
Fact Sheet: Housing and Construction: 2011

The place you live is more than a place to “hang your hat,” more than four walls and a roof. It is a major investment and expense, as well as an indicator of the state of the economy. Consequently, analysts in government and private industry alike study the nation’s housing very closely. In this fact sheet, we explore the various sources of Census Bureau housing and construction data.

American Housing Survey (AHS)

Key fact: The largest, regular housing sample survey in the nation. Most comprehensive source of housing data. Actually two surveys: a national survey and a metropolitan area survey.

AHS-National

- Statistics are available at the national and regional levels.
- Data released biennially (odd-numbered years).
- Data collected from a sample of about 60,000 housing units in 2009.
- Microdata is available for download from www.huduser.org.
- Focus is on the size, composition, quality and characteristics of the housing inventory. In addition to more standard information, such as housing costs, the AHS provides data on topics that cannot be found in any other source, such as water leakage, external building conditions, neighborhood quality (i.e., presence or lack of crime or litter) and presence of air-conditioning. One of the few surveys to ask respondents to provide opinions on a scale of 1 in 10, in this case, regarding their satisfaction with their home and neighborhood.
- In 1999, 2003 and 2009 supplemental sample was selected in the largest metro areas in order to produce metro-level estimates.
- Began in 1973 as the Annual Housing Survey; since 1981, the survey has been conducted every other year.

AHS-Metropolitan

- For the metro area survey, statistics available for selected metro areas, and within each metro, three “subareas.” Subareas are defined as the three largest central cities or counties in the metro area.
- Data released on an intermittent basis. From 1974 to 1996, data were collected on a rotating schedule for 47 areas. Thereafter, metro data were collected every two years (even-numbered years) from 1998 to 2004, with the exception of the decennial census year of 2000. Beginning in 2007, the metro data collected occurred in odd-numbered years with the national survey.
- The metropolitan area sample size is usually about 2,500 housing units per area.
- Microdata is available for download from www.huduser.org.
- The same type of data are collected in both the national and metro surveys.

Decennial Census

Key fact: Statistics available down to the smallest levels of geography but on a limited number of topics.

- Statistics provided every 10 years for levels of geography down to blocks.
- The 2010 Census provides information on whether a home is occupied or vacant, and whether it is owned or rented.
- Statistics on occupancy status released on a state-by-state flow basis in February and March 2011. Data on homeownership and type of vacancy to be released in May 2011.
- Housing statistics available back to 1940. Prior to 2010, data were collected by the decennial census “long form” on a more extensive list of housing topics. These data are now collected in the American Community Survey.

American Community Survey (ACS)

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

- Single-year housing data for all areas of 65,000 or more, including counties, cities and congressional districts, as well as for the nation and all states.
- Three-year estimates available for all areas of 20,000 or more. Additionally, five-year estimates are now available for the nation’s smallest areas, such as census tracts and block groups.
- Provides data previous collected by the decennial census “long form.”
- Sample of about 3 million addresses each year.
- Questionnaire asks about age and type of structure, number of rooms, presence of various amenities, home heating fuel, vehicles available, housing costs, tenure, home value and mortgages.
- Statistics for 2009 released in September 2010. Five-year (2005-2009) estimates were released in December 2010 and three-year (2007-2009) estimates were released in January 2011.

Current Population Survey/Housing Vacancy Survey (CPS/HVS)

Key fact: Current information on rental and homeowner vacancy rates, and characteristics of units available for occupancy.

- One of Census Bureau’s 13 Principal Economic Indicators.
- Rental and homeowner vacancy rates available for the nation, regions, states, and for the 75 largest metropolitan areas. Multifamily vacancy rates available nationally only, with housing unit estimates available nationally and regionally.
- About 72,000 housing units both occupied and vacant in the CPS sample. Of these units, about 61,200 are occupied and are eligible for interview each month. Among the 10,800 vacant units, about half are interviewed for the HVS, which is a supplement of the CPS.
- U.S. rental and homeowner vacancy rates provided quarterly back to 1956; annual and quarterly estimates of the U.S. housing inventory available back to 1965 (regional data back to 1984). Annual state and metro area data back to 1986.

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- Data for fourth quarter 2010 released in January 2011. Annual statistics currently available for 2009 with 2010 data scheduled for release in late February.

New Residential Construction

Data on Building Permits, Housing Starts, and Housing Completions, as well as inventories of units authorized by building permits but not started and units under construction. One of the Census Bureau's 13 Principal Economic Indicators.

Building Permits

Key fact: Number of new privately-owned housing units authorized by building permits in a given period. A leading economic indicator used to track the housing industry.

- Data collected by the Building Permits Survey, from 9,000 local building permit officials monthly and 11,000 annually.
- Data available for the U.S., regions, divisions, states, metropolitan areas, counties, and individual permit-issuing jurisdictions.
- Preliminary national and regional data are released on about the 12th workday of each month with the release of data on New Residential Construction.
- Revised national and regional monthly data, and monthly estimates by division, state, metropolitan area, county, and permit-issuing place are released on about the 18th workday of each month. Final annual estimates for the previous year by Census Region, Census Division, state, metropolitan area, county, and permit-issuing jurisdiction are released on the first workday in May.
- Statistics back to 1960; all national and regional data available online; other data available online back to 1996.

Housing Starts

Key fact: Number of privately-owned new housing units on which construction has been started in a given period. An economic indicator used to track the housing industry.

- Data available both nationally and regionally.
- Statistics released monthly on about the 12th workday of each month.
- Data collected by the Survey of Construction, which is collected in two parts: from a sample of permit jurisdictions, from which a sample of permits issued for new housing is selected, and from field representatives driving roads in sampled land areas where permits are not required to identify new construction.
- National-level data available for structures with one unit, 2 to 4 units and 5 units or more; regional data available for total units and for single-family homes.
- Annual data also available on the length of time between authorization and start.
- Statistics back to 1959.

Housing Completions

Key fact: Number of privately-owned housing units for which construction has been completed in a given period. An economic indicator used to track the housing industry.

- Data available both nationally and regionally.
- Statistics released monthly on about the 12th workday of each month.
- Data collected by the Survey of Construction, which is collected in two parts: from a sample of permit jurisdictions, from which a sample of permits issued for new housing is selected, and from field representatives driving roads in sampled land areas where permits are not required to identify new construction.
- National-level data available for structures of one unit, 2 to 4 units and 5 units or more; regional data available for total units and single-family homes.
- Annual data also available on the length of time between start and completion.
- Statistics back to 1968.

New Residential Sales

Key fact: Provides statistics on sales of new privately owned single-family homes in a given period. A leading economic indicator used to track the housing industry.

- One of the Census Bureau's 13 Principal Economic Indicators.
- Statistics released monthly on about the 17th workday of each month.
- Statistics available at the national and regional levels.
- Data available monthly, quarterly and annually.
- Includes data on number of new single-family houses sold and for sale and the median and average sales prices of new homes sold.
- Also includes monthly price indexes for houses under construction and quarterly price indexes for houses sold.
- Data collected by the Survey of Construction, which is collected in two parts: from a sample of permit jurisdictions, from which a sample of permits issued for new housing is selected, and from field representatives driving roads in sampled land areas where permits are not required to identify new construction.
- Statistics back to 1963.

Characteristics of New Housing

Key fact: Statistics on the features of new privately-owned residential structures in the U.S.

- Statistics available annually at the national and regional levels; some data also available quarterly.
- Data for the previous year are released each year on the first working day in June.
- Includes statistics on square footage, number of bedrooms and bathrooms, heating fuel, and many other characteristics of new single-family units completed and sold and new multifamily units and buildings completed. Also includes statistics on characteristics of contractor-built homes started.
- Data collected by the Survey of Construction, which is collected in two parts: from a sample of permit jurisdictions, from which a sample of permits issued for new housing is selected, and from field representatives driving roads in sampled land areas where permits are not required to identify new construction.

- Some data available back to 1963; most back to at least 1999.

Construction Spending

Key fact: Provides estimates of the total dollar value of construction work done in the U.S., including residential construction. An economic indicator used to track the construction industry.

- One of the Census Bureau's 13 Principal Economic Indicators.
- Statistics released monthly on the 1st workday of each month.
- Statistics available at the national level.
- Provides data on the value of new construction put in place, including privately-owned and publicly-owned residential construction.
- Data collected by the Construction Progress Reporting Surveys from owners of sampled construction projects.

Manufactured Homes Survey

Key fact: Provides estimates of number and characteristics of new mobile homes placed for residential use and dealer inventories.

- Statistics available at the national, regional and state levels.
- Data available monthly and annually.
- Monthly statistics available on new manufactured home placements, average sales prices and dealers' inventories and more detailed annual estimates including selected characteristics of new manufactured homes.
- Data collected from a monthly sample of new manufactured homes shipped by manufacturers; the dealer to whom the sampled unit was shipped is contacted by telephone and asked about the status of the unit.
- Historical data on shipments available back to 1959; placements and dealers' inventory data back to 1980; and average sales price data back to 1974.

Economic Census (Census of Construction Industries)

Key fact: Most comprehensive and detailed profile of the economy, covering millions of businesses representing more than 1,000 industries.

- Statistics available every five years, for years ending in "2" and "7."
- Data available for nation, region and states.
- Information on number of establishments and employees, value of business done, and payroll.
- Specific industries covered include those such as residential and nonresidential building contractors, civil engineering and trade contractors, builders, remodelers and roofing contractors.
- Data collected on a regular basis starting in 1967. Statistics available online back to 1992.

- Statistics collected in mail-out/mail-back census of businesses.

Note: The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides interested researchers with access to the original data sets generated by American Housing Survey, HUD median family income limits, as well as microdata from research initiatives on topics such as housing discrimination, the HUD-insured multifamily housing stock, and the public housing population. See <http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD>.