



Fact Sheet

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Security Is Important to African Americans

Social Security is neutral with respect to race or ethnicity – individuals with identical earnings histories are treated the same in terms of benefits. This Fact Sheet is provided by the Social Security Administration to highlight how African Americans benefit from the Social Security program and how certain demographic characteristics of African Americans compare with the entire population.

Out of 36.4 million beneficiaries aged 65 and older in 2012, 3.1 million (or 8.5 percent) were African Americans.¹

- The Social Security system is progressive in that lower-wage earners receive a higher percentage benefit than higher-wage earners do. The system returns a greater percentage of pre-retirement earnings to a lower-wage worker than to a higher-wage worker. African Americans who are low-wage workers receive back more benefits in relation to past earnings than do high-wage earners.
- In 2012, the median earnings of working-age African Americans who worked full-time, year round were about \$35,000, compared to \$42,500 for all working-age people.²
- In 2012, the average annual Social Security income received by African American men 65 years and older was \$14,514, compared to \$11,974 for African American women.³
- In 2012, among African Americans receiving Social Security, 31 percent of elderly married couples and 53 percent of unmarried elderly persons relied on Social Security for 90 percent or more of their income.⁴

¹ Office of Retirement Policy (ORP) tabulations of 2013 Current Population Survey (CPS) from dataset: cps2013. Based on the public-use March 2013 CPS (income year 2012), and are subject to nonsampling error (such as respondent error in reporting characteristics and amount and type of income). These are all Social Security beneficiaries aged 65 or older in March 2013. Because more than one race can be reported in the CPS, the African American group includes individuals who identify themselves as that race alone or in combination with one or more races.

² Office of Retirement Policy (ORP) tabulations of 2013 Current Population Survey (CPS) from dataset: allperson2013. Based on the public-use March 2013 CPS (income year 2012), and are subject to nonsampling error (such as respondent error in reporting characteristics and amount and type of income).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Office of Retirement Policy (ORP) tabulations of 2013 Current Population Survey (CPS) from dataset: couple2013. Based on the public-use March 2013 CPS (income year 2012), and are subject to nonsampling error (such as respondent error in reporting characteristics and amount and type of income).

- African Americans have lower life expectancies than other races at age 65.
 - African American men who are age 65 in 2012 can expect to live to age 79, compared to age 82 for all men.
 - African American women who are age 65 in 2012 can expect to live to age 83, compared to age 85 for all women.⁵
- African Americans receiving benefits are helped by Social Security's cost-of-living protection which guarantees a benefit that is annually adjusted for inflation.
- The African American population in the U.S. is expected to grow. Today, 12.6 percent of the population is of African American origin. This proportion is expected to grow to 13 percent by 2050.⁶

This fact sheet is designed to provide general information and does not apply to all individuals within the African American population.

⁵ Day, Jennifer Cheeseman, Population Projections of the United States by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1995 to 2050, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports P25-1130, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC. 1996. Note: Use Middle Assumption, 2010. Access at: <http://www.census.gov/prod/1/pop/p25-1130.pdf> Data in increments of 5 after 2005 until 2010. Appendix B. Life Expectancy, Table B-2. Life Expectancy at Age 65 by Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex: 1995 to 2050, p. 117-119. p. 13. Access at: <http://www.census.gov/prod/1/pop/p25-1130/p251130.pdf>

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, For years 2010-2050. Table 6. Percent of Projected Population by Race and Hispanic Origin for the United States: 2010 to 2050. (NP2008-T6). Release Date: August 14, 2008. Use total population. <http://www.census.gov/population/projections/data/national/2008/summarytables.html> 2008 National Population Projections. Press Release. An Older and More Diverse Nation by Midcentury Access at: <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb08-123.html>