



# Resetting the Poverty Debate

State of the States 2013

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December 2013

# Introduction

In 2012, the official poverty rate in the United States was 15 percent, statistically unchanged from 2011. Nearly one in six people, or 46.5 million Americans, lived below the official federal poverty line—\$23,492 per year for a family of four.<sup>1</sup> Each year, to track the progress toward the goal of cutting poverty in half in 10 years, Half in Ten publishes an annual report that examines 21 different indicators of economic security and opportunity. It helps us better understand where we are improving the situation for America's struggling families and where we need to do a better job nationally.

While our annual report focuses on the national landscape of poverty in America, this new report follows up with a comparative look at the states. For each indicator examined in our national report, we rank the states in comparison to one another and provide some context about policies to improve those indicators.

The bottom line is this: Low-income families in states across the country are suffering from too many years of reckless efforts to reduce the federal deficit. Although many states need to improve local policies—especially those that hinder the ability of low-income families to access federally funded programs—the state-by-state results from our indicators show that the budget choices we make at the national level have consequences. The effects of sequestration will continue into next year and for many years thereafter. “It is like a slowly growing cancer,” says Steven Warren, vice chancellor of research and graduate studies at the University of Kansas.<sup>2</sup> In 2014, sequestration will only get worse. The cuts will be deeper. Many of this year's cuts simply have not been implemented yet. And the one-time fixes that agencies made this year to mitigate sequestration's impacts are no longer an option moving forward.<sup>3</sup>

It's time to reset the debate. It's time to reinvest in our economy and build a better path to shared opportunity for families that are still struggling, even in a slow-growing economy. Although not ideal, the recent budget agreement reached by House and Senate negotiators will reduce the harmful effects of sequestration and represents a positive step in the right direction. However, it still does not make the investments needed to get our country back on track.<sup>4</sup> We simply cannot afford another year of reckless policies that leave the most disadvantaged among us paying for deficit reduction. It's time for Congress to replace the debate about reckless cuts with one about investments in our economy and shared opportunities, especially for families that are struggling at the bottom.

Indicator	Source
<b>POVERTY IN THE UNITED STATES</b>	
Poverty rate	American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.
Child poverty rate	American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.
<b>GOOD JOBS</b>	
High school graduation rate	Common Core of Data, National Center for Education Statistics.
Disconnected youth	Population Reference Bureau analysis for Kids Count of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.
Higher-education attainment rate	CAP Action analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, Table B15001.
Unemployment rate	Local Area Unemployment Statistics, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
Gender wage gap	Institute for Women's Policy Research analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey.
<b>STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES</b>	
Children living apart from parents	Child Trends analysis for Kids Count of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect.
Teen birth rate	National Vital Statistics System, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
<b>FAMILY ECONOMIC SECURITY</b>	
Lack of health insurance coverage	CAP Action analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, Table C27016.
Hunger and food insecurity	Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement, U.S. Department of Agriculture.
Unemployment insurance coverage	Unemployment Insurance Chartbook, U.S. Department of Labor.
Affordable and available housing	National Low Income Housing Coalition analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.
Savings and assets	Bay Area Council Economic Institute analysis for the Corporation for Enterprise Development of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation.

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The Half in Ten campaign is a project of the Center for American Progress Action Fund, the Coalition on Human Needs, and The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. It is dedicated to building the political and public will to cut the U.S. poverty rate in half in 10 years. The campaign builds on the work of the Center for American Progress's 2007 Task Force on Poverty, combining evidence-based policy recommendations with strategic building of networks, spokespeople, and opinion leaders in communities to amplify the call to reduce poverty in America. Our approach is grounded in four fundamental goals: creating good jobs, promoting economic security, strengthening families, and cutting poverty in half in 10 years.

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