

# A SNAPSHOT OF CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY IN 2018

October 2019



## THE OFFICIAL POVERTY MEASURE

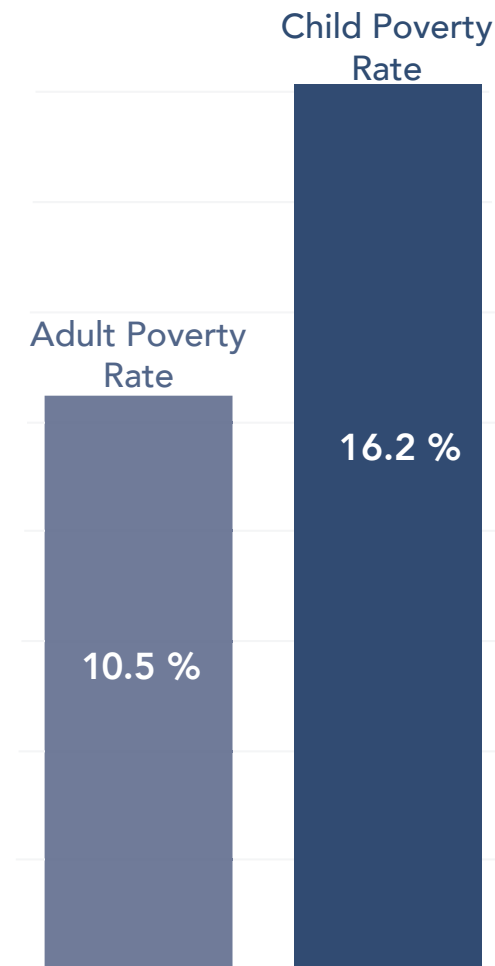
According to the Census Bureau's Official Poverty Measure (OPM), 16.2 percent of children (11.9 million) were living in poverty in 2018. The official poverty line for a family of four with two children is \$25,465 per year.

The new figure represents a 1.2 percent decrease from 2017. While this small decrease in the child poverty rate is encouraging (representing nearly a million children lifted out of poverty), we know that children still have a 54.4 percent higher chance of living in poverty than adults and that the United States continues to have a significantly higher rate of child poverty than most of our peer countries.<sup>1</sup>

Due to systemic racism and discrimination ingrained in our country's institutions, children of color continue to experience rates of poverty three times that of white children. More than 29 percent of Black children and 23.7 percent of Hispanic children were living in poverty in 2018 compared to 8.9 percent of white children.

The numbers also show a modest decrease in children living in deep poverty, with 6.9 percent of children (5 million) living in households with incomes below half of the poverty line (\$12,732 a year for a family of four with two children). These figures include 13 percent of Black children and 9 percent of Hispanic children compared to 4 percent of white children. Deep poverty is also disproportionately experienced by children, who were 1.4 times likelier than adults to live below 50 percent of the poverty line in 2018.

These numbers are particularly worrisome since households living in deep poverty lack the income to meet their children's basic needs. Despite the vulnerability of children living in households of deep poverty, they often lack access to assistance. Many anti-poverty programs are contingent on a household having some income, yet families in deep poverty have little to no earnings due to barriers such as disability, substance abuse, mental health or other complex and persistent issues that prevent them from working full time or at all.



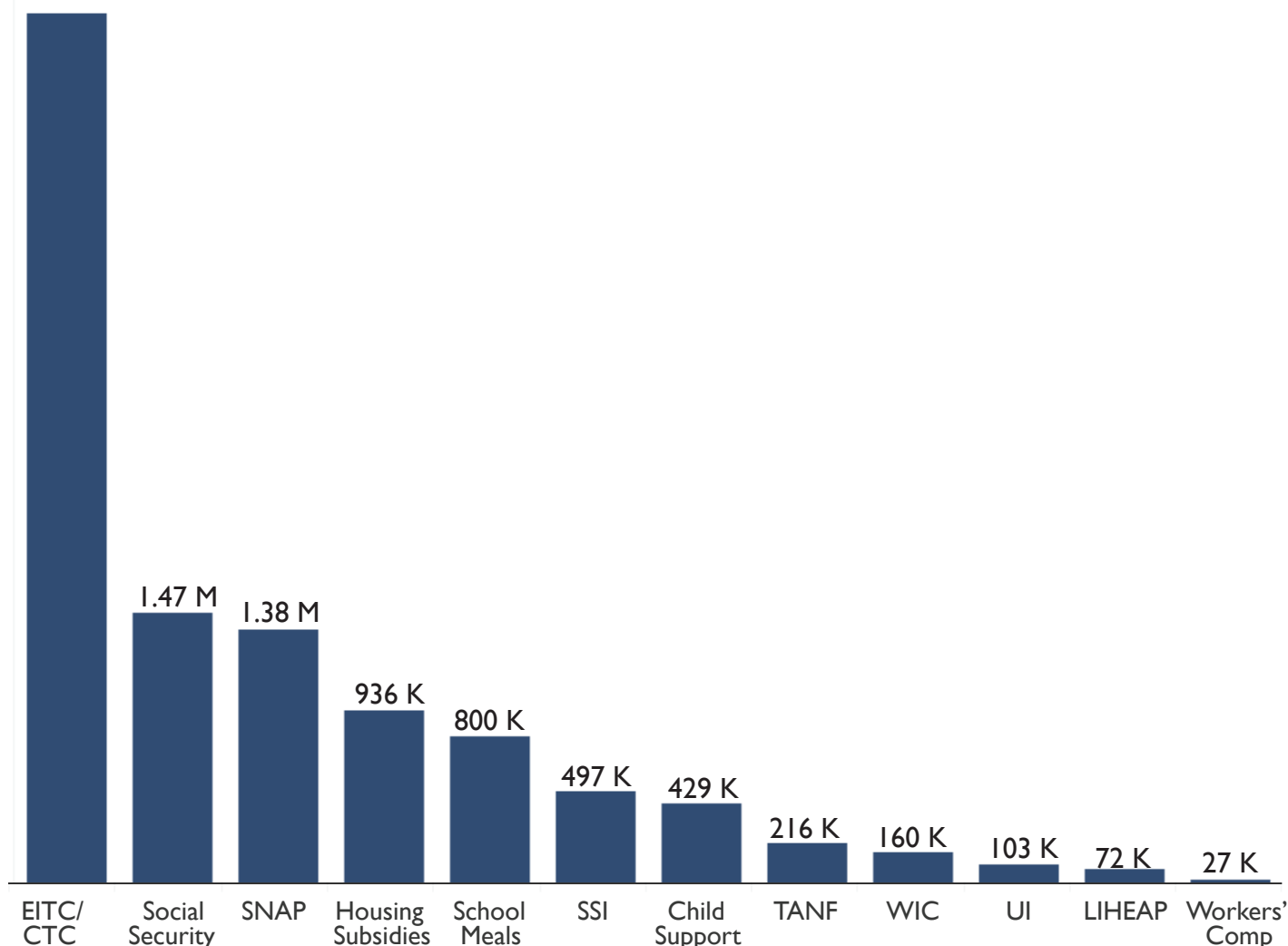
U.S. Census Bureau, "Income and Poverty in the United States in 2018", Table B-1

It is important to note that the official poverty line remains artificially low,<sup>2</sup> and therefore children in households with incomes just above the line still struggle to make ends meet. In 2018, 37.6 percent of children (27.6 million) were living just above the poverty line, measured as an annual income of less than \$50,000 for a family of four with two children. These are households in which one unexpected expense, such as a car repair or medical bill, can cause families to fall back into poverty.

## THE SUPPLEMENTAL POVERTY MEASURE

The good news is that we are making more progress than the OPM indicates. The Supplemental Poverty Measure<sup>3</sup> (SPM) is an alternative indicator that, unlike the OPM (which uses an income threshold solely based on the cost of food) the SPM incorporates the cost of food, clothing, shelter and utilities. It also adjusts for family size and geographic differences in housing costs. The SPM further considers cash income (including child support) and non-cash benefits, subtracts taxes (or adds tax credits), work expenses, out-of-pocket medical expenses, and child support paid to another household. The more comprehensive SPM calculation shows us that when we take anti-poverty programs such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Child Tax Credit (CTC), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), housing assistance and other programs into account (as well as other factors) the child poverty rate drops to 13.7 percent.<sup>3</sup>

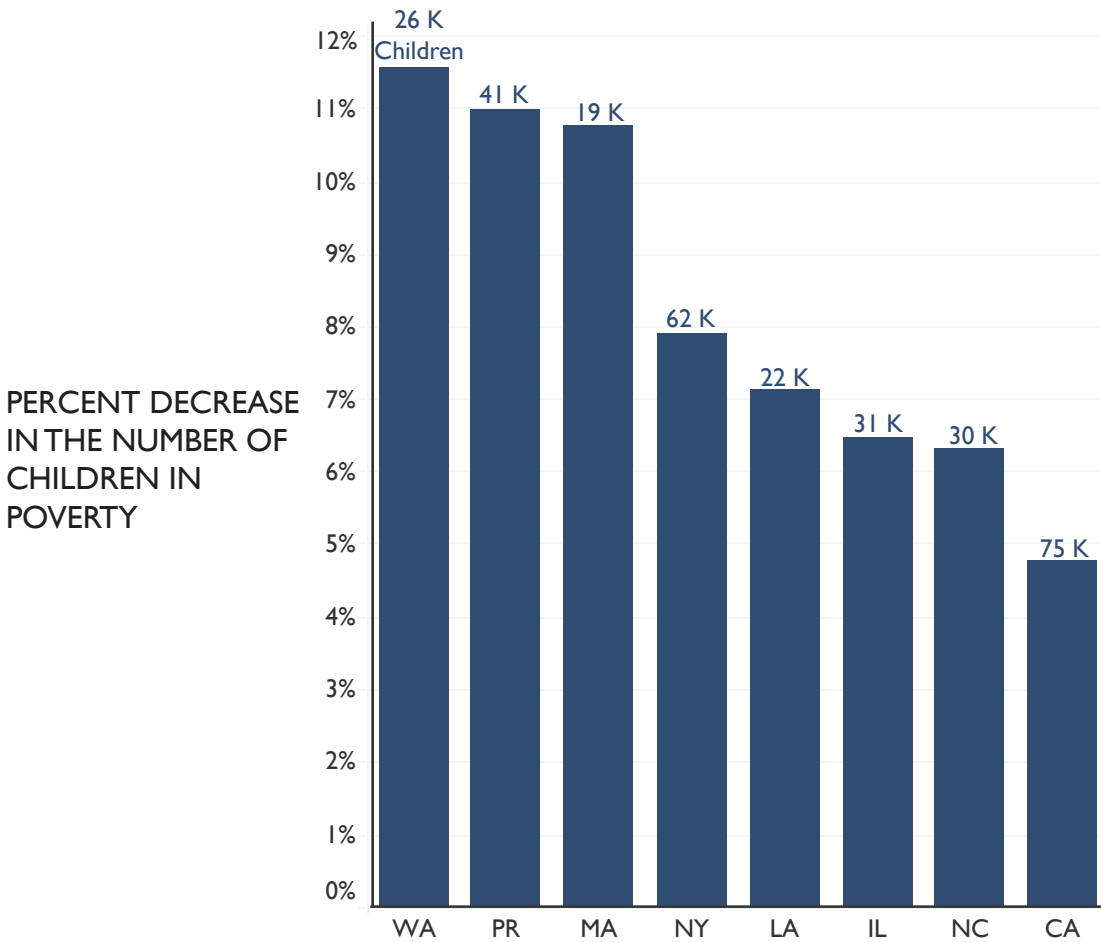
**4.74 M CHILDREN LIFTED  
OUT OF POVERTY IN 2018**



Data: U.S. Census Bureau, "The Supplemental Poverty Measure: 2018"

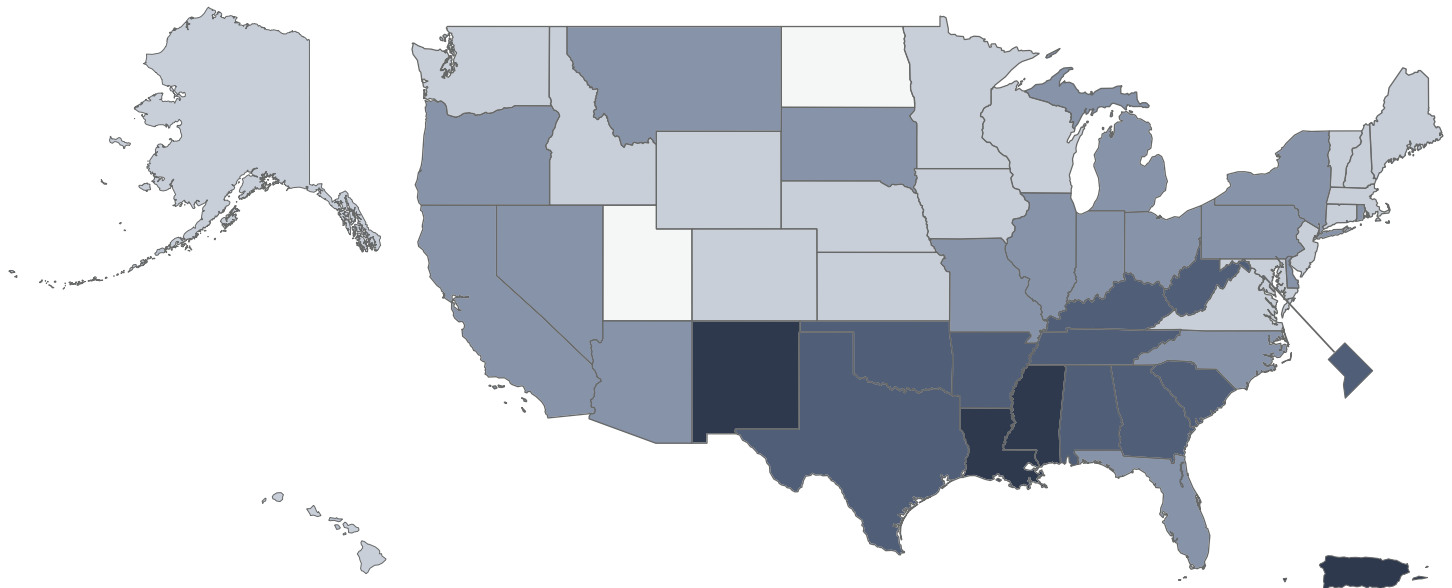
# HIGHLIGHTS OF STATE TRENDS

- » No state saw a statistically significant increase in the number of children living below the poverty line from 2017 to 2018. Seven states — Washington, Massachusetts, New York, Louisiana, Illinois, North Carolina and California — and Puerto Rico saw a statistically significant decrease (at the 10 percent confidence level) in the number of children living in poverty.
- » Washington state had the biggest decrease in its child poverty rate, while California saw the biggest decrease in the number of children living in poverty

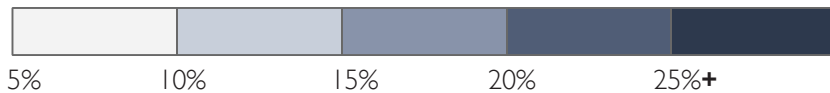


Data: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2018, Table B17006, "Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months of Related Children under 18 Years by Family Type"

- » States in the south and southwest continue to have higher rates of child poverty than the rest of the country. Due to the structural barriers faced by children in Puerto Rico in accessing anti-poverty programs, such as limited access to SNAP and the Child Tax Credit, Puerto Rico continues to have a child poverty rate more than twice that of any state
- » The 10 states with the lowest child poverty rates are more geographically diverse – North Dakota, Utah, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maryland, Minnesota, Colorado, Hawaii, Washington and Nebraska.



SHARE OF CHILDREN IN POVERTY IN 2018



*Data: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2018, Table B17006, "Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months of Related Children under 18 Years by Family Type"*

Finally, it is important to note that when taking other factors into account, such as geographic differences in housing costs, state poverty rates look very different.

## CONCLUSION

No matter what measure is used to indicate child poverty in the United States, our rate remains high – an inexcusable trend considering that findings of a landmark study released earlier this year from the non-partisan National Academies of Sciences show that we know how to make progress. A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty puts forward a set of policy and program recommendations that, if implemented, would cut our national child poverty rate in half within a decade.

For more information, learn about First Focus on Children’s efforts to establish a national target to reach this goal through the End Child Poverty U.S. campaign at [www.endchildpovertyus.org](http://www.endchildpovertyus.org) or email Cara Baldari, Vice President of Family Economics, Housing, and Homelessness at [CaraB@firstfocus.org](mailto:CaraB@firstfocus.org)

## DATA LIMITATIONS

*Unless otherwise specified, the national numbers used in this report come from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplements, Current Population Reports, Income and Poverty in the United States: 2018. The state numbers used here come from the American Community Survey, 2018 1-Year Estimates. These numbers are generated from sampling, and as such, there is potential for error. Census recently revised its Supplemental Poverty Measure calculations for 2018, this fact sheet reflects the most current estimates. For more information on each survey, please [visit www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)*

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Valerie Wilson and Jessica Schieder, "Countries investing more in social programs have less child poverty, Economic Policy Institute, June 1, 2018  
<https://www.epi.org/publication/countries-investing-more-in-social-programs-have-less-child-poverty/>
- 2 Cara Baldari and Rachel Merker, "Millions of children at risk if government changes poverty measure," First Focus on Children, May 13, 2019,  
<https://www.firstfocus.org/blog/millions-of-children-at-risk-if-government-changes-poverty-measure>
- 3 Liana Fox, "The Supplemental Poverty Measure: 2018," U.S. Census Bureau, October, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2019/demo/p60-268.html>.