National Snapshot: Poverty Among Women & Families in 2023

By Sarah Javaid

Poverty in the United States is a policy choice. Between 2020 and 2021, the poverty rate fell dramatically—even in the midst of a pandemic wreaking havoc on the U.S. economy—because lawmakers chose to expand the Child Tax Credit, strengthen unemployment protections, and more. However, between 2021 and 2022, as pandemic-era assistance expired, poverty rates (as measured by the supplemental poverty measure) jumped by the largest recorded single-year increase in more than 50 years.[1] In 2023, poverty rates remained elevated without additional policy action. Women face disproportionate poverty and hardship, with much higher rates for disabled women; Black, Latina, and Indigenous women; those born outside of the United States; and families with children headed by a single woman.[2]

Overall, median household income significantly increased in 2023 for the first time since 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.[3] However, overall figures hide deep underlying disparities. Income increases were driven by white, non-Hispanic households while Black and Latinx households were left behind.[4] In fact, the income disparities between white, non-Hispanic households and Black and Latinx households widened in 2023.[5] These disparities were also reflected in children's poverty rates under the official poverty measure (OPM)—between 2022 and 2023, poverty among white, non-Hispanic children decreased, while poverty among Black, Asian, and Latinx children rose.[6]

This fact sheet presents poverty estimates in 2023 using the Census Bureau's official poverty measure (OPM) and the supplemental poverty measure (SPM).[7] Findings reveal the continued harmful consequences of discontinuing temporary supports for women, children, and families and failing to address underlying systemic inequities. The findings also underscore the important role that long-term public investments in child care, nutrition assistance, accessible and affordable housing, refundable tax credits, and other critical supports that women and families rely on play in providing stability and opportunity for families – and the high stakes in upcoming debates on funding these programs.

What Does the Federal Poverty Rate Measure?

The **official poverty measure (OPM)** reported by the Census Bureau measures the percentage of the U.S. population with total income below the federal poverty threshold for their family size (e.g., $31,942 in 2023 for a family of four with two children).[8] "Income" is calculated before taxes and includes only cash income, such as:

- Earnings
- Pension and retirement income
- Investment income (i.e., interest, dividends, royalties, estates, and trusts)
- Social Security
- Public assistance (non-cash benefits are not included in the measure—see below)
- Unemployment benefits, workers' compensation, veterans' payments
- Alimony and child support payments

Methodology for calculating the poverty threshold has remained unchanged since its development in the 1960s, does not vary by geographic location, and assumes all families spend one third of their pre-tax income on food.[9] These outdated methods don't reflect the realities of income and costs that many families face today and likely underestimate the number of people experiencing poverty.
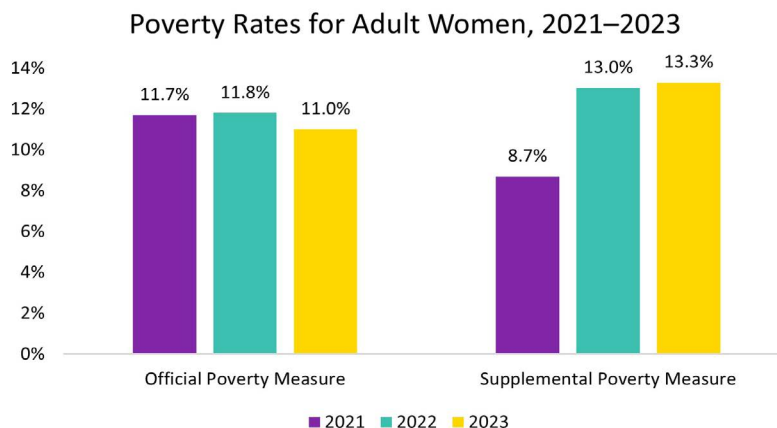
The **supplemental poverty measure (SPM)** extends the official poverty measure by accounting for geographical differences in housing costs; it also uses updated data derived from the Consumer Expenditure Survey on expenditure on food, clothing, shelter, and utilities in the calculation of poverty thresholds. The SPM incorporates the value of several federal and state benefits that help support low-income families but are not counted as income under the official poverty measure, minus necessary expenses. In 2023, benefits included (but were not limited to):

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits (formerly known as Food Stamps)
- Refundable tax credits (the Earned Income Tax Credit and the refundable portion of the Child Tax Credit)
- Long-term housing subsidies[10]

Necessary expenses that were subtracted in 2023 included income taxes, Social Security payroll taxes, child care and other work-related expenses, child support payments to another household, and medical expenses. In addition, the SPM defines family units as people living at the same address who share resources. The SPM includes unrelated children under the age of 15, while the OPM does not.[11]

The SPM poverty rate for adult women remained elevated in 2023 after the end of pandemic-era relief programs two years ago.

- Poverty rates for adult women using the supplemental poverty measure (SPM) increased from 8.7% in 2021 to 13.0% in 2022 and remained high in 2023 at 13.3%. It is clear women are still struggling in the face of rising costs and a lack of relief programs.

- Poverty rates for adult women using the Census Bureau's official poverty measure (OPM) decreased slightly over the last year, from 11.8% in 2022 to 11.0% in 2023.

Poverty Rates for Adult Women, 2021–2023

Official Poverty Measure	Supplemental Poverty Measure
2021: 11.7%	2021: 8.7%
2022: 11.8%	2022: 13.0%
2023: 11.0%	2023: 13.3%

■ 2021 ■ 2022 ■ 2023

Source: NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplements microdata. Figures are for women age 18 and over.

Women were more likely than men to live in poverty in 2023.

- Using the Census Bureau's official poverty measure (OPM), nearly one in nine women 18 and older, over 14.6 million, lived in poverty in 2023.
- Nearly half (48.0%) of women in poverty last year lived in extreme poverty, defined as income at or below 50% of the official federal poverty level. This means nearly one in 18 women (5.3%) lived in extreme poverty last year, compared to 4.2% of men.
- Women were more likely than men to live in poverty in 2023 using the OPM (11.0% compared to 8.8%) and using the SPM (13.3% compared to 12.1%).
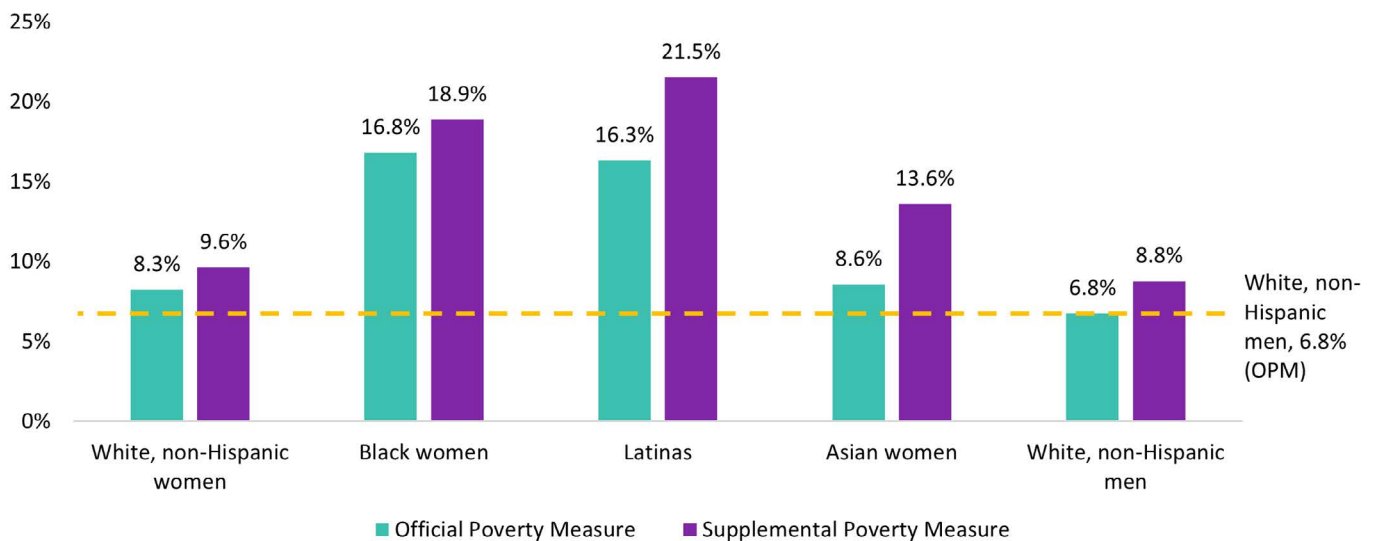
Poverty is even higher for women of color, disabled women, and immigrant women.

- Using the official poverty measure, one in 12 (8.3%) white, non-Hispanic women lived in poverty in 2023, compared to 6.8% of white, non-Hispanic men. However, many women of color were even more likely to live in poverty.[12]
  - o **Black women**: 16.8% of Black women lived in poverty.
  - o **Latina women**: 16.3% of Latina women lived in poverty.
  - o **Asian women**: 8.6% of Asian women lived in poverty.
  - o **Indigenous women**: 20.4% of Indigenous women lived in poverty.[13]

More than one in seven women born outside of the United States (14.7%) lived in poverty using the OPM in 2023, and they were more likely than women born in the United States (10.2%) to be in poverty. The U.S. immigration system has long been broken and failed to provide adequate support to immigrants, particularly women, who comprise the backbone of our economic infrastructure. While poverty among immigrants has fallen in recent decades, there is more to be done, including protecting policies that support immigrant families.[14]

- Nearly one in four disabled women ages 18 to 64 (24.5%) lived in poverty in 2023, as measured by the OPM—meaning disabled women experienced poverty at over three times the rate for nondisabled men (7.8%) and over two times the rate for nondisabled women (10.0%). The OPM poverty rate among disabled women's male counterparts was lower: 20.1% of disabled men lived in poverty in 2023.

Poverty Rates for Adults by Selected Demographics, 2023

	Official Poverty Measure	Supplemental Poverty Measure
White, non-Hispanic women	8.3%	9.6%
Black women	16.8%	18.9%
Latinas	16.3%	21.5%
Asian women	8.6%	13.6%
White, non-Hispanic men	6.8%	8.8%

White, non-Hispanic men, 6.8% (OPM)

■ Official Poverty Measure   ■ Supplemental Poverty Measure

Source: NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplements microdata. Figures are for adults age 18 and over.

- SPM rates show similar patterns:
  - In 2023, 18.9% of Black women, 21.5% of Latina women, and 13.6% of Asian women lived in poverty using the SPM, compared with 9.6% of white, non-Hispanic women and 8.8% of white, non-Hispanic men.[15]
  - 23.5% of disabled women ages 18 to 64 lived in poverty using the SPM, compared with 10.9% of nondisabled men and 11.8% of nondisabled women of the same age.

The child poverty rate as measured by the SPM remains over double what it was in 2021.

SPM poverty rates for children more than doubled from 5.2% in 2021 to 12.4% in 2022, marking a record-high single-year increase in child poverty rates, and rates continued to climb, to 13.8%, in 2023. The increases in recent years have been largely driven by the expiration of the expanded Child Tax Credit, refundable Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, stimulus payments, and other pandemic-era supports for families.

Over 11 million children lived in poverty in 2023 under the OPM (15.3%), more than two in five of whom (43.4%) lived in extreme poverty, defined as income at or below 50% of the official federal poverty level. This means that one in 15 children (6.6%) were experiencing extreme poverty last year.
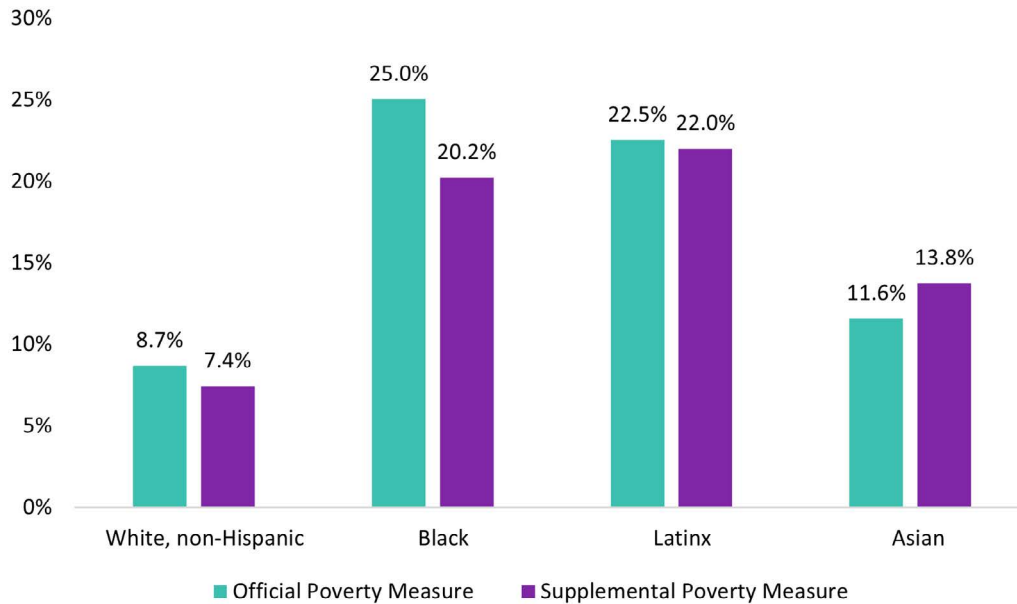
- Poverty rates under the OPM were even higher for Black children, Latinx children, Indigenous children, and children born outside the United States:
  - **Black children**: One in four (25.0%) Black children lived in poverty.
  - **Latinx children**: Over one in five (22.5%) Latinx children lived in poverty.
  - **Asian children**: Over one in nine (11.6%) Asian children lived in poverty.
  - **Indigenous children**: Over one in four (26.7%) Indigenous children lived in poverty.[16]
  - **White, non-Hispanic children**: Nearly one in 11 (8.7%) white, non-Hispanic children lived in poverty.
  - **Children born outside of the United States**: Over one in four (27.2%) children born outside of the United States lived in poverty.

Poverty Rates for All Children, 2021–2023
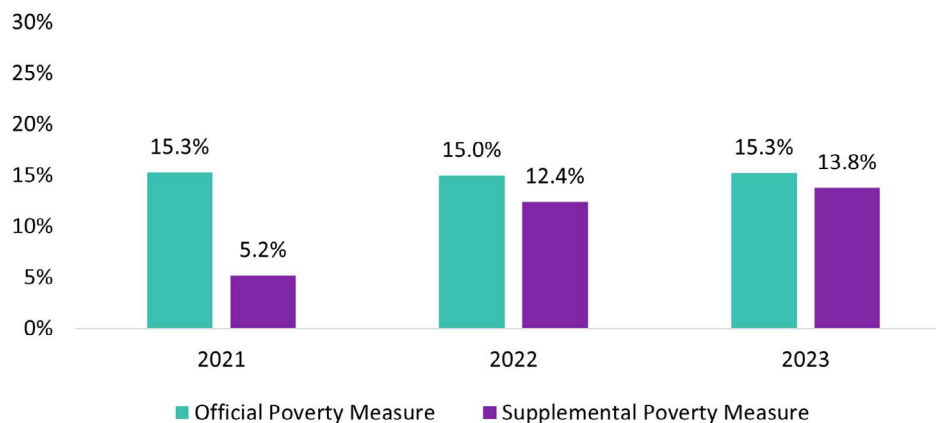
Source: NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplements microdata.

Poverty Rates for Children by Race/Ethnicity, 2023

Chart shows Official Poverty Measure (teal) and Supplemental Poverty Measure (purple):
- White, non-Hispanic: 8.7% / 7.4%
- Black: 25.0% / 20.2%
- Latinx: 22.5% / 22.0%
- Asian: 11.6% / 13.8%

■ Official Poverty Measure   ■ Supplemental Poverty Measure

Source: NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplements microdata.

The SPM poverty rates for families with children headed by a single woman remain high with the expiration of key supports.
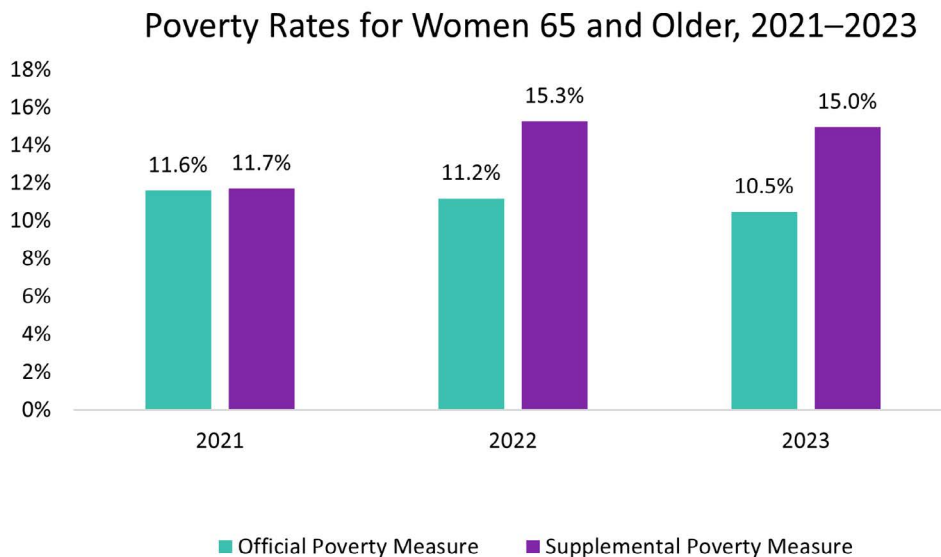
- The longstanding lack of robust public investments in women, children, and families pushes single mothers in the United States into poverty at a much higher rate than their counterparts in other rich democracies.[17] The SPM poverty rates for family units with children headed by a single woman in 2023 (28.5%) and 2022 (26.7%) were over two times higher than in 2021 (11.9%).[18] The increase in the SPM poverty rates driven by the end of pandemic-era relief programs once again underscores the link between policy intervention and poverty.

- Using the OPM, nearly six in 10 poor children (56.7%) lived in families headed by a single woman in 2023.[19]

- The official poverty rate for families with children headed by a single woman was 31.6%, nearly twice as high as the rate for families with children headed by a single man (16.0%).

- Families with children headed by a single Indigenous woman, a single Black woman, or a single Latina woman fared even worse using the OPM:

  o   Over one in three (34.7%) families with children headed by a single Black woman lived in poverty.
  o   Over one in three (36.8%) families with children headed by a single Latina woman lived in poverty.
  o   More than one in five (27.6%) families with children headed by a single Asian woman lived in poverty.
  o   Nearly two in five (38.6%) families with children headed by a single Indigenous woman lived in poverty.[20]
  o   More than one in four (25.9%) families with children headed by a single white, non-Hispanic woman lived in poverty

Families with children under age 6 headed by a single woman—who must grapple with high child care costs and other financial burdens on their own—had even higher poverty rates using the OPM:[21]

  o   42.9% of families with children under age 6 headed by a single woman lived in poverty.
  o   44.5% of families with children under age 6 headed by a single Black woman lived in poverty.
  o   45.8% of families with children under age 6 headed by a single Latina woman lived in poverty.
  o   38.5% of families with children under age 6 headed by a single white, non-Hispanic woman lived in poverty.
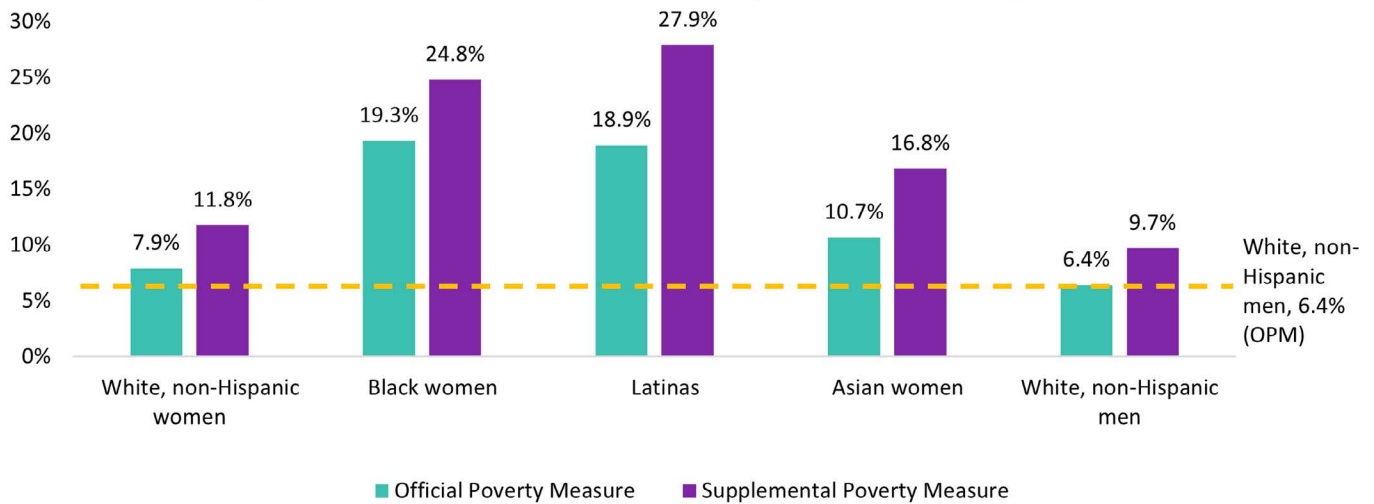
Older women are more likely to be in poverty than older men.

- Using the OPM, women made up nearly six in 10 (58.5%) poor people ages 65 and older in 2023.

- The official poverty rate for women 65 and older was 10.5% in 2023, compared to 8.9% for older men.

- Poverty rates were particularly high for certain groups of older women in 2023 under the OPM:

  o **Black women**: Nearly one in five (19.3%) Black women 65+ lived in poverty.
  o **Latina women**: Nearly one in five (18.9%) Latina women 65+ lived in poverty.
  o **Asian women**: Nearly one in nine (10.7%) Asian women 65+ lived in poverty.
  o **Indigenous women**: Nearly one in five (19.5%) Indigenous women 65+ lived in poverty.[22]
  o **White, non-Hispanic women**: More than one in 13 (7.9%) white, non-Hispanic women 65+ lived in poverty.

- The SPM poverty rate for older women increased from 11.7% in 2021 to 15.3% in 2022 and remains high at 15.0% in 2023. Similar to other groups, older women were impacted by the end of pandemic relief programs such as stimulus payments, the expanded Earned Income Tax Credit, and Unemployment Insurance.

Poverty Rates for Women 65 and Older, 2021–2023

Year	Official Poverty Measure	Supplemental Poverty Measure
2021	11.6%	11.7%
2022	11.2%	15.3%
2023	10.5%	15.0%

■ Official Poverty Measure ■ Supplemental Poverty Measure

Source: NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplements microdata.

Poverty Rates for Adults 65 and Older by Selected Demographics, 2023

Legend: ■ Official Poverty Measure ■ Supplemental Poverty Measure

White, non-Hispanic women: 7.9%, 11.8%
Black women: 19.3%, 24.8%
Latinas: 18.9%, 27.9%
Asian women: 10.7%, 16.8%
White, non-Hispanic men: 6.4%, 9.7%

White, non-Hispanic men, 6.4% (OPM)

Source: NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplements microdata.

Poverty is a policy choice.

The 2023 poverty data show that poverty as measured by the Supplemental Poverty Measure remained high after 2022's surge among women and children, following the end of pandemic relief programs. High SPM poverty is a stark reminder that many women and families struggle to make ends meet in the wake of the pandemic, just as they did before. On top of that, they are also dealing with continued systemic inequities and rising costs of living.

But it doesn't have to be this way. We know policies can ameliorate long-standing inequities in our economy—policies like the expanded Child Tax Credit and robust public investments in child care, paid family and medical leave, and aging and disability care. Raising additional revenue to do so by making sure the wealthiest and big corporations pay their fair share in taxes will also help more women and families have what they need to thrive. In contrast, cuts to funding for programs and services that women and families rely on—like Medicaid, child care, nutrition assistance, and housing assistance—will only push more families' incomes below the federal poverty level in years to come. Only by making long-overdue investments in women and families will we advance racial and gender equity and lay the groundwork for broadly shared prosperity.

1   Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Record Rise in Poverty Highlights Importance of Child Tax Credit; Health Coverage Marks a High Point Before Pandemic Safeguards Ended" (September 12, 2023), https://www.cbpp.org/press/statements/record-rise-in-poverty-highlights-importance-of-child-tax-credit-health-coverage; and The U.S. Census Bureau, "Child Poverty Fell to Record Low 5.2% in 2021" (September 13, 2022), https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/09/record-drop-in-child-poverty.html.

2   All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level. Comparisons based on race/ethnicity were made with reference to the white, non-Hispanic group. The only exception is for Native women and children whose poverty rates were calculated using the American Community Survey data instead of the CPS ASEC data.

3   Gloria Guzman, "Median Household Income Increased in 2023 for the First Time Since 2019," United States Census Bureau, (September 10, 2024), https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2024/09/household-income-race-hispanic.html.

4   See Gloria Guzman, "Median Household Income Increased in 2023 for the First Time Since 2019."

5   Widening disparities compared to white, non-Hispanic households were significant for Hispanic households but not Black households.

6   NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplements (ASEC) microdata. Note that data presented here, as calculated with CPS ASEC microdata, may vary slightly from data presented in online tables by U.S. Census Bureau. OPM rates for white, non-Hispanic children fell from 9.7% in 2022 to 8.7% in 2023 while rates rose for Black (22.3% in 2022 to 25.0% in 2023), Asian (8.8% in 2022 to 11.6% in 2023), and Latinx children (21.7% in 2022 to 22.5% in 2023).

7   The OPM and the SPM are based on different measurement units leading to difference in universe: the SPM includes unrelated children under the age of 15, while the OPM does not. The Census Bureau accounts for this difference using an alternative "official+" poverty measure when directly comparing the official and SPM poverty rates in their poverty report (see https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2023/demo/p60-280.pdf). However, this factsheet does not directly compare OPM and SPM rates and thus the original OPM rates are presented.

8   The Census Bureau's federal poverty thresholds can be found at https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html.

9   Gordon M. Fisher, "The Development of the Orshansky Poverty Thresholds and Their Subsequent history as the Official U.S. Poverty Measure," U.S. Census Bureau, (September 1977), https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/1997/demo/fisher-02.html

10 Note that the SPM did not account for the expansion of housing subsidies through temporary programs such as Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA).

11 The U.S. Census Bureau, "What Is the Supplemental Poverty Measure and How Does It Differ From the Official Measure?" (September 2018), https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2018/09/what_is_the_suppleme.html.

12 Men and women self-identify their sex in U.S. Census Bureau surveys as their male or female. They also self-identify their race and ethnicity. Asian women are those who self-identified as Asian alone. Black women are those who self-identified as Black alone. Native women are those who identified themselves as American Indian or Alaskan Native alone. White, non-Hispanic women and men are those who identified themselves as white alone, but who are not of Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin. Latina women are of any race who identified themselves to be of Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin. Foreign-born women are those who have identified themselves as born outside of U.S territories and possessions (Note that the Current Population Survey does not extend to Puerto Rico or to the outlying areas of the United States, and thus those living there are excluded from this analysis). Disabled persons are those who have identified themselves as having any physical or cognitive difficulty, as measured by affirmative responses to any of the Current Population Survey's six physical or cognitive difficulties.

13 Unlike for other groups, the 2022 OPM poverty rates for Native women and children were calculated using U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey, available at https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs.

14 Jeanne Batalova and Michael Fix, "Understanding Poverty Declines among Immigrants and Their Children in the United States," Migration Policy Institute, (May 2023), https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-poverty-declines-immigrants-2023_final.pdf.

15 The 2022 SPM poverty rates are not available for Native women and children.

16 Supra note 2.

17 Ryan Finnigan, "Penalties for Poverty Risks Drive High Poverty in the United States" (The UC Davis Center for Poverty & Inequality Research, February 2018), https://poverty.ucdavis.edu/sites/main/files/file-attachments/finnigan_brief_penalites_1.pdf?1519946490.

18 Family units are defined different under the OPM and SPM: The OPM uses the Census-defined family as its unit of analysis, which includes all persons residing together who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption; it treats all unrelated individuals age 15 or older independently. The SPM unit more broadly includes all related persons at the same address, as well as any cohabitors and their relatives, and any coresident unrelated children who are cared for by the family (such as foster children). See https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v75n3/v75n3p55.html#mn13. Using the OPM, family units with children headed by a single woman are defined as primary families with related children under 18, headed by a female reference person, no spouse present. Using the SPM, family units with children headed by a single woman are defined as female reference person units with children under 18, no spouse present.

19 Over 11 million children lived in poverty in 2023, which includes 280,000 not living in families. NWLC calculations using Census Table POV-02, available at https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pov/pov-02.html. Using the OPM, families with children headed by a single woman or man are defined as primary families with related children under 18, headed by a female or male reference person, no spouse present. The OPM poverty rates for families with children were calculated based on Census Table POV-06, available at https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pov/pov-06.html.

20 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey, table C17010C, available at https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs.

21 Poverty rates for families with children under age 6 headed by a single woman were calculated based on Census Table POV-06, available at https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pov/pov-06.html. Data were not available for Native families or Asian families.

22 Supra note 2.