

Trends in USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation Rates: Fiscal Year 2020 and Fiscal Year 2022 (Summary)

Background

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides nutrition assistance to eligible low-income individuals and households in need. This report is the latest in a series on SNAP participation rates, which estimate the proportion of people eligible for benefits under Federal income and asset rules to those who actually participate in the program. This report presents rates for fiscal year (FY) 2022 and re-estimated rates for pre-pandemic FY 2020 using new weights released by the Census Bureau for the 2020 Census. These rates should not be compared to any prior estimates due to the updated weights used.

Because the COVID-19 public health emergency affected data collection starting in March 2020, the FY 2020 rates cover only the pre-pandemic period of October 2019 through February 2020. Using 5 rather than 12 months of data resulted in an overestimate of SNAP eligibility and thus an underestimate of the SNAP participation rate in pre-pandemic FY 2020. Therefore, readers should also use caution when interpreting the pre-pandemic FY 2020 participation rates and when comparing these rates to the FY 2022 participation rates. There are no estimated participation rates for FY 2021 due to suspended data collection during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Key Findings

- SNAP served 88 percent of all eligible individuals in FY 2022, which is the highest in the nearly 50-year history of estimating SNAP participation rates.
- Individuals with greater need, like those with no or very low incomes, participated at higher rates than other eligible individuals in FY 2022.
- Elderly individuals participated at lower rates than other eligible individuals in FY 2022.

Methods

Estimates of participants (numerator) in this report are based on SNAP administrative data for pre-pandemic FY 2020 and the entirety of FY 2022 for the 50 States and the District of Columbia, while estimates of eligible individuals (denominator) are based on the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement data for the relevant calendar years. Differences between these two sources cause some estimated participation rates to exceed 100 percent.

Individuals in households with income or assets above the Federal SNAP resource limits are removed from the participant count unless every member receives cash benefits from Supplemental Security Income, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or State general assistance. These participation rate estimates do not include individuals who received temporary Disaster SNAP benefits or those who received benefits in error.

Findings

SNAP served 88 percent of all eligible individuals in FY 2022, which is the highest in the nearly 50-year history of estimating SNAP participation rates. On average, around

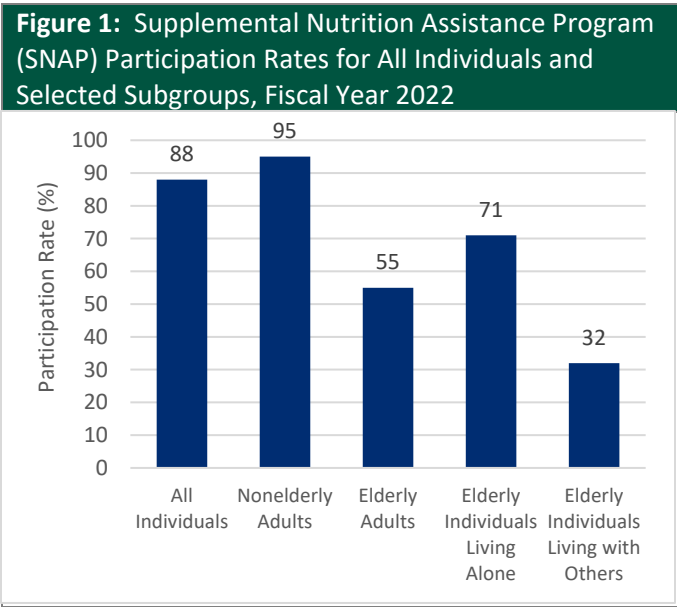
38 million individuals were eligible for SNAP under Federal rules each month in FY 2022; of this, about 34 million participated in the program. This is an increase from the estimated 33 million SNAP participants in pre-pandemic FY 2020. There were about 41 million SNAP eligible individuals in pre-pandemic FY 2020, though this was likely an overestimate due to using only five months of pre-pandemic FY 2020 data. As a result, the 81 percent participation rate for pre-pandemic FY 2020 is likely an underestimate.

Individuals with greater need, like those with no or very low incomes, participated at higher rates than other eligible individuals in FY 2022. In both pre-pandemic FY 2020 and FY 2022, nearly all individuals in households with income below 100 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines received SNAP. The participation rate for individuals in households with income greater than 100 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines experienced a large increase in FY 2022 but remained below the national average participation rate in both pre-pandemic FY 2020 and FY 2022 (40 percent and 53 percent, respectively). The

participation rate for individuals in households that received the minimum benefit or less increased but

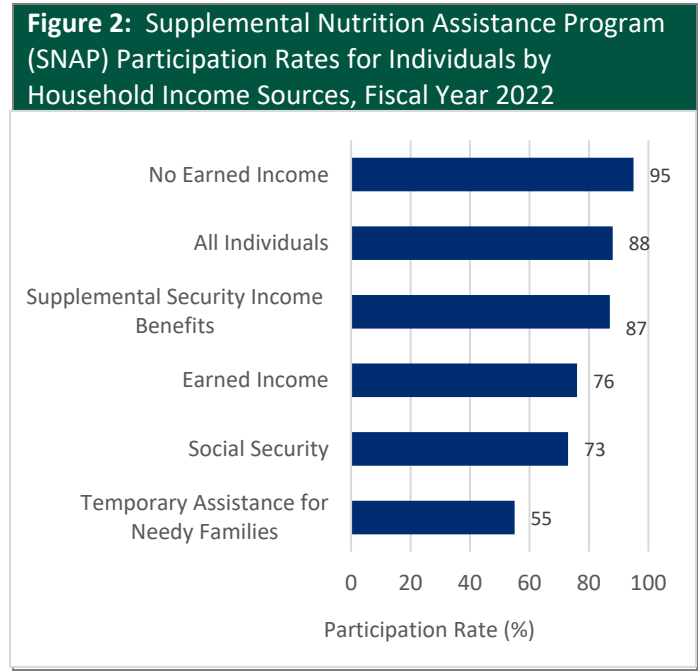
remained among the lowest rates for subgroups examined for both periods, at 29 percent in pre-pandemic FY 2020 and 34 percent in FY 2022.

Elderly individuals (ages 60+) participated at lower rates than other eligible individuals in FY 2022, while nonelderly adults participated at higher rates than other eligible individuals. The participation rates for all elderly individuals and for the subgroups of elderly adults living alone or with others remained below the average participation rate for all individuals in FY 2022. Among elderly individuals, those living alone participated at the highest rate, 71 percent in FY 2022. The participation rate for nonelderly adults remained above the average participation rate for all individuals in FY 2022 (Figure 1).



Participation rates varied by source of income in FY 2022. Individuals in households without earned income participated at a higher rate than all eligible individuals in FY 2022 (95 percent) and individuals in households with earned income participated at a lower rate than all eligible individuals (76 percent). The participation rate for

individuals in households receiving Supplemental Security Income benefits is similar to the participation rate for all individuals. However, the participation rates for individuals in households receiving Social Security (73 percent) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families income (55 percent) are lower than the rate for all eligible individuals (Figure 2).



There were decreases in participation rates for two related subgroups—eligible noncitizens¹ and citizen children living with noncitizen adults—between pre-pandemic FY 2020 and FY 2022. The participation rate for eligible noncitizens decreased from 54 percent to 50 percent during this time, and the rate for citizen children living with noncitizen adults decreased from 66 percent to 59 percent.

Additionally, participation rates for households in urban and rural areas increased from pre-pandemic FY 2020 to FY 2022. The estimated participation rate for urban households increased from 80 percent to 86 percent. The participation rate increased from 84 percent to 94 percent for rural households.

¹ SNAP eligible noncitizens are typically permanent residents with 10-years work, military service, a disability, 5 years residency, or children.