

Fact Sheet: Income and Poverty: 2012

The economic well-being of most Americans depends on their own income or on the income of family members. If the income of a family or an individual is below the official poverty threshold, then that family or individual is considered to be in poverty. Even if income remains above the poverty level, relatively low income may make it difficult to pay for basic services, such as housing, child care, education and medical care.

In this fact sheet, we explore the various sources of Census Bureau income and poverty data.

Current Population Survey (CPS)

Key fact: Annual Social and Economic Supplement to CPS focusing on national, calendar-year estimates of income and official poverty numbers and rates along with demographic and social characteristics.

- National estimates of income, earnings and income distributions and official source of U.S. poverty statistics. Also provides data on health insurance coverage.
- Sample of about 100,000 addresses.
- Records income from more than 50 sources and up to 27 different income amounts in the last calendar year.
- Data provided by a wide range of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.
- Provides a consistent historical time series of many decades in length at the national level, with income data back to 1947 and poverty data to 1959.
- Statistics for 2012 released in September 2013.

American Community Survey (ACS)

Key fact: A nationwide survey designed to provide communities with reliable and timely demographic, social, economic and housing data every year.

- Single-year income and poverty estimates for all areas with a population of 65,000 or more, including counties, cities and all congressional districts, as well as for the nation and all states.
- Three-year estimates available for all areas with a population of 20,000 or more.
 - Five-year estimates for the nation's smallest areas, such as census tracts and block groups, were first released in 2010.
- In June 2011, the sample size was increased from 2.9 million to 3.54 million addresses each year.
- Questionnaire asks about eight types of income received in the previous 12 months.
- Data provided for a wide range of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.
- Statistics for 2012 to be released in September 2013.

Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)

Key fact: Longitudinal survey useful for understanding changes for the same household, family or person's income and poverty status over a period of time.

- Provides both cross-sectional and longitudinal monthly data on a nationally representative sample of households.
- Useful for examining those characteristics and traits of individuals, families and households that result in changes in their income and poverty status over a three - or four-year period
- Collects earnings data from all jobs worked, income data from 52 sources, as well as income from assets and investments.
- About 52,000 addresses were in the initial eligible sample for the 2008 SIPP.
- Data were first collected in 1984 and have been and are regularly released.

Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE)

Key fact: Only Census Bureau source of 1-year income and poverty data for every county.

- Annual poverty estimates for all school districts and median household income and poverty estimates for all counties and states.
- Only available source for 1-year poverty estimates for all school districts and all counties regardless of population size.
- Data products are model-based and combine data from a variety of sources, including the ACS, the decennial census, population estimates and administrative records such as federal tax return information.
- School district data are provided for the number of children ages 5 to 17 in families in poverty. County- and state-level data are provided for median household income and the number in poverty for people of all ages, children under age 18 and children ages 5 to 17 in families. State-level data are provided on the number of children younger than 5 in poverty.
- The county- and state-level data were first published for 1989; the school district data were first published for 1995.
- Estimates for 2011 were released in December 2012; estimates for 2012 are scheduled for release in November 2013.