

Rural Children At A Glance

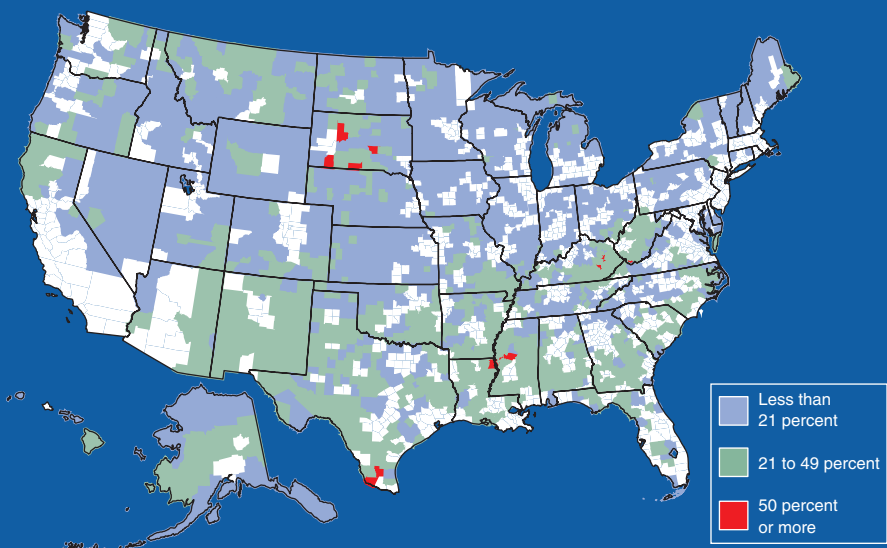


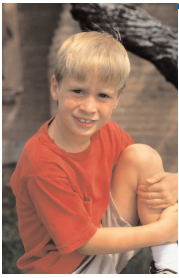
The number of children under age 18 in the United States increased from 63.6 million in 1990 to 72.1 million in 2000. The number of children in nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) areas increased by 3 percent, compared with an increase of 16 percent in metropolitan (metro) areas. A number of nonmetro counties lost population in the 1990s, and the small increase in the number of children may reflect the outmigration of young families.

Child poverty in 21st century America is higher (18 percent in 2003) than the rate for the general population (12.5 percent), as well as above the rates in most other industrialized countries. Child poverty is a significant social problem that negatively affects children's development. Although rural child poverty rates declined in the 1990s, they remain higher than the rates for urban children (21 percent vs. 18 percent). In 2003, 2.7 million rural children were poor, representing 36 percent of the rural poor. Nonmetro children are more likely than metro children to receive food stamps and free or reduced-price school lunches, in part a reflection of higher nonmetro poverty. The geographic distribution of child poverty—heavily concentrated in the South—is important for targeting poverty reduction policies and program assistance such as child nutrition programs, food stamps, and health insurance coverage in rural areas.

USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) analyzes ongoing changes in rural areas and assesses Federal, State, and local strategies to enhance economic opportunity and quality of life for rural Americans. Following are the most current indicators of the demographic, social, and economic well-being of rural children for use in developing rural policies and programs to assist children and their families in rural areas.

Nonmetro child poverty rates, 2000





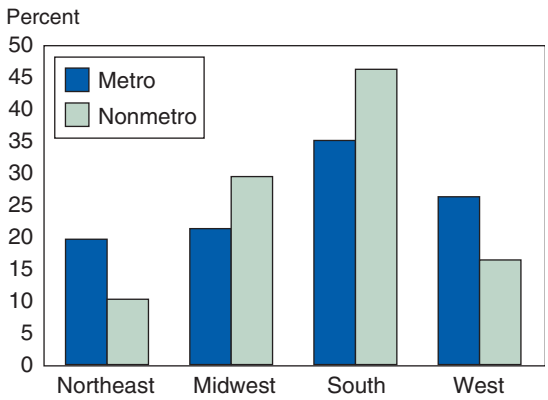
Diversity Characterizes Today's Child Population in Rural Areas

The size and geographic distribution of the child population determine the demand for schools, health care, and other services and facilities that serve children and their families.

- The number of children in the rural United States grew by 3 percent between 1990 and 2000. Children (under age 18) represented a smaller and more diverse—but still substantial—proportion of the nonmetro population in 2000 (17 percent) than in 1990 (19 percent).

- The largest share of rural children (45 percent) resided in the South, and most of the increase in this region's child population occurred among minorities.

Distribution of children by region and metro-nonmetro residence, 2004



Racial/Ethnic Diversity Increased Between 1990 and 2000

- In 2000, 80 percent of nonmetro children were White, a decline of about 4 percentage points since 1990, due primarily to an increased share of Hispanic children.

- The proportion of Hispanic children increased from 5 percent in 1990 to 8 percent in 2000, a result of high fertility rates and substantial immigration of Hispanics to the United States. Although Hispanic children and their families are concentrated in the Southwest, Hispanic children were more dispersed throughout nonmetro America in 2000 than in 1990.

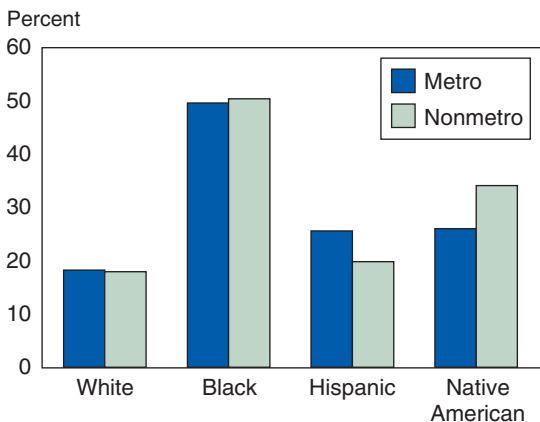
- About 10 percent of nonmetro children were Black in 2000, essentially the same as in 1990, and concentrated chiefly in the nonmetro South. Children of Native American heritage remained at 3 percent of the nonmetro child population in 2000. Asian-American children comprise less than one percent of nonmetro children.

Children Are More Likely To Live in Mother-Only Families

- The number of children in mother-only families increased in the 1990s due to both high rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing, but at a much slower pace than during the 1970s or 1980s. In 2004, 24 percent of nonmetro children under age 18 lived in mother-only families, up from 20 percent in 1990, but less than the percentage of metro children (26 percent).



Children living with their mother only, by race-ethnicity and metro-nonmetro residence, 2004



- Minority children are more likely to live in mother-only families than White children. In 2004, half of nonmetro Black children and 34 percent of nonmetro Native American children were in mother-only families, compared with 18 percent of nonmetro White children. Children in mother-only families may experience greater economic disadvantage than children in married-couple families because their mothers often have low earnings, their fathers may not contribute to their support, and/or their financial assistance benefits may not be sufficient to raise them above poverty.

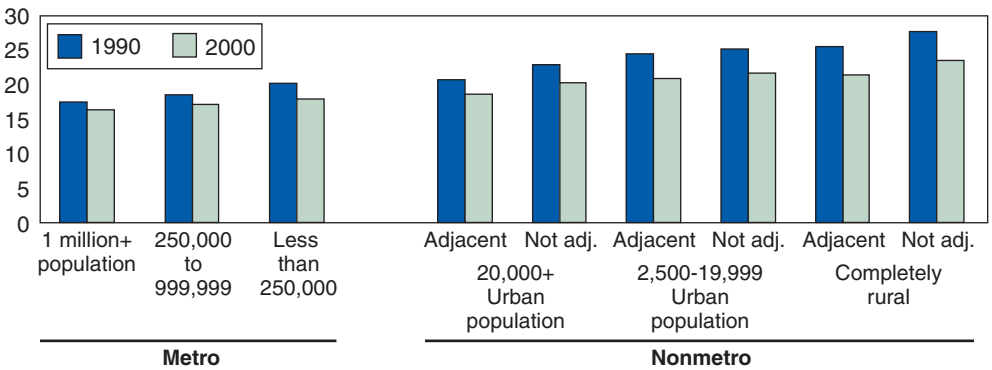
Child Poverty Declined Between 1990 and 2000

The percentage of children living in poverty is perhaps the most widely used indicator of child well-being, in part because poverty is closely linked to a number of less desirable outcomes in areas such as health, education, emotional welfare, and delinquency. Poverty rates for children in nonmetro areas have historically been higher than for children in metro areas, partly due to higher rural unemployment and a greater share of low-wage jobs in rural areas. During the 1990s, child poverty rates declined in large part due to welfare reform measures and an expanding economy, but the nonmetro poverty rate continued to exceed the metro rate.

- Child poverty rates declined in the late 1980s, increased in the early 1990s in both metro and nonmetro areas, and peaked in 1993 at 22 percent in metro areas and 24 percent in nonmetro areas. Beginning in 1994, child poverty rates dropped substantially, down to 18 percent in metro areas and 21 percent in nonmetro areas in 2003. In the late 1990s, child poverty declined more rapidly in metro areas than in nonmetro areas, widening the residential poverty gap.
- Child poverty rates vary across rural areas, increasing along a continuum of least to most rural. In 2000, rates ranged from 18 percent in nonmetro counties with populations of 20,000 or more and adjacent to an urban (metro) area to 23 percent in completely rural counties. Proximity to an urban area affected rural poverty rates, with nonadjacent counties having higher child poverty rates than adjacent counties, regardless of their population size.
- Child poverty rates declined between 1990 and 2000. Rates fell the most—4 percentage points—in completely rural nonadjacent counties, compared with 2 percentage points in nonmetro counties of 20,000 or more population and adjacent to a metro area. The declines resulted in a more even distribution of poverty rates across rural areas.

Poverty rates of children under 18 years old by rural-urban continuum code, 1990-2000

Percent



- Rural child poverty has been most persistent and severe in Central Appalachia, the Deep South (including the Mississippi River Delta), the Rio Grande border area, the Southwest, and the American Indian communities in the Northern Plains. Although poverty declined between 1990 and 2000, over 750 nonmetro counties (37 percent of all nonmetro counties) had child poverty rates of 21 percent or more in 2000.
- In addition to the share of nonmetro children who were poor, 14 percent were classified as near-poor in 2003 (in families with total incomes 100-149 percent of the official poverty level), a proportion unchanged from 1990. The financial standing of the near-poor is precarious at best, with families moving in and out of poverty.

Race/Ethnicity, Family Structure, and Region Affect Child Poverty

- While most poor children are White, minority children are overrepresented in the count of poor children relative to their share of the population. In nonmetro areas in 2003, Black children were more than twice as likely to be poor as White children (44 percent vs. 18 percent).

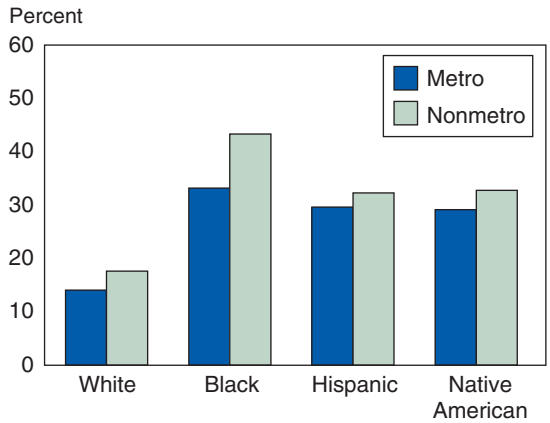


- Nonmetro poverty rates for Black children and Hispanic children each declined 8 percentage points between 1990 and 2000, compared with only a 2-percentage-point decline for White children. The ratio of Black child poverty to White declined over the decade, as did the ratio of Hispanic child poverty to White, narrowing the racial/ethnic gap in poverty.

- In the South, 19 percent of nonmetro children were poor, compared with 18 percent in the nonmetro West and 16 percent in both the nonmetro Northeast and Midwest.

- Nearly 46 percent of nonmetro children in mother-only families were poor in 2003, compared with 10 percent in two-parent families. Minority children in mother-only families had higher poverty than White children in such families: nonmetro rates were 59 percent for Black children, 56 percent for Hispanic children, 41 percent for Native American children, and 42 percent for White children. Children in single-parent families tend to have more school-related, health, and behavioral problems and to live in families with lower incomes, complete fewer years of schooling, and earn less as adults.

Children below the poverty level by race-ethnicity and metro-nonmetro residence, 2003



Other Indicators of Child Well-Being Differ by Metro-Nonmetro Status

Nonmetro children are more likely than metro children to have younger and less educated parents, and children with younger and less educated parents are more likely to be poor. Many poor and low-income working families do not earn enough money to provide health care, childcare, and other critical services for their children.

Family and parental characteristics of children under 18 by residence and poverty status, 2004

Indicator	All children		Poor children ¹	
	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro
Total, under age 18	60,432	13,147	10,709	2,739
	<i>Number (1,000s)</i>			
	<i>Percentage</i>			
Age of child				
Under 6 years	32.7	31.0	36.6	37.9
6-11 years	32.5	32.7	33.7	32.3
12-17 years	34.8	36.4	29.7	29.8
Family type				
Married-couple family	68.8	69.5	31.9	34.0
Mother-only family	25.9	24.1	59.3	55.4
Father-only family	5.3	6.5	8.8	10.6
Parental age				
18-29 years	15.7	19.3	31.2	33.6
30-44 years	60.5	59.6	53.1	52.4
Parental education				
Less than high school	15.9	15.7	38.8	34.0
High school graduate	27.5	37.3	33.8	39.8
College -1 or more years	56.6	47.0	27.4	26.2
Parental labor force status ¹				
Employed	75.5	76.3	45.0	50.8
Not in labor force	19.8	19.5	43.5	40.7

¹ Based on employment status and family income for the previous year.



Parental Characteristics Have Implications for Child Well-Being

- Children in families with a parent who did not complete high school are likely to be worse off economically than children with highly educated parents who are more marketable in the labor force. Among *all* nonmetro children, 16 percent had parents who had not completed high school, but 34 percent of nonmetro *poor* children had parents who had not completed high school.
- About three-quarters of nonmetro children had parents who were employed in 2003, compared with only half of nonmetro poor children. Poverty rates are higher for children with unemployed parents or parents not in the labor force. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) may help many low-income working families, especially those in the most remote rural areas where poverty rates are higher.

Proportionately Fewer Rural Than Urban Children Have Some Form of Health Insurance

- In 2001, 9.2 million children (12 percent) were not covered by health insurance—7.6 million in metro areas and 1.6 million (22 percent) in nonmetro areas—despite the availability of government health insurance programs for children in low-income families.
- In 2002, 2.7 percent of nonmetro children and 2.1 percent of metro children had needed medical care during the prior 12 months but had not received it because the family could not afford it. A higher share of nonmetro children (8.8 percent) than metro children (7.1 percent) had two or more emergency room visits in the previous 12 months. Poor children are more likely than nonpoor children to have unmet medical needs, delayed medical care, no usual place of health care, and high use of emergency room services.

Indicators of well-being for children under 18 by residence and poverty status, 2004

Indicator	All children		Poor children ¹	
	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro
	<i>Percentage</i>			
Children receiving:				
Food stamps	12.0	15.3	47.8	52.2
TANF	3.8	2.8	17.0	10.4
Hot lunch	66.8	78.7	80.0	84.6
Free or reduced-price lunch	37.3	40.3	73.9	74.7
Children living in public housing	9.1	10.0	16.4	15.1

¹Based on family income for the previous year.

Note: Households must meet a low-income threshold to qualify for food stamps, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and free or reduced-price lunches.

Nonmetro Children Are More Likely Than Metro Children To Receive Government Food Assistance

- In 2002, about the same share (16 to 17 percent) of nonmetro and metro children resided in households that were food insecure—that is, lacking consistent access to enough food for active, healthy living. A family's ability to provide for children's nutritional needs and secure access to adequate, nutritious food without relying on emergency feeding programs is linked to family income and other resources.
- In 2003, nonmetro children were more likely to receive food stamps (15 percent) than metro children (12 percent); among poor children, 52 percent in nonmetro areas received food stamps vs. 48 percent in metro areas. A greater share of nonmetro children received free or reduced-price lunches (40 percent) than metro children (37 percent); about 75 percent of poor children (both metro and nonmetro) received free or reduced-price lunches.
- The proportion of children receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) was lower for nonmetro than for metro children; in 2003, 10 percent of nonmetro poor children received TANF, compared with 17 percent of metro poor children. Similar shares of poor children in nonmetro (15 percent) and metro areas (16 percent) lived in public housing projects.

“Dimensions of Child Poverty in Rural Areas,” *Amber Waves*, Vol. 1, No. 5, 2003. *The proportion of rural children in families with incomes below the poverty level declined from 22 percent in 1990 to 19 percent in 2000. With a child poverty rate much higher than that of the general population, the Nation has much to gain from improving the economic conditions of children and their families.* www.ers.usda.gov/AmberWaves/November03/Findings/childpoverty.htm

FoodReview: Examining the Well-Being of Children—The theme for this issue is “America’s Children.” Articles discuss the well-being of U.S. children, children’s diet quality, the problem of overweight children in the U.S., foodborne disease among children, the economics of breastfeeding, and food assistance programs that help children and their families. [www.ers.usda.gov/publications/Food Review/may2001](http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/Food%20Review/may2001)

Definitions

Metro-nonmetro status—Metropolitan (metro) and nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) areas are defined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Estimates from the Current Population Survey and the National Health Interview Survey identify metro and nonmetro areas according to OMB’s 1993 designation. Under the 1993 classification, metro areas include central counties with one or more cities of at least 50,000 residents or with an urbanized area of 50,000 or more and total area population of at least 100,000. Nonmetro counties are outside the boundaries of metro areas and have no cities with 50,000 residents or more. Data from the 2000 Census in this report are based on OMB’s 2003 definition of metro and nonmetro areas. Under the 2003 classification, metro areas are defined for all urbanized areas regardless of total area population. Outlying counties are also classified as metro if they are economically tied to the central counties, as measured by the share of workers commuting on a daily basis to the central counties. The rural-urban continuum code distinguishes metro counties by total metro area size and nonmetro counties by degree of urbanization and proximity to metro areas. The terms “rural” and “nonmetro” are used interchangeably in this report. **See <http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/rurality/>**

Poverty rates—Any individual with income less than that deemed sufficient to purchase basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, and other essential goods and services is classified as poor. The income necessary to purchase these basic needs varies by the size and composition of the household. The 2003 poverty line for a four-person family is \$18,810. Poverty lines are adjusted annually to correct for inflation.

Data sources

This report is based on data from the 1990 and 2000 Censuses of Population; the March 2004 Current Population Survey (CPS) data file, and selected previous years; and the 2002 National Health Interview Survey. To gauge the effects of parental characteristics on children’s economic well-being, the child’s record in the CPS data file was linked to the parent’s data record.

ERS website and contact person

General information about rural America can be found at www.ers.usda.gov/Emphases/Rural . . . and about children in rural America at: www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/incomepovertywelfare/ChildPoverty/

For more information, contact **Carolyn C. Rogers** at crogers@ers.usda.gov or **202-694-5436**.

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