

2025 KIDS COUNT Data Book
State Press Release



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Over 72,000 working families with children in Puerto Rico live in poverty

In this context, the Instituto del Desarrollo de la Juventud advocates for public policies that place low-income working families at the forefront.

San Juan, Puerto Rico – Over 72,000 households headed by working parents continue to live in poverty in Puerto Rico, according to the most recent data. This was highlighted by the Instituto del Desarrollo de la Juventud (IDJ) during Data Week 2025. Despite some progress, this reality persists: the archipelago still faces labor market barriers that prevent many families from achieving economic mobility.

In Puerto Rico, the median income for families with children is \$26,360—nearly \$40,000 less than the median income in New Mexico, the lowest ranked jurisdiction in the United States. As a result of this wage disparity, 72,236 families with children (36%) in Puerto Rico live in poverty despite being employed, facing barriers to economic mobility. This reality underscores the urgent need to invest in expanding economic mobility opportunities through access to quality jobs.

Economic disparities become even more evident when examining the situation of single-parent families: according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 72% of children living in female-headed households in Puerto Rico are below the poverty line. In these households, the median annual income is just \$14,495, highlighting the deep economic challenges many mothers who are heads of household face on the island.

“In Puerto Rico, thousands of parents get up every day to work and provide for their families, and yet they still live in poverty. The evidence is clear: people here work, and

those who don't often face real barriers—not a lack of will,” said Sarah Vázquez Pérez, interim executive director of the Instituto del Desarrollo de la Juventud and a member of the KIDS Count network in Puerto Rico.

Vázquez Pérez added, “We can't keep normalizing the idea that hard work isn't enough. There's still time to push for public policies and structural changes that promote economic mobility and support these families. When families are at the center of economic development, we all benefit.”

Key Findings on the Employment Conditions of Families

- In 2023, 45% (226,000) of children from 0 to 17 years old lived in homes where their parents lack secure employment. This has decreased from 55% in 2013 — a 10 percentage point reduction that, while positive, has not been enough to reverse the structural conditions of poverty.
- This same proportion is observed in the indicator of children in low-income working families. Compared to 2013, this is an increase of six percentage points (from 39% to 45%), reflecting a deterioration in the economic stability of many working families.
- In addition, 72,236 families with children (36%) live below the poverty line despite being employed.

“A decade of change shows that families with children are increasingly entering the labor force, yet these jobs are not enough to improve their economic reality. As a result, we're seeing an increase in the number of children living in families that are working but still earning low incomes,” said Vallerie Blakely Vallecillo, Research Analyst at the IDJ.

The stagnation of these conditions is also reflected in the overall grade of the Child and Youth Well-Being Index, developed by IDJ, which remains at a D, placing the island in 20th position when compared to the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

“Too many families are struggling to make ends meet. These data show the need to centralize families in our policy decisions. Moving families and their children forward should be the goal by which we measure progress,” said Dr. María Enchautegui-Roman, Director of Research and Chief Knowledge Officer of IDJ.

The data highlight a clear priority: improving the economic conditions of families with children and youth in Puerto Rico is essential to achieving sustainable progress in economic mobility. These families are a key component of the country's development and face structural challenges that require immediate attention.

IDJ recommendations include:

In response to this reality, the Instituto del Desarrollo de la Juventud (IDJ) developed *Nuestra Agenda: A Path Toward Quality Jobs*, a document that outlines 16 public policy recommendations aimed at promoting the economic mobility of families with children in Puerto Rico. This agenda presents a strategy structured around four pillars:

- **Create good jobs**, particularly in sectors with growth potential.
- **Train the workforce**, through workforce development programs aligned with the needs of the job market.
- **Remove barriers to employment**, such as limited access to childcare or transportation.
- **Ensure that work pays off**, by strengthening income through supplemental tax credits and adequate wages.

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About the Instituto del Desarrollo de la Juventud

The IDJ promotes research and public policies to strengthen the economic security of families with children and youth to reduce child poverty in Puerto Rico. IDJ boosts change by developing evidence-based public policy recommendations, empowering those affected to participate in the decision-making process, and fostering alliances. Also, by conducting research that deepens understanding of the problem to forge solutions and disseminating data to increase general knowledge about the challenges children and youth in poverty face in Puerto Rico.

RELEASE INFORMATION

The *2025 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be available at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.aecf.org.

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