Fact Sheet: Income and Poverty: 2017

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

Our income statistics are based on pretax money income and are adjusted to current dollars using the consumer price index research series. Poverty status is calculated by comparing a family's (or individual's) total money income to their official poverty threshold, which varies by family size and composition. If a family's total money income is less than their official poverty threshold, that family and every individual in it are considered to be in poverty.

Current Population Survey

Key fact: The Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey provides national, calendar-year estimates of income and official poverty numbers and rates along with demographic and social characteristics.

- Provides national estimates of income, earnings and income distributions and is the official source of U.S. poverty statistics. Also provides data on health insurance coverage.

- Samples about 92,000 addresses.

- Records income from more than 50 sources in the last calendar year.

- Includes data across a wide range of demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

- Provides a historical time series of many decades in length at the national level, with income data back to 1947 and poverty data back to 1959.

- Statistics for 2017 to be released in September 2018.

American Community Survey

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

- Provides 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.

- Produces five-year estimates for the nation's smallest areas, such as census tracts and block groups (first released in 2010 with data from 2005-2009).

  Additionally:
- Samples about 3.5 million addresses each year (up from 2.9 million in 2010).

• Records income from multiple sources received in the previous 12 months.

• Includes data across a wide range of demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

• Statistics for 2017 to be released in September 2018.

Survey of Income and Program Participation

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.

• Samples about 503,000 addresses.

• Collects earnings data from all jobs worked, income data from 52 sources, as well as income from assets and investments, with many income sources reported monthly.

• Used to examine those characteristics and traits of individuals, families and households that result in changes in their income and poverty status over a two and a half- to five-year period.

• Data were first collected in 1984 and are regularly released.

Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates

Key fact: The only Census Bureau source of single-year income and poverty data for every county.

• Provides annual poverty estimates for all school districts and median household income and poverty estimates for all counties and states.

• Data products are model-based and combine data from a variety of sources, including the American Community Survey, the Decennial Census, population estimates and administrative records such as federal tax return information.

• County- and state-level data were first published for 1989; school district data were first published for 1995.

• Estimates for 2016 were released in December 2017; estimates for 2017 are scheduled for release in December 2018.