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Fact Sheet

Hunger & Poverty in the Hispanic Community

September 2012

According to recently released data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of Americans living in poverty has only slightly decreased since 2010. Since the beginning of the recession in 2008, food insecurity has remained virtually unchanged, largely due to federal safety net programs that keep more people from going hungry. Ironically, Congress is considering massive funding cuts to these programs at a time when they are needed most.

People of color are disproportionately impacted by hunger and poverty in the United States. The Latino community is the largest ethnic minority group in the country, and the food insecurity and poverty figures for Latinos are astonishingly high. However, the figures could be far worse if it were not for programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which keep more Americans from falling into hunger and poverty each year.

Hunger

More than one in four Latino families experience food insecurity—the highest rate among any demographic in the country.[1] Latino families with children struggle even more to put food on the table—nearly one in three.[2]

Food Insecurity, 2011 Data

	General Population[3]	Latinos[4]
Households	14.9% 17.9 million	26.2% 3.8 million
Individuals	16.4% 50.1 million	28.3% 13.8 million
Children under 18	22.4% 16.7 million	34.5% 5.5 million

Source: USDA Economic Research Service

Poverty

Within the Latino community, people living in poverty reached record numbers in 2011: more than 13 million individuals.[5]

Poverty, 2011 Data

	General Population[3]	Latinos[4]
Individuals	15.0%	25.3%
Children under 18	21.9%	34.1%
Children under 5	25.1%	36.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Impact of Anti-Hunger and Anti-Poverty Programs

While poverty and unemployment remained stagnant in 2011, food insecurity did not increase, mainly due to the effectiveness of our federal government nutrition programs.

Thirty-five percent of Latinos earned less than $29,654,[6] the federal income limit for household participation in SNAP in 2011. Still, only 21.4 percent of Latinos received SNAP benefits.[7]

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Poverty and Food Stamp Participation, 2011 Data		
	Below 130% of the poverty line	Received SNAP
General population	20.8%	13.0%
Latinos	34.9%	21.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Programs like SNAP; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); the EITC; and the Child Tax Credit (CTC) help families put food on the table and lift millions of people out of poverty every year. According to USDA, 16.7 percent of SNAP recipients[8] and 45 percent of all WIC participants[9] are Hispanic. Census Bureau data shows that 36.6 percent of working Latino families received the EITC in 2009, the latest year for which data is available.[10] According to a White House report, 3.7 million Latino families, including 8 million children, benefit from the EITC and the CTC.[11]

Benefits of these vital programs are not included in the official poverty and food insecurity figures. If they were, the numbers would show that the EITC lifted 5.7 million people out of poverty in 2011, including 3.1 million children and that SNAP lifted 3.9 million people out of poverty, including 1.7 million children.[12]

Recent budget negotiations have put all of these programs at risk of deep cuts. It is critical that Congress form a circle of protection for hungry and poor people in the upcoming deficit reduction and farm bill debates.

Endnotes

1 Household Food Security in the United States in 2011. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, September 2012. Table 2.

2 Household Food Security in the United States in 2011. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, September 2012. Table 3.

3 Household Food Security in the United States in 2011. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, September 2012. Tables 1A and 1B.

4 Statistical Supplement to Household Food Security in the United States in 2011. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, September 2012. Tables S-2 and S-3.

5 U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2011

6 Id.

7 Id.

8 Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: FY 2010. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis. Table A.23.

9 National Survey of WIC Participants II, Participant Characteristics Report. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis. Exhibit 3.6.

10 U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

11 President Obama's Agenda and the Hispanic Community. The White House, August 2012.

12 U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2011 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

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