

KEY POVERTY DATA SOURCES

(See www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/description.html for additional guidance.)

American Community Survey (ACS)

The American Community Survey (ACS) is a huge survey of households intended to fully replace the traditional “long form” portion of the decennial census, but at lower cost and with updates issued annually rather than once a decade. The ACS asks respondents to report their income for the past 12 months.

For State and Local Estimates, Comparisons Between States, and Detailed State Characteristics

- Sample size (now 3 million) much bigger than CPS (see below).
- Mostly comparable to smaller ACS surveys for 2000-2004, which were called “Supplementary Surveys” in 2000 and 2001. (Not comparable to 2000 census or 2000/2001 ACS test sites.)
- “2008” income data span a variety of periods from 2007-2008, depending on when during 2008 the household was surveyed.
- Many detailed state tables online (with margins of error).
- In 2006, ACS began covering group quarters (including such places as college residence halls, residential treatment centers, skilled nursing facilities, group homes, military barracks, correctional facilities, and workers’ dormitories). This may affect comparability of poverty numbers over time.
- Housing data: cost, cost burdens, bedrooms, vehicles, commuting.
- Health insurance as of 2008 data.

Current Population Survey Annual Social & Economic Supplement (ASEC, a.k.a. March CPS)

The Current Population Survey (CPS) has tracked national labor market trends of the non-institutional population since the 1940s and offers a consistent national time series beginning in 1959. The survey’s detailed annual March supplement, based on a sample of about 100,000 addresses, is the official source of nationwide poverty data. The CPS asks respondents to report their income for the previous calendar year (January to December). At the state level, the Census Bureau publishes some state poverty estimates but warns that a one-year CPS sample is small and unreliable for many states. Researchers often merge multiple years of CPS data to reduce this sampling error and can use this technique to look at state level time trends going back to 1980.

For National Data (and State Trends in Overall Poverty, Using Two-Year Averages)

- Raw data files go back to 1960s.
- Higher quality poverty data (more questions on income and family relationships).
- Has long been the official and trusted source of national poverty data (ACS rates often a bit higher) although Census now encourages use of ACS for state-level trend data on poverty and income.
- Additional topics, such as estimates of noncash benefits and simulated state income tax liability for individuals or couples.
- For most states, average two or three years of survey data to get state estimates.

Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE):

The SAIPE program generates overall poverty figures by age and median household income at the state and county level. Since 2005, the estimates have been built on ACS data and sum to ACS annual totals at the national level. But they use a computer model (incorporating data from decennial censuses, tax forms, changes in food stamp caseload, and other sources) to try to bring the ACS data down to the state and county level even more accurately than is possible with the ACS alone due to sample size limitations. Estimates prior to 2005 were pegged to the CPS not the ACS and are *not* comparable with later years; the CPS-based data are available for most years 1989-2004.

Definitive State, County, and School District Estimates — But Out-of-Date, Has Few Statistics

- Another data source of ACS- (or CPS-) like data at the state, county, and even school-district level.
- Combines: data from ACS (or before 2005, CPS), IRS, food stamp caseloads, and other sources.
- Census says SAIPE has the best sub-national estimates once it’s released. But it has long delays, and no race or other demographic detail.

Some Basic Poverty Tables On Line

ACS

www.census.gov

Click “American Factfinder” (on left toolbar),

Under American Community Survey (in middle), click “Get Data”

Select a single year data or three-year averaged data

Click “[Detailed Tables](#) from the American Community Survey”,

Follow directions to select geographies and tables (e.g., table C17016, working poor families)

CPS

www.census.gov

Click “Poverty” to reach Poverty Homepage

Click “Detailed Poverty Tables” and select a year

Table POV46 has state estimates by age

For prior years go to Poverty Homepage, click Publications; report for year; “Detailed Tables”

SAIPE

www.census.gov

click “Poverty”, click “Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates”