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Contact: **David Carrier**
202-572-6138
dcarrier@childtrends.org

New Study Finds Nearly One-Half of Children in Immigrant Families Live in Poverty
Official Measure Understates Poverty for All Children

Washington, DC— Nearly one-half (47.9 percent) of children in immigrant families live in poverty when basic living and child care costs are taken into account, according to a new research brief from Child Trends and the Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, University at Albany, SUNY. The brief, *Children in Immigrant Families—The U.S. and 50 States: Economic Need Beyond the Official Poverty Measure*, draws on Census 2000 data to present two new estimates of poverty rates for children by using measures that differ from those currently used by the federal government to determine official poverty thresholds.

According to the two new measures – the “baseline basic budget poverty” rate and the “baseline basic budget poverty plus” rate – many more children in native-born and immigrant families are poorer than the official poverty rate indicates. Deficiencies in the current poverty measure understate poverty by more than one-half for children in both groups; however, the under-reporting is greatest for children in immigrant families due to the likelihood of their living in states where cost of living is comparatively high.

Among the findings:

- The official poverty rates for children in immigrant and native-born families are 20.7 percent and 13.4 percent, respectively, but these proportions rise to 34.1 percent and 18.1 percent, respectively, when taking into account the costs of housing, food, other necessities, and federal income/payroll taxes (components of the new “baseline basic budget poverty” measure).
 - These proportions rise to 47.9 percent for children in immigrant families and 28.7 percent for children in native-born families when applying the “baseline basic budget poverty plus” measure, which also reflects child care and early education costs.
- Children in immigrant families tend to live in states with higher costs of living, which accounts for the larger gaps between the official poverty rate and the “baseline basic budget poverty” rate.
 - 52 percent live in states in which the two poverty rates differ by 13-18 percent.

The brief also presents implications for policy and programs:

- The level at which eligibility criteria are set for major public programs could be reviewed regularly to ensure that economically deprived children and families qualify for needed benefits and services.
- Policy and programmatic approaches directed especially at the specific circumstances of immigrant families could be developed and expanded to serve the actual population of children in immigrant families living in poverty.
- The federal government could devote additional resources to developing the data needed to accurately assess economic need among children and families in the United States, reflecting the local cost of living and other necessary expenses incurred by families.

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[Child Trends](#) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center that studies children at all stages of development. Our mission is to improve outcomes for children by providing research, data, and analysis to the people and institutions whose decisions and actions affect children.

[The Center for Social and Demographic Analysis](#) has just completed 25 years of existence and supports the efforts of population scientists at the University at Albany to conduct innovative research on such demographic topics as immigration, residential segregation, and health disparities.