Who lives in Poverty USA?

All those who make less than the Federal government’s official poverty threshold. . . which for a family of four is $22,314.00. People working at minimum wage, even holding down several jobs. Seniors living on fixed incomes. Wage earners suddenly out of work. Millions of families everywhere from our cities to rural communities.

Poverty does not strike all demographics equally. For example, in 2010, 21.7% of men lived in Poverty USA, but 24.1% of women. Along the same lines, the poverty rate for married couples in 2010 was only 6.2%—but the poverty rate for single-parent families with no wife present was up to 15.8%, and for single-parent families with no husband present over 31%.

And though poverty is often perceived as a problem of urban environments and inner cities, the poverty rate in metropolitan areas (14.9%) is actually lower than the poverty rate in rural areas (16.5%).

Between 2009 and 2010, the poverty rate for people living with a disability rose from 25% (in 2009) to 27.9% (in 2010). That’s 4.2 million people living with a disability—in poverty. And on any given night in January 2010, 26.2% of all sheltered persons who were homeless had a severe mental illness.

To learn about poverty rates by state and county, and detailed poverty rates for varying demographics, visit the Interactive Poverty Map.


Children in Poverty USA

In 2010, 22% of all children lived in Poverty USA—that’s over 1 in every 5 children.

In 2009, the National Center on Family Homelessness analyzed state-level data and found that nationwide, 1.5 million children experience homelessness in a year.

Luckily, there are programs that help. The National School Lunch Program provides low- or no-cost meals to impoverished children. In 2010 alone, the program served subsidized lunches to more than 31 million children—and has served 219 billion lunches since its founding in 1946.

View the Interactive Poverty Map to find out what the child poverty rate is in your state, or states around you.

Seniors in Poverty USA

Though the official census data gives seniors a 2010 poverty rate of only 9%, the Supplemental Poverty Measure, which accounts for expenses such as the rising costs of health care, raises the senior poverty rate to an astounding 15.9%—higher than the overall poverty rate.

View the Interactive Poverty Map to find out what the senior poverty rate is in your state, or states around you.


Poverty Thresholds

Poverty thresholds are determined by the US government, and vary according to the size of a family, and ages of the members. In 2010, the poverty threshold—known more commonly as the poverty line—for an individual was $11,139. For two people, the weighted average threshold was $14,218.

Three people: $17,374
Four people: $22,314
Five people: $26,439
Six people: $29,897
Seven people: $34,009
Eight people: $37,934
Nine or more: $45,220

For more details about poverty thresholds, visit the US Census Bureau. Poverty thresholds are intended for use as a statistical yardstick, not a complete description of what people and/or families actually need to live.

What’s worse, 6.7% of the population—or nearly 20.5 million people—live in deep poverty, with incomes at only 50% of their poverty thresholds.
And 33.9% of the population—or 103.6 million—live close to poverty, with incomes less than two times that of their poverty thresholds.

To learn more about poverty thresholds and what it is like to live at the poverty line, take a tour of Poverty USA.


Employment

Since 2007 (the year before the most recent recession), the real median household income in the USA has declined 6.4% and is 7.1% below the median household income peak that occurred prior to the 2001 recession in 1999. This decline has been most significant in households in the Midwest, South and West of the country.

In the same time period, the number of men working full time, year-round decreased by 6.6 million. The corresponding number of women declined by 2.8 million—but in 2010, the earnings of women who worked full time, year-round were only 77% of that for men working full time, year-round.


Food Insecurity

In 2010, the USDA estimated that 14.5% (or 17.2 million) of US households were food insecure—meaning that they had difficulty at some time during the year providing enough food for all their members due to a lack of resources. Rates of food insecurity were substantially higher than the national average for households with incomes near or below the Federal poverty line.

Again, there are programs that help. Fifty-nine percent of food-insecure households in the survey reported that in the previous month, they had participated in one or more of the three largest Federal
food and nutrition assistance programs, such as SNAP (food stamps). Learn more about SNAP and other important programs in the Policies that Help section.

Source: Household Food Security in the United States in 2010, USDA