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Michigan is getting poorer, Census shows

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Michigan households brought in less income last year than they did in 2009, new American Community Survey data released today show.

The 1.4% drop in median household income is less than the national average, but more Michigan residents are now living in poverty.

Michigan getting poorer, census data show

Patricia Luttmann, 58, who left her job as a waitress two weeks ago, stopped by the Michigan Works! office in Southgate on Wednesday in hope of finding new employment.

Her husband, Larry Luttmann, 52, had been unemployed for two years, but went to Michigan Works! for job help and is now a painter.

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Larry and Patricia Luttmann of Dearborn Heights discuss the problems of finding work in metro Detroit. Patricia Luttmann came to the Michigan Works! office in Southgate on Wednesday to find a new job. / WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press

"They definitely helped me," said Larry Luttmann, who lives in Dearborn Heights.

It's no secret that Michigan residents are struggling with unemployment and lost income.

The first round of census data from the 2010 American Community Survey (ACS), released today, illustrates what Michigan residents are experiencing: Median household income fell 1.4% between 2009 and 2010, and nearly 1 in 4 children in the state live in poverty.

But the data, which includes details on more than 40 topics for geographic areas with populations of 65,000 or more, isn't all bad. Michigan's income losses and poverty rate gains were both lower than the national average.

Numbers tell the story

Despite the official end of the recession in mid-2009, real income and the ratio of employed to the total population continued to decline nationwide between 2009 and

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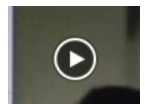
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2010.

At the same time, poverty rates climbed.

No states experienced an increase in real household income between 2009 and 2010, and 35 states -- including Michigan -- saw their income drop year-over-year.

Michigan's median household income dipped by about 1.4%, from \$46,078 to \$45,413. A 2.2% drop occurred nationwide as median household income fell from \$51,190 to \$50,046.

"Michigan finally has gotten to the point of relative stabilization after dropping in the past nine, 10 years -- seems to be that we have bottomed out," said Kurt Metzger, director of the nonprofit Data Driven Detroit in Detroit.

Among Michigan communities with more than 65,000 residents, Flint had the largest statistically significant income decline at 17.3%. The median household income in Flint fell from \$27,426 to \$22,672.

Households in Canton saw income dip 13.9%, from \$82,644 to \$71,148. Waterford experienced the only statistically significant increase at 13.1% -- from \$51,225 to \$57,949 -- creeping back toward its 2006 estimate of roughly \$61,000 in inflation-adjusted dollars.

One of Michigan's larger issues, according to state demographer Ken Darga, is the number of new residents attracted to the state.

Michigan ranks last in the nation for the rate of in-migration -- people moving in -- at 1.2% in 2010. The national average is 2.2%.

But Michigan isn't seeing much out-migration either -- the state ranks fifth-lowest in the U.S. for residents moving out.

Darga said in-migration and employment are closely tied, meaning fewer people move to a state when job opportunities aren't there.

Metro Detroit had the second-lowest ratio among the 50 largest metro areas nationwide of those who are employed compared with the working age population.

In metro Detroit, the ratio of those who are employed compared with the working-age population was 61, down from 61.3 in 2009.

On Tuesday, Michigan Works! announced it was preparing to offer more assistance to job seekers and employers, as about 12,000 residents statewide lose welfare assistance Oct. 1. According to the Southeast Michigan Community Alliance Michigan Works!, about 6,500 residents in Wayne County are without jobs, and about 1,200 live outside Detroit. Of the 1,200, about 25%-30% are actively looking for work.

Michigan Works! hopes to reach the other 70-75%.

"The biggest issue is skills and competency not matching what employers are looking for," said Gregory Pitoniak, CEO of SEMCA Michigan Works! "There is a skills gap and many mature workers have outdated skills."

Poverty rate rising

Meanwhile, Michigan's poverty rate increased to 16.8% from 16.2% among all individuals, placing the state's poverty rate above the national average -- which rose by 1 percentage point from 14.3% in 2009 to 15.3% in 2010.

The childhood poverty rate in Michigan, which is those younger than 18, reached 23.5% in 2010, up from 22.5% the year before. Nationwide, the percentage of children living below the poverty level increased by 1.6 percentage points to 21.6%, up from 20.0%. Detroit and Flint had the highest childhood poverty rates in the state in 2010.

The Wayne County Head Start program, which serves families of 3- and 4-year-olds in the county who live outside Detroit, is noticing an interesting trend of drops in enrollment, said county spokesman Dennis Niemiec.

"We are finding that about 3,723 children are enrolled, but (400-500 children) are not showing up," Niemiec said, who noted officials are looking into why the numbers drop when the program starts.

The percentage of Michigan residents with health insurance coverage remained statistically unchanged at 87.6% in 2010. A drop in privately held insurance last year from 69.9% to 68.6% was offset by an increase in public health insurance coverage, which was up 1.6 percentage points from 31.6% to 33.2%.

The percentage of residents in Detroit with health insurance declined by 2.8 percentage points from 81.8% to 79% -- driven by a decline in private health insurance coverage from 42.8% to 39.1%.

Rick Murdock, executive director of the Michigan Association of Health Plans, a statewide group with about 50 health care providers and insurance members, said the data show Michigan's Medicaid program has expanded to cover some adults who lost workplace coverage.

In October, the Census Bureau expects to release additional ACS data for communities with a population of 20,000 or more. The survey is completed by about 3 million households in the U.S. annually.

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