

## New York City's poverty rate rose to alarming 20.1% in 2010, latest Census Bureau figures show

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Julia Xanthos/News

Marilyn Muentes has four children to care for but has been out of work since 2009.

One of five New Yorkers is too poor to pay rent or buy food - a troubling sign the city is still stumbling through a bruising recession, new statistics show.

The latest [Census Bureau](#) figures show the city's poverty rate catapulted to 20.1% last year, its highest point in more than 10 years.

Even city officials were stunned by the leap from 18.7% in 2009, but they blamed the bad economy for the growing number.

"We are not here to put lipstick on a pig. These are not the numbers we wanted to see," said [Mark Levitan](#), [Mayor Bloomberg](#)'s poverty point man.

Poverty has been a sticky issue for Bloomberg, who counted 1.49 million New Yorkers in poverty when he came into office in 2002. Now it's 1.6 million.

"I really hope things turn around," said [Marilyn Muentes](#), 22, who relies on friends' homes in [Manhattan](#) and the [Bronx](#) to shelter her and her four children.

"My babies are hungry. We all need help now," she said, noting she hasn't worked since she lost her waitressing job in 2009.

[New York](#) mirrored a national trend of swelling poverty - 15% of Americans are poor, meaning they earn \$21,765 for a family of four. That's up from 14% in 2009.

The crisis is most severe in big cities - more than 20% of the population in [Chicago](#), [Los Angeles](#) and [Dallas](#) are poor.

Most worrisome, experts say, are the racial disparities. In New York, 15% of whites are poor while 28% of Hispanics and 23% of blacks meet the poverty threshold.

Queens had the most dramatic jump in poverty last year. The Bronx had the highest poverty rate in the city, followed by [Brooklyn](#).

Every borough but Manhattan suffered an increase.

Anti-poverty groups say working-class people are increasingly falling to the bottom of the economic food chain - those whose hours are cut back or lose the second job that paid for clothes and food.

"If this problem goes untreated, you are endangering the entire economic engine that is [New York City](#)," said [David Jones](#), president of [Community Service Society](#).

At St. John's Bread and Life, a food pantry and soup kitchen in [Bedford-Stuyvesant](#), Brooklyn, traffic for meals soared 17% this year, [Executive Director Anthony Butler](#) said.

"People don't have enough money, so they are using their emergency funds to pay rent and they can't afford food," Butler said.

Bloomberg has tried to tackle the poverty issue by forming the [Center for Economic Opportunity](#) and, most recently, announcing a public-private partnership to help young black and Latino men get the skills and services they need to move ahead.

City Hall even created a poverty formula that has pegged the city's rate as higher than the fed's because it accounts for a local cost of living.

It was 19.9% in 2009 and will be updated later this year.

Still, the flip-flops on [Wall Street](#) and hemorrhaging of jobs will make it difficult to budge any poverty rate, Jones predicted.

"New York City can't do this on their own," he said.

"It can come up with remedies on its own, but it's part of a national problem."

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