



Geography of Low-Income Children and Families (NOVEMBER 2003)

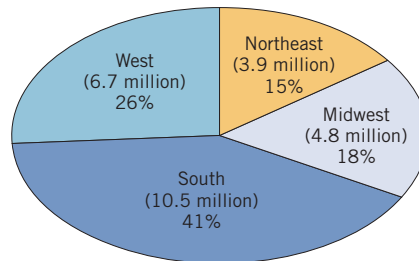
Overview

Where America's low-income¹ children live is changing. Two-thirds of children in low-income families live in the West or the South, a substantial increase from a decade ago. These children typically face moves due to their parent's desire to build better lives by finding better housing, better jobs, or forming independent households.

Two out of three children in low-income families live in either the South or the West.

- 41% of children in low-income families live in the South, up from 37% a decade ago.²
- 26% live in the West, up from 23% a decade ago.

Figure 1: Distribution of Children in Low-Income Families by Region, 2001



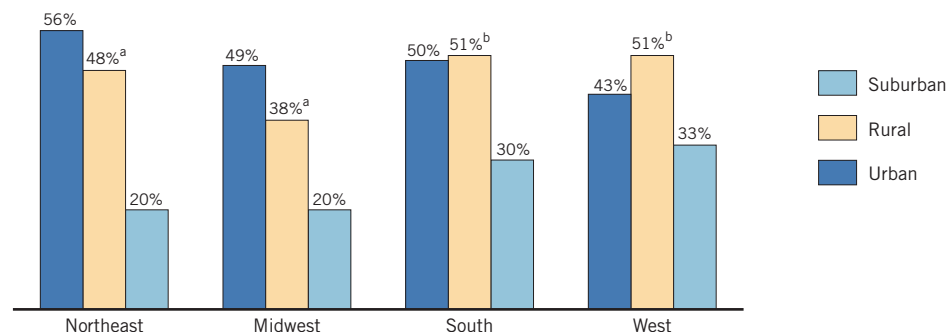
In the Northeast and Midwest, children in urban areas are more likely to live in low-income families.

- 56% in the Northeast.
- 49% in the Midwest

In the South and West, children in rural areas are more likely to live in low-income families.

- 51% in the South
- 51% in the West

Figure 2: Percent of Children in Low-Income Families, by Region and Urban, Rural, and Suburban Residence, 2001



^a Significantly lower than the percent in urban areas, $p < .10$, two-tailed t-test
^b Significantly higher than the percent in urban areas, $p < .10$, two-tailed t-test

The West was the most common residence of children of recent immigrants.

- 37% of children of recent immigrants³ lived in the West.
- 46% of children of recent immigrants who live in the West do not have a parent who holds a high school degree.

Children in low-income families were twice as likely to face moving in the past year compared to children in higher-income families.

- The majority of children in low-income families who made an interregional move in the previous year (over 40%) moved to the South.
- More than 90% of children who moved in the previous year moved within a region.

Reasons for moving vary.

- 45% of children in low-income families who moved to different regions did so for the parents' jobs.
- Children in low-income families who moved within regions usually did so for housing-related reasons—the most commonly cited was “wanted better housing.”

Policies

Work Supports: These trends reinforce the importance of state policies that support low-income working families such as an expanded federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), refundable state tax credits, and affordable child care.⁴

Immigrant Access to Support: Limiting recent immigrants' access to the social safety net increases the vulnerability of their children. Increasing the work and income supports available to immigrant families will help them to become financially stable.

The welfare reform legislation of 1996 sharply restricted legal immigrants' access to key income and employment supports, and while parts of the 1996 legislation have been reversed, much remains to be done.⁵

Affordable Housing: Low-income children's higher mobility rates are cause for concern. Moving is associated with family turbulence and difficulties in school.⁶ Children in low-income families are more likely to move so that their parents can find less expensive housing. State policies that assure affordable housing (e.g., through voucher programs) can potentially increase residential stability among children and employment among their parents.⁷

Endnotes

1. Low income is defined as twice the federal poverty level, or \$36,800 for a family of four (2003).

2. Estimates in this fact sheet were prepared by Heather Koball and Ayana Douglas-Hall of NCCP based on the Current Population Survey, March 2002 supplement for a report on regional trends among low-income families and children. See: Koball, H. & Douglas-Hall, A. (2003). *Where do children in low-income families live?* New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health <www.nccp.org/pub_liv03.html>.

3. Recent immigrant is defined as an individual moving to the United States for good within the last 10 years.

4. Cauthen, N. K. & Lu, H. (2003). *Employment alone is not enough for America's low-income children and families* (Living at the Edge Research Brief 1). New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health.

5. See NCCP's LIFT policy database on the NCCP web site: www.lift.nccp.org, for more information on benefits available to immigrant families

6. Pribesh, S. & Downey, D. B. (1999). Why are residential and school moves associated with poor school performance. *Demography*, 36(4), pp. 521-534.

Stoneman, Z.; Brody, G. H.; Churchill, S.; & Winn, L. (1999). Effects of residential instability on Head Start children and their relationship with older siblings. *Child Development*, 70(5), pp. 1246-62.

7. National Center for Children in Poverty. (2003). Housing assistance promotes employment. *News & Issues*, Summer, pp. 3, 7 <www.nccp.org/pub_sum03c.html>; MDRC. (2001). *Welfare, housing, and employment: Learning from the Jobs-Plus Demonstration* (MDRC Policy Brief). New York, NY: MDRC <<http://www.mdrc.org/Reports2001/JP-PolicyBrief/JobPlusPolicyBrief.pdf>>; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2000). Research evidence suggests that housing subsidies can help long-term welfare recipients find and retain jobs. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities <www.cbpp.org/6-27-00hous.htm>.