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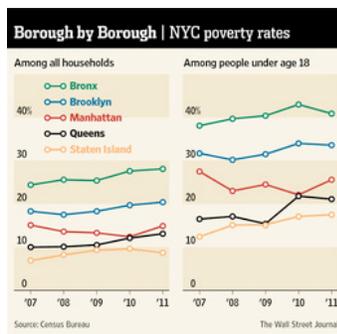
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Tracking the City's Poor

By ANJALI ATHAVALEY

More than one in five New Yorkers lives below the federal poverty, new federal data show, a one percentage point increase that adds fuel to a debate over how robust the city's economic recovery has been.

Almost 21% of New York City residents were in poverty in 2011, higher than the national average of 15.9% and about double the rate in both New Jersey and Connecticut, according to a U.S. Census Bureau survey set to be released Thursday. To be considered under the poverty line, a family of five must have made less than \$27,517 in 2011 before the addition of any government assistance.



The data added another layer to a perplexing economic picture: While city has gained back all of the jobs it lost in the recession, the unemployment rate remains higher than the national average and has increased in the last year. In July, the latest month available, it was 10%.

"What's odd is that the increase in the poverty data contradicts the employment growth here," said Barbara Byrne Denham, chief economist at Eastern Consolidated. "It is surprising given that so much of the job growth in New York City is at the low income or middle income level."

Mayor Michael Bloomberg has touted the city's economic comeback, citing job growth figures. Samantha Levine, a spokeswoman for the mayor, said Wednesday that New York's poverty numbers reflect a national challenge.

"The U.S. economy has shifted and too many people are getting left behind without the skills they need to compete and succeed," she said in an email.

The Census data is part of the wide-ranging American Community Survey, which provides estimates on categories such as median household income, health insurance and employment for the country, as well as

individual state and metropolitan areas.

Of the boroughs, the Bronx had the highest rate in 2011, with 30.4% of the population living in poverty in 2011. Manhattan experienced the largest increase, from 16.4% to 18.3%.

Some economists pointed to New York's high unemployment as a driving factor in poverty.

"While we've had job growth that looks good relative to other places, it hasn't been that robust," said James Parrott, chief economist at the Fiscal Policy Institute, a liberal-leaning think tank.

Ms. Denham said the job growth had come in restaurants and retail, sectors that usually provide jobs that to people with lower education levels and help lift them from poverty. Others said low-wage jobs weren't enough to raise income levels after a devastating recession.

David R. Jones, president and CEO of the Community Service Society of New York, an anti-poverty group, called the city's recovery "anemic."

"It's not bringing workers back in," he said. "If they do get jobs, they're getting extraordinarily low-wage jobs with no benefits."

He added, "It's not lifting them over poverty."

Jilly Stephens, executive director City Harvest, which helps supply soup kitchens and other anti-hunger organizations, said her group had seen growth in demand for their services.

"The statistics issued today demonstrate quite clearly that our most vulnerable neighbors are far from a recovery," Ms. Stephens said.

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