

Updated February 26, 2018

SNAP Helps Millions of Latinos

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the nation’s most important anti-hunger program. The SNAP program lifts millions of low-income Latinos¹ out of poverty and helps them afford an adequate diet.

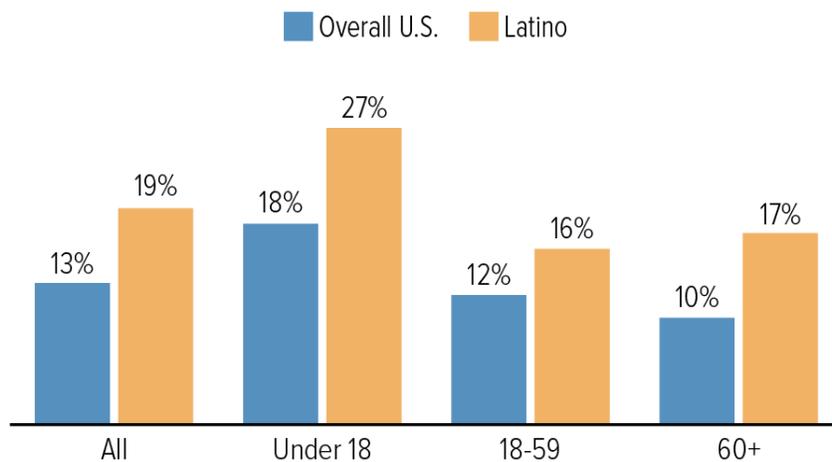
Poverty and Food Insecurity Are Higher Among Latinos

Latinos have a higher poverty rate than the overall U.S. population. (See Figure 1.)

FIGURE 1

Latinos Have Higher Poverty Rates Than Nation as a Whole

Poverty rates by age and ethnicity in 2016



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2017 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

The most recent Census data show that:²

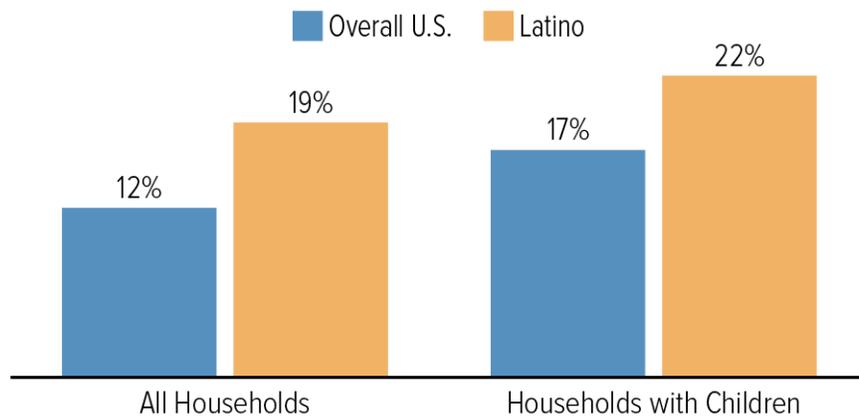
- About 1 in 5 Latinos (19 percent) live below the poverty line, compared with 1 in 8 (13 percent) in the general population.
- About 1 in 4 (27 percent) Latino children live below the poverty line, compared with 1 in 6 (18 percent) among U.S. children.
- About 1 in 6 (16 percent) Latinos aged 18-59 live below the poverty line, compared with 1 in 9 (12 percent) among all such adults.
- About 1 in 6 (17 percent) Latino adults aged 60 and over lived below the poverty line, compared with 1 in 10 (10 percent) among all such older adults.

Latino households are more likely to experience food insecurity, compared with all U.S. households. (See Figure 2.) The U.S. Agriculture Department (USDA) classifies households that lack consistent access to nutritious food at some point during the year because of limited resources as “food insecure.”

FIGURE 2

Latino Households Have Higher Food Insecurity Than Nation as a Whole

Percentage of households that lacked access to adequate food at some point in the year, by ethnicity, in 2016



Source: Alisha Coleman-Jensen et al., “Household Food Security in the United States in 2016, Statistical Supplement,” USDA, September 2017.

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The most recent USDA report shows that:³

- About 1 in 5 (19 percent) households headed by Latinos were food insecure in 2016, compared with 1 in 8 (12 percent) for all U.S. households.

- More than 1 in 5 (22 percent) households headed by Latinos with children were food insecure in 2016, compared with 1 in 6 (17 percent) for all U.S. households with children.

How SNAP Responds

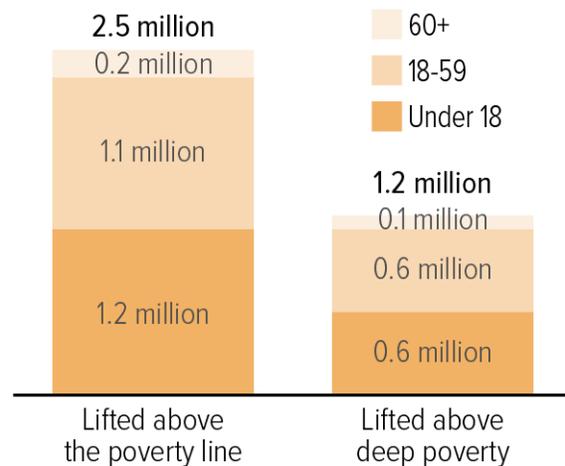
SNAP is a powerful anti-poverty program for Latinos. In a typical month of 2016, SNAP helped about 10 million Latinos put sufficient food on the table.⁴ Its benefits lifted about 2.5 million Latinos, including 1.2 million children, out of poverty in 2015. SNAP also kept 1.2 million Latinos out of deep poverty (above half of the poverty line) that year.⁵ (See Figure 3.)

- Latinos represent more than one-fifth of all SNAP participants. According to the Census estimates for 2016, Latinos make up about 18 percent of the U.S. population.⁶
- More than a fifth of SNAP benefits — about \$16 billion in 2016 — went to Latino households.⁷
- On average, Latino households that participate in SNAP receive \$290 in SNAP each month.
- A typical participating Latino family of three has an average monthly income of \$980, or 59 percent of the poverty line. When their \$400 SNAP benefit — the average for a family of three — is added to their cash income, total monthly resources rise by 29 percent, to \$1,380.

FIGURE 3

SNAP Lifted Millions of Latinos Out of Poverty and “Deep Poverty” in 2015

By age



Note: “Deep poverty” is defined as having income below half of the poverty line. Figures use the federal government’s Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM). Unlike the Census Bureau’s official poverty measure, the SPM counts the effect of non-cash government benefits and tax credits. Figures don’t add up due to rounding.

Source: CBPP analysis of Census Bureau data from the March Current Population Survey; corrections for underreported benefits from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Urban Institute TRIM model

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¹ Latinos refers to an ethnicity and may include individuals of any race.

² U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2017 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

³ Alisha Coleman-Jensen *et al.*, “Household Food Security in the United States in 2016, Statistical Supplement,” USDA, September 2017, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/84973/err-237.pdf>.

⁴ The source for these data is the U.S. Agriculture Department’s fiscal year 2016 SNAP Households Characteristic data. Reporting of race/ethnicity is voluntary and is missing for 15.5 percent of SNAP participants. Some 7.5 million SNAP participants self-identified or were coded by an eligibility worker as “Latino or Hispanic.” They represented about 17 percent of all SNAP participants. The cases with missing race/ethnicity information are concentrated in 23 states. For example, Tennessee, Texas, and Washington each were missing the data for more than two-thirds of SNAP individuals. As a result, we relied on another data source, the March 2017 Current Population Survey, to estimate that another 2 million Latinos, 5 percent of all SNAP participants, should have been included as Latino.

⁵ CBPP analysis of Census Bureau data from the March Current Population Survey; corrections for underreported benefits from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Urban Institute TRIM model.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, Annual Estimates of the Resident Population as of July 1, 2016.

⁷ A Latino household is defined as a household with at least one Latino SNAP participant. About \$13 billion, 19 percent of total SNAP benefits, was issued to Latino households based on the U.S. Agriculture Department's fiscal year 2016 SNAP Households Characteristic data. Due to missing race/ethnicity data discussed above, we estimate that an additional \$3 billion was issued to Latino households that did not report race/ethnicity data.