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Poverty in the United States in 2025

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SUMMARY

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Poverty in the United States in 2025

The federal government publishes poverty statistics using two measures: the *official poverty measure* and the *Supplemental Poverty Measure* (SPM). These two measures tell different stories about who is poor in the United States because they measure different things. Both measures compare the income of a family or unrelated individual with a measure of need for that same family or individual. If the income (measured in dollars) is less than the measure of need (also measured in dollars), the family or unrelated individual is considered to be in poverty; if the income is greater than or equal to the measure of need, the family or individual is classified as not being in poverty. The measures differ as to what is counted as income or included in the measure of need: The SPM generally incorporates a broader conception of family unit, need, and income.

For the official measure in 2025, the poverty rate—the percentage of people in poverty—fell to 10.2%, representing 34.5 million people in the United States who lived in poverty, down from 10.7% in 2024. Under the SPM, the poverty rate registered no change from the previous year, at 13.1%. The SPM principally differs from the official poverty measure in that the SPM takes account of taxes, work expenses, and noncash resources in ways the official measure does not. Specifically, the SPM poverty rate reflects the cost of housing (which is included in the SPM's computation of basic needs), the amounts received among certain noncash benefits and refundable tax credits, and work-related expenses, which, in 2025, partially offset the incomes gained as more persons worked.

Both sets of poverty estimates provide policymakers with views of the most economically vulnerable segments of the U.S. population. Official poverty estimates offer a comparison of economic conditions over a nearly 70-year period, with a focus on how populations with low cash income have fared, and offer comparisons by demographic group over a long period. In comparison to the official measure, the SPM estimates are based on newer methods and data sources and more current spending patterns, are geographically adjusted to reflect variations in housing costs, and take account of a wider range of government interventions that affect low-income families.

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Introduction

The federal government publishes poverty statistics using two measures: the official poverty measure and the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM). These two measures tell different stories about who is poor in the United States, because they measure different things. Both measures compare the resources of a family or unrelated individual with a measure of need for that same family or individual. If the resources (using some definition of *income*, measured in dollars) are less than the measure of need (a "poverty threshold," also measured in dollars), the family or unrelated individual is considered to be in poverty; if resources are greater than or equal to the measure of need, the family or individual is classified as not being in poverty. The measures differ as to what is counted as resources or included in the measure of need:

- Under the official poverty measure, the measure of need was originally computed using family expenditure data from 1955 and food costs in 1962. These computations used the cost of a tightly constrained food budget and the average share of family income that was spent on food to represent the overall income amounts (the poverty thresholds) at which a family whose basic needs overall might have been similarly constrained. These official poverty thresholds have been updated annually for inflation. For the resources necessary to meet that level of need, the official poverty measure counts income in the form of cash only, before taxes—meaning that tax credits and the monetary value of noncash benefits are not counted.
- Under the SPM, the measure of need is based on recent spending data from the Consumer Expenditure Survey as opposed to being computed once and indexed forward for inflation (as is done for the official measure).[1] The data are used to find the median amount that families spent on food, clothing, shelter, utilities, and telephone and internet service. That dollar amount is multiplied by 0.83, to reflect a low family budget for those items, then multiplied by 1.2, to allow for other items a family may need to purchase (such as personal care products), with additional adjustments for homeownership status, geography, and family size. For the resources necessary to meet that level of need, the SPM uses after-tax income (which includes tax credits), estimates the value of certain noncash benefits (such as food assistance), and subtracts some expenditures (such as work-related expenses, child care expenses, and medical expenses paid out of pocket) that families cannot use toward the categories of basic needs that are used to define the SPM poverty level. This approach was intended to better reflect the economic choices families currently face, and to better reflect the effects of government programs on the low-income population, than does the official measure.

The SPM differs from the official poverty measure in that the SPM takes account of taxes, work expenses, and noncash resources in ways the official measure does not: The SPM poverty rate reflects the cost of housing (which is included in the SPM's computation of basic needs and is geographically adjusted), the amounts received among certain noncash benefits and refundable tax credits, and work-related expenses that partially offset the incomes gained as more persons worked. For the official measure in 2025, the "poverty rate"—the percentage of people in poverty—fell to 10.2%, representing 34.5 million people who lived in poverty, down from 10.7%

[1] The SPM poverty thresholds for 2025 are based on five years (20 quarters) of spending data from the Quarterly Consumer Expenditure Survey Interview data, from 2020 quarter 2 through 2025 quarter 1.

in 2024.[2] Under the SPM, the poverty rate was 13.1% and did not register any change from the previous year.

This report presents a general overview of poverty in the United States. It introduces the concepts and data sources used in defining and measuring poverty. It then offers a historical perspective on poverty at the national level by presenting trend data on the official poverty measure. Next, the report focuses on poverty by demographic group, mainly by comparing 2025 estimates with 2024 estimates, along the following characteristics:

- family structure, because poverty is defined according to the composition, needs, and income of families and because antipoverty interventions have often been targeted to families;
- age, because age groups vary in the types and sources of income available to them and because congressional policymaking has often focused on children and the aged population;
- race and Hispanic origin, because poverty rates among these demographic groups historically have had wide differences; and
- work status, because economic well-being is typically tied to the current or past work of oneself or one's family members.

State poverty rates are then presented to provide a geographical perspective on poverty throughout the United States. Lastly, the report describes the SPM and illustrates how the SPM offers a different view of poverty from the official measure. This different view is particularly relevant for examining the impact on poverty of the refundable tax credits and other measures Congress uses to provide assistance to persons with low income.

Poverty Data as Estimates: Survey Data Collection and Poverty Measure Definitions

The numbers and percentages of people in poverty presented in this report are based on the Census Bureau's estimates.[3] While the official measure has been regarded as a historically consistent benchmark rather than a complete description of what people and families need to live,[4] it offers a measure of economic hardship faced by the low-income population. The poverty measure compares family income with a dollar amount called a "poverty threshold," a level below which the family is considered to be poor. The Census Bureau releases these poverty estimates every September for the prior calendar year. Most of the comparisons discussed in this report are year to year. The report considers a number or percentage to have changed from the

[2] The Census Bureau had revised estimates for 2024 to reflect revised population control totals. The 2024 figure had previously been reported as 10.6%.

[3] The national-level data in this report were obtained from Christina Bijou and Emily A. Shrider, *Poverty in the United States: 2025*, U.S. Census Bureau, September 15, 2026, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2026/demo/p60-290.html; and the detailed tabulations and the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC) public use file that accompanied the release of that report.

[4] "While the thresholds, in some sense, represent the needs of families, they should be interpreted as a statistical yardstick rather than as a complete description of what people and families need to live" (Bijou and Shrider, *Poverty in the United States: 2025*, p. 11). The characterization of the poverty measure as a statistical yardstick goes back decades. See, for example, *Chicago Tribune*, "U.S. Changes Yardstick on Who Is Poor," May 3, 1965, p. 4.

previous year, or to be different from another number or percentage, only if the difference is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.[5]

How the Official Poverty Measure Is Computed

The Census Bureau determines a person's poverty status by comparing his or her resources with a measure of need. For the official measure, the term *resources* is defined as total family income before taxes, and the measure of "need" is a dollar amount called a "poverty threshold." There are 48 poverty thresholds, which vary by family size and composition. If a person lives with other people to whom he or she is related by birth, marriage, or adoption, the money income from all family members is used to determine his or her poverty status. If a person does not live with any family members, his or her own income is used. Only "money income" before taxes is used in calculating the official poverty measure, meaning this measure does not treat in-kind benefits—such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps), housing subsidies, or employer-provided benefits—as income. Because the official measure uses income before taxes, it also excludes refundable tax credits, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC), as well as stimulus payments that were made as refundable tax credits.

The poverty threshold dollar amounts vary by the size of the family (from one person not living in a family to nine or more family members living together) and the ages of the family members (how many of the members are children under 18 and whether the family head is 65 or older). Collectively, these poverty thresholds are often referred to as the *poverty line*. As a rough guide, the poverty line in 2025 can be thought of as $32,970 for a family of four; $25,590 for a family of three; $20,730 for a family of two; or $16,330 for an individual not living in a family, although the official measure is actually much more detailed.[6]

The threshold dollar amounts are updated annually for inflation using the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers. The same thresholds are applied throughout the country: No adjustment is made for geographic variations in living expenses.[7]

The official poverty measure used in this report is the federal government's definition of *poverty* for statistical purposes, such as comparing the number or percentage in poverty over time. A

[5] Not every apparent difference in point estimates is a real difference. The official poverty measure uses information from the CPS ASEC, which samples about 95,000 addresses nationwide. All poverty data discussed here are therefore estimates, which have margins of error. *Error* in this case refers to a difference from the true data that is caused by using a sample instead of the entire population, not mistakes in computation or biases from imperfect data collection or processing. Even if a survey were implemented perfectly and had collected complete and accurate information from all respondents in the sample, surveying a different sample would likely yield slightly different estimates of the poverty population or the poverty rate. Thus, even if the true poverty rate were exactly the same in two different years, it is possible to get survey estimates that appear different. To report that a change has occurred in the poverty rate—that is, that the difference between the estimates is likely not caused by sampling variability—the difference has to be large enough that fewer than 10% of all possible survey samples would produce a difference that large (and, conversely, 90% of the samples would not). Such a difference is said to be statistically significant at the 90% confidence level. Point estimates with differences that are not statistically significant are described as such in this report.

[6] To provide a general sense of the poverty line, the Census Bureau computes weighted averages of the thresholds within each family size. For example, a family of three may consist of any of the following combinations: three adults, two adults and one child, or one adult and two children. Each combination has its own distinct threshold. The $25,590 figure cited represents an average of those family combinations, adjusted to reflect that some types of three-person families are more common than others. The averages are a convenience for the reader but are not actually used to compute poverty status for statistical reports. In actual computations, 48 thresholds are used in the official measure.

[7] Unlike the poverty thresholds that are used to compute official poverty statistics, the Department of Health and Human Services poverty guidelines used for administrative purposes include separate amounts for Alaska and Hawaii.

related definition of *poverty*—the poverty guidelines published by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)—is used for administrative purposes, such as determining eligibility for assistance programs, and will not be discussed in this report.[8]

The SPM: Its Relevance in Relation to the Official Measure

Over the past several decades, criticisms of the official poverty measure have led to the development of an alternative research measure called the SPM, which the Census Bureau also computes and releases. Statistics comparing the official measure with the SPM are provided at the conclusion of this report. As noted earlier, the SPM includes adjustments to reflect geographic variations in housing costs and the estimated effects of taxes and in-kind benefits (such as housing, energy, and food assistance) on poverty, while the official measure does not. The SPM also takes a more expansive approach than the official measure does in recognizing relationships among household members for the purpose of identifying how those members share costs and pool resources. Furthermore, while one-time payments such as economic stimuli are not considered as part of the official definition of *income*, these payments are considered as resources in the SPM. Because some types of tax credits and noncash benefits provide financial help to families and individuals with low incomes, the SPM may be of interest to policymakers.

The official measure provides a comparison of the population below poverty over a longer period than does the SPM, including some years before many current antipoverty assistance programs had been developed.[9]

Historical Perspective Under the Official Poverty Measure

Figure 1 shows the number and percentage of the population estimated to be below the official poverty line from the earliest year in which these data were available (1959) through the most recent (2025). Because the total U.S. population has grown over time, poverty rates are useful for historical comparisons because they control for population growth. The U.S. official poverty rate in 2025 is the lowest recorded since its measurement began.[10]

[8] The official poverty measure described in this report was established in the Office of Management and Budget's Statistical Policy Directive 14, May 1978, reproduced on the Census Bureau's website at https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty/about/history-of-the-poverty-measure/omb-stat-policy-14.html. It states that the official measure is to be used for statistical purposes but should not be construed as required for administrative purposes. The HHS poverty guidelines were developed for administrative purposes—they are a simplification of the official poverty thresholds. For details, see CRS Report R44780, *An Introduction to Poverty Measurement*, by Joseph Dalaker.

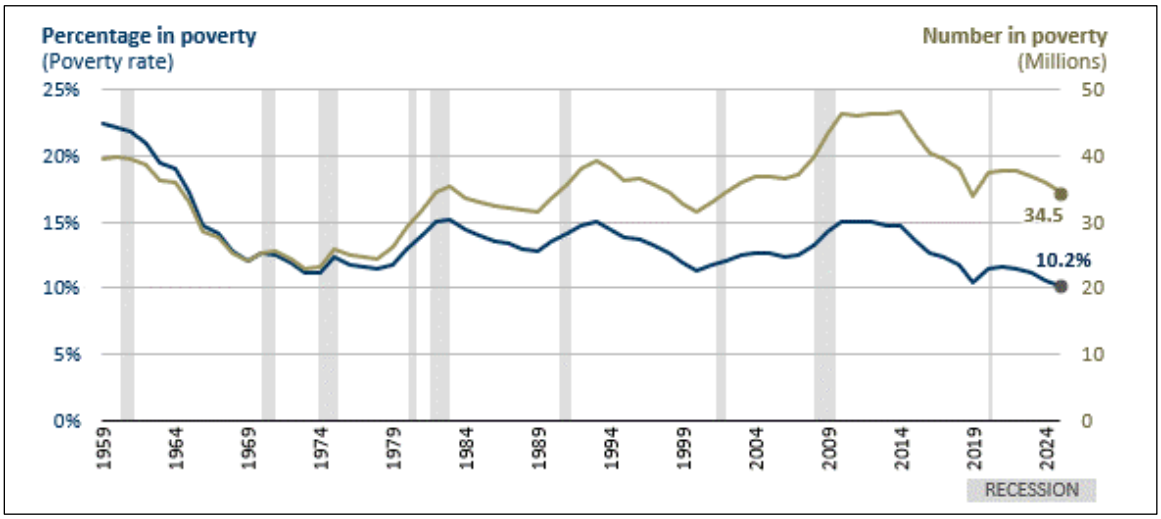
[9] While their methodology is not discussed in this report, researchers at Columbia University have developed a historical SPM, which estimates what the SPM would have been in previous years before the data necessary for computing the SPM according to current methods were available. See Columbia University, Center on Poverty and Social Policy, "Historical Supplemental Policy Measure Data," https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/historical-spm-data.

[10] Since 2020, poverty rate estimates have been biased downward, and income estimates biased upward, due to lower response rates. The CPS ASEC had households that did not respond to the survey before 2020 as well, but the bias to income and poverty estimates resulting from nonresponse increased during the pandemic and has not returned to pre-pandemic levels. See Adam Bee and Jonathan Rothbaum, "Using Administrative Data to Evaluate Nonresponse Bias in the 2026 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement," *Research Matters* (blog), U.S. Census Bureau, September 15, 2026, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/research-matters/2026/09/evaluating-nonresponse-bias.html.

Poverty rates fell through the 1960s. Since then, they have generally risen and fallen according to the economic cycle, though during the two expansions prior to the pandemic, official poverty rates did not fall measurably until four to six years into the expansion. The current economic expansion registered a year-to-year decrease in the poverty rate three years after the end of the latest recession: The most recent recession occurred from February to April 2020, and the current expansion began in May 2020. During the first two years since then, the official poverty rate did not decline from year to year.[11] In addition to the 10.2% rate in 2025, historically notable lows in the official poverty rate occurred in 1973 (11.1%), 2000 (11.3%), and 2019 (10.5%).[12] Peaks occurred in 1983 (15.2%), 1993 (15.1%), and 2010 (15.1%).[13]

Poverty rates tend to rise during and after recessions, as opposed to leading economic indicators such as new housing construction, which often change before the overall economy does. The poverty rate's lag is explainable in part by the way it is measured: It uses income from the entire calendar year.[14]

Figure 1. Official Poverty Rate and Number of Persons in Poverty: 1959-2025



Sources: CRS, based on online data from Table 3, "Poverty Status of People by Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin Using the Official Poverty Measure: 1959 to 2025," https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/p60/290/table_3_opm_hist.xlsx, accompanying Christina Bijou and Emily A. Shrider, *Poverty in the United States: 2025*, U.S. Census Bureau, September 15, 2026, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2026/demo/p60-290.html. Recession dates were obtained from the National Bureau of Economic Research, "US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions," https://www.nber.org/research/data/us-business-cycle-expansions-and-contractions.

[11] As noted earlier, the SPM illustrates a different picture—one in which poverty rates fell in 2021 and rose in 2022 and 2023—because it measures the effects of taxes, tax credits (which include stimulus payments during the pandemic and expansions to the CTC), and noncash benefits (including expansions to food assistance programs), while the official measure does not. This will be discussed further in the "Supplemental Poverty Measure" section.

[12] The rate in 2019 had previously been lowest numerically but suffered from nonresponse bias that resulted from the stoppage of in-person interviews in 2020 as a safety precaution during the COVID-19 pandemic. As of the date of this report, CPS ASEC nonresponse rates have not returned to pre-pandemic levels (see Bee and Rothbaum, "Using Administrative Data to Evaluate Nonresponse Bias"). Before 2019, the poverty rates in 1973 and 2000 had been considered to be tied for the lowest measured poverty rate because they are not statistically different from each other.

[13] These poverty rates may not necessarily be distinguishable from the poverty rates in their adjacent years. See footnote 5 for an explanation of statistical significance.

[14] For further historical information about poverty and recessions, see CRS Report R45854, *Trends in the U.S. Poverty Rate after Recessions*, by Joseph Dalaker; and CRS Report R46939, *Underemployment, Recessions, and Poverty*, by Joseph Dalaker.

Notes: The 2019 and 2020 estimates were biased downward because of increased nonresponse associated with telephone-only interviewing during the pandemic. Response rates since the pandemic did not return to their pre-pandemic levels. (For details, see Adam Bee and Jonathan Rothbaum, "Using Administrative Data to Evaluate Nonresponse Bias in the 2026 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement," *Research Matters* [blog], U.S. Census Bureau, September 15, 2026, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/research-matters/2026/09/evaluating-nonresponse-bias.html.) A summary of previous methodological changes to the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement and the poverty measure, with references to technical descriptions of the changes, is available in Social Security Administration, *Annual Statistical Supplement, 2022*, Appendix C, https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/supplement/2022/apnc.pdf.

Official Poverty by Demographic Group

The decline in the official poverty rate in 2025 was not universal but occurred among a few demographic groups. Discussed below are the declines among children, adults 18-64, female-householder families, people who identify as Hispanic, and full-time year-round workers in the context of broader demographic trends.

Family Structure

Because poverty status is determined at the family level by comparing resources with a measure of need, vulnerability to poverty may differ among families of different compositions. In this section, poverty data by family structure are presented using the official poverty measure, with *family* defined as persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption to the householder (the person in whose name the home is owned or rented). In the "Supplemental Poverty Measure" section of this report, a different definition will be used.

In general, women have higher poverty rates than men: 11.1% compared with 9.2% in 2025. Historically, families with a female householder and no spouse present (*female-householder families*) have had higher poverty rates than both married-couple families and families with a male householder and no spouse present (*male-householder families*).[15] This remained true in 2025: The poverty rate among female-householder families was 20.0%, compared with 11.0% for male-householder families and 4.1% for married-couple families (**Figure 2**).

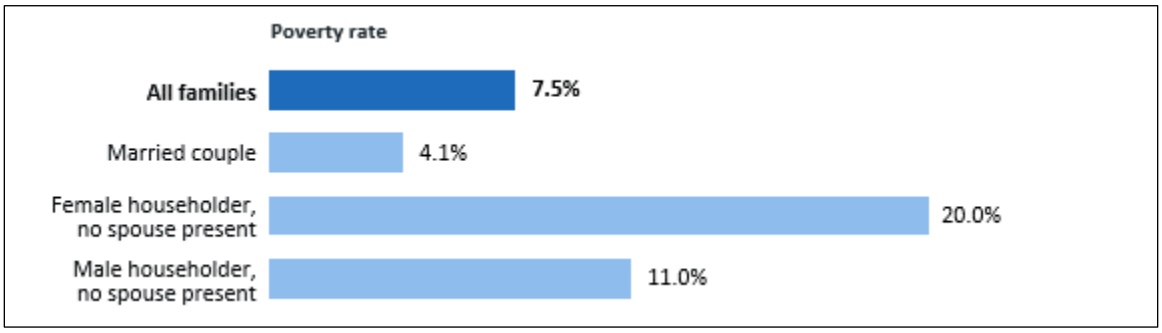
The 2025 female-householder poverty rate is the latest in a series of lower poverty rates for this group, compared with their rates in previous decades (see **Figure 3**). Poverty rates for female-householder families are available from 1959 onward. Until 1964, the rates for this group were estimated to be above 40%. From 1964 through 1997, poverty rates for female-householder families were between 30% and 40%, and from 1998 to 2014, they hovered close to or below 30% except during the years following the Great Recession, when they peaked above 30%. From 2015 to 2025, the poverty rates for this group remained below 30%.[16]

[15] One demographic group may have a higher poverty rate than another due to lower income, higher poverty thresholds (which in the official measure are determined by family size), or a combination of the two. For working-age people, earnings is a large component of income. For a discussion of the lower earnings of women compared with men, see CRS In Focus IF10414, *The Gender Earnings Gap*, by Sarah A. Donovan. The historically lower earnings and work opportunities for women have prompted Congress's attention through the decades to the economic vulnerability of families headed by a woman with no husband present, such as for families in which the father is deceased or in which the mother never married. For a brief historical review of congressional policymaking around monetary assistance to families, including (among other issues) changes in policy with respect to monetary assistance for single mothers, see CRS Report R49012, *PRWORA at 30: TANF*, by Patrick A. Landers. A more thorough discussion of changes in policy since 1909 is available in Appendix A of the archived CRS Report R41917, *Welfare, Work, and Poverty Status of Female-Headed Families with Children: 1987-2013*, by Thomas Gabe.

[16] While their poverty rates fell, women experienced a faster cycling into and out of poverty in 2001 compared with (continued...)

The poverty rate for persons living alone or with nonfamily members only was 19.0% in 2025, not statistically different from 2024.

Figure 2. Official Poverty Rates of Families by Family Structure: 2025



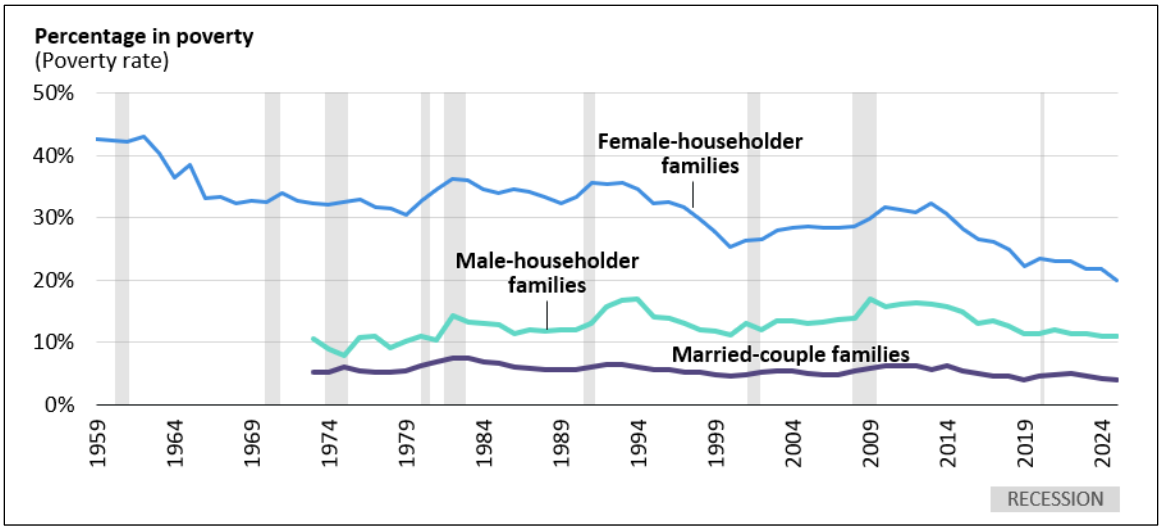
Source: CRS, based on poverty data from Table 2, "Number and Percentage of Families and People in Poverty by Type of Family Using the Official Poverty Measure: 2024 and 2025," https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/p60/290/table_2_opm_family.xlsx, accompanying Christina Bijou and Emily A. Shrider, *Poverty in the United States: 2025*, U.S. Census Bureau, September 15, 2026, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2026/demo/p60-290.html.

Notes: The poverty rates above include only families with a householder (the survey's reference person for the household, typically the person in whose name the home is owned or rented). The Census Bureau defines *family* as people living together who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption.

1990. Economists David Card and Rebecca Blank used the Survey of Income and Program Participation—a survey that interviewed the same persons every month over multiple years—to compare the likelihood of women ages 18-62 to enter a *poverty spell* (two months or more in poverty) in 2001 compared with 1990. They explained, "Over the 1990s, average annual poverty rates fell, especially among female-headed families, while earnings rose. Surprisingly, we find that the incidence of poverty spells actually increased at the same time, especially among single heads. Poverty spells were more frequent but they were also less persistent. Women entered poverty from higher income levels and recovered more quickly, mainly through more rapid increases in labor market earnings following the initial dip at the start of the poverty spell." David Card and Rebecca M. Blank, "The Changing Incidence and Severity of Poverty Spells Among Female-Headed Families," *American Economic Review*, vol. 98, no. 2 (May 2008) pp. 387-391, http://www.aeaweb.org/articles.php?doi=10.1257/aer.98.2.387.

Writing in 1997, analyst Carolyn Rogers observed social and economic trends that seemed to portend these later changes, noting (among other trends) delayed childbearing and greater labor force participation, although she also noted that the trends were not as prevalent for women outside of metropolitan areas as for those living within them. She explained, "Changes in marriage and childbearing, educational attainment, labor force attachment, and occupational placement all contributed to narrowing the gender earnings gap. As these trends continue, gender differences in wages in the 1990's should narrow more than in the 1970's. In addition, declining discrimination toward women in the labor market, as a direct result of government activities and changing societal attitudes, will contribute to higher earnings for women. While affirmative action helps, the upgrading of women's relative position in the labor force over time has been, and continues to be, a gradual process." Carolyn C. Rogers, "Changes in the Social and Economic Status of Women by Metro-Nonmetro Residence," U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, February 1, 1997, https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/42124.

Figure 3. Official Poverty Rates of Families by Family Structure: 1959-2025



Source: CRS, based on poverty data from Table 4, "Poverty Status of Families by Type of Family and Presence of Related Children, Race, and Hispanic Origin," https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/tables/time-series/historical-poverty-people/hstpov4.xlsx, in *Historical Poverty Tables: People and Families—1959 to 2025,* released concurrently with Christina Bijou and Emily A. Shrider, *Poverty in the United States: 2025*, U.S. Census Bureau, September 15, 2026, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2026/demo/p60-290.html.

Notes: Before 1979, unrelated subfamilies were included in all families. Since 1979, unrelated subfamilies have been excluded from all families. *Unrelated subfamily* is defined as a married couple family with or without children or a single parent with one or more own, never-married children under the age of 18 living in the household and not related by birth, marriage or adoption to the householder. Data for male-householder families (formerly called male-headed families) and married-couple families are not available before 1973.

Age

When poverty is examined by age, the three main groups (under 18, 18-64, and 65 and older) are noteworthy for distinct reasons. People under age 18, particularly young children below their state's legal working age, are typically dependent on other family members for income. People ages 18-64—referred to hereinafter as the "working-age" population—typically have wages and salaries as their greatest source of income. People age 65 and older, referred to as the "aged population," are often eligible for retirement benefits, and those who do retire typically experience changes in their primary sources of income, such as from earnings to Social Security.

Figure 4 illustrates poverty rates historically by age, because the overall poverty rate (seen in **Figure 1**) masks the historical decline in poverty among the aged population. Before 1974, the poverty rate for people age 65 and over was the highest of the three age groups. In 1966, people age 65 and over had a poverty rate of 28.5%, compared with 17.6% for people under 18 and 10.5% for working-age adults. By 1974, the poverty rate for people age 65 and over had fallen to 14.6%, compared with 15.4% for people under 18 and 8.3% for working-age adults. This decline is mainly attributable to expansions to Social Security benefits during the late 1960s and early 1970s.[17] Since then, people under 18 have had the highest poverty rate of the three age groups.[18]

[17] For a synopsis of changes to Social Security law over time, see CRS Report RL30920, *Social Security: Major Decisions in the House and Senate Since 1935*, by Tamar B. Breslauer and William R. Morton.

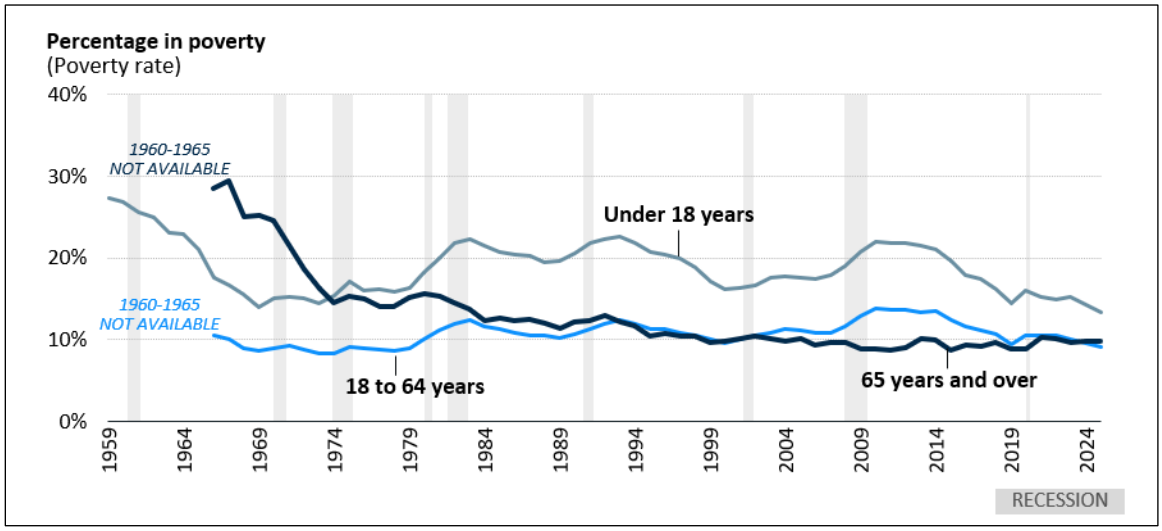
[18] Historically, children under six have been more vulnerable to poverty than children as a whole. For instance, in the aftermath of the Great Recession in 2010, children under six related to their householder registered a poverty rate of (continued...)

The poverty rate among the 65-and-older population eventually fell below the poverty rate of the working-age population and, except for an uptick in 2021, has trended below that group since the early 2000s.

Official poverty rates fell for children and working-age adults from 2024 to 2025, while the aged experienced no poverty rate decline. Official poverty rates in 2025 were 13.4% for children (down from 14.3% in 2024), 9.2% for the working-age population (down from 9.6% in 2024), and 9.8% for the aged population.

If poverty rates for these groups are examined using the SPM, the picture changes markedly. The official poverty measure uses family income before taxes and thus does not count refundable tax credits or noncash benefits, nor does it subtract medical or work-related expenses, all of which affect age groups in different ways. These differences are discussed in the "Official and Supplemental Poverty Findings for 2025" section.

Figure 4. Official Poverty Rates by Age: 1959-2025



Sources: CRS, based on data from Table 3, "Poverty Status of People by Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1959 to 2025," https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/tables/time-series/historical-poverty-people/hstpov3.xlsx, in *Historical Poverty Tables: People and Families—1959 to 2025,* released concurrently with Christina Bijou and Emily A. Shrider, *Poverty in the United States: 2025*, U.S. Census Bureau, September 15, 2026, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2026/demo/p60-290.html. Recession dates were obtained from the National Bureau of Economic Research, "US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions," https://www.nber.org/research/data/us-business-cycle-expansions-and-contractions.

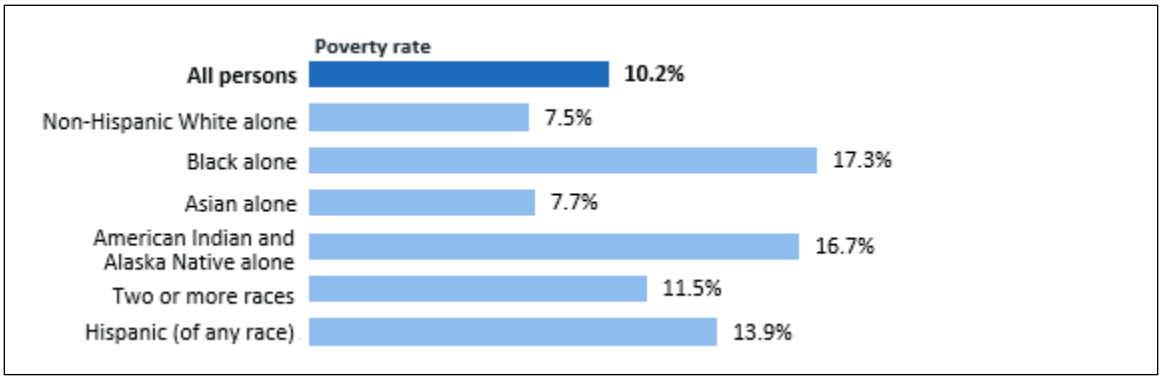
Notes: The 2019 and 2020 estimates were biased downward because of increased nonresponse associated with telephone-only interviewing during the pandemic. Response rates since the pandemic did not return to their pre-pandemic levels. (For details, see Adam Bee and Jonathan Rothbaum, "Using Administrative Data to Evaluate Nonresponse Bias in the 2026 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement," *Research Matters* [blog], U.S. Census Bureau, September 15, 2026, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2026/demo/p60-290.html.) A summary of previous methodological changes to the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement and the poverty measure, with references to technical descriptions of the changes, is available in Social Security Administration, *Annual Statistical Supplement, 2022*, Appendix C, https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/supplement/2022/apnc.pdf.

25.3%, or 3.3 percentage points greater than the 22.0% for all persons under age 18 that year. In 2025, the difference was narrower—0.8 percentage points (14.2% for related children under six versus 13.4% for all persons under 18)—but still statistically significant.

Race and Hispanic Origin[19]

Poverty rates vary by race and Hispanic origin, as shown in **Figure 5**. In surveys, Hispanic origin is asked separately from race. Accordingly, people identifying as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race.[20] The poverty rate for the population identifying as Hispanic fell from 15.1% in 2024 to 13.9% in 2025. None of the other race or origin groups registered statistically significant changes in their official poverty rates.[21]

Figure 5. Official Poverty Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin: 2025



Source: CRS, based on data from Table 1, "Number and Percentage of People in Poverty Using the Official Poverty Measure: 2024 and 2025," https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/p60/290/table_1_opm_person.xlsx, accompanying Christina Bijou and Emily A. Shrider, *Poverty in the United States: 2025*, U.S. Census Bureau, September 15, 2026, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2026/demo/p60-290.html.

Notes: People of Hispanic origin may be of any race. Additionally, respondents may identify with one or more racial groups. Except for "All persons," "Two or more races," and "Hispanic," the remaining groups shown include those who identified with one race only. The "Non-Hispanic White alone" group includes only the White non-Hispanic population, while the "Black alone," "Asian alone," and "American Indian and Alaska Native alone" groups include persons who identify as Hispanic. Data for Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders are not shown separately.

Work Status

Earnings from work are an important source of income for many individuals and families. The poverty rates among workers have historically been and continue to be lower than among

[19] Since 2002, federal surveys have asked respondents to identify with one or more races. Previously, they could choose only one. Except for the two-or-more-races population and the Hispanic population, the racial categories listed in this section include those identifying with one race only. Another approach is to include those who selected each race group either alone or in combination with one or more other races. Those data are also available on the Census Bureau's website at https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2026/demo/p60-290.html, where they are published in Bijou and Shrider, *Poverty in the United States: 2025*, and in accompanying historical data tables.

[20] Hispanic origin is classified separately from race. The Asian, Black, American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and two-or-more-races populations shown in this report all include Hispanics.

[21] The Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, American Indian and Alaska Native, and two-or-more-races populations are smaller than the other groups shown, and as a result, their margins of error are greater than for the other groups, meaning that larger differences are required to register as statistically significant than for White, Black, or Hispanic populations. The 2025 poverty rates and margins of error for the groups with no statistically significant change were as follows: 7.5% (± 0.3) for non-Hispanic White alone, 17.3% (± 0.9) for Black alone, 7.7% (±1.0) for Asian alone; 16.7% (± 2.6) for American Indian and Alaska Native alone, 7.5% (± 3.8) for Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, and 11.5% (± 1.5) for persons who self-identified with two or more races.

nonworkers. Looking at the working-age population in 2025, 4.3% of workers were in poverty, compared with 27.3% of nonworkers. (Neither figure was statistically different from 2024.)

Workers may be broken out further into those who worked *full-time year-round*—meaning they worked at least 50 weeks in the year (including paid vacations and sick leave) for at least 35 hours per week—and those who worked less than full-time year-round. To have worked less than full-time year-round, a person must have worked at least one week but for fewer than 50 weeks, fewer than 35 hours per week, or both: These are *part-time or part-year* workers. Among the working-age population, full-time year-round workers experienced a poverty rate of 1.6% in 2025 (down from 1.8% in 2024), while for part-time or part-year workers, the poverty rate was 11.8% (not statistically different from 2024). Thus, having a job reduces the likelihood of being in poverty but does not guarantee that a person would avoid poverty.

While those data focused on the poverty status of working-age individuals and whether they had jobs, poverty is not limited to the working-age population. Most children (defined for this report as all persons under age 18) cannot earn a living and are dependent on older family members' income. Most persons age 65 and older are considered to be retirement age. While many in the aged population can and do work, programs such as Social Security were put in place to ensure that a basic level of income could be provided for the aged who no longer want to or are unable to work. Further, persons in the working-age population may not be able to work because they are caring for other family members, need care themselves, or cannot find jobs. These populations are not insulated from the effects of poverty: Their family income—and in turn their poverty status—is affected by the earnings of other family members. For that reason, **Table 1** examines the entire population by the number of working family members and whether those family members worked full-time year-round or part-time or part-year. **Table 1** is intended to illustrate the effects of work on poverty throughout the entire population and not just on those who are able to work.[22]

Table 1. Persons by Number and Type of Workers in Family and Poverty Status: 2025

	Below Poverty		Not in Poverty		Total	
Number and Type of Workers in Family	Number (Thousands)	%	Number (Thousands)	%	Number (Thousands)	%
0 workers	18,331	30.8	41,114	69.2	59,445	100.0
0 full-time year-round, 1 or more part-time or part-year	9,871	22.8	33,512	77.3	43,382	100.0
1 full-time year-round, 0 part-time or part-year	4,933	5.6	83,787	94.4	88,720	100.0
1 full-time year-round, 1 or more part-time or part-year	1,075	2.2	48,866	97.9	49,941	100.0

[22] Individuals 15 and older who do not live in families are included in **Table 1**. They are treated as being in one-person families. They may appear in one of the first three rows of the table because they themselves may be a nonworker (no workers in family), a part-time or part-year worker (no full-time year-round, one part-time or part-year), or a full-time year-round worker (one full-time year-round, no part-time or part-year). Individuals under 15 who do not live in families (such as foster children or children living in institutions) do not have a measured official poverty status and are thus excluded from the table.

Number and Type of Workers in Family	Below Poverty		Not in Poverty		Total	
	Number (Thousands)	%	Number (Thousands)	%	Number (Thousands)	%
2 or more full-time year-round	295	0.3	96,348	99.7	96,643	100.0
All persons	34,505	10.2	303,626	89.8	338,131	100.0

Source: CRS computations using data from the U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey: 2026 Annual Social and Economic Supplement*, public use data file.

Notes: Details may not sum to totals because of rounding. Full-time year-round: someone who has worked at least 50 weeks (including sick leave and paid vacations) for at least 35 hours per week in the calendar year. Part-time or part-year: someone who has worked at least 1 week but fewer than 50 weeks, fewer than 35 hours per week, or both.

As can be seen in **Table 1**, poverty rates decrease as the number of workers in the family or their hours or weeks worked increases (from 30.8% for those who did not live with any workers in 2025 and were not workers themselves to 0.3% for those in families with two or more full-time year-round workers). Of the 34.5 million persons living in poverty in 2024, approximately 28.2 million lived alone or in families without any full-time workers (the first two rows of the table). Nearly all of those living in poverty lived with fewer than two full-time year-round workers.

Poverty Rates by State

Poverty is not equally prevalent in all parts of the country. Using three-year average estimates from the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS) (CPS ASEC) for calendar years 2023-2025, **Figure 6** shows states with relatively high poverty rates across parts of the Appalachians, the Southwest, the Mississippi Delta and the Southeast, as well as in New York and Michigan, compared with the 10.7% estimated for the nation's poverty rate. Three-year averages are used in order to reduce the statistical uncertainty for the state-level estimates, because the CPS ASEC was designed to produce national-level estimates.[23]

Among the states and the District of Columbia, the poverty rate in Louisiana (19.6% ± 1.5), seemingly the highest, was not statistically distinguishable from the rate in Mississippi (17.6% ± 1.2). The poverty rate in New Hampshire (5.4% ± 0.9) was the lowest.[24] When poverty rates are compared geographically, the official poverty thresholds are not adjusted for geographic variations in the cost of living—the same thresholds are used nationwide. Thus, an area with a lower cost of living accompanied by lower wages will appear to have a higher poverty rate than

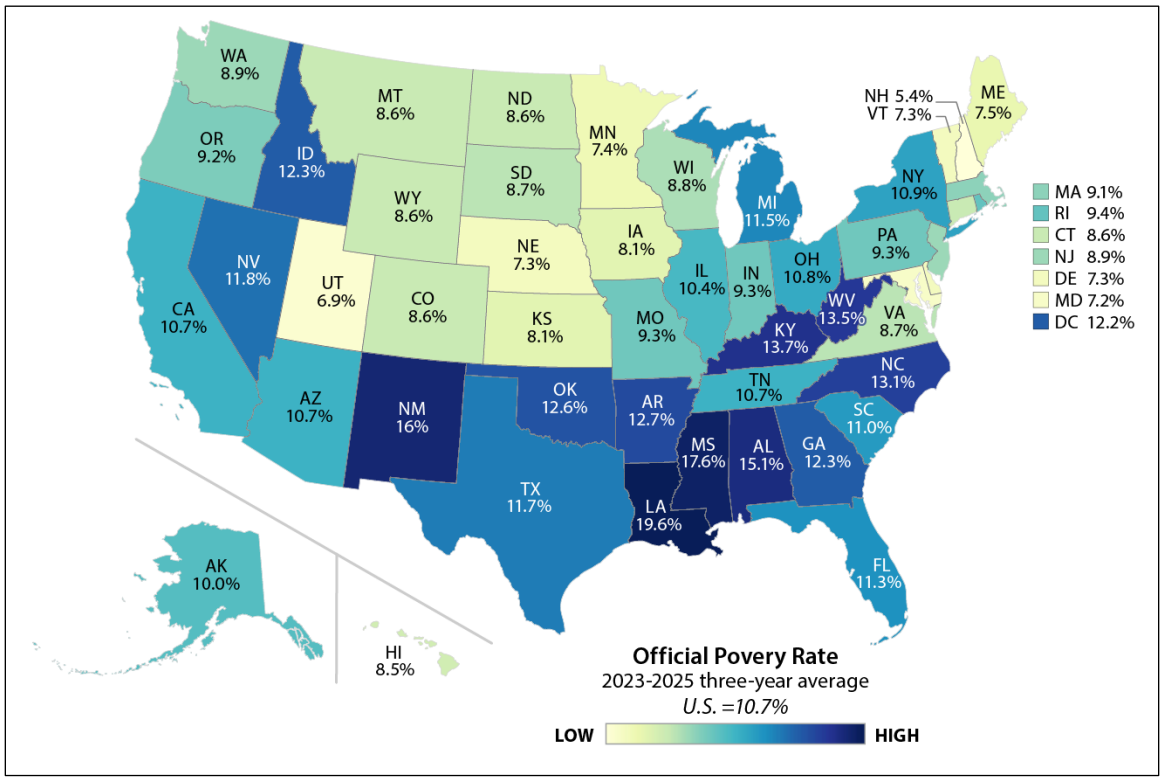
[23] Typically, the Census Bureau recommends the American Community Survey (ACS) for estimates at the state level and smaller areas because it has the largest sample size of any U.S. household survey for income and poverty statistics. The 2025 ACS one-year estimates were not released at the same time as the Census Bureau's poverty report because the Census Bureau needed to recompute those data to conform with an administrative order from the U.S. Department of Commerce (under which the Census Bureau is organized) to change the procedures it used to protect respondents' confidential data. For details see George M. Cook, "Understanding the New Disclosure Avoidance Policy: What It Means for Data, Confidentiality and You," U.S. Census Bureau, *Random Samplings* (blog), August 17, 2026, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/director/2026/08/understanding-the-new-disclosure-avoidance-policy.html, and U.S. Department of Commerce, "Disclosure Avoidance for Statistical Products," June 4, 2026, https://www.commerce.gov/opog/disclosure-avoidance-statistical-products.

[24] Data for Puerto Rico are not available from the CPS ASEC, nor are data for American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Test results for the three-year average poverty rates for each state and the District of Columbia are available in Table 15, "Interrelationships of State Official Poverty Rates Using 3-Year Average: 2023, 2024, and 2025," https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/p60/290/table_15_opm_state_grid.xlsx, accompanying Bijou and Shrider, *Poverty in the United States: 2025*."

an area with a higher cost of living and higher wages, even if individuals' purchasing power were exactly the same in both areas.

The data in **Figure 6** use the official poverty measure. State poverty rates under the SPM are discussed in the section "Official and Supplemental Poverty Findings for 2025."

Figure 6. State Official Poverty Rates: 2023-2025 Three-Year Averages



Source: CRS, using data from Table 15, "Interrelationships of State Official Poverty Rates Using 3-Year Average: 2023, 2024, and 2025," https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/p60/290/table_15_opm_state_grid.xlsx, accompanying Christina Bijou and Emily A. Shrider, *Poverty in the United States: 2025*, U.S. Census Bureau, September 15, 2026, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2026/demo/p60-290.html.

Notes: The District of Columbia is treated as a state equivalent in Census Bureau datasets. Three-year averages are used to increase the number of respondents upon which the estimates are based. The survey that was used to develop the estimates (the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement) was designed to provide national-level estimates. Poverty thresholds in the official poverty measure are not adjusted for geographic variations in costs.

Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)

Criticisms of the official poverty measure led to the development of the SPM. Described below are the development of the official measure, its limitations, attempts to remedy those limitations, the research efforts that eventually led to the SPM's first release in 2011, and a comparison of poverty rates in 2025 based on the SPM and the official measure.[25]

[25] For a more thorough discussion of the SPM's development and methodology, see CRS Report R45031, *The Supplemental Poverty Measure: Its Core Concepts, Development, and Use*, by Joseph Dalaker.

How the Official Poverty Measure Was Developed

The poverty thresholds were originally developed in the early 1960s by Mollie Orshansky of the Social Security Administration. Rather than attempt to compute a family budget by using prices for all essential items that low-income families need to live, Orshansky focused on food costs.[26] Unlike other goods and services—such as housing or transportation, which did not have a generally agreed-upon level of adequacy—minimum standards for nutrition were known and widely accepted. According to a 1955 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) food consumption survey, families spent an average of roughly one-third of their income on food. Therefore, using the cost of a minimum food budget[27] and multiplying that figure by three yielded a figure for total family income. That computation was possible because USDA had already published recommended food budgets to address the nutritional needs of families experiencing economic stress. Some additional adjustments were made to derive poverty thresholds for two-person families and individuals not living in families to reflect the relatively higher fixed costs of smaller households.

Motivation for a Supplemental Poverty Measure

While the official poverty measure has been used for 60 years as the source of official statistics on poverty in the United States, it has received criticism over the years for several reasons. First, it does not take into account benefits from most of the largest programs that aid the low-income population. For instance, it uses money income before taxes—meaning that it does not necessarily measure the income available for individuals to spend, which for most people is after-tax income. Therefore, any effects of tax credits designed to assist persons with low income are not captured by the official measure. The focus on money income also does not account for in-kind benefit programs designed to help the poor, such as SNAP or housing assistance. The official measure has also been criticized for the way it characterizes families' and individuals' needs in the poverty thresholds. That is, the method used to compute the dollar amounts used in the thresholds, which were originally based on food expenditures in the 1950s and food costs in the 1960s, does not accurately reflect current needs and available goods and services.[28] The official

[26] While Orshansky did not attempt to compute a complete basket of goods and services, her focus on food costs was already a more detailed empirical approach to poverty measurement than were the dollar amounts used in the 1964 Economic Report of the President, issued by the Council of Economic Advisers (Chapter 2, "The Problem of Poverty in America"). In that report, flat figures of $3,000 and $1,500 were used for all families and unrelated individuals, respectively. See also White House, *Economic Report of the President*, January 1964, https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/economic-report-president-45/1964-8135. For a thorough history of the official poverty measure, see Gordon Fisher, *The Development of the Orshansky Thresholds and Their Subsequent History as the Official U.S. Poverty Measure*, 1992 (revised 1997), https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/1997/demo/fisher-02.html.

[27] The stringency of this food budget, called the *Economy Food Plan*, was characterized by Betty Peterkin and Faith Clark, "Money Value and Adequacy of Diets Compared with the USDA Food Plans," *Family Economics Review*, September 1969, p. 8, https://archive.org/details/familyeconomicsr6251inst_48: "Diets were considered good if they provided the recommended allowances (1963) for all nutrients, and fair or better if they provided at least two-thirds of the allowances." They presented results of a 1965 survey of urban families indicating that less than 50% of families on the Economy Food Plan had fair or better diets (implying that at least 50% did not), while less than 10% of the families on the plan had good diets.

[28] Criticisms have been discussed in the mainstream press as well as academia. A 1988 article (Spencer Rich, "Drawing the Line Between Rich, Poor," *Washington Post*, September 23, 1988, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1988/09/23/drawing-the-line-between-rich-poor/60f5dbeb-dab3-4a42-819a-2dea34e7854e/) documented dissatisfaction about the official measure. This came from both people claiming that the poverty thresholds and their resulting poverty rate were too high—citing the measure's failure to capture the effects of in-kind benefits for the poor and its overstatement of inflation—and those claiming that they were too low based on the fact that if the thresholds (continued...)

measure also does not account for the sharing of expenses and income among household members not related by birth, marriage, or adoption. And, as mentioned earlier, the official thresholds do not take account of geographic variations in the cost of living.

In 1995, a panel from the National Academy of Sciences issued a report, *Measuring Poverty: A New Approach*, which recommended improvements to the poverty measure.[29] Among the suggested improvements were to have the poverty thresholds reflect the costs of food, clothing, shelter, utilities, and a small amount extra to allow for miscellaneous needs[30]; to broaden the definition of *family*; to include geographic adjustments as part of the measure's computation; to include the out-of-pocket costs of medical expenses in the measure's computation[31]; and to subtract work-related expenses from income. An overarching goal of the recommendations was to make the poverty measure more closely aligned with the real-life needs and available resources of the low-income population, as well as the changes that have taken place over time in their circumstances owing to changes in the nation's economy, society, and public policies (see **Table 2**).

After a decade and a half of research, which sought to implement and refine the methodology suggested by the panel and was conducted both within the Census Bureau and by other federal agencies and the academic community, the Census Bureau issued the first report using the SPM in 2011.[32]

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were derived using more recent household consumption data, they would be based on roughly five times the cost of food, not three times as Orshansky had computed in the early 1960s.

[29] Constance F. Citro and Robert T. Michael, eds., *Measuring Poverty: A New Approach* (National Academy Press, 1995), https://www.nationalacademies.org/read/4759/chapter/1.

[30] The portion of the SPM threshold that represents food, clothing, shelter, and utilities (FCSU) is set to 83% of the median FCSU expenditures among families with children, according to the Consumer Expenditure Survey, with *families* in this case defined as the consumer units measured within that survey. That amount is meant to represent a basic, modest level of FCSU. An extra 20% of that amount is then added to represent other basic needs, such as personal care products, cleaning supplies, and non-work-related transportation. Before 2020, telephone and internet were included as utilities in the Consumer Expenditure Survey. Since 2020 they have not been, and as a result they have been added to the SPM thresholds as separate components to maintain consistency (hence the reference to "FCSUti" in **Table 2**).

[31] The SPM subtracts medical out-of-pocket expenses from its measure of resources (income), but does not include health care costs as part of the poverty thresholds (the measure of need). Medical out-of-pocket expenses include, for instance, items such as health insurance premiums paid out of pocket, copayments for doctor or dentist appointments, over-the-counter medications, diagnostic tests, and medical supplies. The SPM also does not currently account for refundable premium tax credits established by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (P.L. 111-148) in its income measure. As indicated by the Office of Management and Budget, since the SPM's inception, changes to the SPM methodology have been implemented periodically after interagency working groups deliberated and made recommendations. See U.S. Census Bureau, "Observations from the Interagency Technical Working Group on Developing a Supplemental Poverty Measure," March 2010, https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/topics/income/supplemental-poverty-measure/spm-twgobservations.pdf. Census Bureau staff members continue to research how the SPM methodology may be revised to address these and other topics. See John Creamer, "Health Inclusive Poverty Measure in the United States: 2024," U.S. Census Bureau, September 9, 2025, https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2025/demo/sehsd-wp2025-14.html, and John Creamer, "Reconsidering the Medical Expense Deduction in the Supplemental Poverty Measure," U.S. Census Bureau, August 13, 2025, https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2025/demo/sehsd-wp2025-12.html.

[32] The effort to consolidate the previous research and create the SPM was done under the auspices of an interagency technical working group led by the Office of Management and Budget and received public commentary via a *Federal Register* notice (U.S. Census Bureau, "Developing a Supplemental Poverty Measure," 75 *Federal Register* 29513, May 26, 2010, https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2010/05/26/2010-12628/developing-a-supplemental-poverty-measure). The *Federal Register* notice referenced a report by the working group ("Observations from the Interagency Technical Working Group on Developing a Supplemental Poverty Measure"), which has since been moved to a new URL at https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/topics/income/supplemental-poverty-measure/spm-
(continued...)

Table 2. Differences Between the Official and Supplemental Poverty Measures

	Official Poverty Measure	Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)
Resource units (*families*)	People related by birth, marriage, or adoption (official Census Bureau definition of *family*). People age 15 and older not related to anyone else in the household are considered their own economic units.[a]	People related by birth, marriage, or adoption; unrelated and foster children; and cohabiting partners and their children or other relatives (if any) are considered "SPM resource units" (sharing resources and expenses together).
Needs (*thresholds*)	• Vary according to family size and ages of family members. • Dollar amounts based on the cost of a food plan for families in economic stress in the early 1960s multiplied by three (with adjustments for two-person families and individuals). • Updated for inflation using the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers. • No geographic cost adjustments.	• Vary according to the size and composition of the resource unit (see above). • Dollar amounts based on consumer expenditure data for food, clothing, shelter, utilities, telephone, and internet (FCSUti), with adjustments by homeownership and mortgage or rental status. • Based on five years of consumer expenditure data (not fixed at one point and trended forward), lagged one year from the most recent for consistency with the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement data available for computing in-kind benefit amounts for the SPM thresholds. • Housing costs geographically adjusted for individual metropolitan areas and entire nonmetropolitan areas within states.
Resources (*income* definition)	Money income *before* taxes (includes 18 private and government sources of income, including Social Security, cash assistance, and other sources of cash income).	Money income (both private and government sources) *after* taxes— • **minus** work expenses, child care expenses, child support paid, out-of-pocket medical expenses • **plus** tax credits (such as the Child Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit) and the value of in-kind benefits (such as food and housing subsidies) that can be used to meet FCSUti needs.

Source: CRS, using information from page 2 in Christina Bijou and Emily A. Shrider, *Poverty in the United States: 2025*, U.S. Census Bureau, September 15, 2026, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2026/demo/p60-290.html

Notes: For caveats, see the "Supplemental Poverty Measure" section of this report.

a. The Census Bureau has also computed poverty estimates under the Official+ measure, in which unrelated children under age 15 are assigned the same poverty status as their respective householders. This report uses the official poverty measure, which excludes these children.

twgobservations.pdf. The comments that the Census Bureau received on that report are available at https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/topics/income/supplemental-poverty-measure/redactedcomments.pdf. These and additional methodological documents on the SPM are available at https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/supplemental-poverty-measure/guidance/methodology.html.

Official and Supplemental Poverty Findings for 2025[33]

Compared with the official measure, the SPM takes into account greater detail of individuals' and families' living arrangements and provides a more up-to-date accounting of the costs and resources available to them. Because the SPM recognizes greater detail in relationships among household members and geographically adjusts housing costs, it provides an updated rendering, compared with the official measure, of the circumstances in which the low-income population lives. In that context, some point out that the SPM's measurement of taxes, transfers, and expenses may offer policymakers a clearer view of how government policies affect the population living in poverty today. However, the SPM was developed as a research measure, and the Office of Management and Budget set the expectation that it would be revised periodically to incorporate improved measurement methods and newer sources of data as they became available. It was not developed for administrative purposes.[34] The fact that tax liabilities and credits are modeled, or that in-kind benefits are estimated using limited data, can be useful to bear in mind when comparing SPM estimates with official poverty estimates or when any changes to the SPM methodology are implemented in the future.[35] In contrast, the official measure's consistency over a longer time span makes it easier for policymakers and researchers to make historical comparisons.

Underreporting and Estimates of Income and Noncash Benefits

The income amounts used to compute poverty status under both the official measure for the nation and the SPM were obtained from an annual household survey: the CPS ASEC. The ASEC is a series of questions asked once a year at the end of the CPS, which is a monthly survey designed to obtain monthly labor force estimates, such as the unemployment rate—that is, the monthly CPS was not primarily designed for income measurement. Like other household surveys, the CPS ASEC suffers from underreporting of income amounts, and that affects both official and SPM poverty estimates. For example, in 2025, Social Security net benefit payments were approximately $1.44 trillion,[36] while the total Social Security amounts received according to the CPS ASEC were approximately $1.34 trillion.[37] Both the official measure and the SPM include Social Security as income that families use to meet the level of need represented by their poverty threshold.

Unlike the official poverty measure, the SPM also includes the value of noncash benefits, and typically these values are estimated, either because (1) respondents may not be privy to the values (as is the case for energy assistance payments made directly by the government to utility companies) or may not remember or report accurate amounts or (2) the survey questions may not ask the relevant details to obtain the amounts directly. For example, the monetary value of SNAP benefits received according to the SPM totaled approximately $42.1 billion for

[33] Data in this section are available in pp. 5-9 of Bijou and Shrider, *Poverty in the United States: 2025*, and in Table 7, "Number and Percentage of People in Poverty by Different Poverty Measures: 2025," accompanying Bijou and Shrider, *Poverty in the United States: 2025*, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2026/demo/p60-290.html, unless otherwise indicated (such as from computations using the CPS ASEC public use file).

[34] The HHS poverty guidelines were developed for administrative purposes—they are a simplification of the official poverty measure. For details, see CRS Report R44780, *An Introduction to Poverty Measurement*, by Joseph Dalaker.

[35] For instance, work expenses such as commuting costs can be difficult to pin down precisely for every person or family, because they often influence and are influenced by a person's or family's decision about where to live. Rather than attempting to estimate the relevant work expenses for every family, the SPM assigns a flat amount to workers multiplied by the number of weeks they worked. Some researchers have also found that the tax model used in the SPM underestimates refundable tax credits in comparison with administrative data, which particularly affects families with children. Therefore, refinements to the SPM methodology based on the ongoing SPM research may not be trivial. Working papers that present results of research into SPM methodology may be found on the Census Bureau's website at https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/supplemental-poverty-measure/library/working-papers.html.

[36] Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds, *The 2026 Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds*, June 9, 2026, Table III.A1, p. 30, https://www.ssa.gov/oact/tr/2026/tr2026.pdf.

[37] Author's computations of 2025 calendar year Social Security income using the 2026 CPS ASEC public use file.

calendar year 2025, while SNAP administrative records report approximately $95.8 billion for the same period.[38] As a result of this underreporting, SNAP's effects on the number of persons measured as being in poverty according to the SPM are likely understated.[39]

SPM and Official Poverty Rates for 2025

Under the SPM, the profile of the population is different from the profile under the official measure. The SPM poverty rate in 2025 was 13.1%—not statistically different from 2024 and 2.9 percentage points higher than the 10.2% under the official measure (see **Figure 7**). This variation stems from differences in how the SPM thresholds are computed and from the additions and subtractions to the SPM's income measure that are depicted in **Figure 9**.[40]

For the official measure, poverty rates for children and working-age adults decreased from 2024 to 2025, but for the SPM, both the comparative ranking of the age groups' poverty rates and their year-to-year changes were different from their counterparts under the official measure.[41] Poverty rates under the SPM were 13.4% for children (no statistical change), 12.3% for working-age adults (no statistical change), and 15.4% for the aged (no statistical change). These different results stemmed from the definitions of *income* and *family* under the SPM. Out-of-pocket medical expenses, which are subtracted from SPM income (making the poverty rate higher than it would be without the subtraction), are highest for the aged. The refundable portions of the CTC; SNAP; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and school lunches all target families with children. Counting the values of these noncash benefits lowers the poverty rate from what it would have been without them. Work-related expenses, incurred by the working-age population, are subtracted from income, thus elevating the poverty rate relative to what it would have been without the subtraction.

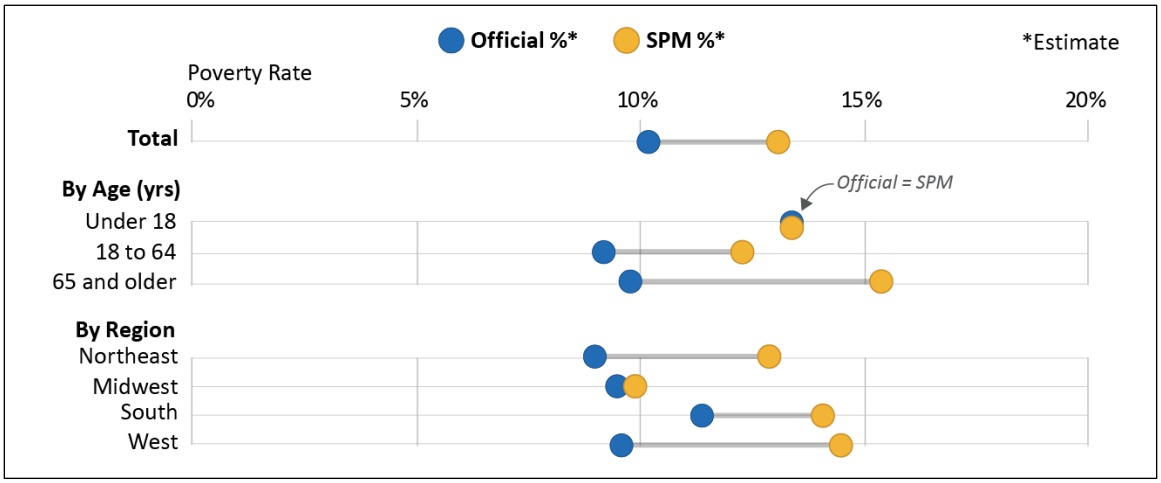
[38] U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, *SNAP Data Tables: National Level Annual Summary: Participation and Costs*, https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/snap-annualsummary-8.xlsx, data as of August 14, 2026, and computations using the 2025 CPS ASEC public use file of SNAP amounts used as SPM resources in 2025, summed across the entire population.

[39] Census Bureau staff have been researching the effect of SNAP underreporting on SPM poverty rates and possible solutions. See Liana E. Fox et al., *Precision in Measurement: Using SNAP Administrative Records to Evaluate Poverty Measurement*, U.S. Census Bureau, October 2017, https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2017/demo/SEHSD-WP2017-49.pdf; and Kathryn Stevens et al., *Precision in Measurement: Using State-Level SNAP Administrative Records and the Transfer Income Model (TRIM3) to Evaluate Poverty Measurement*, U.S. Census Bureau, April 2018, https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2018/demo/SEHSD-WP2018-15.pdf. Further research on SPM methodology may be found at https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/supplemental-poverty-measure/library/working-papers.html.

[40] Tax credits in the SPM are typically estimated for the tax year (i.e., the year that taxes are incurred, which is the year before the date tax returns are filed), but most tax credits are actually received as a lump sum the following year, meaning the SPM usually includes the tax credits as income the year before the survey respondents actually receive them. Some state tax credits in 2022 were exceptions to this because they were issued early. The Census Bureau's tax model used in the SPM was updated to include these 2022 state tax credits. For details, see Douglas Conway and Matthew Unrath, "Modeling State Tax Rebate Payments in the 2022 CPS ASEC," U.S. Census Bureau, September 2023, https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2023/demo/SEHSD-WP2023-26.html; and Daniel Lin, "Methods and Assumptions of the CPS ASEC Tax Model," U.S. Census Bureau, November 30, 2022, https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2022/demo/SEHSD-wp2022-18.html.

[41] As stated in the "Age" section, official poverty rates in 2025 were 13.4% for children (down from 14.3% in 2024), 9.2% for the working-age population (down from 9.6% in 2024), and 9.8% for the aged population (no change registered from 2024).

Figure 7. Poverty Rates Under Official Measure and SPM, by Age and by Region: 2025



Source: CRS, based on data from Table 1, "Number and Percentage of People in Poverty Using the Official Poverty Measure: 2024 and 2025," https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/p60/290/table_1_opm_person.xlsx, and Table 4, "Number and Percentage of People in Poverty Using the Supplemental Poverty Measure: 2024 and 2025," https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/p60/290/table_4_spm_person.xlsx, accompanying Christina Bijou and Emily A. Shrider, *Poverty in the United States: 2025*, U.S. Census Bureau, September 15, 2026, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2026/demo/p60-290.html.

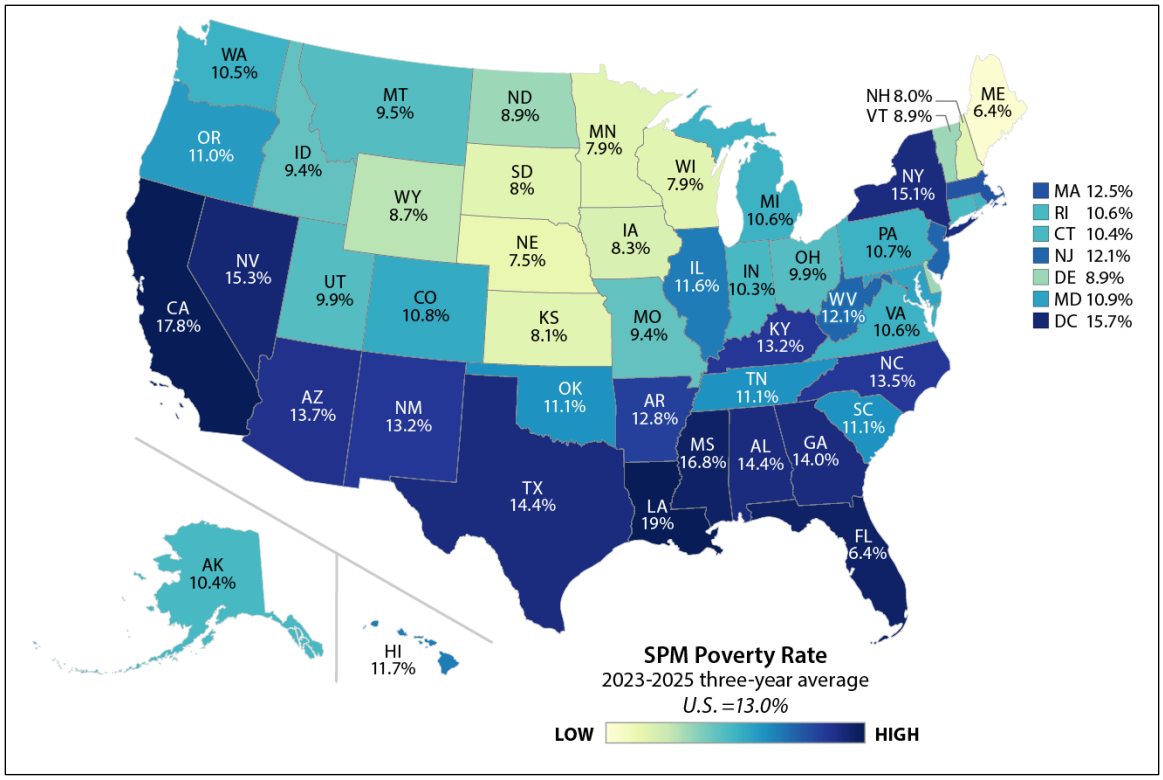
Note: SPM = Supplemental Poverty Measure.

Poverty rates by region also differed under the SPM compared with the official measure because of the geographic adjustment of housing costs in the SPM poverty thresholds. In the Northeast, South, and West, the SPM poverty rate was higher than the official poverty rate by 2.6 percentage points, 2.0 percentage points, and 4.8 percentage points, respectively (**Figure 7**). Housing costs are higher in the Northeast and West compared with the U.S. average, which is consistent with their SPM poverty rates being higher than their official poverty rates, although in the South housing costs are lower than the U.S. average.[42] In the Midwest, where housing costs are the lowest of the nation's four regions, the SPM poverty rate was not significantly different from the official rate. None of the regions experienced statistically significant changes in their poverty rates from the previous year.

The map in **Figure 8** displays states shaded according to their SPM poverty rates. While certain similarities exist compared with the official poverty rates by state shown in **Figure 6**—particularly the relatively lower poverty rates in the northern Great Plains and higher poverty rates in Appalachia and the Mississippi Delta—certain states differ greatly. These tend to be states with higher housing costs, such as California and New York.

[42] Median gross rents by number of bedrooms (Table B25031) and median selected monthly owner costs (Table B25088) are available from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2024 One-Year Estimates, and can be queried by region. For example, see https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2024.B25031?t=Renter+Costs&g=010XX00US_020XX00US1,2,3,4.

Figure 8. State SPM Poverty Rates: 2023-2025 Three-Year Averages



Source: CRS, using data from Table 17, "Number and Percentage of People in Poverty by State and Different Poverty Measures Using 3-Year Average: 2023, 2024, and 2025," https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/p60/290/table_17_spm_opm_state.xlsx, accompanying Christina Bijou and Emily A. Shrider, *Poverty in the United States: 2025*, U.S. Census Bureau, September 15, 2026, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2026/demo/p60-290.html.

Notes: The District of Columbia is treated as a state equivalent in Census Bureau datasets. Three-year averages are used to increase the number of respondents upon which the estimates are based. The survey that was used to develop the estimates (the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement) was designed to provide national-level estimates. SPM: Supplemental Poverty Measure. The SPM poverty thresholds are adjusted to reflect geographic variations in housing costs.

SPM Resource Components in 2025: Their Effect on SPM Estimates

Figure 9 illustrates the impact of various resource components on the number of people identified as poor using the SPM. Bars pointing to the left of the vertical axis (negative) indicate the number of people kept out of the population identified as poor by the SPM's treatment of that resource component. Bars pointing to the right of the vertical axis (positive) indicate the number of people added to the estimated poor population by the SPM's treatment of the component.

These data show how the population estimated to be poor would change if the SPM omitted a particular component (either by subtracting resources or failing to subtract taxes and expenses) but do not take into account any behavioral changes people would make in the absence of any one program, tax, credit, or expense. Furthermore, the data illustrate changes to the poverty population estimate with each component considered in isolation. People are often affected by multiple resource components. Therefore, the numbers represented by separate bars should not be added together.

Social Security income, which is included in both the SPM and official poverty measures, had the biggest impact on the number of persons kept out of poverty (28.8 million in 2025 according to the SPM). While it was designed to be an income insurance program for workers and their families and not targeted specifically to the poor, it has a large antipoverty effect nevertheless. While most people kept out of poverty by Social Security were ages 65 and older (21.0 million), a substantial minority were younger: 6.6 million were ages 18-64, and 1.3 million were under age 18. Some of those in the younger age groups are Social Security recipients themselves because of a disability, but others were kept out of poverty because an older family member received it.

Refundable tax credits are measured only in the SPM, not the official measure. They helped 6.1 million persons avoid poverty in 2025. One such credit, the EITC, helped 4.0 million persons avoid poverty in 2025. The refundable portion of the CTC helped 2.3 million avoid poverty in 2025.[43] SNAP helped 3.1 million avoid poverty in 2025 under the SPM.

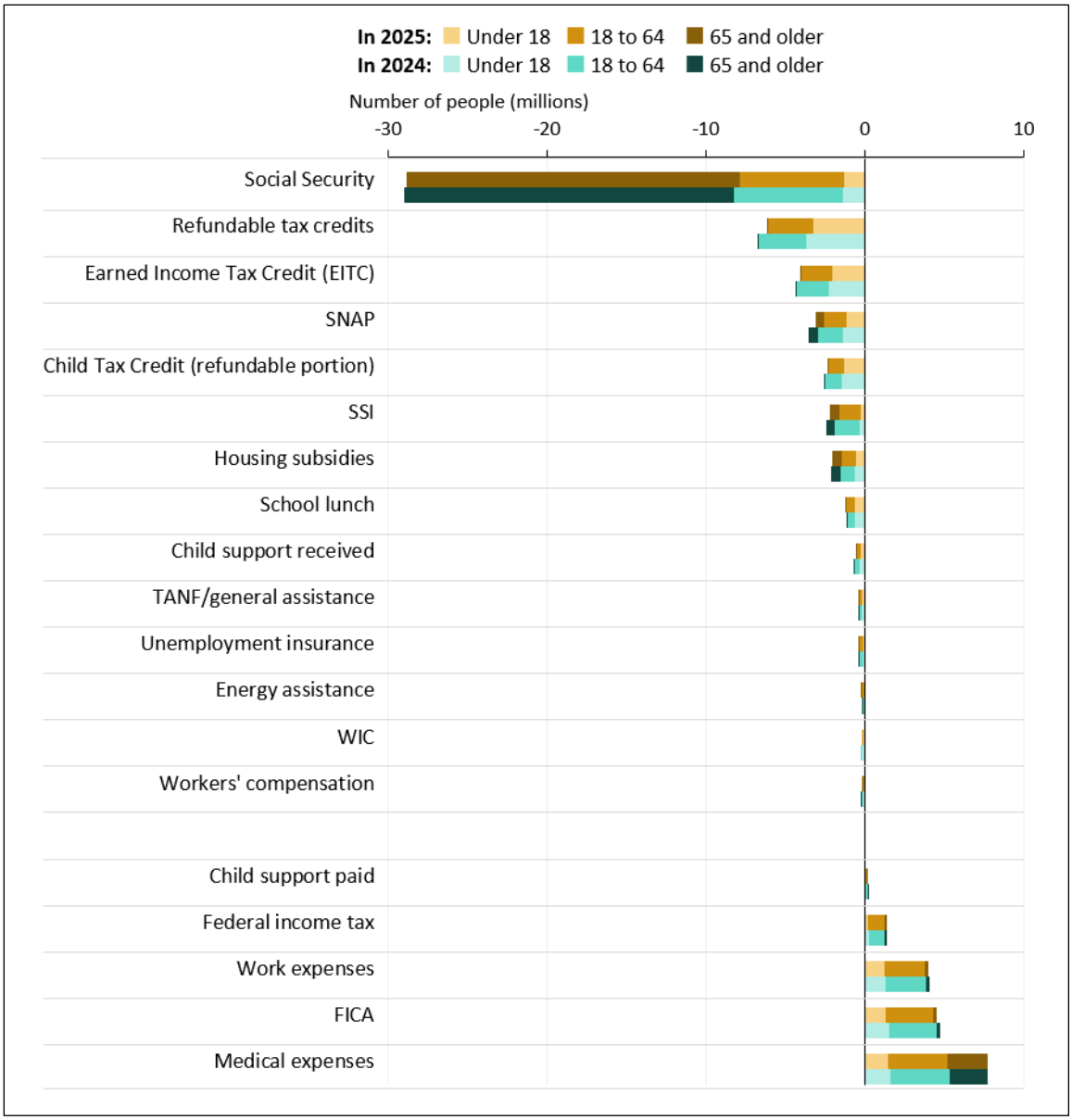
Work expenses and child care expenses combined, which in the SPM are capped at the amount of the earnings of the lowest-earning adult in the family, are subtracted from the SPM income measure. This subtraction led to 4.0 million persons being categorized as impoverished under the SPM in 2025 who otherwise would not have been so categorized. The SPM deduction for Federal Insurance Contributions Act taxes paid had a similar effect: Once these taxes were subtracted from income, 4.5 million persons in 2025 were counted as being in poverty under the SPM who otherwise would not have been.

The difference between the two measures can be further understood by comparing which persons were in poverty according to one measure but not under the other. Among people in poverty in 2025 under only one of the measures, 6.9 million were classified as poor by the official measure and nonpoor by the SPM, while over twice as many (16.7 million) were classified as poor by the SPM but nonpoor by the official measure.[44] For those who were poor under the official measure but nonpoor under the SPM, the SPM's broader definition of *family* tended to include more full-time workers in the family. These persons had greater cash incomes under the SPM despite having (in many cases) higher poverty thresholds and expenses subtracted. On the other hand, among those categorized as poor under the SPM but not under the official measure, medical expenses were higher than for their non-SPM-poor counterparts. They also received lower SNAP benefits, school lunch subsidies, EITC, and Additional Child Tax Credits, on average, compared with their counterparts who were poor under the official measure but not under the SPM.

[43] During the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress passed legislation that expanded refundable tax credits in order to counteract the negative economic impact of the pandemic. As a result, the SPM registered greater numbers of persons lifted out of poverty by the tax credits than it had previously. The expansions to the tax credits expired after the pandemic was over, and accordingly the SPM registered fewer persons lifted out of poverty by them. For a discussion of the impacts of the expanded tax credits on SPM poverty estimates and their expiration, see CRS Report R48055, *Poverty in the United States in 2022*, by Joseph Dalaker. For a discussion of expansions to the CTC under the American Rescue Plan Act, see CRS Report R46839, *The Child Tax Credit: The Impact of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA; P.L. 117-2) Expansion on Income and Poverty*, by Brendan McDermott et al. For a discussion of previous expansions to the EITC, see the archived CRS Report R44825, *The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC): Legislative History*, by Margot L. Crandall-Hollick. For an introduction to the EITC as it stands as of September 2026, see CRS Report R43805, *The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC): How It Works and Who Receives It*, by Brendan McDermott.

[44] CRS computations using the 2026 CPS ASEC public use file.

Figure 9. Effects of Each Transfer, Tax, or Expense on the Number of People Identified as Below Poverty Using the SPM: 2024 and 2025



Source: CRS, using data from Table 6, "Effect of Individual Elements on the Number of Individuals in Poverty Using the Supplemental Poverty Measure: 2024 and 2025," https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/p60/290/table_6_spm_program_effect_counts.xlsx, accompanying Christina Bijou and Emily A. Shrider, *Poverty in the United States: 2025*, U.S. Census Bureau, September 15, 2026, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2026/demo/p60-290.html.

Notes: "Number of people" represents the estimated change in the population who would be identified as poor if the SPM's definition of *income* were changed to exclude or include each resource component. This can be thought of as the marginal impact that each resource or expense had on the population below poverty in 2024. Because people are often affected by more than one of the resource components listed, cumulative effects of multiple resources cannot be computed by summing the bars. The impact on the estimated number of poor was computed for each component in isolation, leaving all else equal. Child care expenses are included in work expenses. SPM = Supplemental Poverty Measure; FICA = Federal Insurance Contributions Act tax (payroll tax for Social Security and Medicare); SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; SSI = Supplemental

Security Income; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.

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