



THE SOUTHERN ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT PROJECT

MEMO: EQUITY DATASETS

OVERVIEW

Equity is a cornerstone of recent federal legislation. The American Rescue Plan Act, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act and others all focus on equity as a shared outcome. The commitment is so foundational to this work that President Biden signed the Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government (EO) on his first day in office. ([January 20, 2021](#))

Ensuring the goal of equity is met requires using data to measure successes and milestones. However, data is not readily available from the federal government for a number of groups identified in these legislative acts. The Southern Economic Advancement Project ([SEAP](#)) found some datasets to aid in equity assessments.

This memo includes links to datasets about underserved communities and resources developed for Justice40 evaluation.

Datasets Help Define Equity In President Biden's Executive Order

The EO defines equity for individuals and communities as follows,

"For purposes of this order:

(a) The term "equity" means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

(b) The term "underserved communities" refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as exemplified by the list in the preceding definition of "equity."



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MEMO: EQUITY DATASETS

Race & Ethnicity Data

"Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color."

The most comprehensive race and ethnicity data available is from the U.S. Census Bureau, data.census.gov. Specifically, the [2020: DEC Redistricting Data \(P.L. 94-171\)](#) dataset has race and ethnicity data at several sub-state geographies, including county and census tract.

Note: The U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is working to improve Federal race and ethnicity data to reflect the country's diversity better. OMB has opportunities to provide feedback on potential changes. There is a federal registrar notice with comments from the public; more information can be found at [spd15revision.gov](https://spdl5revision.gov).

Members of Religious Minorities

The United Nations [defines a minority](#) as "an ethnic, religious or linguistic minority is any group of persons which constitutes less than half of the population in the entire territory of a State whose members share common characteristics of culture, religion or language, or a combination of any of these. A person can freely belong to an ethnic, religious or linguistic minority without any requirement of citizenship, residence, official recognition or any other status."

One way to understand religious breakdowns is to look at "religious diversity." The Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) periodically surveys Americans about their religious affiliation. They produce [an index](#) of religious diversity by county.

Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity (SOGI)

"Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons"; Read more about sexual orientation and gender identity at the [Human Rights Campaign](#).

SOGI data by state can be found in the [Household Pulse Survey](#) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. Additional information can be found at the [National Institutes of Health](#) and the [Federal Agenda on LGBTQI+ Equity](#) released in January 2023.

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MEMO: EQUITY DATASETS

Persons with Disabilities

[The Americans with Disabilities Act](#) defines an individual with a disability as "a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment."

[Examples](#) of disabilities include but are not limited to, cancer, diabetes, post-traumatic stress disorder, HIV, autism, cerebral palsy, deafness or hearing loss, blindness or low vision, epilepsy, mobility disabilities such as those requiring the use of a wheelchair or walker or cane, intellectual disabilities, major depressive disorder and traumatic brain injury.

The Disability and Health Data System, part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, provides [state-level health and demographic data about adults with disabilities](#).

Mathematica provides [information on county-level variation in disability prevalence and participation rates](#) from the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (DI) programs among working-age adults (ages 18 to 64) from 2018.

Persons Who Live in Rural Areas

Definitions of the rural-urban delineation vary slightly by agency. For example, the Census Bureau defines "all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area" as rural. They define an urban area as "a densely settled core of census blocks that meet minimum housing unit density and/or population density requirements. To qualify as an urban area, the territory identified according to criteria must encompass at least 2,000 housing units or have a population of at least 5,000." This definition applies to the [2020 census data](#) (scroll to the bottom of the page for data). Prior [census information](#) is also available.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture also provides [information](#) about rural areas.

Persons Otherwise Adversely Affected by Persistent Poverty or Inequality

One way to identify persistent poverty is by persistent poverty counties - counties that have had poverty rates of more than 20% for over 30 years. The Congressional Research Service defines this further and provides additional factors in their [report](#) (last updated April 2022). The Department of Agriculture also provides descriptions, data, and maps on its [website](#).



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MEMO: EQUITY DATASETS

RESOURCES THAT ADDRESS OVERLAPPING ISSUES

Am I Rural?

A tool developed by The Rural Health Information Hub, formerly the Rural Assistance Center, is funded by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy to be a national clearinghouse on rural health issues. They are committed to supporting healthcare and population health in rural communities. ([Am I Rural Tool](#)) Enter your ZIP code to find out if you are in a rural area based on [various definitions of rural](#), including definitions used as eligibility criteria for federal programs.

Justice40 / Environmental Justice

[Justice40](#) is a whole-of-government effort to ensure that Federal agencies work with states and local communities to make good on President Biden's promise to deliver at least 40 percent of the overall benefits from Federal investments in climate and clean energy to disadvantaged communities.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed a [screener tool](#) to better meet the Agency's responsibilities related to protecting public health and the environment. There is also an [Environmental Justice Index](#) housed in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which ranks the cumulative impacts of environmental injustice on health for every census tract.

The Southeast Sustainability Directors Network addresses problems associated with climate change through sustainability efforts — work that creates a healthy, clean, and more stable environment for current and future generations throughout the Southeastern U.S. Their [web application](#) visualizes environmental justice discrepancies and inequities to provide insight into which tracts would be considered "disadvantaged" under Justice40

The Census Bureau provides a suite of [Data Equity Tools](#) to explore communities and legislation. View more on the Digital Equity Act, business builder tools, or income and poverty data.



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