

Census: Recession had sweeping effect on US life

Recession's impact: Census data show longer commutes, delayed marriage, fewer immigrants

- By Hope Yen, Associated Press Writer
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WASHINGTON (AP) -- The recession is profoundly disrupting American life: More people are delaying marriage and home-buying, turning to carpools yet getting stuck in ever-worse traffic, staying put rather than moving to new cities.



AP - FILE - This Dec. 14, 2006, file photo shows Washington traffic at rush hour on Interstate 395 near ...

A broad array of U.S. census data, released Monday, also shows a dip in the foreign-born population last year, to under 38 million after it reached an all-time high in 2007. This was due to declines in low-skilled workers from Mexico searching for jobs in Arizona, Florida and California.

Health coverage swung widely by region, based partly on levels of unemployment. Massachusetts, with its universal coverage law, had fewer than 1 in 20 uninsured residents -- the lowest in the nation. Texas had the highest share, at 1 in four, largely because of illegal immigrants excluded from government-sponsored and employer-provided plans.

Demographers said the latest figures were striking confirmation of the social impact of the economic decline as it hit home in 2008. Findings come from the annual American Community Survey, a sweeping look at life built on information from 3 million households.

Preliminary data earlier this year found that many Americans were not moving, staying put in big cities rather than migrating to the Sunbelt because of frozen lines of credit. Mobility is at a 60-year low, upending population trends ahead of the 2010 census that will be used to apportion House seats.

"The recession has affected everybody in one way or another as families use lots of different strategies to cope with a new economic reality," said Mark Mather, associate vice president of the nonprofit Population Reference Bureau. "Job loss -- or the potential for job loss -- also leads to feelings of economic insecurity and can create social tension."

"It's just the tip of the iceberg," he said, noting that unemployment is still rising.

The percentage of people who drove alone to work dropped last year to 75.5 percent, the lowest in a decade, as commuters grew weary of paying close to \$4 a gallon for gasoline and opted to carpool or take public transportation.

Twenty-two states had declines in solo drivers compared with the year before, with the rest statistically unchanged. The decreases were particularly evident in states with higher traffic congestion, such as Maryland, Texas and Washington.

Average commute times edged up to 25.5 minutes, erasing years of decreases to stand at the level of 2000, as people had to leave home earlier in the morning to pick up friends for their ride to work or to catch a bus or subway train.

Palmdale, Calif., a suburb in the high desert north of Los Angeles, posted the longest commute at 41.5 minutes. It barely edged out New York City, with its congestion and sprawling subway system, at 39.4 minutes. Shortest commute time: Bloomington, Ill., at 14.1 minutes.

Nationwide, more than 1 in 8 workers, or 17.5 million, were out the door by 6 a.m.

Marital bliss also suffered. Nearly 1 in 3 Americans 15 and over, or 31.2 percent, reported they had never been married, the highest level in a

decade. The share had previously hovered for years around 27 percent, before beginning to climb during the housing downturn in 2006.

The never-married included three-quarters of men in their 20s and two-thirds of women in that age range. Sociologists say younger people are taking longer to reach economic independence and consider marriage, because they are struggling to find work or focusing on an advanced education.

The Northeast had the most people who were delaying marriage, led by states such as New York and Massachusetts. People in the South were more likely to give marriage a try, including those in Arkansas, Tennessee and Texas.

The dip in foreign-born residents comes as the government considers immigration changes, including stepped-up border enforcement and a path toward U.S. citizenship. At nearly 38 million, immigrants made up 12.5 percent of the population in 2008; an estimated 11.9 million are here illegally.

In three large metro areas, Miami, San Jose, Calif., and Los Angeles, more than one-third of all residents are foreign-born.

Roughly half the states showed declines in the number of immigrants from 2007 to 2008. Major metro areas also posted decreases, including Los Angeles, Phoenix, Detroit and Tampa, Fla. An influx of workers from India, who came looking for specialized jobs in telecommunications, manufacturing, computers and software, partially offset the national immigration decrease.

About 1 in 5 U.S. residents spoke a language other than English at home, mostly clustered in California, New Mexico and Texas.

The number of foreign-born and minority residents often tracked closely with how a state ranked in the levels of uninsured.

The highest numbers were in agricultural communities with large Hispanic populations in California's San Joaquin Valley, South Texas and South Florida. Regions in New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, Alaska, Oklahoma and Georgia also fared poorly.

The numbers help explain why the debate over illegal immigration and health insurance is so heated.

"The fact that many election 'swing states,' with large and growing Hispanic populations, rank low on health insurance for children and young adults points to the significance of this issue for both parties in future national elections," said William H. Frey, a demographer at Brookings Institution, a think tank.

Democratic proposals to overhaul health insurance would exclude illegal immigrants from benefits, but Republicans contend the prohibition is meaningless because of lax enforcement. President Barack Obama has now proposed broader and tougher restrictions; opponents say the steps are still not enough.

Other findings:

-- The homeownership rate fell to 66.6 percent last year, the lowest in six years, after hitting a peak of 67.3 percent in 2006. Residents in crowded housing jumped to 1.1 percent, the highest since 2004, a sign people were "doubling up" with relatives or friends to save money.

-- The share of people who carpooled to work rose to 10.7 percent, up from 10.4 percent in the previous year. Commuters who took public transportation increased to 5 percent, the highest in six years, with Washington, D.C., at the top.

-- Women's average pay still lagged men's, but the gap has been narrowing. Women with full-time jobs made 77.9 percent of men's pay, up from 77.5 percent in 2007 and about 64 percent in 2000.

-- More people have high school diplomas. Only two states, Texas and Mississippi, had at least 1 in 5 adults without high school diplomas. This is down from 17 states in 2000 and 37 in 1990.

-- More older people are working. About 15.5 percent of Americans 65 and over, or 6.1 million, were in the labor force. That's up from 15 percent in 2007.

Associated Press writers Frank Bass in East Dover, Vt., Calvin Woodward in Washington and Mike Schneider in Orlando contributed to this report.

Census Bureau: <http://www.census.gov>

<http://finance.yahoo.com/news/Census-Recession-had-sweeping-apf-888739316.html?x=0&sec=topStories&pos=main&asset=&ccode=>