

Frequently Asked Questions for CPS Survey Participants

On this Page:**GENERAL QUESTIONS**

1. [What is the Current Population Survey?](#)
2. [Who is responsible for conducting the survey?](#)
3. [Why does the government collect statistics on the unemployed?](#)
4. [What other information is available from the CPS?](#)

SURVEY PROCEDURES

5. [How long will the survey take?](#)
6. [Am I required to participate in the survey?](#)
7. [How will I complete the interview?](#)
8. [What kinds of questions will I be asked?](#)
9. [How was I selected to be in the survey?](#)
10. [I'm not available right now. Can someone else in my household respond instead?](#)

COMMON CONCERNS

11. [Are my responses and personal information kept confidential?](#)
12. [If I think a question is too personal, do I have to answer it?](#)
13. [Who will use this information?](#)
14. [I'm not unemployed, I'm retired. Why am I being interviewed?](#)
15. [Can I contact someone to discuss my concerns before completing the survey?](#)

General questions

1. What is the Current Population Survey?

The Current Population Survey (CPS) is a monthly survey of households conducted by the Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In addition to the national unemployment rate, it provides a comprehensive body of data on the [labor force](#), [employment](#), [unemployment](#), the unemployment rate, persons [not in the labor force](#), [hours of work](#), [earnings](#), and other [demographic](#) and [labor force characteristics](#).

2. Who is responsible for conducting the survey?

The U.S. Census Bureau, under contract with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), conducts interviews and processes the data. Before BLS begins analyzing the data, all confidential information is removed from the data files, such as names and addresses. BLS then analyzes and publishes the statistics.

3. Why does the government collect statistics on the unemployed?

Government statistics tell us about the extent and nature of unemployment:

- How many people are unemployed
- How they became unemployed
- How long they have been unemployed
- Whether their numbers are growing or declining
- Whether they are men or women, young or old
- Whether they are White, Black, Asian, or of Hispanic ethnicity
- Whether they are more concentrated in one area of the country than another

4. What other information is available from the CPS?

- The age distribution of people employed in different jobs
- Whether more or fewer people are participating in the labor force (both working and looking for work)
- The amount of education the workforce has attained
- The labor force status of veterans
- Characteristics of the self-employed
- Employment and unemployment of people with a disability
- Earnings by educational attainment

Survey procedures

5. How long will the survey take?

The average interview takes about 10 to 15 minutes, but your response will depend on the number of persons in your household. You will be interviewed for four consecutive months now and again for the same four months a year from now.

6. Am I required to participate in the survey?

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. However, your household has been selected to represent people like you, and your contribution helps to ensure that employment and unemployment data are as reliable and accurate as possible. The only way we can achieve this needed reliability is through the cooperation of

households such as yours in providing complete and accurate information.

7. How will I complete the interview?

You will be interviewed at your home or over the telephone by a Census Bureau employee. The survey is not conducted by mail, e-mail, or online.

8. What kinds of questions will I be asked?

You will be asked about your employment status for the calendar week that includes the 12th of the month. You also will be asked a few additional questions about your age, race, occupation, hours of work, and educational attainment, among other things. You also will be asked these questions about everyone in your household 15 years and older.

9. How was I selected to be in the survey?

You as an individual were not selected to be in the survey; rather, your address was chosen to represent hundreds of other households like yours. Your participation in the survey is very important for the completeness and accuracy of the final results.

If you should move during the period of the survey, you will no longer be interviewed.

10. I'm not available right now. Can someone else in my household respond instead?

Yes. Any household member 15 years of age or older can respond for the household. However, we would like to talk to someone who is knowledgeable about people in the household.

Common concerns

11. Are my responses and personal information kept confidential?

Yes. BLS and the Census Bureau understand the importance of keeping your information confidential. [Title 13](#), United States Code, Section 8b, authorizes the U.S. Census Bureau to conduct this survey. Section 9 of Title 13, United States Code, requires Census to keep all information about you and your household strictly confidential and that the information be used only for statistical purposes. No information that could personally identify you or your family is released. If anyone violates this law, it is a federal crime; they may face severe penalties, including a federal prison sentence of up to five years, a fine of up to \$250,000, or both. More information on the [Census Bureau's data protection policies](#) is available on their Web site.

12. If I think a question is too personal, do I have to answer it?

No. You do not need to answer a question that you feel is too personal. However, answering all of the questions does help us to obtain a more complete picture of the U.S. labor force. None of your personally identifying information, such as name and address, is reported.

13. Who will use this information?

Your responses are combined with those of other survey participants to produce important statistical information about the U.S. labor market. Data from the CPS are used by government policymakers and legislators as important indicators of our nation's economic situation and for planning and evaluating many government programs. They are also used by business, the media, students, academics, and the general public.

14. I'm not unemployed, I'm retired. Why am I being interviewed?

Whether you are employed or retired, unemployed or just going to school, all that information is important in capturing the current makeup of our nation's labor force. Trends in the movement of workers into and out of the labor force are important to economists and policy makers to help make better decisions about resources and policies.

15. Can I contact someone to discuss my concerns before completing the survey?

Yes. If you would like to discuss any concerns or ask additional questions about the survey, you may contact the Current Population Survey Branch at (301) 763-3806, or submit an email ask.census.gov.

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