

Participation Rates in Other Assistance Programs: 2013

Household Economic Studies

Current Population Reports

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INTRODUCTION

While one focus of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) is to measure participation in major federally funded social safety net programs, the survey also asks respondents about the use of other assistance programs: food, transportation, clothing, and housing assistance.¹ These data provide some insights into the population that uses these ancillary programs.

Other assistance programs are often part of an informal network that provides short-term assistance for low-income individuals and families. In the 2014 SIPP panel, questions on the use of these other assistance programs were limited to residents aged 15 years and older whose household incomes were below 200 percent of their poverty thresholds.² Participants may report more than one type of assistance. Table 1 shows participation rates by selected demographic characteristics (sex, age, race, ethnicity, marital status, number of children under 18, and family income) for these types of assistance.

In 2013, 58.1 percent of the total population aged 15 and older (an estimated 139.9 million people) had household incomes below 200 percent of their poverty thresholds and were therefore asked whether they had

¹ The SIPP sample universe is the civilian, noninstitutionalized population of the United States.

² Data on the use of these other assistance programs were collected in the post-event history calendar (EHC) section of the 2014 SIPP interview. In 2013, 200 percent of the poverty threshold for a family of four with two adults and two children was about \$47,250.

WHAT IS SIPP?

The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) is a nationally representative panel survey administered by the U.S. Census Bureau that collects information on the short-term dynamics of employment, income, household composition, eligibility, and participation in government assistance programs. It is a leading source of information on specific topics related to economic well-being, family dynamics, education, wealth and assets, health insurance, childcare, and food security. Each SIPP panel follows individuals for several years, providing monthly data that measure changes in household and family composition and economic circumstances over time. For more information, please visit the SIPP Web site at www.census.gov/sipp.

received any of these types of assistance.³ An estimated 6.5 percent (15.6 million people) received some type of food, transportation, clothing, or housing assistance at

³ Table 2 shows the estimates for the total population aged 15 years and older with household incomes below 200 percent of their poverty thresholds who were asked the other assistance questions and the population aged 15 years and older who reported receiving any kind of other assistance.

any point during the year.⁴ Among these assistance programs, the one with the largest participation was food assistance followed by transportation, housing, and clothing assistance. An estimated 2.8 percent (6.8 million people) reported receiving food assistance. The most common type of food assistance, reported by 1.6 percent of the population (an estimated 4 million people), was the receipt of bags of groceries or packaged foods. This was followed by 1 percent of the population (approximately 2 million people) reporting the receipt of meals from a shelter, soup kitchen, Meals-on-Wheels, or meals from a charity.⁵

In 2013, 2.7 percent of the population aged 15 and older (approximately 6.5 million people) reported receiving transportation assistance. The most common reason for transportation assistance was to get rides to a doctor's office or medical appointment. An estimated 1.5 percent of the population (approximately 3.7 million people) received this type of transportation assistance. Out of the estimated 3.7 million people who reported receiving rides to a doctor's office or medical appointment, 23.0 percent were covered by Medicare and 25.3 percent reported receiving

Medicaid benefits.⁶ An estimated 2.1 percent of the population aged 15 and older (approximately 5 million people) reported receiving housing assistance and less than 1 percent (an estimated 1.7 million people) reported receiving clothing assistance.

DATA ON MONTHLY PARTICIPATION

The 2014 SIPP collected information on the type, source, and months of receipt for other assistance programs for 2013. Participation rates indicate receipt of this type of assistance for one or more months during the year. Participation across the 12 months in 2013 exhibits a seasonal pattern as the most frequently observed participation rates, across all assistance programs, occurred during the winter months of January and December. For instance, participation in food assistance ranged from 4.5 million in December to 3.6 million in May. For transportation assistance, the range was 4.8 million in January to 4.3 million in July. Monthly participation in housing and/or clothing assistance, which were reported together, had a distribution similar to transportation assistance.⁷ January was the month with the highest rate of participation with an estimated 4.7 million people and July had the lowest participation with an estimated 4.2 million people.⁸

There were four categories for the sources of assistance: 1) a

⁶ These estimates are from the authors' calculations using Wave 1 responses. Percentages are not significantly different at alpha=0.1 level.

⁷ There was only one question asked about receipt of housing or clothing assistance. A respondent could have received either housing assistance, clothing assistance, or both.

⁸ Most of the differences between the monthly estimates are not significant at the alpha=0.1 level.

government social service agency, 2) a community or religious charitable organization, 3) family or friends, and 4) someplace else. For clothing assistance there was a fifth category, employer. These sources of assistance are only asked when respondents indicate receipt of certain types of assistance, such as clothing, food, or transportation assistance.⁹

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAMS DISCUSSED

Food assistance. The 2014 SIPP asked respondents whether they received any of the four types of food assistance during the reference year: 1) money, vouchers, or certificates to buy food; 2) bags of groceries or packaged meals; 3) meals from a shelter, soup kitchen, Meals-on-Wheels, or from other charity; and 4) some other type of food assistance. These types of assistance do not include SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits, WIC (the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children), nor free and reduced school breakfast or lunch, for which participation data are collected separately in the survey. However, some people who received food assistance also received SNAP (53.6 percent), WIC (4.3 percent), free or reduced school lunch (18.2 percent), and breakfast (14.2 percent).

Transportation assistance.

Respondents were asked whether they received any of the following five types of transportation assistance during the reference year: 1) gas vouchers; 2) bus or subway

⁹ If respondents indicated they received transportation assistance in the form of gas vouchers or bus or subway tokens or passes, they were asked about the source of this assistance. Similarly, if respondents received food assistance in the form of money, vouchers, or certificates to buy food, they were asked about the source of this assistance.

⁴ The estimates in this report (which may be presented in the text, figures, and tables) are based on responses from a sample of the population and may differ from the actual values because of sampling variability and other factors. As a result, apparent differences between the estimates for two or more groups may not be statistically significant. All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level unless otherwise indicated. The link to the nonresponse bias report is <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/nonresponse-reports.html>.

⁵ The estimates for the different types of food assistance are grouped and added together in Table 2 under food assistance.

tokens or passes; 3) help registering, repairing, or insuring a car; 4) rides to a doctor's office or medical appointment; and 5) some other kind of transportation assistance.

Clothing assistance. Respondents were asked whether they received free or reduced price clothes, money or vouchers, or both clothes and money or vouchers.

Housing assistance. Respondents were asked whether they received assistance to pay for housing other than public housing, housing vouchers, or energy assistance. Data on public housing, housing vouchers, and energy assistance are collected separately in SIPP. However, 58.6 percent of those who received other housing assistance lived in public housing, 27.4 percent received housing vouchers, and 23.3 percent received energy assistance at some point during the reference period (year 2013).¹⁰

TABLES HIGHLIGHTS

Sex

- While 53.4 percent of the population aged 15 and older and whose household incomes were below 200 percent of their poverty thresholds were women, 61.8 percent of those who received any type of other assistance were women.
- Of those receiving food assistance, 63.7 percent were women.
- About two-thirds of housing assistance recipients (66.1 percent) were women.

¹⁰ Participation in public housing, receiving housing vouchers, and energy assistance are not mutually exclusive occurrences, and an individual or family could be receiving these housing benefits concurrently during the reference year.

Age

- About one-third (32.4 percent) of those receiving transportation assistance were 65 years or older.
- Recipients between 15 and 34 years old were more likely to use clothing assistance (39.7 percent) and housing assistance (32.9 percent) than other age groups.
- Nearly 9 in 10 clothing assistance recipients (87.9 percent) were below age 65.

Race/Ethnicity

- About 7 in 10 of food assistance recipients (73.9 percent) were non-Hispanic White.
- About 1 in 5 people who received clothing assistance (20.5 percent) were of Hispanic origin.
- Over one-fourth of housing assistance recipients (28.5 percent) were non-Hispanic Black.

Marital Status

- Most housing assistance recipients (84.6 percent) were not married.
- While 63.7 percent of the population aged 15 and older and with household incomes below 200 percent of their poverty thresholds were not married, 82.8 percent of transportation recipients were not married.

Children Under 18

- About 6 in 10 food assistance recipients (60.7 percent) had at least one child under the age of 18.
- Almost half of those people who received transportation assistance (48.7 percent) did not have a child under the age of 18 living in their households.

- Of clothing assistance recipients, 48.5 percent reported having 1 or 2 children under the age of 18.

Family Income Below Poverty

- The percentage of recipients of other assistance who had family incomes below 100 percent of their poverty thresholds was higher (43.5 percent) than those of the total population aged 15 and older (15.9 percent).¹¹
- Over one-fifth of the people who received other assistance (22.9 percent) had family incomes that were below 50 percent of their poverty thresholds compared to less than one-tenth (9.3 percent) of the total population aged 15 and older.
- More than half of the people (54.1 percent) who received housing assistance had family incomes below 100 percent of their poverty thresholds.
- Less than half (45.1 percent) of those who received food assistance had family incomes below 100 percent of their poverty thresholds.

While the types of assistance discussed in this brief are not part of the major federally funded social safety net programs, this brief has shown that they are important for a substantial portion of the population aged 15 and older whose household incomes were below 200 percent of their poverty thresholds. In 2013, almost 16 million individuals aged 15 and older reported receiving some other assistance. The majority of people who used these programs were non-Hispanic White, unmarried, and

¹¹ While the screener question used to determine whether an individual was asked about other assistance was based on household income, the data on poverty status use family income (the income of those related by birth, marriage, or adoption) rather than household income.

women. In addition, 43.5 percent of individuals had family incomes below 100 percent of their poverty thresholds and 22.9 percent of individuals were below 50 percent of their poverty thresholds. By comparison, for the population aged 15 and older and whose household incomes were below 200 percent of their poverty thresholds, 25.1 percent had family incomes that place them below 100 percent of their poverty thresholds and 14.5 percent had family incomes that were below 50 percent of their poverty thresholds.

CONTACTS

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USER COMMENTS

The Census Bureau welcomes the comments and advice of users of its data and reports. If you have any suggestions or comments, please e-mail <<http://ask.census.gov>>.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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Table 1.

Distribution of Recipients of Selected Other Assistance Programs by Selected Demographic Characteristics: 2013

Characteristics	Food assistance		Transportation assistance		Clothing assistance		Housing assistance	
	Number or percent	Margin of error ¹	Number or percent	Margin of error ¹	Number or percent	Margin of error ¹	Number or percent	Margin of error ¹
Total (thousands)	6,771	355	6,549	349	1,731	169	4,975	370
Share of total population (15 years and older) . . .	2.8	0.15	2.7	0.15	0.7	0.07	2.1	0.15
Sex								
Male	36.3	1.92	41.3	2.22	41.6	4.87	33.9	2.32
Female	63.7	1.92	58.7	2.22	58.4	4.87	66.1	2.32
Age								
15–34 years old	24.5	1.89	31.6	2.07	39.7	5.10	32.9	2.80
35–49 years old	24.1	2.02	15.6	1.68	27.4	4.67	23.1	2.53
50–64 years old	27.0	2.22	20.4	1.60	20.8	3.93	24.2	2.55
65 years and over	24.3	2.20	32.4	2.73	12.1	4.15	19.7	2.52
Race/Ethnicity								
White, non-Hispanic	73.9	2.11	68.8	2.17	70.7	5.07	61.9	3.22
Black, non-Hispanic	17.7	1.60	22.8	2.07	17.9	3.96	28.5	2.47
Asian, non-Hispanic	1.5	0.56	2.9	1.22	1.9	1.35	5.2	1.79
Other race	6.9	1.18	5.5	1.12	9.5	3.34	4.4	1.23
Hispanic (any race)	16.6	2.12	16.1	2.24	20.5	3.85	19.1	2.66
Marital Status								
Married	26.9	2.01	17.2	2.09	30.7	4.94	15.4	2.91
Not married	73.1	2.01	82.8	2.09	69.3	4.94	84.6	2.91
Children under 18²								
None	39.3	3.85	48.7	3.77	27.7	5.68	31.4	3.85
1–2 children	42.2	3.37	38.0	3.87	48.5	6.14	48.6	4.08
3 or more children	18.5	3.11	13.3	2.27	23.8	5.91	19.9	3.13
Family Income								
Below 100 percent of their poverty thresholds . . .	45.1	2.70	42.5	2.80	43.8	5.92	54.1	2.63
Below 50 percent of their poverty thresholds	23.0	2.15	21.0	1.89	26.9	4.89	29.3	2.45

¹ The margin of error can be subtracted from and added to the point estimate to get the 90 percent confidence interval around the estimate.

² The percentages listed on this table are based upon the number of families that have children under the age of 18.

Note: For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, Wave 1, 2014 Panel.

Table 2.

Distribution of Total Population Aged 15 Years and Older, Population Aged 15 Years and Older With Household Incomes Below 200 Percent of Poverty, and Population Aged 15 Years and Older Who Received Other Assistance by Selected Demographic Characteristics: 2013

Characteristics	Total population 15 years and older		Population 15 years and older with household incomes below 200 percent of their poverty thresholds		Population 15 years and older with household incomes below 200 percent of their poverty thresholds who received any type of other assistance	
	Number or percent	Margin of error ¹	Number or percent	Margin of error ¹	Number or percent	Margin of error ¹
Total (thousands)	240,905	604	139,896	1,472	15,568	581
Percentage of total population 15 years and older . .	100	X	58.1	0.59	6.5	0.25
Sex						
Male	48.1	0.10	46.6	0.26	38.2	1.35
Female	51.9	0.10	53.4	0.26	61.8	1.35
Age						
15–34 years old	32.0	0.16	39.1	0.35	31.4	1.43
35–49 years old	23.9	0.18	21.9	0.35	20.2	1.33
50–64 years old	25.0	0.16	20.4	0.30	23.0	1.30
65 years and over	19.0	0.10	18.6	0.31	25.3	1.68
Race/Ethnicity						
White, non-Hispanic	79.3	0.10	75.5	0.35	68.6	1.35
Black, non-Hispanic	12.3	0.07	15.7	0.28	22.4	1.10
Asian, non-Hispanic	5.2	0.18	4.8	0.23	3.1	0.74
Other race	3.2	0.16	4.0	0.21	6.0	0.77
Hispanic (any race)	15.2	0.12	20.6	0.38	17.1	1.33
Marital Status						
Married	50.7	0.39	36.3	0.64	22.3	1.56
Not married	49.3	0.39	63.7	0.64	77.7	1.56
Children under 18²						
None	51.2	0.54	45.5	0.81	40.9	2.55
1–2 children	38.3	0.66	40.8	0.94	42.1	2.55
3 or more children	10.4	0.43	13.7	0.63	17.0	1.68
Family Income						
Below 100 percent of their poverty thresholds . . .	15.9	0.33	25.1	0.53	43.5	1.74
Below 50 percent of their poverty thresholds	9.3	0.28	14.5	0.44	22.9	1.35

X Not applicable.

¹ The margin of error can be subtracted from and added to the point estimate to get the 90 percent confidence interval around the estimate.

² The percentages listed on this table are based upon the number of families that have children under the age of 18.

Note: For information on sampling and nonsampling error, see <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, Wave 1, 2014 Panel.