

Households with Low Incomes 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.

Households with low incomes are at risk of being undercounted

People with low incomes have been undercounted in past censuses, disadvantaging their families, communities and neighborhoods.

Hard-to-count characteristics of households with low incomes

- **Housing:** The Census Bureau will be reaching out to many households by mail. Since households with lower incomes tend to move more frequently, it is likely that the Census Bureau will not have correct addresses for them.
- **Race and Ethnicity:** Households with low incomes are more likely to include people of color, who are also historically hard-to-count.
- **Internet Access:** The Census Bureau plans to use the Internet as the primary source of data collection for Census 2020. However, only 78 percent of households with income below \$30,000 use the Internet.
- **Administrative Data:** The 2020 Census will likely use administrative data, such as information mined from U.S. tax returns. This may create a disadvantage for individuals and households who do not file taxes or have W-2s.

Consequences of undercounting households with low incomes

When households with low incomes are undercounted, political boundaries may not accurately represent reality. Undercounting results in households with low incomes being denied a full voice in policy decision-making. As a result, this hard-to-count community stands to lose important representation guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.

Undercounting households with low incomes in the 2020 Census could also impact how federal funding is allocated to states and localities. Most programs that impact children, households., and communities with low incomes are funded based, primarily, on census-driven data, including:

- **Title I Grants to Local Education Agencies - \$13.9 billion**
- **Special Education Grants - \$11.2 billion**
- **Head Start Program - \$8.3 billion**
- **Child Care and Development Fund - \$2.9 billion**
- **SNAP - \$69.5 billion**

- National School Lunch Program (NSLP) - \$11.6 billion
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) - \$6.3 billion
- Medicaid - \$312 billion
- Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) - \$11.1 billion
- Health Center Programs (Community, Migrant, Homeless, Public Housing) - \$4.2 billion
- Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers Program - \$19.1 billion
- Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) - \$3.4 billion

You can help - right now

Stakeholders (advocates, funders, and civic leaders) can improve the count of households with low incomes 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 households with low incomes.** 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 households with low incomes 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 households with low incomes face in the census.** Advocates can join Complete Count Committees to help ensure a complete census and include voices from the households with lower incomes community.
- **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.