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One in Five New York City Residents Living in Poverty

By Sam Roberts

Poverty grew nationwide last year, but the increase was even greater in New York City, the [Census Bureau](#) will report on Thursday, suggesting that New York was being particularly hard hit by the aftermath of the recession.

From 2009 to 2010, 75,000 city residents were pushed into poverty, increasing the poor population to more than 1.6 million and raising the percentage of New Yorkers living below the official federal poverty line to 20.1 percent, the highest level since 2000. The 1.4-percentage-point annual increase in the poverty rate appeared to be the largest jump in nearly two decades.

Many New Yorkers were spared the worst of the recession, but the median household income has since shriveled to levels last seen in 1980, adjusted for inflation. Household income declined among almost all groups — by 5 percent over all since the beginning of the recession in 2007, to \$48,743 in 2010.

Manhattan continued to have the biggest income gap of any county in the country, with the top fifth of earners (with an average income of \$371,754) making nearly 38 times as much as the bottom fifth (\$9,845).

Poverty among children under 18 rose 2.9 percentage points to 30 percent. The rate also increased for every other group except people 65 and older. Single mothers, blacks and adults lacking a high school diploma fared worst. Among Hispanic single mothers in the Bronx, the poverty rate was nearly 58 percent.

The bureau's [2010 American Community Survey](#) paints a disturbing portrait of the city. More New Yorkers depended on some form of public assistance than in 2009, and a record 1.8 million residents — nearly one in five households — are now relying on food stamps. Fewer people had health insurance, home ownership declined and housing values plunged; 44 percent of renters were diverting at least 35 percent of their income for housing.

Unemployment rose one percentage point, and more people gave up on finding work, which may be one reason college and graduate school enrollment soared by about 50,000. More living quarters were crowded — from 7.9 percent of all houses and apartments in 2009 to 9.1 percent last year.

Though the poverty rate in the city rose faster than it did nationwide and the Bronx remained the poorest urban county in the country, New York still had a smaller proportion of poor people than many other major cities, including Miami, Dallas, Houston, Chicago, Minneapolis, Los Angeles and Boston.

An influx of immigrants pushed the city's foreign-born population to near-record highs (more than three million, and 37.2 percent). Their ranks swelled by about 50,000. Half of New Yorkers 5 and older now do not speak English at home.

The city's poverty rate had remained about 18 percent since 2007 before climbing from 18.7 percent in 2009. The poverty rate was 20 percent in 1980, 19.3 percent in 1990 and 21.2 percent in 2000, after the dot-com bubble burst.

The 2010 federal poverty threshold for a family of three was \$18,310.

Some economists suggested that federal bailout money to prop up failing financial institutions based in New York had spared the city the worst ravages of the recession, which statisticians declared over in 2009.

"The bailout of Wall Street just put off the day of reckoning," said [Steven Malanga](#), a senior fellow at the [Manhattan Institute for Policy Research](#), a conservative group.

Advocates for the poor said the size of the problem might have been understated. "Increasing poverty is simply a confirmation of what we see every day in ever-longer lines at [food pantries](#) and soup kitchens," said [Joel Berg](#), executive director of the [New York City Coalition Against Hunger](#). "It is also latest proof our city and state policies are failing in fundamental ways."

[David R. Jones](#), president of the [Community Service Society](#), an anti-poverty group, said: "Maybe because things looked so good for the well-educated and restaurants are packed, we figured that we missed this bullet. Projecting forward, I don't think it's getting better."

Nationally, the Census Bureau said median household income had declined 2.3 percent to \$49,445 from 2009 to 2010, and the poverty rate increased to 15.1 percent from 14.3 percent, the third consecutive annual increase.

In New York City, non-Hispanic whites took the biggest financial hit, according to the figures; their real income fell to \$66,330, from \$70,627. Median household income among Hispanic New Yorkers inched up to \$35,887, from \$34,586. Income also rose in Manhattan and Brooklyn.

The city computes its own poverty rate, taking into account expenses for health and day care and higher living costs, as well as the benefits of tax credits, food stamps, school lunches and other assistance.

By its measure, the city's poverty rate in 2009 was 19.9 percent. [Mark K. Levitan](#), director of poverty research for the city's [Center for Economic Opportunity](#), said a more current poverty rate would be provided early next year.

"We will certainly see a higher poverty rate citywide as a whole," he said, though he did not foresee as big a rise.

[Jilly Stephens](#), executive director of [City Harvest](#), said its feeding programs "have reported an average increase of 5 percent on top of the rising demand they were already facing."

[James Parrott](#), deputy director and chief economist of the [Fiscal Policy Institute](#), a union-supported research and advocacy group, said the latest figures "paint a disturbingly clear picture of a deteriorating living standard for most New Yorkers."