

## Hispanic kids the largest group of children living in poverty

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Hispanics now make up the largest group of children living in poverty, the first time in U.S. history that poor white kids have been outnumbered by poor children of another race or ethnicity, according to a new study.

In a [report](#) released Wednesday, the Pew Hispanic Center said that 6.1 million Hispanic children are poor, compared with 5 million non-Hispanic white children and 4.4 million black children. Pew said Hispanic poverty numbers have soared because of the impact of the recession on the [growing number of Latinos](#).

The rise in childhood poverty is another signal of distress for the nation's 50.5 million Hispanics, who have been hit harder by the bleak economy than any other group. They have one of the highest unemployment rates and saw their household wealth decline more steeply than either blacks or whites, largely because so many lost their houses to foreclosure.

Although the recession is the largest single factor explaining the rise, the sheer number of Hispanics in the country and their high birth rates suggest that childhood poverty for Hispanics is not just a temporary bump in the road. The nation's under-18 population would have declined over the past decade if it weren't for Hispanics, and most places that grew in population had Hispanics, along with Asians, to thank.

"How Latinos mature, what schools they go to and how they do in the labor market will have implications for us all in this century," said Mark Lopez, an author of the Pew study. "A quarter of all children are Hispanic, and in the future they will make up a greater share of the nation's workforce."

Although the number of poor Hispanic children is at a record high, black children have a higher rate of poverty — 39 percent, compared with 35 percent for Hispanic children. In contrast, the poverty rate for white children is about 12 percent.

Nationwide, one in five children across all races and ethnicities is living in poverty, which the Census Bureau defines as a household income of \$22,113 for a family of four.

In the Washington region, almost every jurisdiction has experienced a rise in childhood poverty since the

recession began in 2007, according to recently released census statistics. But the District has by far the highest rate, with almost one in three children growing up poor. Almost all are African American. In the suburbs, the highest poverty rates fluctuate between black and Latino kids.

Before the recession, poor white children outnumbered poor Hispanic children in the United States. The recession thrust more children of all races and ethnicities into poverty, but none more than Hispanics. Their poverty rate increased about twice as fast as the rate for black children.

“Hispanics have really been slammed with what’s been going on in the past three years,” said Patricia Foxen, associate director of research for the National Council of La Raza, a Hispanic advocacy group, singling out unemployment and the foreclosure crisis as the two main culprits. “A lot of Latinos invested most of their wealth in buying homes. It’s the American dream. When people lost their homes, as lots of people in the Latino community did, they get wiped out. If both unemployment and foreclosure affect your family, clearly the chances you’re going to live in poverty go way up.”

The Washington area’s demographics are different. Black children account for more than half the region’s 126,000 children living in poverty. About one in four poor children are Hispanic, and one in 10 are white. Asians are the smallest group, just 8 percent of the region’s poor children.

But these figures vary widely by jurisdiction. In the District, for example, 90 percent of the more than 30,000 children living in poverty last year were black, while 8 percent were Hispanic, and less than half a percent were white.

In Arlington County, 39 percent of poor kids were Hispanic, while 19 percent were black. In Fairfax County, black and Hispanic children each made up about a third of the 19,000 poor kids.

At least a third of poor children were Hispanic in Montgomery, Loudoun and Prince William counties, while black children made up a third or more of the poor kids in Montgomery, Prince George’s, Anne Arundel and Howard counties.

The number of people seeking help from Casa of Maryland, a nonprofit group that works with low-income immigrants, has risen by a third or more since the recession began, said Director Gustavo Torres. Though its focus is to help people find jobs, Casa of Maryland is about to expand services for children and families.

“People initially come to us looking for jobs,” Torres said. “Their next question always is: ‘If you don’t have any jobs, can you help me with food? I need food for my family, I need food for my kids, I cannot eat tonight.’ It’s really sad to see. We didn’t face this kind of challenge before.”

He said Casa of Maryland has formed partnerships with food pantries. Once a month, the pantries bring groceries to the organization’s work centers to distribute.

The reason for the growing need is clear to Torres: “The main priority for our children and parents is jobs, jobs, jobs,” he said.

In the Pew study, many of the factors affecting whether a child is likely to live in poverty are the same across races and ethnicities.

Poverty was most prevalent in families headed by a single mother, or parents who are unemployed or have less

than a high school education.

But where parents were born also played a role. The poverty rate among Hispanic children with immigrant parents was 40 percent, compared with 28 percent for children whose parents were born in the United States.

Staff researcher Jennifer Jenkins contributed to this report.

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