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## EBRI Research Questions the Decline in Retirement Plan Participation Shown in the Current Population Survey

WASHINGTON –In recent years, the annual Social and Economic Supplement (the supplement) to the Current Population Survey (CPS) has shown significant declines in employment-based retirement plan participation. New research by EBRI, however, finds that this is likely misleading.

The supplement is one of the most-cited sources of income data for those whose ages are associated with being retired (typically ages 65 or older). In 2014, the U.S. Census Bureau conducted a redesign of the CPS questionnaire in an effort to improve income estimates being reported from the survey. However, after the CPS redesign – despite no changes to the retirement plan questions – the estimates of the percentage of workers who participated in an employment-based retirement plan decreased dramatically: from 64 percent under the old questionnaire to 58 percent under the redesigned questionnaire for the same year.

The participation numbers have continued to decline and now stand at 47 percent. “In analyzing the data, there appears to be a continuing unintended consequence of the survey redesign,” says Craig Copeland, of EBRI. Copeland points out that not only is there a discrepancy between the pre- and post-redesign numbers, the declines shown by the CPS data do not match other government sources. “When looking at the Bureau of Labor Statistics National Compensation Survey, for example, they do not reflect the decline in participation that is shown in the CPS.”

There is evidence that the redesign at least partially achieved its primary objective – increasing the level of income being reported under the CPS to better match other sources, such as IRS data. Still, Copeland notes, when comparing CPS data to IRS administrative data, it is clear that the CPS redesign is still not able to capture all of the income being reported to the IRS. As such, it is important to be careful about coming to conclusions about the retirement system based just on CPS data. The full *Issue Brief* is available [here](#).

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