

# Why the Census Matters for Women & Girls

AN ACCURATE COUNT HELPS SUPPORT HEALTH & ECONOMIC SECURITY

FUNKE ADERONMU, SOPHIE KHAN, & CARA BRUMFIELD

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Census data help guide the distribution of over \$1.5 trillion each year in federal funds—including funding for programs that serve tens of millions of women and girls, particularly with low incomes.
- A fair and accurate count will help ensure the quality of census-derived data and research on women's and girls' economic security, while also ensuring that women and girls receive their fair share of political representation.
- Many women and girls fall into one or more “hard to count” groups and require intentional outreach to ensure a fair and accurate count.

In 2020, the federal government will conduct a decennial census, the [constitutionally-mandated count of every U.S. resident](#). Census data inform decisions about how and where to spend upwards of [\\$1.5 trillion each year](#) for programs and services that support U.S. communities. Census data also help researchers and policymakers understand the characteristics and needs of the population. Historically, some groups of people have been counted far less accurately than others. Such groups are considered [hard to count](#), including people experiencing poverty and people of color. Communities who are undercounted may not receive their fair share of political representation in redistricting, which is based on the decennial census and central to ensuring lawmakers enact policies promoting women's and girls' health and economic security.

## BARRIERS TO FAIRLY & ACCURATELY COUNTING WOMEN & GIRLS

Many women and girls fall into groups the Census Bureau considers hard to count. These include:

- **People experiencing poverty & homelessness:** [Women and girls](#) are more likely to experience poverty than men and boys. People experiencing poverty tend to

be renters (making them more likely to be moving during the census-taking process), have less access to the internet (one mode of self-response for the 2020 census), and are less likely to be captured in some [administrative data](#) as they are less likely to file taxes or have W-2s. Over 200,000 women experienced homelessness at one point in time in 2018, which put them at [serious risk of not being counted in the census](#).

- **People with disabilities:** People with disabilities face accessibility challenges and broader systemic inequities (see: “[Why the Census Matters for People with Disabilities](#)”), and about [36 million](#), a [disproportionate share](#), are women. Women with disabilities are more likely to experience poverty compared to [men with disabilities](#).
- **People of color:** Women and girls of color face a greater risk of being missed by the census compared to white women. The Urban Institute predicts up to a 3.68 percent undercount of Black people and up to a 3.57 percent undercount of Latinx people [in the 2020 Census](#), compared to an overcount of non-Hispanic, White people.
- **Young children:** [Young children](#), particularly if they live with young parents, have the highest net undercount rate. [Reasons](#) for this undercount include the type and complexity of households and living arrangements that they live in, language barriers, and their high [poverty rate](#) (19 percent for children under five in 2017).
- **Survivors of domestic violence:** Women are [more than twice](#) as likely to experience intimate partner violence as men. Although not officially designated as hard to count, survivors are at [greater risk](#) of experiencing [homelessness and poverty](#). [One in three \(43.6 million\) women experience violence](#) by an intimate partner. Domestic partner violence and intimate partner violence survivors may be particularly [reluctant to divulge personal information](#) in the census, as many have built protective factors for themselves, including ensuring that they cannot be found by their abusers.

## THE CENSUS & WOMEN'S HEALTH & ECONOMIC SECURITY

Census data help shape funding decisions for many foundational assistance programs that support improved health and economic security outcomes for women and girls. Census data also help us understand the characteristics and needs of the population.

### PROGRAMS & FUNDING

- **Medicaid:** At least [33 million](#) women and girls receive their health coverage through Medicaid. This includes [25 million](#) women, who make up about [62% of the adult Medicaid population](#). Under Medicaid, [women and girls can access services](#) such as family planning, mental health care, cancer screenings, and disability services, including home health care, transportation, and therapeutic supports. Medicaid covers roughly [1 in 3 women with disabilities](#). The federal government reimburses states for a share of their Medicaid costs, and the reimbursement rate is based, in part, on a state's population count. A state undercount could [lead to a reduction in Medicaid funding for that state, which might restrict access and benefits](#)—disproportionately affecting women and girls with low incomes.
- **CHIP:** The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) primarily serves children, but also provides services to women with low incomes. Nineteen states provide [CHIP coverage to pregnant women](#). The program relies on census data to determine [Enhanced Federal Medicaid Assistance Percentages \(eFMAPs\)](#), or how much federal funding states receive to administer CHIP based on population counts.
- **SNAP:** The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) [provides](#) food assistance to low-income households. Women and girls make up [57 percent](#) of SNAP participants, with women making up [63 percent](#) of all adult SNAP participants. The program [relies](#) on census-derived poverty guidelines to determine eligibility and benefit amounts.
- **WIC:** The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides supplemental food, nutrition education, and referrals to social and health services for over [7 million women, infants, and children](#) up to age 5 with incomes under 200% of the federal poverty level. Census-derived data are used to set [eligibility guidelines](#) and determine funding levels.

- **SSBG, Title V Maternal & Child Health Block Grants, & Title X Family Planning Grants:** The Social Services Block Grant, Title V, and Title X grant programs [rely](#), in part, on census-based population counts to determine award amounts and overall program funding levels. These programs provide critical health services, and social and economic supports—including pre- and post-natal care, [child care](#), birth control, STI/HIV services, and cancer screenings—on which millions of women and girls rely.
- **Section 8 Housing Vouchers:** Section 8 Housing Vouchers support seniors, people with disabilities, and families with low incomes in obtaining decent housing. Approximately [83 percent](#) of households in this program are led by women. [Voucher allocations and household eligibility](#) are partly determined using census-derived data. An undercount, particularly of communities of color, could leave many women [underserved](#).
- **Child Care Assistance & Head Start:** Census data inform funding for early childhood education and child care programs that provide supports for women and their families (see: "[Will Your Kids Count? Young children and their families in the 2020 Census](#)"). Such supports help working [mothers stay in the labor force and bring in needed income](#) for themselves and their families. In FY 2017, nearly [1.32 million children and almost 800,000 families](#) received child care assistance through the [Child Care and Development Block Grant](#) (CCDBG). Head Start provided [comprehensive](#) early education, nutritional, health, and social services for nearly 1 million children and [pregnant women](#) in FY 2018.
- **Violence Against Women Act & Family Violence Prevention and Services Act:** Many programs that address domestic and sexual violence through services, such as survivor advocacy and legal services, rely on census data.

### RESEARCH & DATA

A fair and accurate count of women and girls in the decennial census is essential for census-derived surveys that provide important data about women and girls and their communities. Annual data from the Current Population Survey and the American Community Survey provide a wealth of information on economic security outcomes, including measures of income, poverty, and wealth cross-tabulated by gender and race. These census-derived surveys examine population growth and inform policies concerning family demographics. The Higher Education Act of 1965, which includes protections against gender-based discrimination in postsecondary education through Title IX, uses census estimates to enforce anti-discrimination policies.