Poverty in the United States: A Snapshot

*Census figures released in September 2012 reveal record-high numbers of people continue to live in poverty in the United States. The latest data reveal:

One out of seven people in the USA are living in poverty

- The Census Bureau reports that 46.2 million people were living in poverty in the United States in 2011 -- the largest number of persons counted as poor in the 53 years of poverty measurements.
- The poverty rate (the percentage of all people in the United States who were poor) also remained at record high levels: 15 percent for all Americans and 21.9 percent for children.
- The United States Bureau of the Census measures poverty by comparing household income to the poverty threshold for a household of a given size. The poverty threshold is adjusted each year to take account of changes in the cost-of-living. The poverty threshold does not represent what a family actually needs for a decent living. For example, in 2011 the poverty threshold for a household of four was $23,050.
- While the overall percentage of people living in poverty nationwide did not change significantly between 2010 and 2011, individual states saw increases in overall poverty and poverty among children and the unemployed. Seventeen states saw poverty go up, while 14 saw increases in child poverty and 27, more than half of the states, had increases in the number of unemployed people living in poverty last year.

Almost one out of sixteen people in the USA are living in deep poverty

- The Census defines people in deep poverty when they make 50% below the poverty line; Census figures show that, in 2011, 6.6 percent of all people, or 20.4 million people, lived in deep poverty.

Racial and ethnic minorities, women, children, and families headed by single women are particularly vulnerable to poverty and deep poverty.

Blacks and Hispanics are more likely than whites to be poor, and to be in deep poverty.

- In 2011, 9.8% of non-Hispanic whites (19.2 million) lived in poverty and 4.4% in deep poverty; 25.3% of Hispanics (13.2 million) lived in poverty and 10.5% in deep poverty; and 27.6% of blacks (10.9 million) lived in poverty and 12.8% in deep poverty.
- 12.5% of non-Hispanic white children under 18 lived below poverty; 34.1% of Hispanic children under 18 lived below poverty; and 38.8% of black children under 18 lived below poverty. Overall, 21.9% children under 18 – or some 16.1 million children-- lived below the poverty line.
- Although blacks represent 13.1% of the general population, they represent 27.6% of the poor population. Hispanics, who make up 16.7% of the population, represent 25.3% of the poor population.

Poverty is a women’s issue; Female headed families are more likely to be poor

- In 2011, more than 5 million more women than men lived in poverty.
- Families headed by a single adult are more likely to be headed by women, and these female-headed families are at greater risk of poverty and deep poverty; 34.2% of families with a female householder where no husband is present were poor and 16.9% were living in deep poverty; 16.5% of families with a
male householder where no wife was present were poor and 6.7% were living in deep poverty; and 7.4% of married couple families with children were living in poverty, 2.4% were in deep poverty.

- Children living in single female-headed families were more than four times as likely to be living in poverty, and eight times as likely to be living in deep poverty, than children living in married couple families.

**Other studies report that many people living in poverty have work disabilities**

- In 2011, persons who had a work disability represented 11.3% of the 16- to 64-year-old population, and 24.8% of the poor population within this age range.

- Among those with a severe work disability, 34.7% were poor, compared to 16.3% of those with a less severe disability and 11.7% who reported having no work-related disability.