

2.6 million more poor in America; 46 million poor highest since recordkeeping began

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New census figures **released** Tuesday painted a bleak, record-breaking picture of poverty in the United States, and one that disproportionately affects children.

The new report added 2.6 million more people to the ranks of the poor and showed the nation's poverty rate rose to 15.1 percent — the highest level of poverty in the United States since 1993.

About 46.2 million people lived below the poverty line in 2010, up up from 43.6 million in 2009. The census report said it was the largest number of people in poverty in the 52 years for which poverty estimates have been published.

The government sets the poverty line at an income of "\$22,314 a year for a family of four and \$11,139 for an individual," reported **CNN Money**. Adjustments are made for inflation.

In Utah, the census **found** 283,000 people below the poverty line in 2010, up 13,000 from 2009. The poverty rate in Utah in 2010 was 10 percent, 5.1 percent below the national rate. Still, it is the highest poverty rate Utah has seen since 2004, when it was 10.1 percent.

"You would expect with so many people unemployed, the poverty rate would go up," Paul Osterman, a labor economist at MIT, told CNN. "It's just another sign of what a difficult time this is for so many people."

In response to the increased financial stress, more Utah families are coping by "doubling up," or combining their households with another family, said Drew Martinez, policy analyst for the Community Action Partnership of Utah, in a statement. Nationally, the Census Bureau reported the number of doubled-up households increased to 21.8 million this spring from 19.7 million in 2007.

Children are hit hard by poverty. The poverty rate for children under age 18 reached 22 percent in 2010. This means more than 1 in 5 children in the country are in poverty. **A press release** from the Children's Leadership Council explained this as meaning that 35 percent of all the people in poverty are children even though they are only 24 percent of the population.

"The rising child poverty rate is an indictment of America. To have 22 percent of children living in poverty is unacceptable. We are marching in the wrong direction, and we cannot continue to cut essential services for children and families and remain a strong nation," said Alan W. Houseman, chairman of the CLC.

Bruce Meyer, a public policy professor at the University of Chicago, told the **Associated Press** that the worst may be 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 are in the category of long-term unemployed and more likely to fall into poverty, accounting for more than two out of five currently out of work.

Tim Worstall at Forbes points out, however, that the measurement of the poverty line doesn't look at the poor's true economic condition. "When we calculate who is in poverty, who is below the poverty line, we include in the income said person or family gets their market income (of course) and also

any cash that they get given directly by the government to alleviate their poverty," Worstall wrote. "However, we do not include in that household's income all of the other things we do to alleviate poverty. We don't include free medical care, or maybe help with the rent of an apartment or house. We don't include any help that comes through the tax system nor do we include any vouchers: like food stamps for example."

Worstall said as welfare has shifted from cash payments to non-cash aid, it doesn't reflect in the poverty line measurements. "We used to measure those who were poor after we'd helped them. Now, by and large, we're measuring who would be poor if we didn't help them," he wrote. "This explanation will also aid you in understanding one of the great conundrums of modern America. How on earth can the U.S. be spending hundreds of billions of dollars a year on beating poverty without actually beating poverty? Simple, we spend the money but don't measure how much poverty we've beaten by spending it."

The conservative [National Review](#) examined poverty measurements last year, saying that most Americans equate "poverty" with destitution or "an inability to provide a family with nutritious food, clothing and reasonable shelter."

"But only a small number of the 40 million persons classified as poor under the government's current poverty definition fit that description," Robert Rector said in the [National Review](#). "Most of America's poor live in material conditions that would have been judged comfortable, or even well-off, two generations ago."

The right-leaning [Cato Institute](#) blamed the problems on the "war on poverty."

The left-leaning [Angry Bear blog](#) blames welfare reform. The blog talks about the rising numbers of severe poor, those who are below 50 percent of the poverty line, as a true indicator of the worsening conditions. In 2010 6.7 percent of the nation were at 50 percent below the poverty level — the highest level ever recorded by the census since it started measuring the statistic in 1975 (when it was 3.7 percent).

[The New York Times](#) put the census report in a political context, "The report comes as President Obama gears up to pass a jobs bill, and analysts said the bleak numbers could help him make his case for urgency. But they could also be used against him by Republican opponents seeking to highlight economic shortcomings under his watch as the election season gets under way."

The AP called the report "a somber snapshot of the economic well-being of U.S. households for last year when joblessness hovered above 9 percent for a second year. The rate is still 9.1 percent at the start of an election year that's sure to focus on the economy and President Barack Obama's stewardship of it."

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