

More U.S. children living in poverty now than during recession

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One out of every five children in the United States lives in poverty, and more children are poor today than during the Great Recession, according to a newly-released report.

Kids Count, the annual **report** on the wellbeing of America's children published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, counted 16,087,000 US children, or 22 percent of the total under-18 population, living in poverty in 2013. That's up from 18 percent in 2008, when the most severe global economic crisis since the Great Depression struck. The US Department of Human and Health Services defines poverty as annual household income of \$23,624 or less for a family of four.



Kids working on projects at Kid's Art Park during ArtsFest. Bentonville, Ark.

[Kay Mathews](#)

The report studied data from various federal agencies to compile a state-by-state assessment of childhood wellbeing across the nation, including social, economic, educational and health factors that contribute to impoverishment. It also examined racial disparities between children in low-income households. While only 14 percent of white and Asian/Pacific Islander children lived in poverty in 2013, one in three Hispanic, 37 percent of Native American, and 39 percent of African American children were poor.

State-by-state rankings found that children in Minnesota, with its strong social safety net that includes subsidized healthcare, progressive taxation policies and outstanding educational and childcare programs, were the best off in America, although New Hampshire had the lowest child poverty rate (10 percent). On the opposite end of the rankings, Mississippi children were the worst off, ranking 50th in economic wellbeing, health, and family and community. More than one in three Mississippi children lived in poverty in 2013, and in some areas the poverty rate was much higher—in Clay County, which is 58 percent black, nearly half of all children (48 percent) were poor.

"Never has it been more critical to make strategic investments in Mississippi's children, particularly in terms of investing early in children's education and health," Dr. Linda Southward,

director of MS Kids Count, **told** the *Commercial Dispatch*. "The research is clear. Children who are healthy are more likely to attend school. Children who attend school regularly are more likely to be better readers and also graduate from high school. The long-term economic impact of job attainment and stability increases when one is healthier and more educated."

"Changing the trajectory to reduce both childhood poverty and adult poverty is attainable, by investing early, while simultaneously engaging both families and communities," Southward asserted.

Even in top-ranked Minnesota, experts noted that the much-vaunted social programs benefit mostly white children.

"Right now, they aren't improving outcomes for children of color," Stephanie Hogenson, research and policy director at the Children's Defense Fund, **told USA Today**. "We're trying to turn the dial on that. We focus on what's best for children and we've done a good job, we haven't done the best job in ensuring those programs are accessible and easily utilized by children of color and their family."

According to the report, poor educational performance has reached staggering proportions across America. Fully 79 percent of Mississippi fourth-graders were not proficient in reading, followed by Louisiana and Washington, DC (77 percent). Eighth-grade math proficiency was an abysmal 19 percent in Washington, DC, 20 percent in Alabama and 21 percent in Mississippi and Louisiana.

Teen births and children living in single-parent families, factors which many observers—especially conservatives—claim explain some of the racial disparities found in this and other studies, were highest in states ranking at or near the bottom of the list in poverty and overall wellbeing. Arkansas (44 percent), Mississippi (43 percent) and New Mexico (43 percent) had the highest teen birth rates in 2013, while Mississippi (48 percent), Louisiana (46 percent) and New Mexico (43 percent) had the highest percentage of children in single-parent families.

But other factors not mentioned in the report contribute to a situation in which incomes for the top 1 percent of Americans have **soared 275 percent** since 1979 while income growth has effectively flatlined for the bottom 20 percent, and the richest 1 percent of Americans have accounted for fully **93 percent** of all income gains during the post-recession recovery period.

According to a 2013 study from researchers at Brandeis University's Institute on Assets and Social Policy (IASP), the wealth gap between white and black Americans has **tripled since the 1980s**, when so-called 'trickle-down economics,' also known as 'Reaganomics' because of President Ronald Reagan's embrace of **disproven supply-side policies**, was unleashed upon the American populace, with disastrous results for all but the highest-earning individuals.

“Our analysis found little evidence to support common perceptions about what underlies the ability to build wealth, including the notion that personal attributes and behavioral choices are key pieces of the equation,” the IASP researchers wrote. “Instead, the evidence points to policy and the configuration of both opportunities and barriers in workplaces, schools, and communities that reinforce deeply entrenched racial dynamics in how wealth is accumulated and that continue to permeate the most important spheres of everyday life.”

The IASP team said disparities in taxation, as well as home ownership, income and employment, college education, inheritances and social and cultural factors including mass incarceration of black Americans are more important indicators of economic wellbeing than personal attributes and behavioral choices.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation report closely mirrors figures from the US Census Bureau, which **reported** in 2011 that 21.6 percent of US children were living in poverty, including 32.3 percent of Hispanic children and 38.2 percent of African American children. Overall, the Census Bureau **reported** 48.8 million people in the United States, or 15.8 percent of the total population, living in poverty in 2013.