

Census: US poverty rate swells to nearly 1 in 6

AP By [The Associated Press](#)

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- The ranks of the nation's poor swelled to nearly 1 in 6 people last year, reaching a new high as long-term unemployment woes left millions of Americans struggling and out of work. The number of uninsured edged up to 49.9 million, the biggest in over two decades.

The [Census Bureau's](#) annual report released Tuesday offers a snapshot of the economic well-being of U.S. households for 2010, when joblessness hovered above 9 percent for a second year. It comes at a politically sensitive time for President Barack Obama, who has acknowledged in the midst of a re-election fight that the unemployment rate could persist at high levels through next year.

The overall poverty rate climbed to 15.1 percent, or 46.2 million, up from 14.3 percent in 2009.

Reflecting the lingering impact of the recession, the U.S. poverty rate from 2007-2010 has now risen faster than any three-year period since the early 1980s, when a crippling energy crisis amid government cutbacks contributed to inflation, spiraling interest rates and unemployment.

Measured by total numbers, the 46 million now living in poverty is the largest on record dating back to when the census began tracking poverty in 1959. Based on percentages, it tied the poverty level in 1993 and was the highest since 1983.

Broken down by state, Mississippi had the highest share of poor people, at 22.7 percent, according to rough calculations by the Census Bureau. It was followed by Louisiana, the District of Columbia, Georgia, New Mexico and Arizona. On the other end of the scale, New Hampshire had the lowest share, at 6.6 percent.

The share of Americans without health coverage rose from 16.1 percent to 16.3 percent - or 49.9 million people - after the Census Bureau made revisions to numbers of the uninsured. That is due mostly because of continued losses of employer-provided health insurance in the weakened economy.

Congress passed a health overhaul last year to address rising numbers of the uninsured. While the main provisions don't take effect until 2014, one aspect taking effect in late 2010 allowed young adults 26 and younger to be covered under their parents' health insurance.

Brett O'Hara, chief of the Health and Disability Statistics branch at the Census Bureau, noted that the uninsured rate declined - from 29.3 percent to 27.2 percent - for adults ages 18 to 24 compared to some other age groups.

The median - or midpoint - household income was \$49,445, down 2.3 percent from 2009.

Bruce Meyer, a public policy professor at the University of Chicago, cautioned that the worst may yet to come in poverty levels, citing in part continued rising demand for food stamps this year as well as "staggeringly high" numbers in those unemployed for more than 26 weeks. He noted that more than 6 million people now represent the so-called long-term unemployed, who are more likely to fall into poverty, accounting for than two out of five currently out of work.

Other census findings:

-Poverty rose among all race and ethnic groups except Asians. The number of Hispanics in poverty increased from 25.3 percent to 26.6 percent; for blacks it increased from 25.8 percent to 27.4 percent, and Asians it was flat at 12.1 percent. The number of whites in poverty rose from 9.4 percent to 9.9 percent.

-Child poverty rose from 20.7 percent to 22 percent.

-Poverty among people 65 and older was statistically unchanged at 9 percent, after hitting a record low of 8.9 percent in 2009.

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