



Data in Europe: poverty

Introduction

Figures compiled by Eurostat indicate that 118 million people, or 23.5% of the EU population, were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2016.¹ With poverty exerting long lasting effects on both individuals and societies, both government bodies and universities invest in research on poverty and its effects. This guide discusses key data sources in Europe available to measure and research poverty and its effects. The guide includes sections on:

- 1 National and cross-national statistics (macro data)
- 2 Microdata
- 3 General social surveys
- 4 Finding academic studies into poverty held by social data archives

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¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion



1 National and cross-national statistics (macro data)

Since poverty is important in the policy context, it features in many statistics and reports from statistics institutes, governing bodies and intergovernmental organization. For example, 'no poverty' is one of UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Likewise, one of the five headline targets of the Europe 2020 strategy is to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty or social exclusion by 2020.

1.1 Eurostat: Statistics on Poverty

Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, reports on indicators monitoring change in the EU. Most related to poverty, Eurostat reports on the indicator 'people at risk of poverty or social exclusion', which comprises three sub-indicators 'income poverty', 'very low work intensity' and 'severe material deprivation'. Eurostat provides online access to aggregated results in relation to these and other indicators including income distribution, monetary poverty, living conditions and material deprivation. Results are presented as tables and more flexible multi-dimensional datasets.

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>.

Eurostat also produce Statistics Explained, a guide to European statistics that presents statistical topics in an easily understandable way:

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Income poverty statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Income_poverty_statistics)

1.2 National statistics institutes

National statistics institutes such as The UK Office for National Statistics (ONS), Statistics Netherlands (CBS) or the Czech Statistical Office compile data relating to poverty including data relating to income, receipt of benefits and expenditure. They often publish extensive reports, statistics and aggregated data.

A list of the different statistics institutes is on the UK DATA service website:

<https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/get-data/other-providers/international/national>

1.3 OECD

Another source of macro data relating to poverty is the OECD. Relevant indicators and databases can be found by searching for poverty in the data section of the OECD website: <https://data.oecd.org/>. For instance, the [OECD Social and Welfare Statistics](#) database provides annual data for 34 OECD countries on topics including: Benefits, Family allowances, Social stratification and groupings, Employment and labour, Social welfare policy and systems, Housing, Social indicators and quality of life, Use and provision of specific social services.



2 Microdata

Microdata refers to data at the level of individual units such as people or households. Microdata can be accessed for research via many sources. In particular, aggregated individual level data collected via social surveys provides a key source for statistics on poverty and related topics; for instance, Eurostat compiles statistics on income, social inclusion and living conditions using the EU-Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). Eurostat and other organizations compiling statistics often allow access to the underlying microdata for research. Organisations may provide access directly or via a data repository/ archive. For instance, the UK Office for National Statistics makes microdata from many large scale surveys available via UK Data Service.

2.1 Microdata from Eurostat

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/overview/>

Eurostat provides access to several datasets relevant for poverty related research, including

- European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC),
- The European Community Household Panel (ECHP)
- Labour Force Survey (LFS)

Eurostat allows access to their microdata for scientific purposes only. To apply for access to Eurostat's microdata, your organisation must first be recognised by Eurostat as a research entity (a university, research institution or research department in a public administration, bank, statistical institute etc). If your organisation is recognised as a research entity, you can then apply for access by submitting a research proposal (the procedure takes around 8-10 weeks). Details of the different datasets and access procedures can be found on the access to Microdata webpages (see link above).

2.2 European Quality of Life Survey (Eurofound)

<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-quality-of-life-surveys>

The European Quality of Life Survey, which is carried out every four years, examines European citizens' objective lives circumstances and feelings about their circumstances and lives in general. The time series dataset enables the study of quality of life over the different waves of the EQLS. Information about the survey, including questionnaires and technical reports, can be found on the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) EQLS webpages (see link above).

Access: Eurofound's survey datasets, which are made available no later than two years after fieldwork completion, are stored with the UK Data Service (<https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/>) and available free of charge for non-commercial purposes (requests for use for commercial purposes will be forwarded to Eurofound for authorisation). To download the data, register online with the UKDS. If you are not from a UK university or college, apply for a UK Data Archive username or consult the page on how to access data.

2.3 LIS – harmonised socio-economic micro datasets

<https://www.lisdatacenter.org/our-data/>

LIS collects and harmonises socio-economic micro datasets from upper- and middle-income countries and makes them available into



- Luxembourg Income Study Database (LIS) - the largest available harmonised income micro-database
- Luxembourg Wealth Study Database (LWS)- the first cross-national wealth database in existence

Access: via LIS (See link above). LISSY is a remote-execution system available to registered researchers only and exclusively for non-commercial purposes. There is also an online table maker.

2.4 *Microdata data at the national level (official statistics)*

There are many national surveys on poverty and related topics, often conducted by National Statistics Institutes. Some of the surveys contribute to the EU-SILC; for example, in the UK the Family Resources Survey (FRS) collects the cross-sectional elements of EU-SILC. The FRS is conducted on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions by a consortium that includes the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

National Statistics Institutes may make data available directly or via a data repository or archive. As a result, it can be difficult to identify sources and access procedures. Often, you can find information about accessing microdata for research on the websites of statistical institutes.

The UK Data Service includes a list of national statistics institutes on its website: <https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/get-data/other-providers/international/national>

There are also two useful tools for locating information about microdata used for official statistics:

- **MISSY or Microdata Information System** is an online service platform that provides structured metadata for official statistics. MISSY includes metadata at the study and variable level as well as reports and tools for data handling and analysis. All documentation in MISSY refers to microdata available for scientific purposes. <https://www.gesis.org/en/missy/>
- **CIMES or Centralising and Integrating Metadata from European Statistics** gives an overview of official micro data disseminated for research purposes by the national statistical institutes (NSI) across Europe. It describes data and the procedures for requesting access, information which is otherwise scattered. CIMES does not give direct access to data, only metadata. <https://cimes.casd.eu/>

2.5 *Household panel studies*

Often academically led, longitudinal studies such as household panel studies are a valuable resource for research on poverty. Key examples include:

- Germany: **German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP)** (<https://www.diw.de/soep>) began in 1984. Variables include household composition, employment, occupations, earnings, health and satisfaction indicators. (Access: via DIW (German Institute for Economic Research) for research use by the scientific community only)
- UK: **Understanding Society**: Following the lives of 40,000 UK households to provide valuable evidence about 21st century life (access via the UK Data Service)
- Switzerland: **Swiss Household Panel (SHP)**: (<http://forscenter.ch/en/our-surveys/swiss-household-panel>) - Annual panel study which follows a random sample of private households in Switzerland. Access via FORS).



2.6 General social surveys

Often national and cross-national social surveys include some questions relating to poverty and related topics. For instance, survey may ask about feelings of financial security, attitudes about the causes of poverty and attitudes about welfare and benefits systems. Datasets containing microdata from social surveys can be accessed via a range of European social science data archives.

Cross-national

- **European Social Survey (ESS):**

<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>

The European Social Survey (ESS) is an academically driven cross-national survey that has been conducted across Europe since 2001 with surveys in over 30 nations. The ESS includes rotating modules on specific topics including Family, work and well being (ESS2 2004, ESS5 2010) and Welfare Attitudes (ESS4 2008, ESS8 2016).

Access: via ESS website (see link above). Users need to register with the Norwegian Social Science Data Service to access ESS data.

- **International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)**

<http://www.gesis.org/issp/home/>

The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) started in 1984. It is an annual programme of cross-national collaboration on surveys on topics important for social science research. It evolved out of pre-existing general social surveys (initially the German ALLBUS and US GSS). The ISSP surveys consist of rotated thematic modules on topics relevant to social sciences. Surveys are designed for replication and can be used for both cross-national and cross-time comparison. Modules featuring questions relating to poverty include: Social Inequality (due for repeat in 2019) and Work Orientations. Access: via the [GESIS Data Archive](#). GESIS is responsible for harmonizing and integrating the national datasets and provides access to the data, its documentation and support for external users. GESIS has [ISSP module web pages](#) with search facilities and comprehensive information on modules, metadata and data access. Access to individual country datasets is also available via some national data services.

- **Eurobarometer**

<http://www.gesis.org/eurobarometer-data-service/home/>

Since the early seventies, *Eurobarometer* (EB) surveys have interviewed representative national samples in all European Union (EU) member states in spring and autumn. The EB is designed to provide regular monitoring of public social and political attitudes in the EU through specific trend questions and supplementary surveys on special issues. Eurobarometer surveys have included questions relating to: perceptions of poverty and social exclusion, Social policies and access to social services, and Perceptions of homelessness. Access: via GESIS Data Archive, see the Eurobarometer Survey Series web pages (above). EB datasets are also available online via GESIS's [ZACAT](#) service.

- **European (World) Values Study**

<http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu/>

The European Values Study (EVS) is a large-scale, cross-national, and longitudinal survey research program on how Europeans think about family, work, religion, politics and society. Repeated every nine years, the survey provides insights into the ideas, beliefs, preferences, attitudes, values, and opinions of citizens all over Europe. Access: via GESIS Data Archive. Data and documentation can be downloaded free of charge. Registration is required for data downloads. European Values Survey datasets are available to browse, analyse and download online via GESIS's [ZACAT](#) service.



National public opinion studies

- Sweden: **SOM surveys** – Since 1986, SOM surveys Swedes on issues ranging from politics and media to lifestyle, health and leisure habits. Access via SND (Swedish National Data Service): <https://snd.gu.se>
- UK: **British Social Attitudes** – over 30 years of data on the attitudes of the British public towards a wide range of social issues including attitudes towards poverty and welfare. Access via UK Data Service: <https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/>
- Germany: **The German General Social Survey (ALLBUS)** - collects up-to-date data on attitudes, behavior and social structure in Germany. Every two years since 1980 a representative cross section of the population is surveyed using both constant and variable questions. Access: via GESIS Data Archive <http://www.gesis.org/en/allbus/allbus-home/>

3 Finding academic studies into poverty held by social data archives

Many academic researchers produce quantitative and qualitative data on poverty. Increasingly, researchers are depositing research data in social science data archives and making it accessible to other researchers. Below are two examples of data collections relating to poverty:

- **Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living, 1967-1969** is a data collection from the UK Data Service that contains the original research data collected by Peter Townsend and reported in the seminal *Poverty in the United Kingdom* (Townsend, 1979). (<https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=1671&type=Data%20catalogue>).
- **'Everyday Experiences of Poverty'**. In 2006, Finnish researchers organised a writing competition titled 'Everyday Experiences of Poverty'. They collected and archived over 800 submissions on the conditions and experiences of poverty in Finland with covered theme such as coping with daily life with little money, how to manage to pay the rent and the bills and still have enough money for food, poverty in childhood and criticism of the Finnish welfare system. The research developed further in 2012, when selected participants of the 2006 competition were invited to describe their life and experiences relating to poverty or overcoming poverty in the time after the 2006 writing competition. The data collected in this study can be compared with the 2006 responses by using the identification numbers. The dataset is only available in Finnish. (https://services.fsd.uta.fi/catalogue/FSD2795?tab=summary&lang=en&study_language=en).



3.1 National data services data catalogues

National data services have websites with online catalogues that you can search using terms such as 'poverty'. Searches of large archives can yield many results but usually you can sort and refine searches. Websites and catalogues are mostly in national languages and English. However, data and the documentation might only be in one language.

If you find you don't get any results, one strategy is to think about your search terms. For instance, data useful for examining poverty might come from studies not specifically focused on poverty. For example, for research examining in-work poverty, you may want to focus on identifying data on employment and then checking if you can identify respondents' income level or some indicator of poverty.

The CESSDA website provides links to major social science data archives:

<https://www.cessda.eu/About/Consortium>

3.2 CESSDA data catalogue

<https://datacatalogue.cessda.eu/>

The CESSDA DATA catalogue is a new tool to allow you to search across all CESSDA member archives, with features search as a free text search and ways to sort and filter results. The results will include a summary of the data and link to the relevant archive.