

NEW MEXICO 2ND-POOREST STATE



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Alberto Sanchez holds his daughter, Marisol Franco, as Marisol's mother, Deserae Rigger and Marisol's cousin, Diego Wages, center top, are seen at the family's home at Meadow Lake in Valencia County. They are among the families in New Mexico facing tough times.

1 in 5 New Mexicans Poor

Census Data Show Poverty Is Growing

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The number of New Mexicans living in poverty rose to more than 20 percent in 2010, according to new U.S. Census Bureau data, giving the state the second highest poverty rate in the nation.

The rate increased 2.4 percent from the 2009 rate of 18 percent, according to the 2010 Census American Community Survey. The survey said 413,851 people were living below the poverty threshold, which it defined as \$22,314 for a family of four.

That is an increase of more than 60,000 people

from 2009.

The national poverty rate was 15.3 percent.

One family facing tough times are the Francos, who live in Meadow Lake, about 10 miles east of Los Lunas in Valencia County.

Eight people live in the Francos' mobile home. The only person who makes any real money is 35-year-old Jose Franco, who does construction work. But that is sporadic these days with the housing industry in shambles.

"I'm lucky if I make \$25,000 a year," Franco said last week.

By the numbers

2010 U.S. Census American Community Survey data for New Mexico:

Poverty rate: **20.4 percent**

Number of people below the poverty line: **413,851**

Median income: **\$42,090**

Unemployment rate: **9.5 percent**

Population without health insurance: **19.6 percent**

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Alberto Sanchez, 19, holds his 15-month-old daughter, Marisol Franco, at the family home that they share with six others at Meadow Lake in Valencia County. New census data show that the number of New Mexicans living in poverty rose to more than 20 percent in 2010.

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He said he is sometimes sent home early when there is no work.

The family has been living in the home for about 10 years, just outside of town, right next to a Catholic church. They have several animals — goats, dogs, chickens, horses, geese and rabbits. Franco said they are mostly pets, but some could end up as meals.

Deserae, Franco's daughter, and Alberto, 19, live in the home and are the parents of a baby. Alberto gets odd jobs when he can, including for a woman who cares for animals and donates food for the Francos' animals.

The family recently lost one of their two cars when thieves broke into it and stole the starter, alternator and radiator.

Along with the increase in the poverty rate, the state's median income declined for the second year in a row, dropping from \$43,028 in 2009 to \$42,090 in 2010.

New Mexico's income gap was about equal with that of the country as a whole, with the top fifth of earners, with an average income of \$143,323, making nearly 15 times as much as the bottom fifth, who made an average



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A trailer home in the Meadow Lake area of Valencia County. New census survey information shows that 413,851 people in the state were living below the poverty threshold, which is defined as \$22,314 for a family of four.

of \$9,619. Those in the top fifth earned almost half of all income in the state.

The number of people without health insurance was essentially unchanged at 19.6 percent, although the number of people getting public health insurance rose from 34.9 percent in 2009 to 36.2 percent in 2010.

The annual unemployment rate rose from 9 percent in 2009 to 9.5 percent in 2010, according to the survey.

Gerry Bradley, research director of New Mexico Voices for Children, said New Mexico's poor economic showing is, like the rest

of the country's, due to the recession.

"We had a recession that was, at first, largely driven by the loss of construction industry employment. It's just very hard to pull out of," Bradley said.

Judging from the data that are showing how the recession has affected the economy, he said, it doesn't look like things will improve greatly in the next year.

"But things will probably not get much worse," Bradley said.

Mississippi had the highest poverty rate in the nation.