



100 Million and Counting: A Portrait of Economic Insecurity in the United States

Economic security—having stable, sufficient income to meet your basic needs—is critical to the health and well-being of people, neighborhoods, and our local and national economies. Despite the fact that the United States is the wealthiest nation on earth, tens of millions of people living in this country struggle to attain even a basic dignified standard of living, while millions more balance precariously on the edge where even a short-term illness, loss of income, or emergency expense can be financially insurmountable. Today, roughly 106 million people in the United States—one in every three—are economically insecure, defined as living in households with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

Demographics: Who are the economically insecure?

Economic insecurity is widespread and increasing. Since 2000, the economically insecure population has grown from 30 percent to 34 percent of the U.S. population.

Black and Latinx residents are disproportionately economically insecure. People of color make up about 38 percent of the total U.S. population, but account for 52 percent of those living in economic insecurity.

Total U.S. Population and Economically Insecure Population by Race/Ethnicity, 2015



Source: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series.

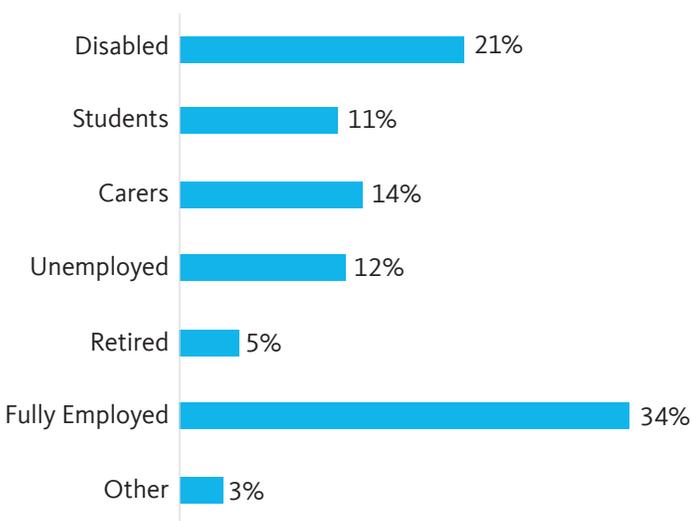
Note: Data represent a 2011 through 2015 average. Universe includes all people for whom poverty status is determined.

Work and economic insecurity

Economic insecurity is widespread and increasing. About four of every 10 economically insecure adults are working regularly—most of them full time and year-round—but not earning enough to make ends meet. Low wages and/or limited hours prevent them from moving out of economic insecurity.

Four of every 10 economically insecure working-age adults are out of the labor force. Millions of adults are out of the labor force due to illness or disability, family responsibilities, schooling, transportation challenges, inability to arrange childcare, or other barriers to securing employment.

Primary Relation to Work, Economically Insecure Adults Ages 18 to 64, 2014



Source: Matt Bruenig's analysis of the 2014 Current Population Survey March Supplement, U.S. Census Bureau.

Note: Data are for March 2014. Universe includes the economically insecure population ages 18 to 64. See data and methods section for more information on how individuals were placed in each category.

Access to opportunity and assets

About one in five economically insecure households do not have a vehicle. Black households are especially likely to lack access to a car: 32 percent of Black households do not own a vehicle, compared with 15 percent of White households.

The majority of economically insecure households are housing-cost burdened. Whether they rent or own, most economically insecure households spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs. Overall, 78 percent of economically insecure renters and 60 percent of economically insecure homeowners are housing burdened.

Implications

A mounting body of research suggests that such inequality and exclusion lead to declining economic growth. The inverse is also true: by developing high-impact, targeted solutions that dismantle barriers and connect economically insecure people and households to resources and opportunities, we can lay the foundation for an economy that works for everyone.

Proven and promising new policy innovations can be leveraged to close racial gaps in employment, income, and wealth, and create robust systems for inclusive growth to build economic security for all. Strategies to achieve these interrelated aims include approaches that can be implemented at the local or state level—including raising the floor on low-wage work, preventing residential and commercial displacement, and expanding transportation access and affordability—as well as big ideas for population-level impact, like a federal job guarantee and universal family care.

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