

# CRS Report for Congress

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## Trends in Poverty in the United States

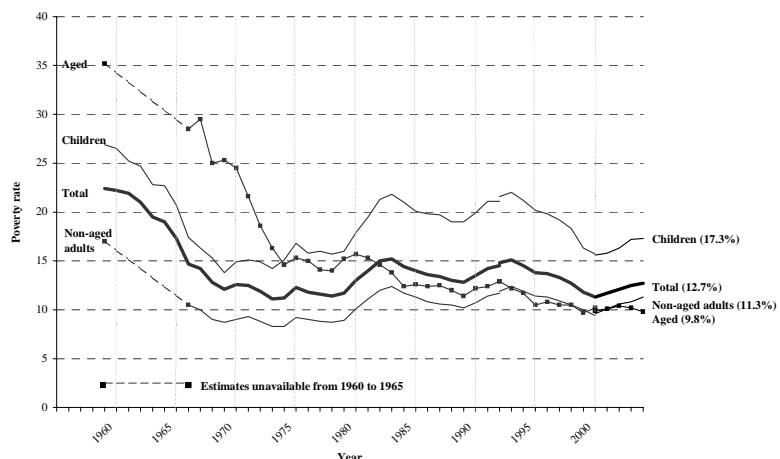
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### Summary

In 2004, 37 million people were found poor under the official poverty definition — a 1.1 million increase from 2003. The poverty rate, or percent of the population considered poor, increased for the fourth straight year, to 12.7% in 2004 — up from 12.5% in 2003, and 11.3% in 2000, its most recent low. The poverty rate in 2004 is still well below its most recent peak of 15.1%, in 1993. The highest rate recorded was 22.4% in 1959, the first year in the Census Bureau series. Persons are considered poor under the Census Bureau measure if their family's pre-tax cash income is below a poverty income threshold for a family of similar size and composition. In 2004, for example, the poverty threshold for a family of 2, averaged \$12,334 and for a family of 4, \$19,307. This report will be updated annually.

**Poverty among Selected Groups.** The poverty rate among children is higher than that of any other age group. In 2004 17.3 of all children were poor — still above the most low of 15.6% in 2000, but significantly lower than its most recent peak of 22% in 1993. Among children living in families with an absent father, 41.9% were poor, compared to 8.9% of children living in married-couple, families. In 1969, when the child poverty rate was at its historic low (13.8%), 11.4% of all children lived in families with an absent father. Although the poverty rate of children in female-headed families in 2004 is well below its 1969 level of 54.4%, the share of *all children* in such families in 2004 (23.6%) is twice what it was in 1969. In 2004, 57.2% of *all poor children* lived in female-headed families.

Figure 1. U.S. Poverty Rates by Age Group, 1959-2004



The poverty rate for the aged (persons age 65 and over) was 9.8% in 2004 — down from 10.2% in 2003. The poverty rate for the aged, once higher than that of children, dropped below the child poverty rate in 1974 and has remained below it since. The aged poverty rate in 2004 was below that of nonaged adults (11.3%) — in 1959 it was over twice that of nonaged adults.

Poverty rates among African Americans and Hispanics are persistently higher than those of white non-Hispanics. In 2004, 24.7% of blacks and 21.9% of Hispanics (who may be of any race) were poor, compared to 8.6% of non-Hispanic whites. Racial data since 2002 are not comparable to earlier years due to persons being allowed to identify themselves as being of one or more races.

**Table 1. Poverty Rates for Selected Groups, 1959-2004**

Year	All persons	Related children under age 18		Adults		Race/ethnicity <sup>a</sup> — all ages				
		Total	In female-headed families	In all other families	Ages 18-64	Age 65+	White <sup>a</sup>	White non-Hispanic <sup>a</sup>	Black <sup>a</sup>	Hispanic
2004	12.7	17.3	41.9	9.9	11.3	9.8	10.8 <sup>r</sup>	8.6 <sup>r</sup>	24.7 <sup>r</sup>	21.9
2003	12.5	17.2	41.8	9.6	10.8	10.2	10.5 <sup>r</sup>	8.2 <sup>r</sup>	24.4 <sup>r</sup>	22.5
2002	12.1	16.3	39.6	9.2	10.6	10.4	10.2 <sup>r</sup>	8.0 <sup>r</sup>	24.1 <sup>r</sup>	21.8
2001	11.7	15.8	39.3	8.8	10.1	10.1	9.9	7.8	22.7	21.4
2000r	11.3	15.6	40.1	8.6	9.6	9.9	9.5	7.4	22.5	21.5
1999	11.8	16.3	41.9	9.0	10.0	9.7	9.8	7.7	23.6	22.8
1998	12.7	18.3	46.1	9.7	10.5	10.5	10.5	8.2	26.1	25.6
1997	13.3	19.2	49.0	10.2	10.9	10.5	11.0	8.6	26.5	27.1
1996	13.7	19.8	49.3	10.9	11.3	10.8	11.2	8.6	28.4	29.4
1995	13.8	20.2	50.3	10.7	11.4	10.5	11.2	8.5	29.3	30.3
1994	14.5	21.2	52.9	11.7	11.9	11.7	11.7	9.4	30.6	30.7
1993	15.1	22.0	53.7	12.4	12.4	12.2	12.2	9.9	33.1	30.6
1992r	14.8	21.6	54.6	11.8	11.9	12.9	11.9	9.6	33.4	29.6
1991r	14.2	21.1	55.5	11.1	11.4	12.4	11.3	9.4	32.7	28.7
1990	13.5	19.9	53.4	10.7	10.7	12.2	10.7	8.8	31.9	28.1
1989	12.8	19.0	51.1	10.4	10.2	11.4	10.0	8.3	30.7	26.2
1988r	13.0	19.0	52.9	10.0	10.5	12.0	10.1	8.4	31.3	26.7
1987r	13.4	19.7	54.7	10.9	10.6	12.5	10.4	8.7	32.4	28.0
1986	13.6	19.8	54.4	10.8	10.8	12.4	11.0	9.4	31.1	27.3
1985	14.0	20.1	53.6	11.7	11.3	12.6	11.4	9.7	31.3	29.0
1984	14.4	21.0	54.0	12.5	11.7	12.4	11.5	10.0	33.8	28.4
1983	15.2	21.8	55.5	13.5	12.4	13.8	12.2	10.8	35.7	28.1
1982	15.0	21.3	56.0	13.0	12.0	14.6	12.0	10.6	35.6	29.9
1981	14.0	19.5	52.3	11.6	11.1	15.3	11.1	9.9	34.2	26.5
1980	13.0	17.9	50.8	10.4	10.1	15.7	10.2	9.1	32.5	25.7
1979	11.7	16.0	48.6	8.5	8.9	15.2	9.0	8.1	31.0	21.8
1978	11.4	15.7	50.6	7.9	8.7	14.0	8.7	7.9	30.6	21.6
1977	11.6	16.0	50.3	8.5	8.8	14.1	8.9	8.0	31.3	22.4
1976	11.8	15.8	52.0	8.5	9.0	15.0	9.1	8.1	31.1	24.7
1975	12.3	16.8	52.7	9.8	9.2	15.3	9.7	8.6	31.3	26.9
1974	11.2	15.1	51.5	8.3	8.3	14.6	8.6	7.7	30.3	23.0
1973	11.1	14.2	52.1	7.6	8.3	16.3	8.4	7.5	31.4	21.9
1972	11.9	14.9	53.1	8.6	8.8	18.6	9.0	n/a	33.3	n/a
1971	12.5	15.1	53.1	9.3	9.3	21.6	9.9	n/a	32.5	n/a
1970	12.6	14.9	53.0	9.2	9.0	24.6	9.9	n/a	33.5	n/a
1969	12.1	13.8	54.4	8.6	8.7	25.3	9.5	n/a	32.2	n/a
1968	12.8	15.3	55.2	10.2	9.0	25.0	10.0	n/a	34.7	n/a
1967	14.2	16.3	54.3	11.5	10.0	29.5	11.0	n/a	39.3	n/a
1966	14.7	17.4	58.2	12.6	10.5	28.5	11.3	n/a	41.8	n/a
1959	22.4	26.9	72.2	22.4	17.0	35.2	18.1	n/a	55.1	n/a

**Source:** Table prepared by the Congressional Research Service based on U.S. Bureau of the Census data. Current Population Reports, series P-60 and CRS tabulations of Current Population Survey data.

**Note:** Related children are children in primary families beginning in 1979. Before 1979, children in unrelated subfamilies are included as related children.

<sup>a</sup> Beginning in 2002, CPS respondents could identify themselves as being of more than one race. Consequently, racial data for 2002 and after are not comparable to earlier years. Here, in 2002 and after, the term white means of white race alone and the term black means of black race alone. Hispanics, who may be of any race, are included among whites and blacks unless otherwise noted (i.e., white non-Hispanic).

**r = Revised estimates. n/a = Not available.**