



Poverty & Equity

Global Estimate of Children in Monetary Poverty: An Update

Ani Rudra Silwal, Solrun Engilbertsdottir, Jose Cuesta, David Newhouse, David Stewart

This note builds on previous collaboration between the World Bank Group and UNICEF to estimate the global extent of child poverty. We estimate that in 2017, 17.5 percent of children in the world (or 356 million) younger than 18 years lived on less than \$1.90 PPP per day, as opposed to 7.9 percent of adults ages 18 and above. The poverty rate of children at the \$3.20 and \$5.50 lines were 41.5 and 66.7 percent, respectively. The number of children living in extreme poverty declined by approximately 29 million between 2013 and 2017. In 2017, Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for two thirds of extremely poor children, and South Asia another 18 percent. These estimates are based on the Global Monitoring Database (GMD) of household surveys compiled in Spring 2020 and consists of surveys from 149 countries that are also used for the official World Bank poverty estimates. Because the estimates pertain to 2017, they do not consider the adverse economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of ending poverty by 2030 is central to the work of the World Bank Group and UNICEF. SDG 1.2.2 recognizes that reducing poverty among children is a crucial element of this goal. This effort requires routine reporting of poverty to measure progress towards that goal. In 2016, the World Bank and UNICEF released the first ever global estimates of children living in extreme poverty defined by the international poverty line of \$1.90 PPP per day (UNICEF and World Bank, 2016). This note presents estimates for 2017 using the Global Monitoring Database (GMD) of household surveys compiled in spring 2020 and consists of surveys from 149 countries that are also used for the official World Bank poverty estimates. Because the estimates pertain to 2017, they do not consider the adverse economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This note describes the characteristics of children living in poverty and disaggregates the analysis by geographic region, income group, and residence in a fragile or conflict-affected country. The profile of extreme poor children is also presented by age group, gender, location, household characteristics, and the alternative poverty lines of \$3.20 PPP and \$5.50 PPP. This information will be useful for governments and all

partners working to improve the lives of the poorest children and their families.

The findings suggest that children were still disproportionately more likely to be in households living under \$1.90 PPP per day in 2017 compared to adults (17.5% vs. 7.9%). This is a moderate improvement over 2013, when it was estimated that 19.5% of children and 9.2% of all adults were living under \$1.90 PPP per day. The number of children living in extreme poverty fell in all regions of the world except for Sub-Saharan Africa, where they are estimated to have increased from 170 million in 2013 to 234 million in 2017.

Data and Methodology

This exercise builds on a similar one conducted in 2016 to examine child poverty globally using the GMD (Newhouse, Suarez-Becerra, and Evans, 2017). The analysis of child poverty presented below is derived from a combined sample of surveys containing records on 10.8 million individuals from 149 countries, including 34 high-income countries,

taken from the Spring 2020 version of the GMD. The GMD is a collection of globally harmonized household survey data compiled by the Data for Goals group of the World Bank's Poverty and Equity Global Practice. Further details on the background of the GMD are given in Castañeda et al. (2016). A unique feature of the GMD is that the welfare aggregates are the same as those used to compute the poverty estimates published by PovcalNet and the World Development Indicators. These aggregates are based on household per capita income or consumption, depending on the specific concept that is used to measure national poverty in any given country.

A challenge in estimating the magnitude of child poverty is that the inputs that are required to generate these estimates are compiled at different points in time. However, attempts were made to make this computation as internally consistent as possible given the availability of data. The GMD used in this note was generated based on data compiled for the Annual Meetings of the World Bank and the IMF in Fall 2020. The global poverty headcount rate for 2017 are consistent with the Spring 2020 release of PovcalNet. The estimate of global population is taken from the World Population Prospects 2019 (United Nations 2019). The estimates of the total number of children in poverty is derived from the estimated ratio of poor children to total population in the GMD database. This is by construction equal to the estimated child poverty rate times the share of the population in the sample that are children.

Results

The findings of the analysis demonstrate that children are disproportionately affected by extreme poverty. In 2017, they were twice as likely (17.5 percent) to be in households that live

¹ We cannot accurately compute the uncertainty around this estimate given the current set up of the GMD. Doing so would require information on the primary sampling unit (PSU) of the survey, not just

under \$1.90 PPP per day compared to 7.9 percent of adults (Table 1)¹. Although this is an improvement over 2013, extreme poverty among children seems not to have not fallen as much (19.5% to 17.5%) as it has done so for adults (9.2% to 7.9%) in relative terms. The youngest children are the worst off – nearly 20 percent of all children below 5 in the developing world live in extreme poor households (Table 2 in the appendix). These estimates also suggest that the concentration of poverty among children increased between 2013 and 2017. In other words, a larger share of the global poor were children in 2017 compared to that in 2013. A possible reason behind this is the fact that the average poverty gap at the \$1.90 PPP line of children younger than 18 years is greater (5.8%) than that of adults (2.5%) as seen in Table 2 in the appendix. In other words, children live further away from the poverty line than do adults. This makes sense since larger households are also more likely to be poorer.

Higher rates of poverty among children compared to adults partly result from the method used to calculate poverty, which is based on income or consumption per capita. Using a household equivalence scale that gives less weight to children would reduce the gap in poverty rates between children and adults. However, in 2016 the child poverty rate remained higher than those for adults under all reasonable two-parameter equivalence scales (Newhouse, Suarez-Becerra, and Evans 2017), and based on the trends for children and adults observed here there is no reason to believe this has changed in the intervening five years.

The geographic distribution of children living in extreme poor households is also striking (Table 3 in the Appendix). Sub-Saharan Africa has both the highest rates of children living in extreme poverty at just under 45.8 percent, and the largest share of the world's extreme poor children, at 65.8 percent. Two out of three extreme poor children in the world now

the sampling weight. Future versions of GMD may have complete information on the PSU, which would allow us to compute the standard error of the poverty estimate.

live in Sub-Saharan Africa. Since countries without data such as Somalia and Eritrea are not included in the analysis, the real share could be even higher. Of all the geographic regions, South Asia has the second highest share of children living in extreme poverty, at 10.2 percent, and accounts for 18.1 percent of the world's extremely poor children.

Therefore, 84 percent of extremely poor children in the world reside in either Sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia. These findings remain even when we use higher poverty lines of \$3.20 and \$5.50 PPP per day (Table 5 in the appendix). The child poverty rates at the \$3.20 line is 41.5 percent and the rate at the \$5.50 line is 66.7 percent.

Table 1: Description of data and global estimates of children in monetary poverty in 2013 and 2017

	2013	2017		
Poverty line in 2011 PPP \$	\$1.90	\$1.90	\$3.20	\$5.50
Number of countries in GMD	89	149		
Low and middle-income	76	115		
High-income	13	34		
Number of individuals in GMD, millions	7.7	10.8		
Total population represented in GMD, millions	5,249	6,601		
Population of children represented in GMD, millions	1,686	1,764		
Population of poor in GMD, mn	655	710	1,898	3,407
Population of children in poverty in GMD, mn	329	356	841	1,351
Share of children in poverty	19.5%	17.5%	41.5%	66.7%
Share of adults that are poor	9.2%	7.9%	23.5%	45.8%
Population living in poverty in the world, mn	766	710	1,898	3,407
Population in poverty in developing countries, mn	766	707	1,892	3,396
Children in poverty in developing countries, mn	385	356	841	1,351

Sources: GMD, UNDESA, WDI, PovcalNet.

Child poverty is more prevalent in countries prone to conflict. About 41.6 percent of children who live in fragile and conflict-affected countries affected by conflict and fragility live in extremely poor households, compared to 14.8 percent of children in other countries (Table 5 in the appendix). However, these fragile and conflict-affected countries only account for a quarter of poor children. Tables 6-12 in the appendix present further results on the extent of child poverty disaggregated by gender, location, household size, and characteristics of the household head such as gender, education, and industry of work. Strikingly, 71.3 percent of poor children live in a household where the head works in agriculture. This suggests that policies that improve agricultural productivity or otherwise support poor farmers can be an effective way to target poor children. In future

work, a richer analysis of child poverty by the informality of work of workers in the family, household composition, and gender could be conducted, similar to Boudet et al. (2018), using existing data in the GMD as this may yield additional insights.

Explaining changes in the magnitude and nature of child poverty between 2013 and 2017 is not straightforward with the data that are available to us. One set of changes affecting these estimates is economic in nature, such as GDP growth and the distribution of this growth within countries. Demographic changes such as the structure of the population may have changed between 2013 and 2017 to some degree. In addition to these changes, small differences may arise due to new surveys being

added to GMD². It is difficult to assess the relative contribution of these issues given their complexity and the limited number of variables in the GMD.

Conclusion

This note is the result of a collaboration between the World Bank and UNICEF to estimate the global magnitude of children in monetary poverty in 2017 to help monitor progress towards SDG 1.1.

We use the most recent data from household surveys available in GMD and the World Bank's official estimates of global poverty. This is an update to a similar exercise conducted for 2013 (Newhouse et al. 2017). Results suggest that 17.1% of children under 18 years of age still live under \$1.90 PPP per day, a moderate reduction from the 19.5% found in 2013 but still twice as much as the poverty rate of adults (7.6%). This implies that 30 million fewer children live under extreme poverty in 2017 compared to 2013. However, there is no room for complacency since the share of children living under higher poverty lines is still staggering: more than two out of five children still live under \$3.20 PPP per day in and two out of three children still live under \$5.50 PPP per day. Moreover, the concentration of poor children in Sub-Saharan Africa is also a concern, where two-thirds of all children under extreme poverty lived in 2017, an increase from 52% in 2013.

The estimates presented in this note do not capture the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on child poverty since all of the household surveys included in our analysis predate this ongoing pandemic.

However, it is likely that the estimates of child poverty presented here will worsen as a result of COVID-19's adverse impact on income generation and food

security. Preliminary projections from UNICEF and Save the Children suggest that the number of children living in poor households (as defined by the national poverty lines) may increase by up to 117 million by the end of 2020, although these estimates could change drastically as the pandemic is still ongoing. The estimates presented in this note are intended to provide inputs to UNICEF and World Bank efforts to monitor SDG 1.1. Future work will attempt to understand the overlap between multidimensional and monetary child poverty using data in the GMD. It would also be useful to use the data to better understand the economic conditions and policies that have enabled some countries reduce child poverty faster than others.

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² These changes are described in PovcalNet documentation, available at [What is new](#) on the PovcalNet website.

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APPENDIX

Table 2: Children in monetary poverty in 2017 at the \$1.90 line in 2011 PPP by age group

Age group	Extreme poor (millions)	Headcount poverty rate (%)	Share of extreme poor (%)	Share of population (%)	Poverty gap ratio (%)
Children 0-17	355.5	17.5	50.1	31.1	5.8
Children 0-4	107.0	19.7	15.1	8.3	6.5
Children 5-9	113.2	19.2	15.9	9.1	6.4
Children 10-14	93.8	16.5	13.2	8.8	5.4
Children 15-17	41.6	12.9	5.9	5.0	4.3
Adults (18 or more)	354.1	7.9	49.9	68.9	2.5
Adults 18-59	302.0	8.3	42.6	56.0	2.6
Adults 60 or more	52.1	6.2	7.3	12.9	2.3
Total	709.6	10.9	100.0	100.0	3.5

Note: The sources of this and subsequent tables are authors' analysis of Global Monitoring Database and PovcalNet.

Table 3: Children in monetary poverty in 2017 at the \$1.90 line in 2011 PPP by region

Region	Extreme poor (millions)	Headcount poverty rate (%)	Share of extreme poor (%)	Share of population (%)
East Asia and Pacific	24.2	5.9	6.8	20.1
of which: China	11.9	5.9	3.4	10.0
South Asia	64.3	10.2	18.1	31.2
of which: India	53.3	11.7	15.0	22.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	234.1	45.8	65.8	25.2
of which: Nigeria	45.4	45.9	12.8	4.9
Latin America and Caribbean	11.9	6.6	3.3	8.9
Europe and Central Asia	10.2	5.9	2.9	8.5
Middle East and North Africa	10.8	8.9	3.0	6.0
Total	355.5	17.5	100.0	100.0

Table 4: Children in monetary poverty in 2017 at the \$1.90 line in 2011 PPP by income group

Income group	Extreme poor (millions)	Headcount poverty rate (%)	Share of extreme poor (%)	Share of population (%)
Low income	137.8	48.0	38.8	14.2
Lower middle income	183.5	17.7	51.6	51.3
of which: India	53.3	11.7	15.0	22.6
of which: Nigeria	45.4	45.9	12.8	4.9
Upper middle income	33.6	5.5	9.4	30.3
of which: China	11.9	5.9	3.4	10.0
High-income	0.7	0.8	0.2	4.2
Total	355.5	17.5	100.0	100.0

Table 5: Children in monetary poverty at \$3.20 PPP (LMIC) and \$5.50 PPP (UMIC) lines

	Extreme poor (millions)	Headcount poverty rate (%)	Share of extreme poor (%)	Share of population (%)
\$3.20 PPP (LMIC) line				
Children 0-17	840.8	41.5	44.3	31.1
Children 0-4	242.2	44.7	12.8	8.3
Children 5-9	260.7	44.1	13.7	9.1
Children 10-14	227.7	39.9	12.0	8.8
Children 15-17	110.2	34.1	5.8	5.0
Adults (18 or more)	1056.1	23.5	55.7	68.9
Adults 18-59	890.7	24.4	47.0	56.0
Adults 60 or more	165.4	19.7	8.7	12.9
Total	1896.9	29.1	100.0	100.0
\$5.50 PPP (UMIC) line				
Children 0-17	1350.6	66.7	39.7	31.1
Children 0-4	375.8	69.3	11.0	8.3
Children 5-9	405.0	68.5	11.9	9.1
Children 10-14	373.7	65.6	11.0	8.8
Children 15-17	196.2	60.8	5.8	5.0
Adults (18 or more)	2053.4	45.8	60.3	68.9
Adults 18-59	1728.8	47.4	50.8	56.0
Adults 60 or more	324.6	38.7	9.5	12.9
Total	3404.0	52.3	100.0	100.0

Table 6: Children in monetary poverty in 2017 at the \$1.90 line in 2011 PPP in fragile countries

GMD sample	Extreme poor (millions)	Headcount poverty rate (%)	Share of extreme poor (%)	Share of population (%)
Non-fragile states	270.5	14.8	76.1	89.9
Fragile states	85.1	41.6	23.9	10.1
Total	355.5	17.5	100.0	100.0

Table 7: Children in monetary poverty in 2017 at the \$1.90 line in 2011 PPP by gender

Gender	Extreme poor (millions)	Headcount poverty rate (%)	Share of extreme poor (%)	Share of population (%)
Female children	173.6	17.7	24.5	15.0
Male children	182.0	17.4	25.6	16.1
Female adults	185.5	8.1	26.1	35.0
Male adults	168.6	7.6	23.8	33.9
Total	709.6	10.9	100.0	100.0

Table 8: Children in monetary poverty in 2017 at the \$1.90 line in 2011 PPP by rural/urban location

Location	Extreme poor (millions)	Headcount poverty rate (%)	Share of extreme poor (%)	Share of population (%)
Rural	291.8	24.5	82.4	60.1
Urban	62.3	7.9	17.6	39.9
Total	354.1	17.8	100.0	100.0

Table 9: Children in monetary poverty in 2017 at the \$1.90 line in 2011 PPP by household size

Household size	Extreme poor (millions)	Headcount poverty rate (%)	Share of extreme poor (%)	Share of population (%)
Three or less	14.4	6.0	4.1	11.8
Four	30.1	8.9	8.5	16.8
Five	43.8	14.4	12.3	14.9
Six	50.1	20.3	14.1	12.2
Seven	44.3	23.8	12.5	9.2
Eight	39.2	25.0	11.0	7.8
Nine	31.1	23.7	8.7	6.5
Ten or more	102.6	24.3	28.8	20.9
Total	355.5	17.5	100.0	100.0

Table 10: Children in monetary poverty in 2017 at the \$1.90 line in 2011 PPP by gender of household head

Gender of head	Extreme poor (millions)	Headcount poverty rate (%)	Share of extreme poor (%)	Share of population (%)
Male head	235.0	17.7	70.7	78.0
Female head	97.3	25.9	29.3	22.0
Total	332.3	19.5	100.0	100.0

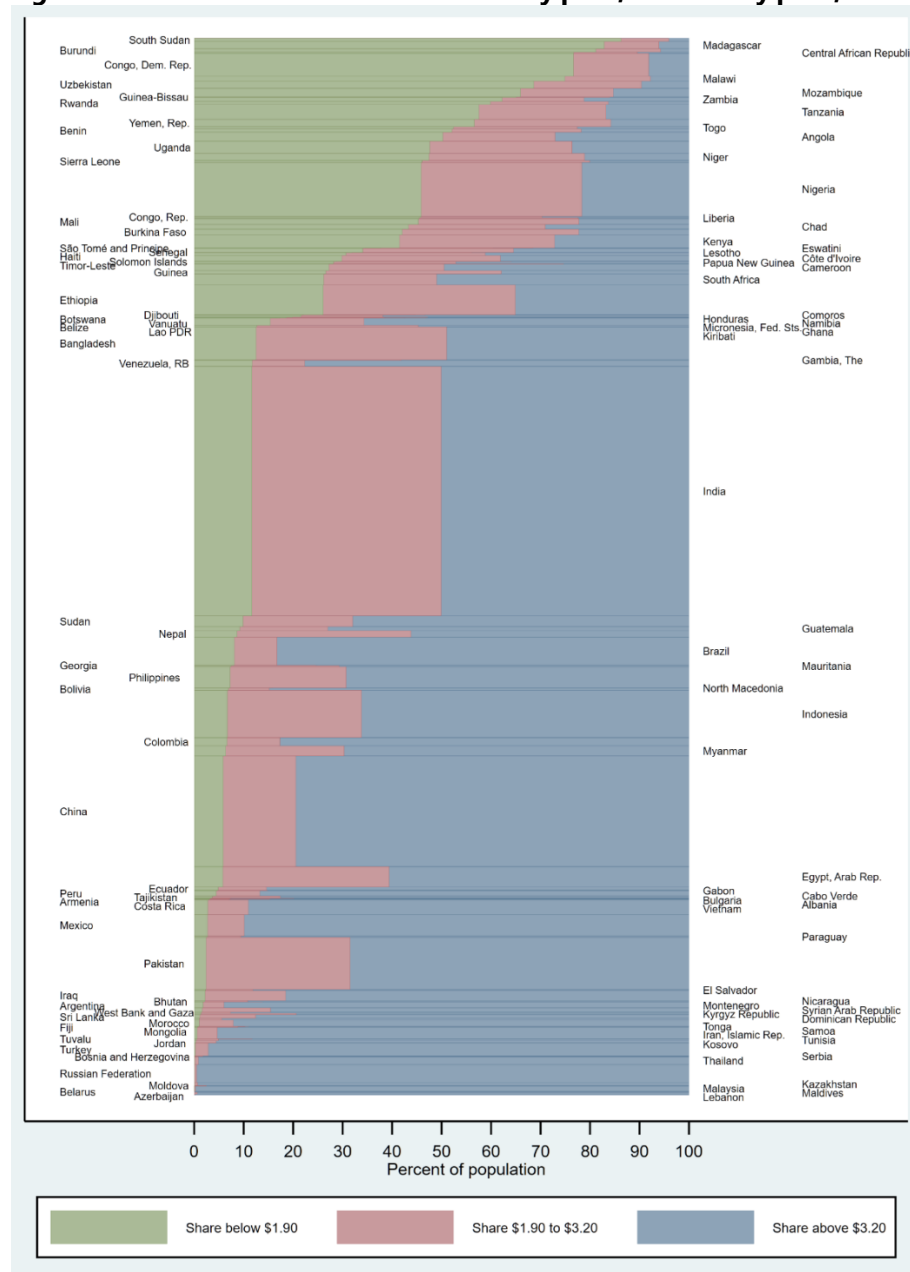
Table 11: Children in monetary poverty in 2017 at the \$1.90 line in 2011 PPP by education of household head

Education of head	Extreme poor (millions)	Headcount poverty rate (%)	Share of extreme poor (%)	Share of population (%)
No education	81.5	34.6	38.8	21.7
Primary	83.7	23.2	39.8	33.2
Secondary	41.0	11.7	19.5	32.2
Tertiary	3.8	2.7	1.8	12.9
Total	210.0	19.4	100.0	100.0

Table 12: Children in monetary poverty in 2017 at the \$1.90 line in 2011 PPP by industry of work of household head

Industry of head	Extreme poor (millions)	Headcount poverty rate (%)	Share of extreme poor (%)	Share of population (%)
Agriculture	100.4	33.7	71.3	39.5
Industry	13.0	9.2	9.2	18.9
Services	19.1	8.4	13.6	30.4
Other	8.4	9.9	5.9	11.2
Total	140.9	18.7	100.0	100.0

Figure 1: Share of children that are extremely poor, moderately poor, and non-poor, by country for 2017



Sources: Global Monitoring Database and PovcalNet.

Notes: Extreme poverty is defined as household per capita income or consumption less than \$1.90. Near-poverty is defined as those between \$1.90 and \$3.10, and non-poor is defined as those living on \$3.10 or more per day.

Table 13: Percent of children living in monetary poverty in 2017

Country	Poverty line in 2011 \$ PPP			Country	Poverty line in 2011 \$ PPP		
	\$1.90	\$3.20	\$5.50		\$1.90	\$3.20	\$5.50
Angola	50.2	73.0	89.7	Iraq	2.2	18.5	59.7
Albania	3.1	15.3	49.4	Jordan	0.4	4.4	31.8
Argentina	1.8	6.0	16.8	Kazakhstan	0.1	0.7	12.4
Armenia	3.2	20.2	62.5	Kenya	41.5	72.9	92.2
Azerbaijan	0.0	0.0	0.0	Kyrgyz Republic	1.4	20.7	71.4
Burundi	81.2	94.2	98.6	Kiribati	12.5	34.4	68.9
Benin	52.1	78.2	92.7	Lao PDR	12.7	45.3	80.2
Burkina Faso	42.1	77.7	93.8	Lebanon	0.0	0.2	2.9
Bangladesh	12.5	51.0	84.5	Liberia	45.5	77.6	94.9
Bulgaria	3.3	7.3	16.1	Sri Lanka	1.1	12.4	45.6
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.1	0.6	4.2	Lesotho	31.8	56.1	79.7
Belarus	0.0	0.0	1.0	Morocco	1.0	7.9	33.2
Belize	16.6	33.8	61.0	Moldova	0.0	2.5	25.7
Bolivia	7.0	15.2	31.5	Madagascar	82.9	93.9	98.5
Brazil	8.1	16.7	34.8	Maldives	0.0	0.7	7.8
Bhutan	1.9	13.8	42.8	Mexico	2.7	10.1	33.3
Botswana	19.9	47.3	71.1	North Macedonia	7.2	15.9	30.7
Central African Republic	76.7	89.6	95.8	Mali	45.3	77.8	94.8
China	5.9	20.6	46.9	Myanmar	6.4	30.3	68.7
Cote d'Ivoire	29.8	61.9	86.9	Montenegro	1.9	10.9	26.3
Cameroon	27.2	50.5	74.8	Mongolia	0.7	8.8	38.8
Congo, Dem Rep	76.6	91.9	98.2	Mozambique	66.0	84.7	93.9
Congo, Rep	45.8	70.3	87.3	Mauritania	7.5	29.3	66.5
Colombia	6.7	17.3	40.9	Malawi	74.9	92.2	98.0
Comoros	22.1	44.8	68.9	Malaysia	0.0	0.2	3.4
Cabo Verde	4.1	17.3	45.0	Namibia	18.7	38.4	61.4
Costa Rica	3.0	7.1	20.3	Niger	47.5	78.9	94.8
Djibouti	21.9	46.7	78.1	Nigeria	45.9	78.3	95.5
Dominican Republic	1.0	5.6	25.7	Nicaragua	2.2	10.8	36.6
Ecuador	4.9	14.7	34.5	Nepal	8.7	43.8	79.7
Egypt, Arab Rep	5.8	39.4	84.0	Pakistan	2.4	31.5	75.1
Ethiopia	26.1	64.9	91.9	Peru	4.5	13.3	31.8
Fiji	0.9	11.1	46.9	Philippines	7.3	30.8	63.2
Micronesia, Fed Sts	16.8	42.5	72.8	Papua New Guinea	28.2	52.8	79.9
Gabon	4.6	14.9	40.5	Paraguay	2.7	9.5	25.0
Georgia	7.9	24.6	55.6	West Bank and Gaza	1.4	7.4	29.8
Ghana	15.4	34.3	62.7	Russian Federation	0.1	0.5	4.3
Guinea	26.6	62.1	89.3	Rwanda	59.9	83.7	94.0
Gambia, The	11.8	41.9	77.0	Sudan	9.9	32.1	66.3
Guinea-Bissau	65.1	84.0	92.9	Senegal	34.1	64.6	87.9
Guatemala	9.2	27.0	53.6	Solomon Islands	28.7	64.1	88.0
Honduras	21.6	38.1	60.6	Sierra Leone	46.1	79.9	95.1
Haiti	30.7	58.8	85.0	El Salvador	2.3	11.9	36.8
Indonesia	6.7	33.8	66.5	Serbia	0.1	1.8	11.3
India	11.7	49.9	84.1	South Sudan	86.3	95.9	99.4
Iran, Islamic Rep	0.6	4.7	18.7	Sao Tome and Principe	37.8	68.5	89.4

Appendix Table 13: Percent of children living in monetary poverty in 2017 (continued)

Country	Poverty line in 2011 \$ PPP			Country	Poverty line in 2011 \$ PPP		
	\$1.90	\$3.20	\$5.50		\$1.90	\$3.20	\$5.50
Eswatini	34.5	60.4	79.3	Tanzania	57.5	83.3	95.2
Syrian Arab Republic	1.6	15.5	50.8	Uganda	47.6	76.4	92.1
Chad	43.3	71.0	89.5	Uzbekistan	68.6	90.4	97.7
Togo	52.4	77.4	92.8	Venezuela, RB	11.7	22.3	44.9
Thailand	0.1	0.9	12.2	Vietnam	2.8	11.0	32.5
Tajikistan	3.7	17.4	50.0	Vanuatu	17.3	46.8	78.9
Timor-Leste	28.0	74.7	95.3	Samoa	0.8	10.3	39.7
Tonga	1.0	9.8	34.6	Kosovo	0.3	4.4	28.1
Tunisia	0.5	4.9	23.5	Yemen, Rep	56.6	84.2	95.3
Turkey	0.2	2.8	16.0	South Africa	26.2	49.0	68.9
Tuvalu	0.5	11.7	39.3	Zambia	62.3	78.8	90.3

Sources: Global Monitoring Database and PovcalNet.