



children's
defense fund
Leave No Child Behind®

For Immediate Release: Tuesday, September 15, 2020

Media Contact:

Emily Gardner, Communications Director
202-662-3554
egardner@childrensdefense.org

New Census Data Doesn't Tell Full Story of the Child Poverty Crisis in America

10.5 million children lived in poverty in 2019, and economic conditions have worsened drastically in recent months, with children hit the hardest

Washington, D.C. – The Census Bureau today released national poverty data from 2019, which showed that last year 10.5 million children lived in poverty in America, making them the poorest age group in the country.

However, these estimates do not adequately capture the present-day realities of Americans due to the impact of COVID-19. The pandemic has not only disrupted the everyday lives of children and families but also exposed and exacerbated the extreme racial, income and wealth inequalities in our nation.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, our unequal economy was not working for too many families. Of the 10.5 million children living in poverty last year, 4.5 million lived in extreme poverty. Our youngest children were the poorest, with 3 million children under 5 living in poverty. The overwhelming majority (70.1 percent) of children in poverty lived with at least one working family member and a third (33.7 percent) lived with a family member who worked full-time, year round. Poverty is defined as an annual income below \$25,926 for a family of four with two children, while extreme poverty is defined as less than \$12,963 per year.

Historical, systemic racism and institutional barriers over centuries that continue today have left children and communities of color particularly vulnerable. Data released today showed that in 2019, 71 percent of children in poverty were children of color.

“Every child wants to succeed, but children need consistent, stable, and supportive environments to grow and thrive,” said Max Lesko, National Executive Director of the Children’s Defense Fund. “But the latest data proves that children, particularly children of color, were already the poorest Americans before this pandemic began. Now our children are continuing to bear the brunt of this crisis and our lack of response, threatening their long-term growth and development in the most critical years.”

Due to the economic fallout of the COVID crisis, millions of households across the country have lost income, are falling behind in rent, and are struggling to make ends meet—and children are being hit the hardest. According to the latest Census Pulse Survey data, more than half of adults in households with children (51 percent) report that they or another member of the household have lost employment income since the start of the pandemic. Nearly 1 in 4 adults in households with children (22 percent) are behind on rent and 1 in 7 (14 percent) said their children are not getting enough to eat. Sixty-percent of the

poorest households with children have been forced to hold off or postpone in-person healthcare visits to the doctor due to financial pressures.

At the same time, 1.3 million children living in poverty do not have consistent access to the internet for educational purposes and 574,000 do not have access to the internet at all, which completely interrupts children's learning as remote schooling is essential during the pandemic.

"Children's lives have been completely upended by this pandemic, with their learning and development disrupted by school and child care closures," said Kathleen King, Interim Policy Director for the Children's Defense Fund. "When you consider how many of our children depend on schools not only for education, but for healthy meals, health care, mental health services and more, it is clear that our children are suffering and that this crisis will only widen the racial and socioeconomic gaps for children in this country."

The data released by the Census Bureau today makes clear why we must not only protect but further invest in programs proven to reduce child poverty. At the same time, official poverty estimates vastly understate the extent of children and families struggling to make ends meet. Official poverty estimates fail to fully and meaningfully capture all children and families without adequate income to support a family. For example, while 38.1 million people were officially counted as poor in 2018, studies suggest at least 3.2 million additional people experienced poverty that year.

"Our current poverty measurement hasn't kept pace with the cost of living, doesn't account for geographic differences, and does not accurately reflect what a family needs to survive and thrive in America today," said Emma Mehrabi, Director of Poverty Policy for the Children's Defense Fund. "What we do know is that any progress made in reducing child poverty and addressing racial disparities will have to be made through bold policies that put the needs of children first like SNAP expansion, housing assistance, cash assistance, and refundable tax credits that lift up children and families."

In February of this year, the Children's Defense Fund released the latest update of its landmark report, [*The State of America's Children® 2020*](#), which showed detailed data and stories of real children across the country. The report makes it clear that children—especially children of color—are disproportionately harmed by our nation's failure to invest in them and protect their safety and well-being. Moreover, the report provides advocates, policymakers, parents and families, community and faith leaders, educators and others with a comprehensive tool to make a case for more significant investment in programs that help children and to end policies and dismantle broken systems that harm America's children.

"When you're seven years old and you're stressed about whether you will be evicted or even have enough to eat the next day, you quickly learn the difference between surviving and living," said Kylie Maria Gil, youth activist and 2019 Children's Defense Fund New York Beat the Odds honoree. "Despite our difficulties, we cannot lose hope. We all must take action and raise our collective voices and do everything in our power to make life easier for children who only should be expected to enjoy being children."

###