

National Snapshot: Poverty Among Women & Families in 2024

By Shengwei Sun

Poverty in the United States is a policy choice. Between 2020 and 2021, poverty rates as measured by the Census Bureau's Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) 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.¹ However, between 2021 and 2022, as pandemic-era assistance expired, poverty rates jumped by the largest recorded single-year increase in more than 50 years.² Poverty rates have remained elevated since then, in the absence of additional policy action.

This fact sheet presents poverty estimates in 2024 and prior years using the SPM, which accounts for both cash and non-cash benefits as well as necessary expenses. The 2024 poverty estimates using the official poverty measure (OPM) are available in the appendix.

Findings reveal the continued harm to women, children, and families that has resulted from discontinuing effective, but temporary, supports while failing to address underlying systemic inequities. 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.³

The 2024 income and poverty data paint a troubling picture for two groups in particular.

The first group is Black women and families:

- Thanks to a strong labor market, the country's overall median household income kept pace with inflation and stood at record high in 2024; however, Black household income declined in 2024—a major outlier.⁴
- For Black women in particular, employment levels have been trending downward since early 2024,⁵ and Black women experienced a statistically significant increase in their SPM poverty rate between 2023 and 2024 (from 18.9% to 21.2%), in contrast to other groups whose poverty rates remained largely unchanged.

The second group is women 65 years and older:

- This group also experienced a statistically significant increase in their SPM poverty rate last year, from 15.0% to 16.2%. Rising costs of living—in particular medical expenses—likely had an outsized impact on older women, who tend to have fewer resources in retirement than older men.⁶

In addition, data shows that nearly two in five working-age women (16 to 64) who were in SPM poverty worked for pay in 2024, underscoring that for many women—who are overrepresented in low-paying jobs⁷—work alone is not enough to escape poverty. Data further shows that many women in poverty could not engage in paid work due to caregiving responsibilities, illness, and/or disability.

Findings from this analysis demonstrate that too many women, children, and families in the United States already experience extreme economic hardship—and that stability and opportunity for women and families require long-term public investments in health care, child care, nutrition assistance, accessible and affordable housing, refundable tax credits, and other critical supports. And that is why the stakes are so high in ongoing debates over funding for these programs.

The Republican tax and budget bill, enacted in July 2025 after these data were collected, did not make any of the investments that women and their families need. Instead, the bill included historic cuts to basic needs programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid⁸—threatening to push millions more into poverty and worsen longstanding inequities.

Why Use the Supplemental Poverty Measure?

The Census Bureau uses both the supplemental poverty measure (SPM) and the official poverty measure (OPM) to track poverty in the United States. Relative to the OPM, the SPM better reflects the realities of income and costs that many families face today. For the purpose of this analysis, the SPM measure is better suited to capture the poverty-reducing effects of non-cash public benefits such as SNAP and tax credits—benefits that are especially significant for families with children. In 2021, for example, child SPM poverty rates dropped to a historic low thanks to the expanded Child Tax Credit and other pandemic-era assistance measures enacted as part of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).⁹

The OPM remains the source for official poverty statistics and for determining means-tested program eligibility. It measures the percentage of the U.S. population with total income below the federal poverty threshold for their family size (e.g., \$31,812 in 2024 for a family of four with two children).¹⁰

“Income” is calculated before taxes and includes only cash income.¹¹ 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.¹²

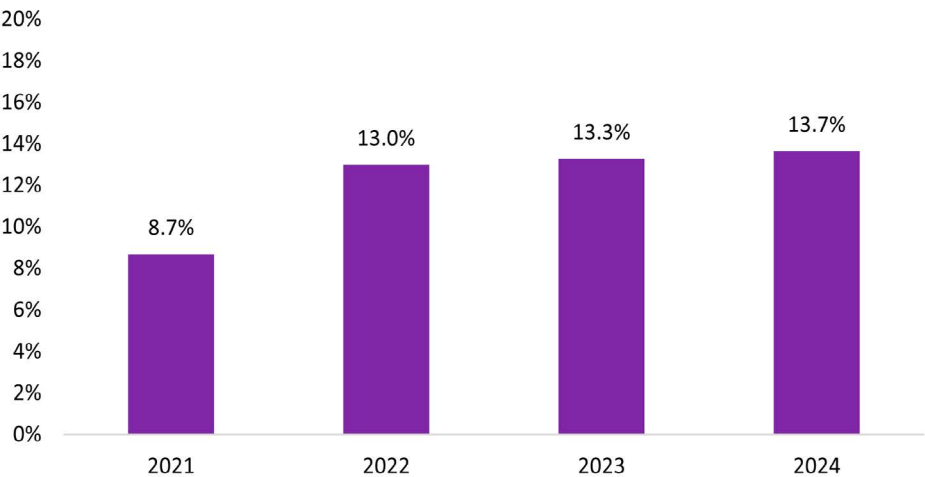
The SPM accounts for a range of additional factors to more accurately reflect how individuals and families are faring economically.¹³ Notably, the SPM incorporates the value of several federal and state benefits that help support low-income families but are not counted as income under the OPM, minus “necessary expenses.”¹⁴ In 2024, 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

The SPM poverty rate for adult women remained elevated in 2024 after the end of pandemic-era relief programs three years ago.

Poverty rates for adult women using the SPM increased from 8.7% in 2021 to 13.0% in 2022 and remained high in 2024 at 13.7%, meaning nearly one in seven women lived in poverty using the SPM. It is clear women are still struggling in the face of rising costs and the failure to extend critical relief programs.

SPM Poverty Rates for Adult Women, 2021 to 2024



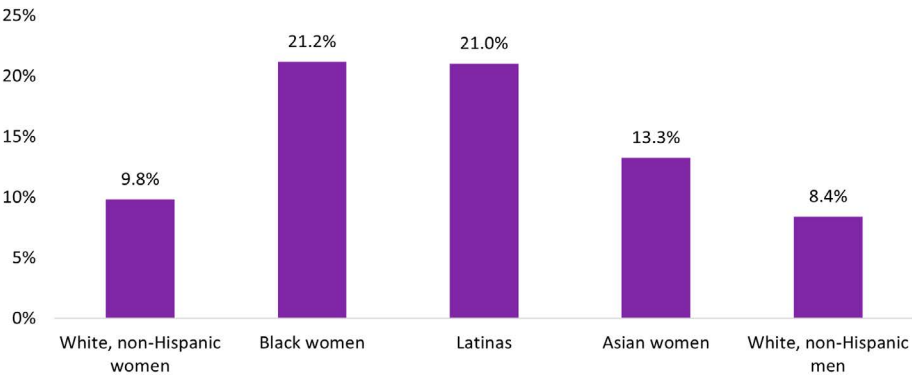
Source: NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplements microdata. Figures are for women ages 18 and over.

Poverty rates are higher for women of color, disabled women, and immigrant women. Black women’s already high poverty rate increased in 2024.

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- In 2024, 13.7% of adult women and 11.9% of adult men lived in poverty using the SPM.
- 21.2% of Black women, 21.0% of Latinas, and 13.3% of Asian women lived in poverty as measured by the SPM, compared with 9.8% of white, non-Hispanic women and 8.4% of white, non-Hispanic men.
- Among these groups, only Black women experienced a statistically significant increase in poverty between 2023 and 2024, from 18.9% to 21.2%.

SPM Poverty Rates for Adults in 2024, by Gender, Race and, Ethnicity



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

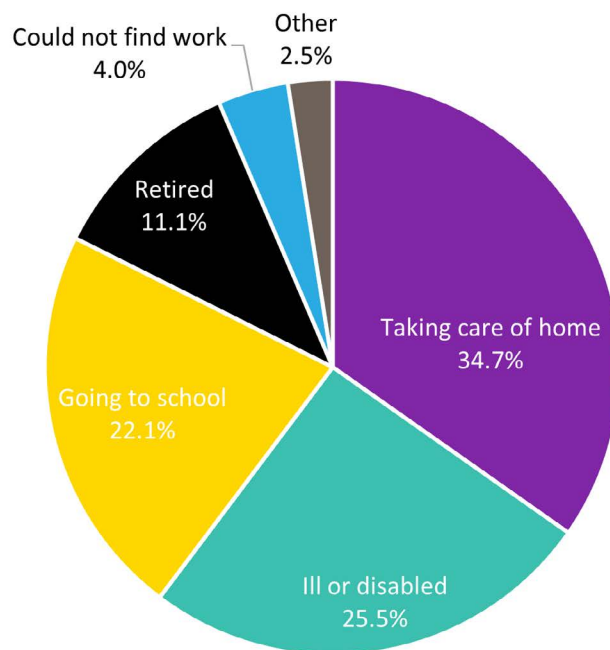
- More than one in five women born outside of the United States (20.7%) lived in poverty using the SPM in 2024, and they were more likely than women born in the United States (12.1%) to be in poverty. The U.S. immigration system has long been broken, and immigrants are frequently excluded from public benefits programs—even as they pay taxes and support our economy in vital occupations and industries like child care, health care, domestic work, and agricultural packaging and processing.¹⁵ Funding cuts to basic needs programs along with expanded immigration detention and enforcement prioritized by the current administration not only harm immigrant communities, but all of us.
- Nearly one in four (24.3%) disabled women ages 18 to 64 lived in poverty using the SPM—meaning disabled women experienced poverty at over two times the rate for nondisabled men (10.7%) and nondisabled women (11.8%) in the same age range. The SPM poverty rate among disabled men (20.4%) was higher than that for nondisabled men and women, but lower than that for disabled women. Funding cuts, including to Medicaid, will disproportionately harm disabled people who rely on this essential program for health care and care that supports daily activities.

Work is not enough to lift women out of poverty.

In 2024, nearly two in five (39.2%) working-age (16 to 64) women who were in poverty as measured by the SPM worked for pay.¹⁶ Women of every race are overrepresented in low-paid jobs, where employers often do not provide the wages, hours, or benefits that people need to achieve economic security.¹⁷

Among working-age women in SPM poverty who did not work for pay last year, over a third cited “taking care of home” (34.7%) as the main reason for not working for pay; one-quarter reported “illness and disability” (25.5%); and nearly another quarter reported “going to school” (22.1%). As the data suggests, most working-age women in SPM poverty who did not work for pay were out of work due to caregiving responsibilities and illness or disability, pointing to the structural barriers women face in achieving economic security.

Main Reasons for Not Working for Pay in 2024, Among Working-Age Women in SPM Poverty Who Did Not Work for Pay in 2024

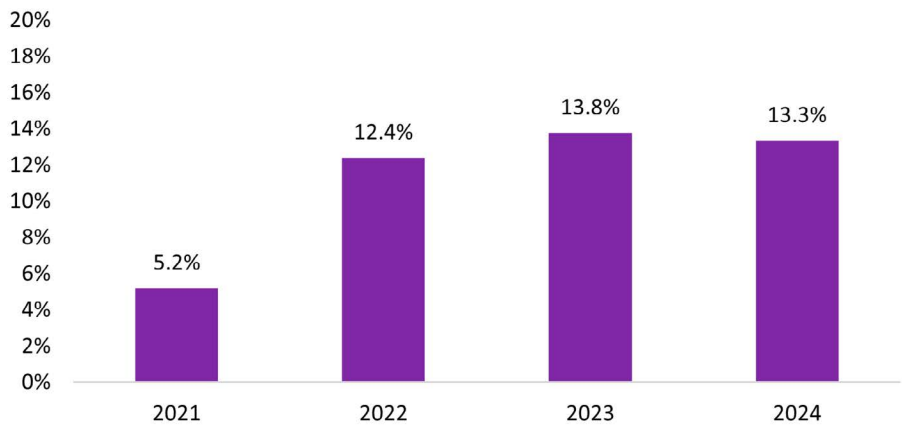


Source: NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplements microdata. Figures are for women ages 16 to 64 who were in SPM poverty and did not work at a job or business at any time in 2024.

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

- The SPM poverty rate 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 the rate remained high at 13.3% in 2024. 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.

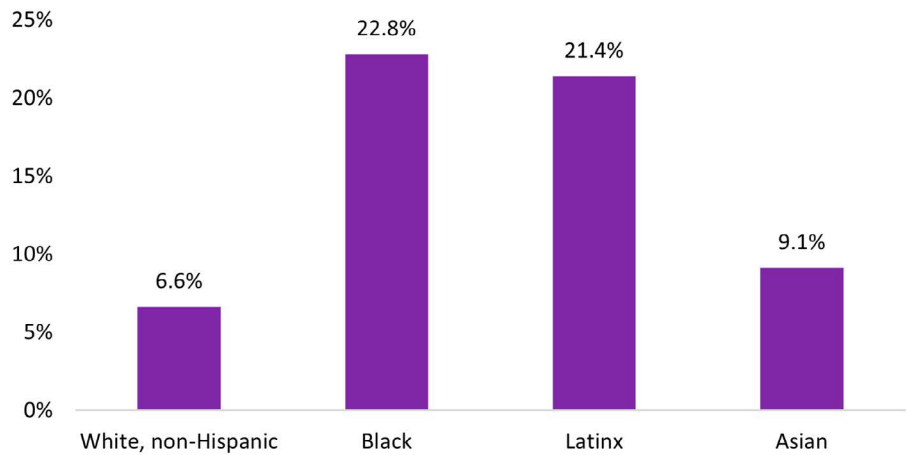
SPM Poverty Rates for Children,
2021 to 2024



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

- Poverty rates under the SPM were even higher for Black children and Latinx children: More than one in five Black children (22.8%) and Latinx children (21.4%) lived in poverty last year, compared to 9.1% of Asian children and 6.6% of white, non-Hispanic children.

SPM Poverty Rates for Children in 2024,
by Race and Ethnicity

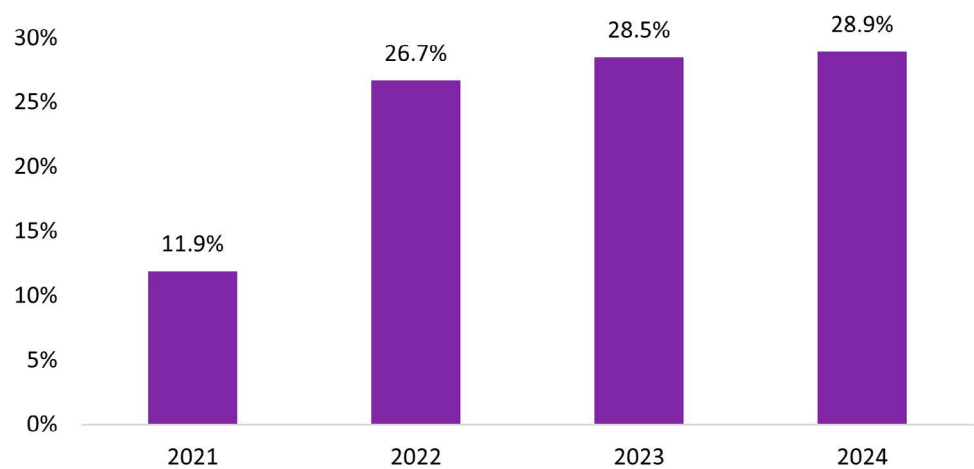


Source: NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplements microdata. Figures are for individuals under the age of 18.

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.¹⁸ The SPM poverty rate for family units with children headed by a single woman in 2024 (28.9%) was over two times higher than in 2021 (11.9%).¹⁹ The increase in the SPM poverty rates driven by the end of pandemic-era relief programs once again underscores the link between policy interventions and poverty.

SPM Poverty Rates for Families With Children
Headed by a Single Woman, 2021 to 2024



Source: NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplements microdata. Families with children headed by a single woman are defined as female reference person units with children under 18, no spouse present.

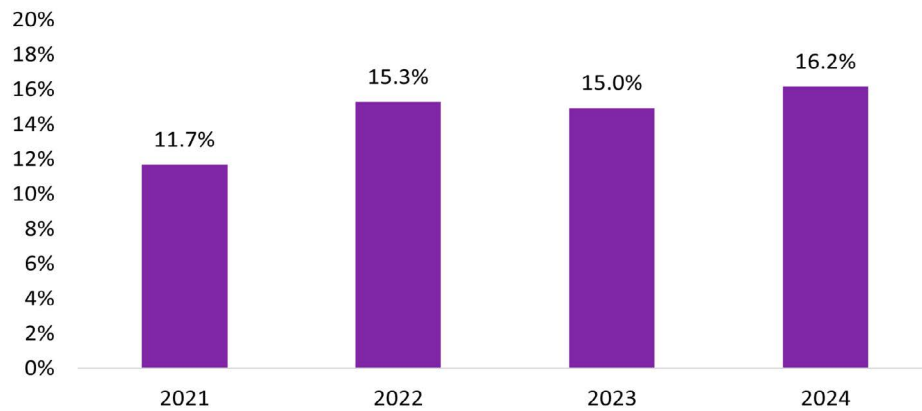
Families with children headed by a single Black woman fared even worse:

- 34.3% of families with children headed by a single Black woman lived in poverty.
- 25.0% of families with children headed by a single Latina lived in poverty.
- 19.5% of families with children headed by a single white, non-Hispanic woman lived in poverty.

The SPM poverty rates for older women increased in 2024.

The SPM poverty rate for older women has increased from 11.7% in 2021 to 16.2% in 2024. Similar to other marginalized groups, older women were impacted by the lapsing of pandemic relief programs such as stimulus payments, the expanded Earned Income Tax Credit, and unemployment insurance.

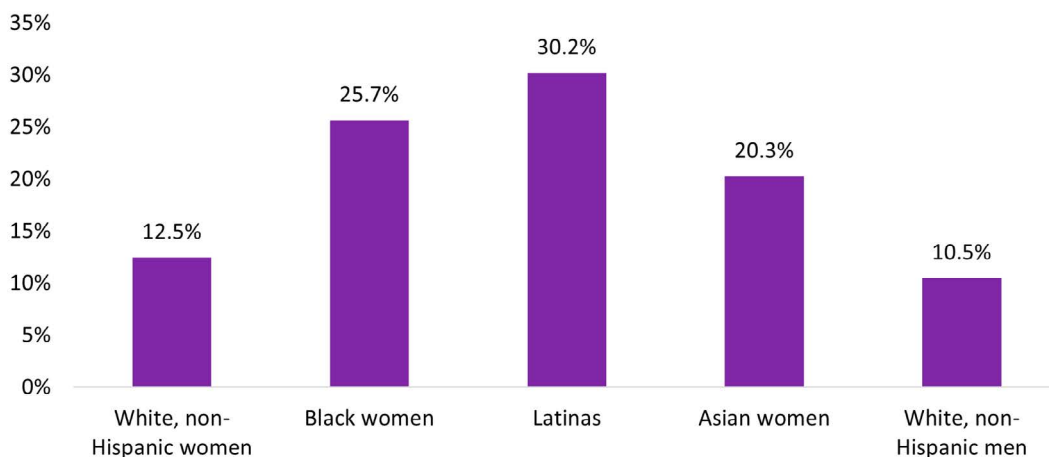
SPM Poverty Rates for Women 65 and Older, 2021 to 2024



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

- Between 2023 and 2024, the SPM poverty rate increased from 15.0% to 16.2% for older women while remaining statistically unchanged for older men (13.5% in 2024). Rising costs of living and in particular, medical expenses,²⁰ likely had an outsized impact on older women, who face higher risks of economic insecurity than men as a result of life-long patterns of gender inequality in work experiences, caregiving responsibilities, and wealth accumulation.²¹
- Poverty rates were particularly high for certain groups of older women in 2024 using the SPM:
 - Nearly one in three (30.2%) Latinas ages 65 and older and one in four (25.7%) Black women ages 65 and older lived in poverty, compared to 20.3% of Asian women, 12.5% of white, non-Hispanic women, and 10.5% of white, non-Hispanic men in the same age group.

SPM Poverty Rates for Older Adults in 2024, by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity



Source: NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplements microdata. Figures are for adults ages 65 and over.

Poverty is a policy choice.

The Census Bureau’s SPM poverty data show clearly that poverty in 2024 remained high after 2022’s surge among women and children, following the end of pandemic relief programs. Despite a strong labor market for most workers in 2024, the SPM poverty rates not only held steady across demographic groups but actually increased among Black women and older women in 2024. Rising SPM poverty for Black women and older women is a stark reminder that many women and families struggle to make ends meet in our economy, given ongoing systemic inequities and rising costs of living. The recent tax and budget bill’s cuts to programs and services that women and families rely on—like Medicaid and nutrition assistance—will only increase hardship and exacerbate disparities.

In particular, the bill’s expansion of so-called “work requirements” for Medicaid enrollees²² and those who would otherwise be eligible for SNAP benefits²³ will strip needed support from women and their families, adding administrative hurdles while doing little to encourage employment. Prior research finds that most Medicaid enrollees and non-elderly adult SNAP recipients who can work do work.²⁴ Data further shows that most working-age women in SPM poverty who did not work for pay in 2024 were out of work due to caregiving responsibilities and illness or disability, underscoring how structural barriers impede women’s economic security.

But it doesn’t have to be this way. Along with higher wage standards for employers, basic needs programs such as SNAP and Medicaid have proven effective in reducing poverty. Policies like the expanded Child Tax Credit and robust public investments in child care, paid family and medical leave, and aging and disability care can address long-standing gender and racial inequities and help more families thrive. Raising additional revenue to support policies and investments like these by making sure the wealthiest and big corporations pay their fair share in taxes will also ensure that our economy works for everyone, not just the wealthy few. Only by making long-overdue investments in women and families will we lay the groundwork for broadly shared prosperity.

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Appendix: Poverty Rates as Measured by the Official Poverty Measure (OPM)

Poverty rates as measured by the OPM are lower than poverty rates as measured by the SPM for most demographic groups included in this analysis, except for children (especially Black children) and female-headed families with children, because non-cash benefits like SNAP and tax credits are significant for families with children.

Poverty Rates Using the Official Poverty Measure in 2024

Men 18 and older	8.3%
Women 18 and older	10.9%

Black women	17.8%
Latinas	15.2%
Asian women	8.3%
White, non-Hispanic women	8.3%
White, non-Hispanic men	6.5%
Women born outside of the United States	13.8%
Women born in the United States	10.3%
Disabled women ages 18 to 64	23.1%
Disabled men ages 18 to 64	18.5%
Nondisabled women ages 18 to 64	9.9%
Nondisabled men ages 18 to 64	7.3%
Children	
Black children	25.4%
Latinx children	20.2%
Asian children	6.4%
White, non-Hispanic children	8.2%
Families with children headed by a single woman	30.6%
Families with children headed by a single Black woman	35.6%
Families with children headed by a single Latina	36.1%
Families with children headed by a single Asian woman	19.6%
Families with children headed by a single white, non-Hispanic woman	23.6%
Women 65 and older	10.8%
Black women 65 and older	19.0%
Latinas 65 and older	20.0%
Asian women 65 and older	12.2%
White, non-Hispanic women 65 and older	8.3%
Men 65 and older	8.9%

Sources: The OPM poverty rates for families with children 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>. Rates for all other groups were calculated using U.S. Census Bureau, 2025 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplements microdata.

- 1 Kallee Burns, Liana Fox, and Danielle Wilson, "Expansions to Child Tax Credit Contributed to 46% Decline in Child Poverty Since 2020" (The U.S. Census Bureau, September 13, 2022), <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/09/record-drop-in-child-poverty.html>.
- 2 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>.
- 3 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.
- 4 Melissa Kollar and Zach Scherer, "Income in the United States: 2024" (The U.S. Census Bureau, September 2025), <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/2025/demo/p60-286.pdf>. The 2024 overall median household income is not statistically different from the 2019 median household income—the highest level since data became available in 1967.
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- 8 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "By the Numbers: House Bill Takes Health Coverage Away From Millions of People and Raises Families' Health Care Costs" (June 6, 2025), <https://www.cbpp.org/research/health/by-the-numbers-house-bill-takes-health-coverage-away-from-millions-of-people-and-raises-families-health-care-costs>; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "By the Numbers: Harmful Republican Megabill Takes Food Assistance Away From Millions of People" (August 14, 2025), <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/by-the-numbers-harmful-republican-megabill-takes-food-assistance-away-from-millions-of-people>.
- 9 Burns, Fox, and Wilson, "Expansions to Child Tax Credit Contributed to 46% Decline in Child Poverty Since 2020."
- 10 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>.
- 11 Examples of pre-tax cash incomes used to construct the OPM measure include earnings, pension and retirement income, investment income, Social Security, unemployment benefits, workers' compensation, veterans' payments, and more.
- 12 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>.
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- 14 "Necessary expenses" include income taxes, Social Security payroll taxes, child care and other work-related expenses, child support payments to another household, and medical expenses.
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- 16 "Worked for pay" is defined as having worked at a job or business at any time during 2024.
- 17 Tucker and Vogtman, "Hard Work Is Not Enough: Women in Low-Paid Jobs."
- 18 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_penalties_1.pdf?1519946490.
- 19 The SPM unit includes all related persons at the same address, as well as any cohabitators and their relatives, and any coresident unrelated children who are cared for by the family (such as foster children). 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. See <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v75n3/v75n3p55.html>.
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- 22 National Women's Law Center, "Medicaid Work Reporting Requirements Would Harm Women's and LGBTQ+ People's Health and Economic Security to Fund Tax Breaks for the Rich" (February 2025), <https://nwlc.org/resource/medicaid-work-reporting-requirements-would-harm-womens-and-lgbtq-peoples-health-and-economic-security-to-fund-tax-breaks-for-the-rich>.
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