

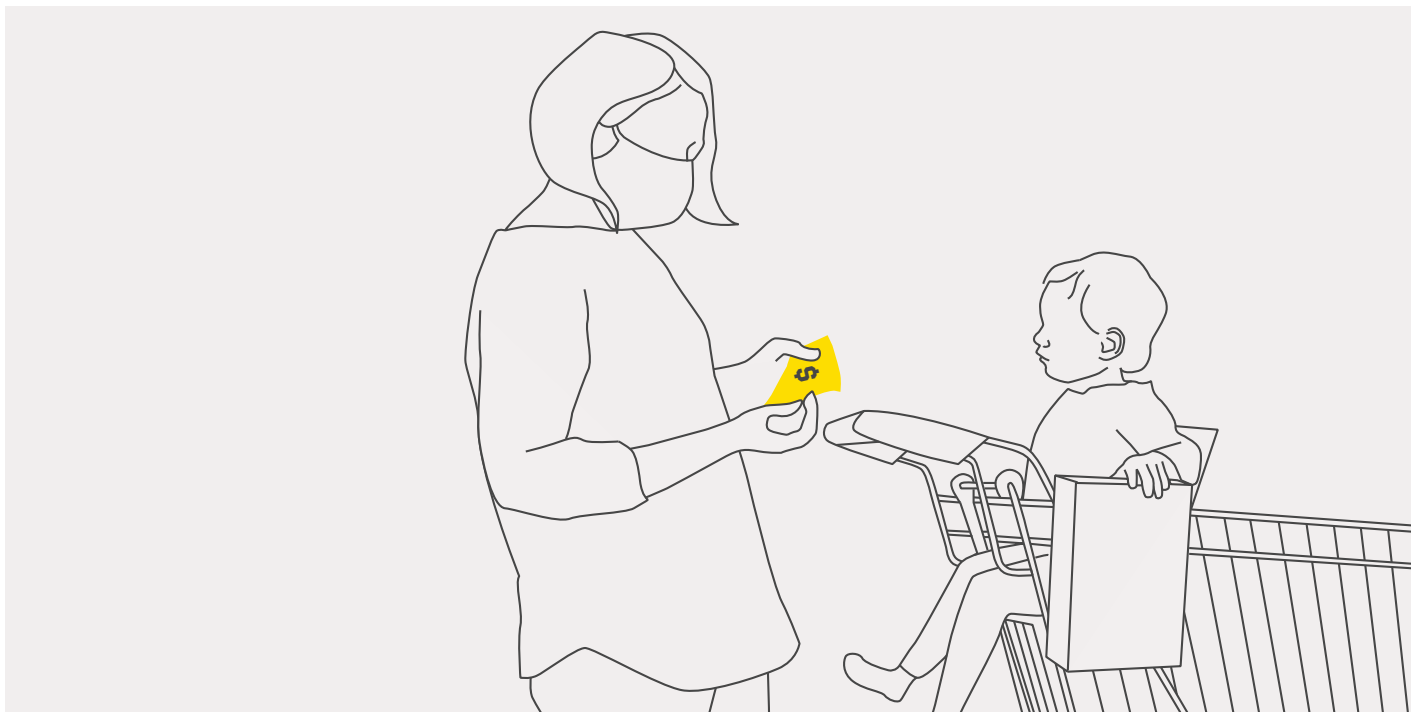
# STILL IN UNCERTAIN TIMES; STILL FACING HUNGER

After a year and a half of dealing with COVID-19, many American families are still struggling to afford food, which is taking a toll on parents' and children's emotional well-being.

In December of 2020, we reported on the high rates of hunger (also referred to as food insecurity) during the pandemic among households with young children. In this fact sheet, we revisit this topic with updated information and look at whether and how families' experiences with hunger have changed since December 2020.

Recent data from our RAPID-EC national survey shows that, 18 months into the pandemic, one in five households with young children are still experiencing hunger, which is affecting parents'

and children's emotional well-being. We also find differences in families' experiences of hunger across race/ethnicity and income, which are rooted in structural inequalities.



designbysoapbox.com

At present, it is unclear how Child Tax Credit payments, which began in July 2021, are affecting rates of hunger. Data collected from future surveys will help us better understand the effects of this policy on families with young children.

We measure hunger/food insecurity using six items developed by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA):

- The food that we bought just didn't last, and we didn't have money to get more.
- We couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.
- Did you or other adults in your household ever cut the size

of your meal or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

- If yes, how often did this happen?
- Did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?
- Were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

We calculate a total score for each participant on these six items. We classify participants as food insecure if they report two or more of the experiences described in these items (i.e., if they have a score equal to or greater than 2).

---

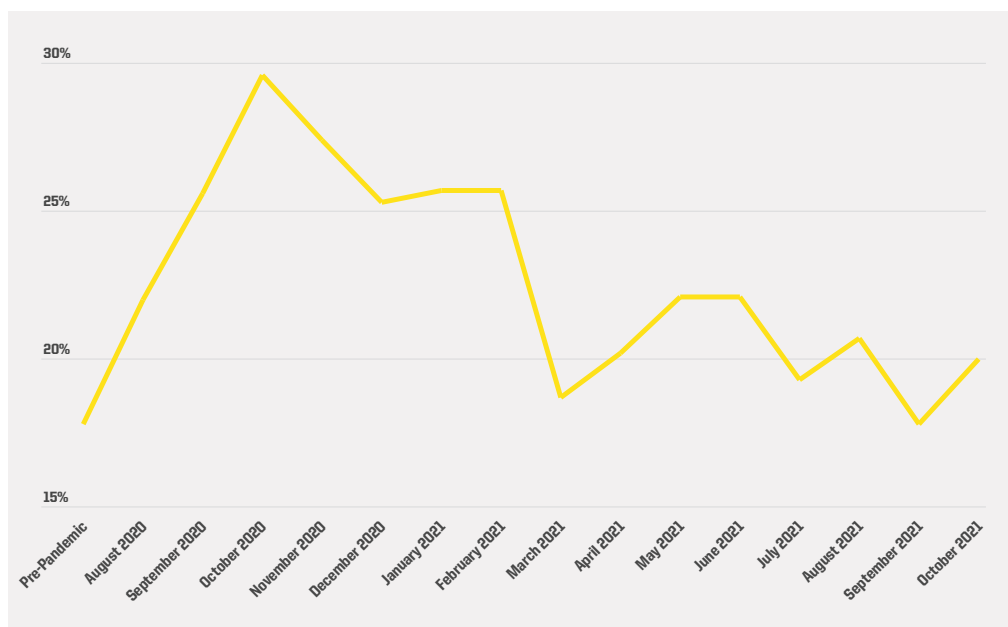
**"We're just one of the growing number of families that need more assistance in the most basic areas: money, food and shelter."**

Parent from Oregon

---

## FAMILIES EXPERIENCING HUNGER: PRE-PANDEMIC TO 2021

Trend of hunger




---

**"Food stamps get us through on food but anytime my husband makes a bit more money, they cut us back. The extras from relief bills has helped make the food money go farther."**

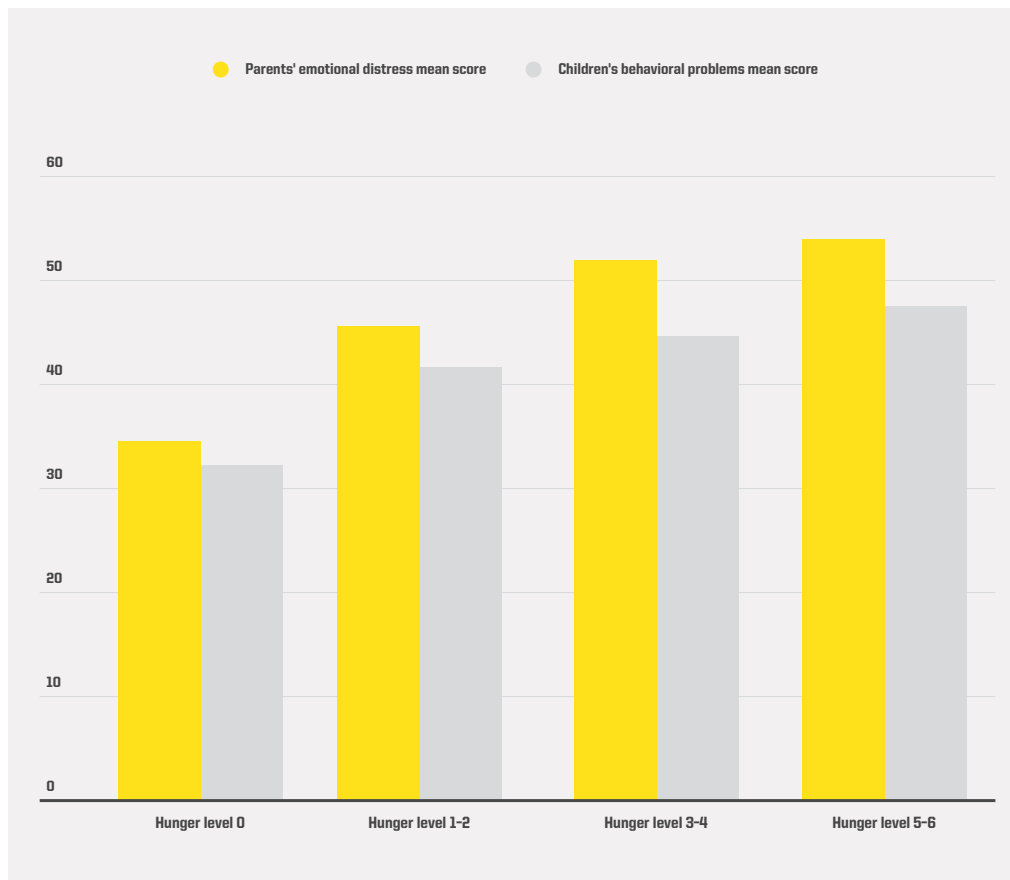
Parent from Pennsylvania

Eighteen percent of families with young children in our survey report experiencing hunger prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. During 2020, this number substantially increased

to above 25%. While rates in 2021 have come back to pre-pandemic levels, this still translates to more than 4.5 million US households with children age 5 and under that are dealing with hunger.\*

## HUNGER LEVELS AFFECT EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Parents' and children's emotional well-being, by hunger level\*\*



Hunger levels are affecting the emotional well-being of both parents and young children.

- Parents in households experiencing more hunger report significantly higher levels of emotional distress (a composite of

depressive, anxiety, stress, and loneliness symptoms).

- In families with high levels of hunger, parents also report lower well-being among their children (a composite of fear/anxiety and fussiness).

\* Based on 2019 American Community Survey, number of households with children under 6 years.

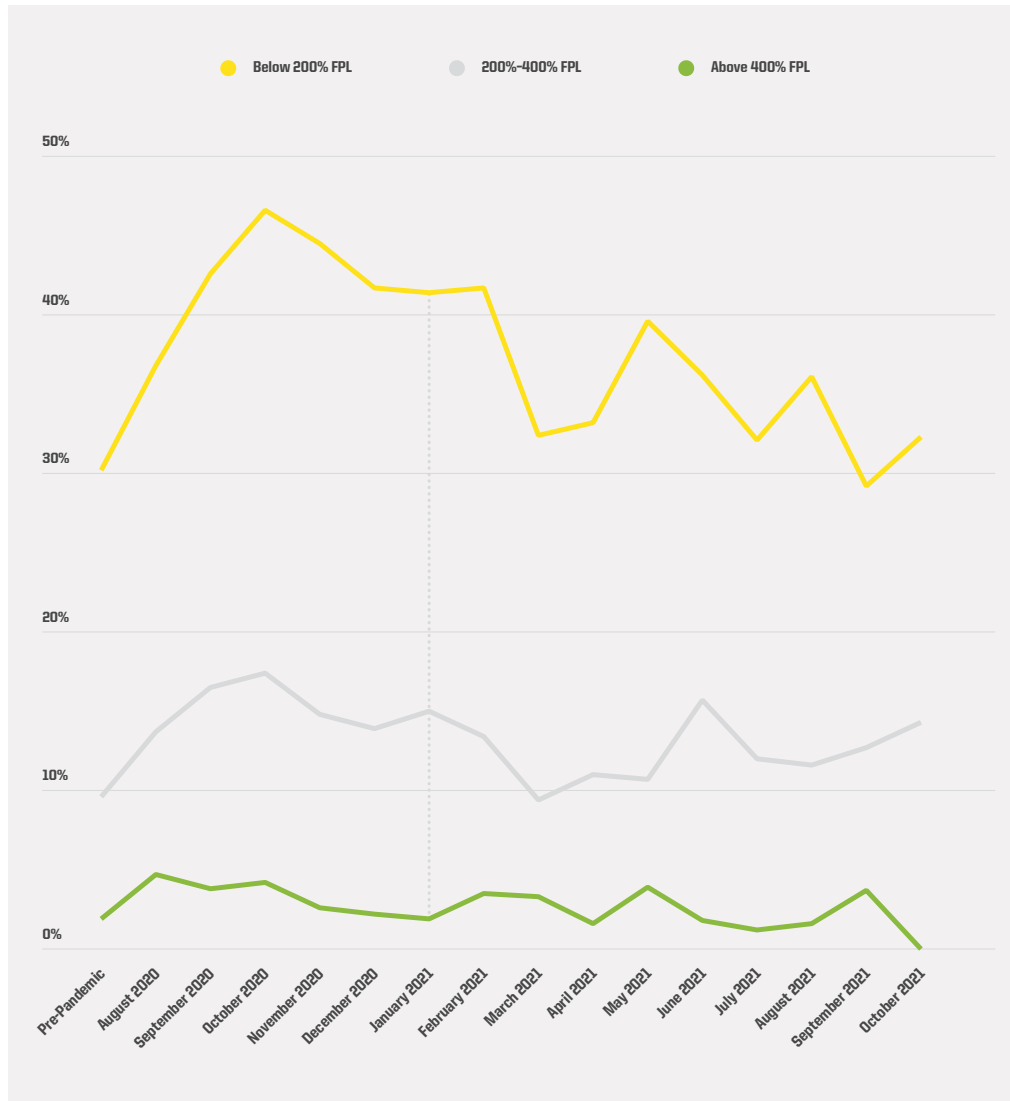
\*\* We ask parents about their experiences with four symptoms of emotional distress: stress, loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Responses for each symptom were averaged to create a single score and transformed to a range of 0-100 for each parent.

**“There is not enough food to go around.”**  
Parent from Louisiana

**“Have been feeding kids rather than myself. Obviously when I’m hungry it’s more likely to be a bad day for everyone as I am tired cranky and less patient.”**  
Parent, no state listed

# NOT ALL FAMILIES ARE EXPERIENCING THE SAME LEVELS OF HUNGER

Trend of hunger, by income level



**“I lost my cleaning and painting business. About to lose my vehicle. We have food but it’s a struggle to provide some days.”**  
Parent from Alabama

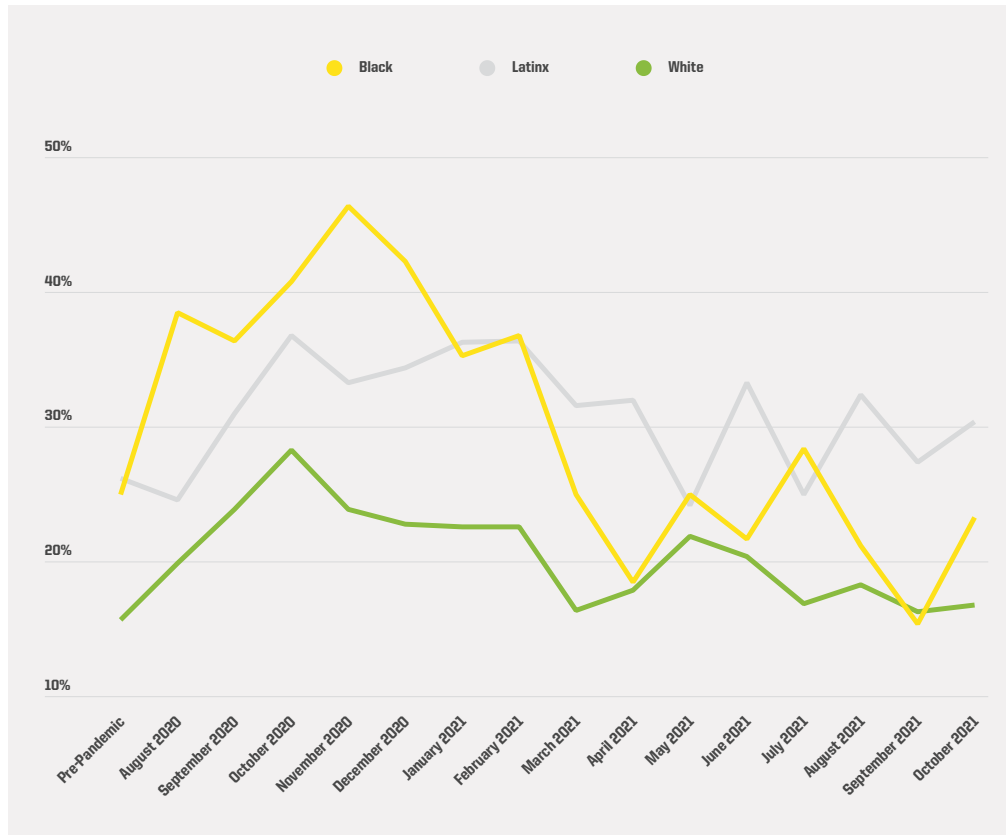
There are differences across income levels in families’ experiences of hunger.

- During the pandemic, the rate of hunger has been consistently highest for lower-income families compared to middle- and higher-income families.
- In 2021 (shown in the graph to the right of the dotted vertical line), there has been a significant decrease in hunger among lower-income families compared to middle- and higher-income households. However, they still have the highest rate of hunger, with more than 1 in 3 families experiencing hunger.

**“Feeding our children is the biggest challenge. We go without on a lot of things, but food and shelter we cannot go without.”**  
Parent from Oklahoma

## EXPERIENCES OF HUNGER AMONG FAMILIES OF DIFFERENT RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUPS

Trend of hunger, by race/ethnicity



There are also differences in experiences of hunger among families of different racial and ethnic groups.

- Black and Latinx families have been consistently experiencing more hunger during the pandemic compared to White households. These high rates of hunger persist even after accounting for differences in income between Black, Latinx and White households. Evidence suggests that Black and Latinx families are at greater risk of hunger due to structural inequalities, including

residential segregation and racial discrimination, in addition to factors that impact employment and income.

- Black families had the highest rate of hunger in 2020, but in 2021, there has been a significant declining trend of hunger among Black families compared to Latinx and White families. The declining trend of hunger among Latinx families is less pronounced than for Black families. Despite the declining trends, Black and Latinx families still have higher rates of hunger than White families throughout this period of time.

**“Temporary food stamps are a joke. I make \$90 too much for food stamps, can’t pay my bills, and have no money for food.”**  
Parent from Louisiana

**“Meal programs and food boxes would still be helpful.”**  
Parent from New York

**“Assistance with access to food and the child tax credit are really helpful.”**  
Parent from Georgia

# ABOUT THE RAPID-EC PROJECT

These analyses are based on responses collected from 4,748 caregivers with children under age 6 between the dates of August 11th 2020 and October 1st 2021. These caregivers represent a range of voices: 6.13% are Black/African American, 15.07% are Latinx, and 48.36% live at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. Proportions/percentages are calculated based on the item level response rates, not out of the total sample. The data for these analyses are not weighted.

The RAPID-EC project includes a survey of caregivers with children under age 6 and a survey of child care providers and other adults who care for children under age 6.

These surveys are designed to gather essential information continuously regarding the needs, health-promoting behaviors, and well-being of children and their families and important adults in their lives during the COVID-19 outbreak and recovery period in the United States.

Twice per month, RAPID-EC collects data from 1,000 caregivers and child care providers in all 50 states. The surveys are national in scope, though not technically nationally representative. RAPID-EC collects snapshots of data across time and can also assess trends longitudinally.

For more information about RAPID-EC study design and methods, see [here](#).

RAPID-EC is under the direction of Philip Fisher, PhD, Director of the Center for Translational Neuroscience at the University of Oregon

**1,000+**

surveyed  
bi-weekly

**83**

surveys

**11,000**

unique  
households

**50**

US states

