

Census finds poverty still stuck at 15% despite reviving economy

By Denver Post wire services

WASHINGTON» The nation's poverty rate remained stuck at 15 percent last year despite America's slowly reviving economy, a discouraging lack of improvement for the record 46.5 million poor and an unwelcome benchmark for President Barack Obama's recovery plans.

More than 1 in 7 Americans were living in poverty, not statistically different from the 46.2 million of 2011 and the sixth straight year the rate had failed to improve, the Census Bureau reported Tuesday. Median income for the nation's households was \$51,017, also unchanged from the previous year after two consecutive annual declines, while the share of people without health insurance did improve — but only a bit, from 15.7 percent to 15.4 percent.

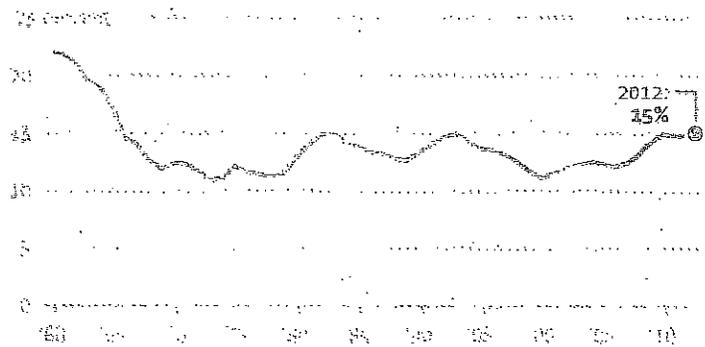
"We're in the doldrums, with high poverty and inequality as the new normal for the foreseeable future," said Timothy Smeeding, an economics professor at the University of Wisconsin at Madison who specializes in income inequality. "The fact we've seen no real recovery in employment and wages means we've just flatlined."

The data shows the economic expansion hasn't broadened to all Americans amid rising stock prices and home values that have boosted the financial standing of more affluent people. Those on the lowest tiers of the economy continue to struggle amid relatively high unemployment and stagnant wages.

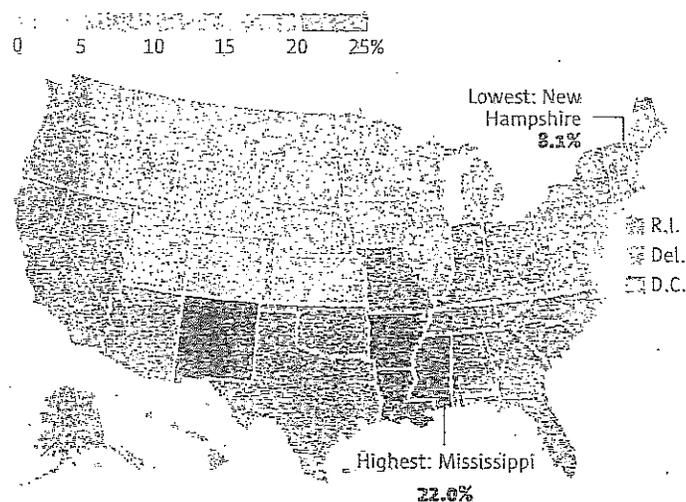
An updated research paper published earlier this month by University of California at Berkeley economist Emmanuel Saez found that the top 10 percent of earners — those with household income

Poverty's persistence

For the third straight year, the number of people in the United States living in poverty has remained at 15 percent:



Percentage living in poverty in 2012 by state:



Source: Census Bureau

The Associated Press

above \$114,000 — collected more than half of the nation's total income in 2012, the largest proportion since 1917 when the government started collecting such data.

The study, using preliminary 2012 data, also found that those with the top 1 percent of incomes saw their earnings grow 31.4 percent from 2009 to 2012, while the bottom 99 percent saw growth of

just 0.4 percent.

Mississippi had the highest share of its residents in poverty, at 22 percent, according to rough calculations by the Census Bureau. On the other end of the scale, New Hampshire had the lowest share, at 8.1 percent.

For the past year, the official poverty line was an annual income of \$23,492 for a family of four.