

# Census: More Californians in poverty than any other state

By Aaron Sankin, *Huffington Post*

California has a poverty rate of 23.5 percent, the highest of any state in the country, according to figures released this week by the United States Census Bureau.

The only other geographic region with an equivalent poverty rate is the District of Columbia, with 23.2 percent. The second most poverty-stricken state was Florida, at 19.5 percent.

The recognition of California's shockingly high poverty rate comes as a part of a shift in the way the Census Bureau measures its data. When the government began examining poverty back in the early 1960s, the line for determining who fell underneath the threshold was determined solely by looking at food costs.

In the decades since, there's been increasing criticism this benchmark, as it doesn't take into account tax rates and assistance programs such as food stamps, child care expenses and medical costs. In examining its most recent data, the Census Bureau considered these previously ignored factors, deemed the "supplemental poverty measure."

These new metrics have yielded quite different results than in past years. Under the traditional definition of poverty, for example, California's rate is 16.3 percent.

"We're seeing a very slow recovery [nationally], with increases in poverty among workers due to more new jobs which are low-wage," University of Wisconsin-Madison economist Timothy Smeeding told the *Associated Press*. "As a whole, the safety net is holding many people up, while California is

struggling more because it's relatively harder there to qualify for food stamps and other benefits."

The Golden State's jump between the supplemental and conventional measures was the largest swing of any state, and the Sacramento Bee attributes it to California's high cost of living.

"There are several important differences between the official and supplemental poverty measures," explained Census Bureau economist Kathleen Short in a statement. "For instance, the supplemental measure uses new poverty thresholds that represent a dollar amount spent on a basic set of goods adjusted to reflect geographic differences in housing costs. The official poverty thresholds are the same no matter where you live."

Under the supplemental measures, the national poverty rate jumped by a full point up to 16.1 percent, or just under 50 million individuals. The poverty rate for minors dropped from 22.3 percent down to 18.1 percent, while the rate for seniors (ages 65 and above) nearly doubled to 15.1 percent.