

More than half of L.A.'s 1 million poor households live in unaffordable or substandard rentals, study says

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Los Angeles and New York City top the list of U.S. cities with the most poor people laboring under heavy rent burdens, living in substandard housing, or both, according to a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Affairs study released Wednesday.

More than half of Los Angeles' 1 million very poor households, or 567,000, spent more than half their income on rent or resorted to undesirable housing in 2015, the study said.

In New York City, 44% of the very poor also struggled to afford housing, but because there were more of them — 1.8 million — the number falling into what the study called the “worst-case housing needs” category was higher, 815,000.

More than half of very low-income people in Miami, Phoenix and Riverside also struggled to pay the rent, the study said.

Rising rents have been linked to Los Angeles' explosive homelessness problem, which grew 23% last year, to 58,000 people countywide, officials reported based on a January street and shelter count.

A report earlier this month by real estate firm Zillow found that 2,000 more people would be pushed into homelessness by a 5% rent hike — just over the 4.5% jump the company forecasts for L.A. next year. The company said rent increases are closely tied to burgeoning homelessness in cities including Los Angeles, Seattle and New York City, where there is little low-income housing for those priced out of rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods to go to.

Nationwide, HUD reported that the number of households with worst-case housing needs ballooned 66% since 2001, with record increases between 2007 and 2011, when mortgage foreclosures and unemployment dramatically expanded. Those affected cut across racial and ethnic groups and regional borders, and included families with children, senior citizens and people with disabilities, HUD said in its report.

While incomes rose between 2013 and 2015, rents increased nearly as fast, and rent hikes for the poorest tenants outpaced income gains, the report said. The study excluded renters who receive government housing aid.

“Today's affordable rental housing crisis requires that we take a more business-like approach on how the public sector can reduce the regulatory barriers so the private markets can produce more housing for more families,” HUD Secretary Ben Carson said in releasing the study.

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