcomes into adulthood, among other negative consequences.

The impacts extend beyond individuals, too. It is estimated that child poverty costs the U.S. on the order of $1 trillion annually in direct and indirect health costs, increased child maltreatment, loss of economic productivity, and costs associated with crime and incarceration. Research associates public investments in childhood poverty reduction strategies with positive economic returns .

How Children Are Faring

In 2024, an estimated 15% of California children lived below the federal poverty threshold ($31,812 annually for a family of two adults and two children in 2024). Across counties and county groups with data, official child poverty rates ranged from less than 6% to more than 28%. In Merced County, more than one in eight children lived in *deep* poverty—i.e., on annual income lower than half the federal poverty threshold ($15,906 for two adults and two children in 2024).

Children Living in Poverty - Supplemental Poverty Measure



Definition: Estimated percentage of children ages 0-17 in living situations with incomes below their Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) threshold (e.g., in 2025, 16.6% of California children lived in poverty, according to the SPM).
Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (Sept. 2026).

Poverty-Reducing Effects of the Social Safety Net - California Poverty Measure: Early 2023

California	Percentage Points	
Safety Net Program	Child Deep Poverty	Child Poverty
CalFresh	1.4	5.0
CalWORKs	0.6	1.9
Earned Income Tax Credit; Child Tax Credit	1.3	5.1
Free or Reduced Price School Meals; WIC	0.5	1.8
Housing Subsidies	0.7	1.6
Supplemental Security Income	0.2	0.7
All Safety Net Programs	9.3	14.9

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 5 percentage points higher in the first quarter of 2023, according to the CPM).
Data Source: Public Policy Institute of California & Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, California Poverty Measure (Aug. 2024).

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, 17% of California children lived in poverty in 2025. California's SPM child poverty rate consistently exceeds comparable U.S. figures. Hispanic/Latino children are more likely to live below their SPM threshold than their Asian and white peers—in 2023-2025, the percentage of Hispanic/Latino children in poverty according to the SPM was more than double the percentage for white children, statewide and nationally.

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 for early 2023 show that 14% of children statewide lived in poverty and 2.2% lived in deep poverty—up from 9% and 1.7%, respectively, in fall 2021. In the absence of social safety net programs, it is estimated that the child poverty rate would have been nearly 15 percentage points higher and the deep poverty rate more than 9 percentage points higher in early 2023. Local CPM child poverty rates for early 2023 varied from 11% to 18% across the state's ten most populous counties and from 5% to 30% across legislative districts with data. 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