

Young Children and their Families Count in the 2020 Decennial Census

Why the Decennial Census is Important

The U.S. Constitution requires an accurate count of the nation's population every 10 years, and the decennial census seeks to count every person in every household. An integral part of our nation's democracy, census data affects the ability of our government to ensure equal representation and equal access to important federal and private sector resources for all Americans. Census data is used to allocate seats and draw district lines for the U.S. House of Representatives, state legislatures, and local governing boards; to target at least \$800 billion annually in federal assistance to states, localities, and families; and to guide community decision-making affecting schools, housing, health care services, business investments, and much more.

"Hard-to-count" population groups are at higher risk of not being fully counted in the decennial census. While some groups have been underrepresented for decades; some may experience new or increased vulnerability due to major changes in census methodology: Using the Internet as the primary point of contact for the 2020 Census, or a reluctance to respond given concerns about data confidentiality. An undercount of the hard-to-count populations can lead to unequal political representation as well as unequal access to vital public and private resources for the people in greatest need.

Young children are undercounted in the census at a higher rate than any other age group

Young children – defined as children under age five – have been undercounted for decades, disadvantaging their families, communities, and neighborhoods. Even among other children, those under five years old are more likely to be missing from census data. In 2010, more than 2.2 million children under age five were not included in census results.

Some young children are especially at risk of being missed

Depending on their race, ethnicity, or even where they live, some groups of young children have higher-than-average undercounts. Black and Hispanic children have the highest net undercounts. In addition, young children living in certain geographic areas are at particular risk of being under counted.

The young child undercount is getting worse

The undercount for children under age five has been getting progressively worse. The net undercount rate for young children is more than three times what it was in 1980, and locales with disproportionately high numbers of young children may be at higher risk of an undercount than ever before.

Why young children are missed so often in the census

Millions of young children live in households, families, and neighborhoods that are most challenging to enumerate.

- Almost 4.5 million children under age five live in hard-to-count neighborhoods.
- Young children have a higher poverty rate than any other age group, and poor households are typically difficult to count.
- Young children in large families may go uncounted because they live in large, complex households.
- Some young children have complicated living arrangements, moving among various relatives or caregivers. Foster children, children living with grandparents, and children whose parents are cohabitating but not married are also more likely to be missed.
- In households where people speak a language other than English, language barriers contribute to the undercount of young children.

What undercounting children costs communities

An undercount of young children will result in their communities being denied a full voice in policy decision-making. Children are included in population totals used for political boundaries, and congressional reapportionments most likely will not be based in reality. As a result, young children's needs may not be represented, as guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, and they may not be prioritized

Undercounting young children in the 2020 Census could also impact how more than \$600 billion in federal funding is allocated to states and localities based on census date. Some of the programs that impact children's lives and are funded in whole, or in part, on census data include:

- **State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) – \$11 billion**
- **Special Education Grants (IDEA) – \$11.2 billion**
- **Head Start – \$8.2 billion**
- **Foster Care – \$4.6 billion**
- **Child Care and Development Fund – \$3.3 billion**

The following programs based on census-derived data provide financial security for children from lower-income families, and economic development for their communities:

- **Section 8 Housing Assistance Payment Program – \$9.2 billion**
- **SNAP – \$69.4 billion**
- **Medicaid – \$311.9 billion**

You can help – right now

Stakeholders (advocates, funders, and civic leaders) can improve the count of young children in the 2020 Census by joining or supporting work on policy development, community organizing, and the "Get Out the Count" campaign for the 2020 Census:

- **Show members of Congress why they need to support adequate resources for the Census Bureau to conduct the 2020 Census and accurately count all young children.** Several years prior to a decennial census, the Census Bureau needs a major annual funding ramp up to perform critical tests and build out a massive program infrastructure. Due to financial constraints, important activities crucial to ensure a fair and accurate census have been postponed or canceled, putting young children at risk of a severe undercount.
- **Stay informed about key census policy and operational developments.** [The Census Project](#) provides regular updates on census-related activities in Congress and the administration. [The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights](#) also publishes many helpful resources.
- **Educate state and local leaders about the challenges young children face in the census.** Advocates can join Complete Count Committees to help ensure a complete census and include voices from the young children.
- **Become a Census Bureau partner to help ensure the Census Bureau's partnership program gets the resources it needs.** This important program is at risk due to budget shortfalls. Partners (organizations, associations, institution, etc.) get timely updates and promotional material from the Census Bureau.

If you would like to learn more about these or other ways you and your organization can be involved, contact Andrew Aurand, Vice President for Research of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, at AAurand@nlihc.org or Chris Harley, Census Counts Campaign Director, at harley@censucounts.org.