

# 1st household income survey from Feb 2026

To provide a better picture of living standards, wealth disparity

SHIVA RAJORA

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In an ambitious move, the ministry of statistics and programme implementation (Mospi) is set to launch the household income survey (HIS), starting February next year.

The survey will be used to calculate average income of rural and urban households, statistics minister Rao Inderjit Singh told *Business Standard*.

“Household Income Survey has also been planned for launch by the ministry from February 2026 for the purpose of estimating average income of rural and urban households,” said Singh.

The upcoming survey by the National Statistics Office (NSO) marks renewed efforts at collecting data on household income in India.

It is set to provide a better picture of living standards, poverty incidence, income and wealth disparities and consumer behaviour in the country compared to the currently used household consumption expenditure surveys.

“The proposed survey will not replace the consumption expenditure survey. The income survey is difficult but the committee is working and learning the methodology that has been adopted by some other countries. Getting information from households will be a challenge but the committee is examining all the aspects. It will see all the technical issues as well as field issues that arise during the course,” said an official.

Rajesh Shukla, chief executive officer (CEO), People Research on India's Consumer Economy (PRICE), says there is great dearth of reliable longitudinal data on household income in India. This comes because during previous attempts there were difficulties in collecting reliable income data in the field due to seasonality effects, lack of availability of accounts from employer households, ambiguities in choice of unit of sampling, hidden income generated through wages paid in kind, and so on.

“For these reasons, the NSO perhaps refrained from collecting data on household income. Greater emphasis was, therefore, placed on



## Welfare monitoring

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- Committee working and learning methodology adopted by some other countries
- The proposed survey to not replace the consumption expenditure survey, said an official
- Difficulties in collecting reliable income data in the field
- Inability to tap into multiple sources of income main shortcomings of earlier surveys, according to Pronab Sen, former chief statistician

household expenditure surveys. It's a welcome move to kickstart the process as earlier attempts couldn't bear the desired fruit,” he added.

The NSO, in the past, had made efforts to collect information on household income in its ninth (1955) and 15th (1959) rounds. However, the data that was collected on household incomes was not published in the NSO reports. Later, it undertook collection of data on receipts and disbursements as part of the Integrated Household Survey in its 19th (1964) and 24th (1969) round (July 1969–June 1970). However, it was found the estimates of income that were made from these surveys were lower than the estimates of consumption and savings put together.

Former chief statistician Pronab Sen says that one of the main shortcomings of earlier surveys has been their inability to tap into multiple sources of income that people have in India. For example, people in rural areas report at least three occupations, while those in urban areas report at least two occupations. Moreover, there is also income from additional sources like rent and investment, among others.

“The government has failed spectacularly in its attempts to generate income data and the consensus is that this data is too tough to collect. This is because people themselves don't want to reveal their incomes and non-responsiveness is quite high,” said Sen.

The Situation Assessment Survey of Farmer Households (SAS) — in the 59th round (2003) — was the last effort at collecting income data by the NSO. However, it was limited to farmer households, which do not represent all households dependent on agriculture. Despite its many drawbacks, SAS remains the single largest data source on rural household incomes in India.

“If we are able to gather income data, we could have a better picture of poverty incidence and wealth inequality in the country as they are supposed to be based on income data and not consumption data. Since upper income deciles don't consume all of their income, the disparity among groups is underestimated when we use expenditure surveys,” added Sen.