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**Germans Suffer Growing Poverty and Inequality**

20/02/2015



The largest economy in Europe is facing mounting inequality, according to research published Thursday.

"Poverty in Germany has never been so high and regional fragmentation never so deep as today," said Ulrich Schneider, the head of Germany's Equal Welfare Organization.

According to figures from the organization, 15.5 percent of Germany's population now live in poverty. The latest data suggests between 2013 and 2012, 400,000 Germans sank below the poverty line. As poverty increased, Schneider said there were concerning signs the "gap between rich and poor states in Germany is becoming bigger and bigger."

While southern states such as Bavaria and Baden Wuerttemberg have the lowest rates of poverty, the new research found poverty in northern states including Bremen, Berlin and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania were above 20 percent.

Schneider stated the data illustrates a "complete decoupling" between economic growth and mounting poverty, according to AFP.

"Overall the state ranking shows a ragged republic," he lamented.

Unlike much of Europe, Germany has enjoyed relatively solid economic growth in recent years.

Throughout 2014 the economy accelerated, ending the year with 1.5 percent GDP growth. The

country has seen eight years of consecutive decreases in unemployment, while the government was sitting on a comfortable surplus by December 2014.

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