

Current US Poverty Statistics

Working to strengthen and expand transformative movements for social change that can draw on the power of religions and human rights



Incomeⁱ

- The federal poverty threshold is \$12,140 for individuals and \$25,100 for a family of four.
- 1 in 7 people in the US live below the federal poverty threshold (13.9% or 44.7 million).
- According to the federal threshold, a single adult making \$12,141 is not poor.
- An additional 95.3 million (29.6%) of people living in the United States are low-income, defined as incomes below twice the federal poverty line. Taken together, this means that 43.5% of the US population is poor or low income.
- Over half of all children are poor or low income (51.9%). Half of all children will qualify for food stamps before they turn 20, including 9 out of 10 African American children.
- A study measuring "economic insecurity" found that 4 out of 5 (79%) of people in the US live in danger of poverty or unemployment at some point in their lifetime (defined as a year or more of periodic joblessness, reliance on government aid such as food stamps or income below 150 percent of the poverty line).
- Only 48% of people could handle a \$400 emergency expense without selling something or borrowing money.
- 8 out of 10 poor families with children received AFDC benefits in 1979. In 2015 just over 2 in 10 poor families with children received TANF benefits. In 14 states it's less than 1 in 10.

Wealthⁱⁱ

- In 2013 the top 1% of the US population owned 42.8% of financial (non-home) wealth; the next 19% owned 51.9% of financial wealth (totaling 94.7% for the top 20% combined); the bottom 80% owned 5.3% of financial wealth
- Globally the richest 1% own more wealth than the bottom 99% combined. In 2017 the richest 8 people controlled more wealth than 3.6 billion people. (It was 80 people in 2014 and 388 people in 2010.)
- The 2018 fiscal year US military budget is \$824,600,000,000.

Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Sexualityⁱⁱⁱ

- 1 in 4 Native Americans (26.2%), 1 in 5 African Americans (21.6%), 1 in 5 Hispanic/Latinx (22%), 1 in 9 Asians (14.7%) and 1 in 10 non-Hispanic whites (9.9%) live below the federal poverty threshold.
- In absolute numbers there are more poor non-Hispanic whites than any other racial or ethnic group, 44% of the poor (19.4 million), although non-Hispanic whites make up 62.6% of the overall population.
- Among foreign born, non-citizens the poverty rate is 21.3%.
- African Americans are incarcerated at a rate more than three times their 13.2% share of the overall population. If current trends continue 1 in 3 black men born in 2001 will go to jail or prison at some point in his lifetime.
- Two-thirds of minimum wage earners are women. One in seven women lives below the poverty line. More than half of all children below the poverty line live in families headed by women.
- Transgender people are four times more likely to live in extreme poverty than cisgender people.
- 1 in 4 LGBTQ people live below the federal poverty threshold.

Employment^{iv}

- 43.7% of workers earned under \$15 an hour in 2014; 60% of jobs created 2008-12 paid the minimum wage of \$7.25.
- 1 in 3 employed college graduates holds a job that does not require a college degree.
- Since the 1960s the black unemployment rate has been about 2 to 2.5 times the white unemployment rate. In March 2010, the black unemployment rate was 16.8%, 1.9 times the white unemployment rate (9.0%).
- Today's minimum wage—\$7.25—is worth \$4.00 less than 1968's. (The 1968 \$1.60 minimum = \$11.31 in 2017) If the 1968 minimum had kept pace with overall income growth, it would have been \$21.16 in 2012.
- 85% of the 5.6 million US manufacturing jobs lost between 2000 and 2010 were attributable to technological change, not international trade. Human welders make an average of \$25/hour; a robot welder costs \$8/hour.
- In Illinois, Wal-mart's 50,000 employees qualified for \$220 million in state anti-poverty programs in 2013.

Health Insurance, Food and Housing^v

- 62.1% of all bankruptcies in 2007 were due to medical debt and three-quarters of them had health insurance.
- 45.4 million people (nearly 1 in 6) received SNAP (food stamps) in January 2016, but over 60 million people qualified (18.6%). At the same time 30% of food in the US, worth about \$48.3 billion, is wasted each year.
- 51% of pre-k through 12th grade public school students in 2015 were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.
- 549,928 individuals were homeless on a single night in 2016 (31% were under 24)* and 7 million people are "doubled up" with family and friends. At the same time 1 in 8 homes in the US are vacant (17.6 million units).
- 10,002 people died while waiting for a judge's decision about their disability benefits application in 2017.
- In 2000, 245,000 deaths in the United States were attributable to low education, 176,000 to racial segregation, 162,000 to low social support, 133,000 to individual-level poverty, 119,000 to income inequality, and 39,000 to area-level poverty.

- ⁱ Unless otherwise notes, all measures are current from the most recent census and use the Census' Supplemental Poverty Measure, which accounts for government benefits not included in the official poverty measure. It also includes taxes (and tax credits), medical expenses and work expenses. Liana Fox "The Supplemental Poverty Measure: 2016," US Census Bureau, 9/2017, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2017/demo/p60-261.html>; Lindsey Tanner. "Food Stamps Will Feed Half Of US Kids, Study Says," Associated Press, 11/2/09; "AP: 4 in 5 Americans Live in Danger of Falling into Poverty, Joblessness," NBC News, 7/28/13, http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/07/28/19738595-ap-4-in-5-americans-live-in-danger-of-falling-into-poverty-joblessness; US Federal Reserve "Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2013," 7/2014, <http://www.federalreserve.gov/econresdata/2013-report-economic-well-being-us-households-201407.pdf>. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Chart Book: TANF at 20," accessed July 19, 2017, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/chart-book-tanf-at-19> and "TANF Reaching Few Poor Families," accessed 11/28/2017, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/tanf-reaching-few-poor-families>. The poverty rates for 2018 have not been released, but the poverty thresholds are updated for 2018, from Federal Register, "Annual Update of the HHS Poverty Guidelines," 1/2018, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/01/18/2018-00814/annual-update-of-the-hhs-poverty-guidelines>.
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*Note that the point in time measure of homelessness is not an accurate estimate of annual homelessness, since families are in and out of homelessness over the year. For example in New York City, the September 2017 point in time count measured 62,351 homeless people, but in the fiscal year 2017 more than 129,803 different homeless people slept in the municipal shelter system, including 45,000 children. Additionally, the point in time measures includes only people in shelters, transitional housing or who are unsheltered. It does not include double-ups.