

Labour market slack - employment supply and demand mismatch

Statistics Explained

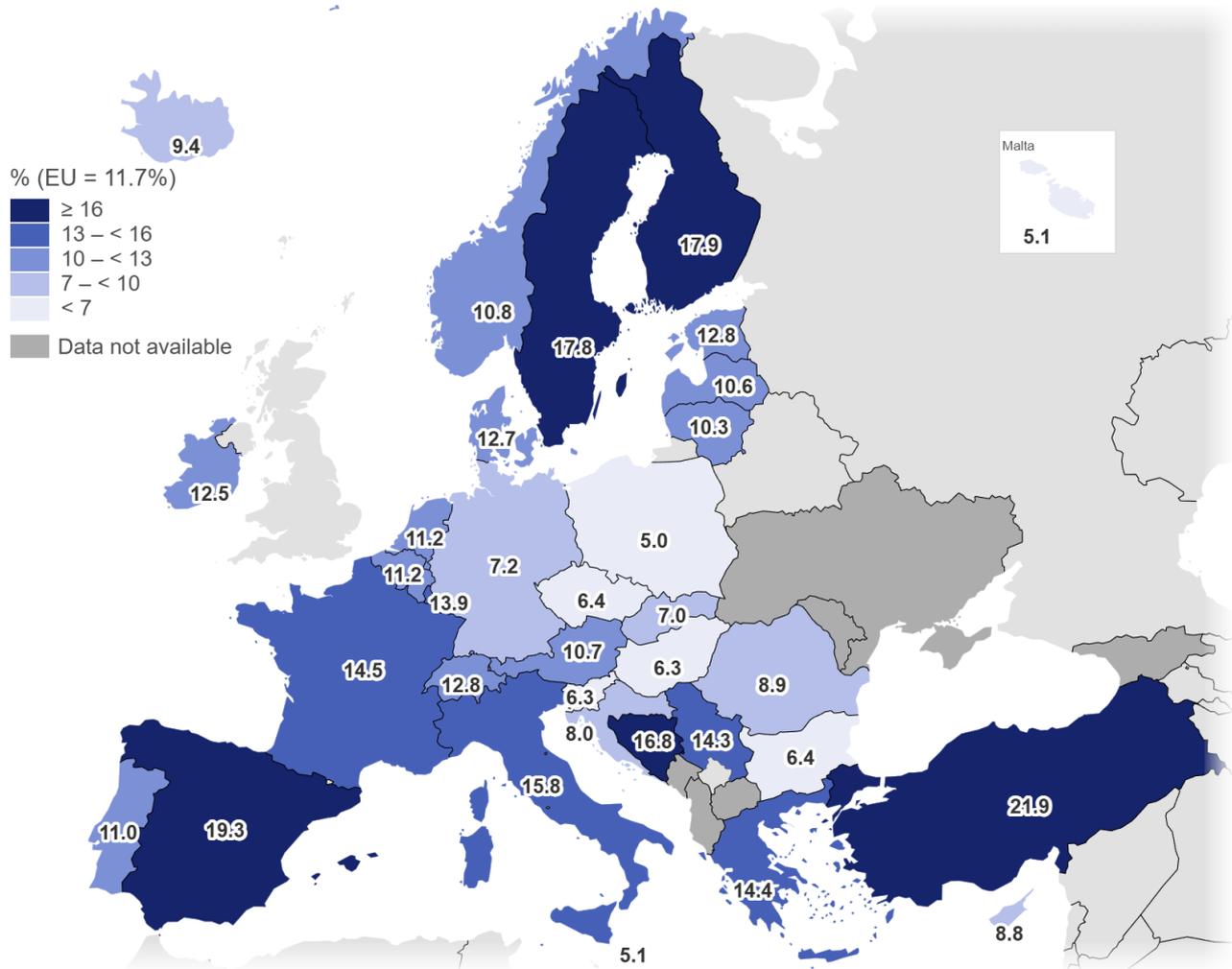
*Data extracted in October 2025
Planned article update: October 2026*

Highlights

In 2024, 26.7 million people in the EU - corresponding to 11.7% of the extended labour force – faced an unmet supply of employment. Unemployment accounted for more than half of the EU's labour market slack (53.5%) in 2024. In Italy 46.5% of people facing an unmet supply of employment were available to work and wanted to work but did not look for a job in 2024.

Labour market slack, 2024

(% of total extended labour force aged 15-74 years)



eurostat

Source: Eurostat (dataset code lfsi_sla_a)

Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © OpenStreetMap
Cartography: Eurostat – IMAGE, 10/2025

Labour market slack, 2024 Source: Eurostat (lfsi_sla_a)

In this article, the labour market slack is described for the EU as a whole and for the [27 EU countries](#) individually.

Labour market slack: what's it all about?

Labour market slack refers to all unmet needs for employment. It includes [unemployment](#) as defined by the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) and the following 3 groups

- [Underemployed part-time workers](#)
- [People seeking a job but not immediately available to work](#)
- [People available to work but not seeking](#)

All 3 groups together are referred to as supplementary indicators to unemployment. They do not meet the full criteria of the unemployment definition. This means they are not included in the [unemployment rate](#). But they still show an unmet supply of work. These supplementary indicators complement the unemployment data and provide a

more complete picture of the [labour market](#) , together they sum up to the labour market slack. Figure 1 may help better understand the different categories of labour market slack and the labour market in general.

To allow comparisons among these 4 groups, which do not all belong to the labour force, the concept of 'extended labour force' is used. It includes people

- in the labour force (unemployed and employed) and
- in the potential additional labour force (the 2 categories outside the labour force, i.e. those available but not seeking, and those seeking but not available)

The **total labour market slack** is usually expressed as a percentage of this **extended labour force** , and the relative size of each component of the labour market slack can be compared by using the extended labour force as denominator. In 2024, the detailed labour status distribution, shown as percentages of the total people aged 15 to 74, was as follows

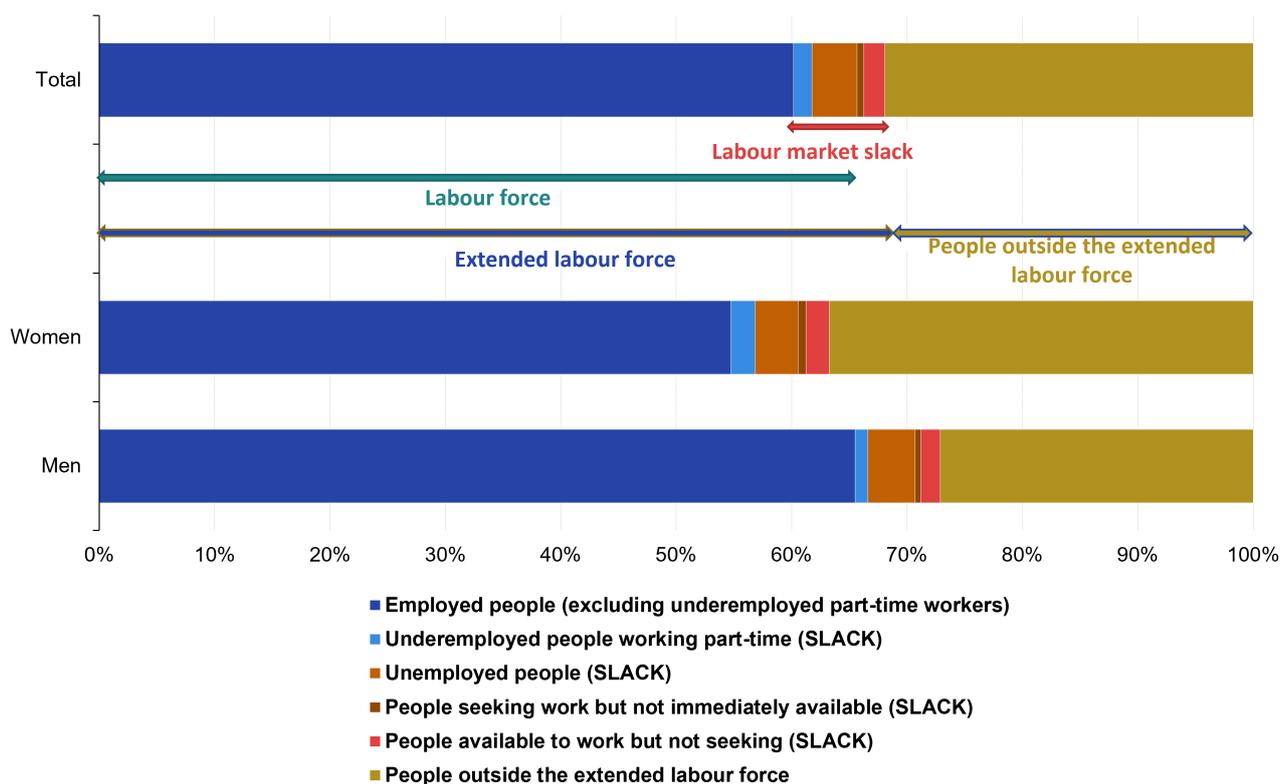
- 60.1% = employed people (excluding underemployed part-time workers)
- 1.6% = underemployed people working part-time (slack component)
- 3.9% = unemployed people (slack component)
- 0.6% = people seeking work but not immediately available (slack component)
- 1.8% = people available to work but not seeking (slack component)
- 31.9% = people outside the extended labour force

They sum up to

- 8.0% = total labour market slack
- 61.7%= total employment
- 34.4% = total outside the labour force

People by sex and labour status, EU, 2024

(in % of the total people in each sex category aged 15 to 74)



Source: Eurostat (dataset codes: lfsi_sup_a, une_rt_a)

Figure 1: People by sex and labour status, EU, 2024 Source: Eurostat (lfsi_sup_a) and (une_rt_a)

Overview of labour market slack in the EU

In 2024, 11.7% in the EU extended labour force had an unmet supply of employment.

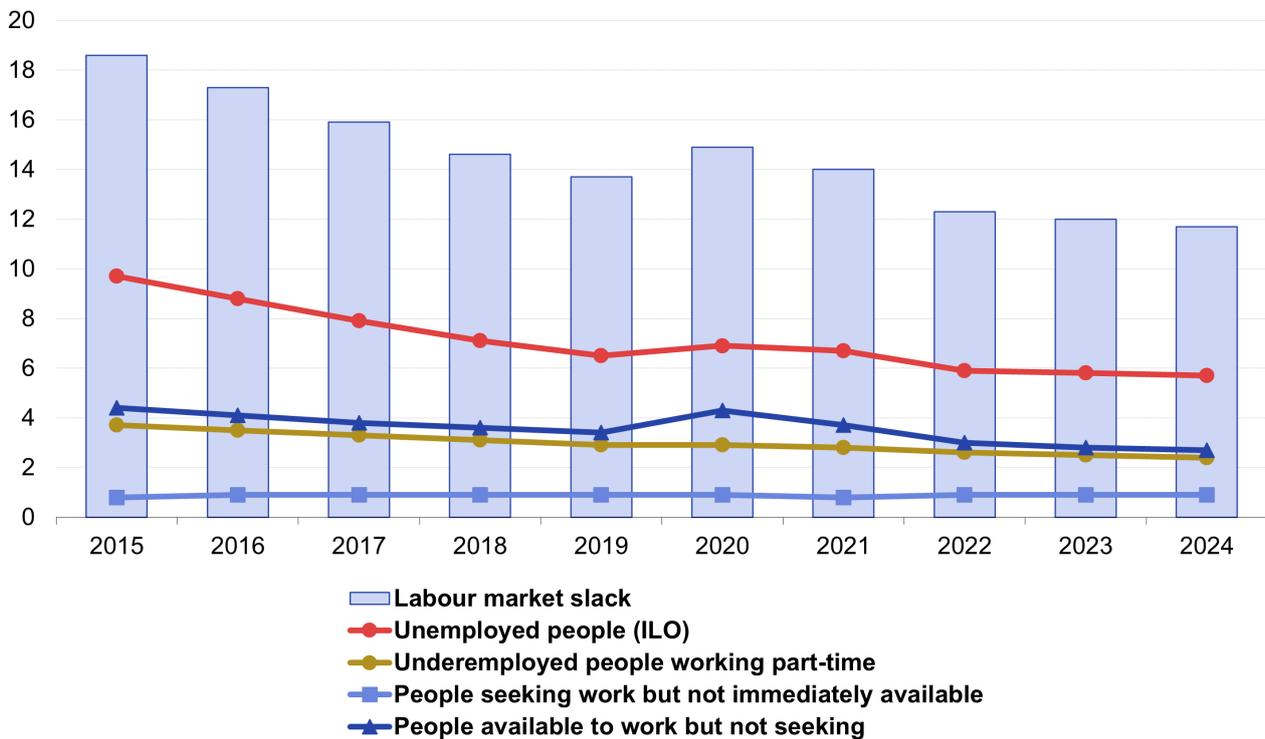
In the EU, the labour market slack of people aged 15 to 74 years corresponding to 26.7 million people facing an unmet supply of employment in 2024.

At EU level, from 2015 to 2019, the trend in labour market slack followed and emphasised the trend in unemployment, which is one of the components of labour market slack (see Figure 2). The other 3 components, although also connected to the economic situation, were more stable over time. In 2015, 18.6% of the extended labour force faced a potential unmet supply of employment. This then declined steadily to 13.7% in 2019, increased again when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the labour market in 2020 (14.9%), and started its downward trend to 11.7% in 2024.

Unlike previous years, the increased labour market slack in 2020 was not mainly caused by increased unemployment, but rather by more people being available for work but not seeking it. This might have been because of the long and repeated lockdowns and other health measures creating unfavourable working conditions.

Labour market slack and its components, EU, 2015-2024

(% of the extended labour force, people aged 15 to 74)



Source: Eurostat (dataset code lfsi_sla_a)

Figure 2: Labour market slack and its components, EU, 2015-2024 Source: Eurostat (lfsi_sla_a)

The components of labour market slack in the EU in 2024 were as follows

- **unemployment** = 5.7% of the extended labour force
- **underemployed part-time workers** = 2.4% of the extended labour force
- **people available to work but not seeking** = 2.7% of the extended labour force
- **people seeking work but not immediately available** = 0.9% of the extended labour force

In 2024, labour market slack was highest in Spain (19.3% of the extended labour force) - followed by Finland (17.9%), Sweden (17.8%), Italy (15.8%) and France (14.5%) – and lowest in Poland (5.0%) and Malta (5.1%) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

The components and country disparities

About half the people in the EU with an unmet supply of work were unemployed.

The unmet supply of work has several different components that are more or less substantial according to the country. As further illustrated, referring only to unemployment to capture the unmet supply of work does not provide a complete picture.

Unemployment accounted for 53.5% of the total EU labour market slack, but the percentage varies significantly from one country to another. Map 1 shows a clear geographical pattern. Eastern and southern countries (except Italy) have more unemployment in their labour market slack than western and northern countries.

Unemployment accounted for over 65% of the labour market slack in Slovakia, Hungary, Greece and Lithuania in 2024 (see Map 1). This figure was highest for Slovakia (75.2%), followed by Hungary (70.0%), Greece (68.6%) and Lithuania (68.0%). By contrast, unemployment accounted for less than 35% of people facing an unmet supply of employment in the Netherlands (31.9%) and Ireland (33.1%).

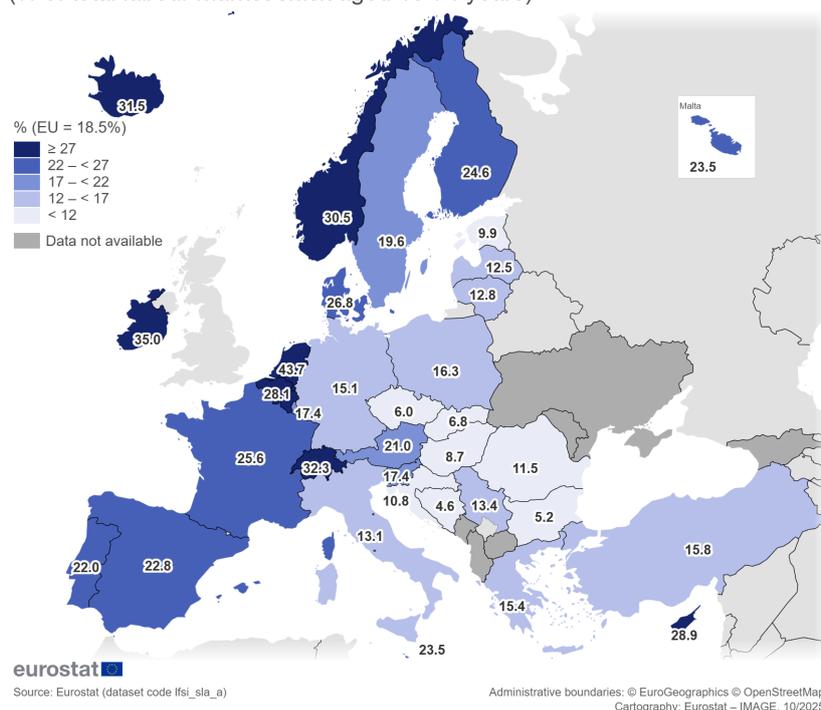
In 2024, **people who are available to work, but not looking for a job** accounted for 19.2% of the EU slack but for over 25% in Italy (46.5%), Germany and Romania (28.1%), Estonia (26.6%), Ireland (26.4%) and Sweden (25.3%) (see Map 2). There was no clear geographical trend here, but the lowest shares for this group were in Czechia (5.7%), Lithuania (9.1%), Greece (12.0%), Cyprus (12.3%), Malta (12.4%), Finland and Slovakia (both 12.9%). In most countries with high shares of this category and in the EU on the whole, the main reason for not actively looking for a job was the lack of suitable job opportunities.

Furthermore, **underemployed part-time workers** accounted for 18.5% of the unmet supply of work in the EU. This category of people was higher in the Netherlands (43.7%), Ireland (35.0%), Cyprus (28.9%) and Belgium (28.1%) (see Map 3). Apart from Cyprus, these countries also had a higher share of part-time workers in their total employment compared with the EU average. The share of underemployed part-time workers was below 12% in Romania (11.5%), Croatia (10.8%), Estonia (9.9%), Hungary (8.7%), Slovakia (6.8%), Czechia (6.0%) and Bulgaria (5.2%). Compared with eastern countries, western countries are generally characterised by a larger share of underemployed part-time workers in their totals of people with an unmet supply of employment. Over half of underemployed people in the EU reported being unable to find a full-time job. In Cyprus and Belgium, the main reason for underemployment was the same, However, in the Netherlands and Ireland, the main reason was participating in education or training.

People seeking but not available accounted for a much smaller part of the slack in the EU on the whole (8.8%) and in most EU countries in 2024. This category of people was higher than 14% in Czechia (48.5%), Finland (18.3%), Luxembourg (15.1%) and Austria (14.7%) and lowest in Romania (1.2%), Italy (2.4%) and Hungary (2.8%) (see Figure 3). In the EU as a whole, the main reasons for non-availability were education or training (31.2% of people seeking work but not immediately available), care responsibilities (18.3%) and own illness or disability (15.6%) in 2024. However, these figures varied by country. Care responsibilities were the main reason for non-availability (81.8%) in Czechia, while in Sweden and Finland the main reason was education or training (71.4% and 60.6% respectively).

Underemployed part-time workers, 2024

(% of total labour market slack aged 15-74 years)



Map 3: Underemployed part-time workers, 2024

Source: Eurostat ([lfsi_sla_a](#))

Employment and slack - relationship by country

Figure 4 presents the people aged 15-74 years by country and labour status in 2024. There is no clear relationship between the share of employed people and the labour market slack. One might expect that less employment means more labour market slack, but this is not always the case. For example, Estonia, Denmark and Sweden had a relative high level of employment among people aged 15-74 years in 2024 (67.9% in Estonia, 66.9% in Denmark and 66.2% in Sweden) and a relatively high share of people facing an unmet supply of employment. Labour market slack affected 9.7% of the people aged 15-74 in Denmark, 10.0% in Estonia, and 14.3% in Sweden. By contrast, Romania had one of the lowest shares of labour market slack (5.3%) while its level of employment was also significantly below the EU average.

This figure also highlights the relevance of looking at the category of *people outside the extended labour force* to provide a complete picture of the labour market. This category includes people who are not employed, available to work, or seeking work (e.g. not-employed students, fully-retired people, care-givers, e.g. for children or older people). In many countries losses in employment were offset by an increase in both labour market slack and in the category of people outside the extended labour force.

Figure 4

Gap between men and women

Labour market slack for women in the EU surpassed that for men by 3.3 pp in 2024.

In 2024, 13.5% of women in the extended labour force in the EU expressed a potential unmet supply of employment, compared with 10.2% of men. This results in a gender gap of 3.3 **percentage points** (pp) in labour market slack (i.e. the difference between the female and the male labour market slack). Women were also more likely to face an unmet supply of employment in most EU countries. Only Latvia (1.8 pp), Lithuania (0.9 pp), and Bulgaria (0.3 pp) recorded a higher labour market slack for men than for women. In Hungary, Finland, Estonia, Romania, Germany, and Malta, the slack was slightly higher for women, though the gender gap remained equal to or below 1 pp. The widest gender gaps were in Spain (8.4 pp), Greece (8.2 pp), Czechia (6.9 pp), and Italy (6.4 pp), all notably higher than in other EU countries.

Figure 5

Source data for tables and graphs

- [Labour Market Slack: tables and figures - 2024](#)

Methods and definitions

Data sources

All figures in this article are based on the [European labour force survey \(EU-LFS\)](#) .

Source: The European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) is the largest European household sample survey providing quarterly and annual results on labour participation of people aged 15 years and over and on people outside the labour force. It covers residents in private households. It does not include conscripts in military or community service in its results. The EU-LFS targets the same populations and uses the same definitions in all countries, which means that the results are comparable between the countries. The EU-LFS is an important source of information about the situation and trends in the national and EU labour markets. Each quarter around 1.2 million interviews are conducted throughout the participating countries to obtain statistical information for some 100 variables. Its diversity of information and large sample size also make the EU-LFS an important source for other European or regional statistics on things like education.

Reference period: early results are obtained as averages of the 4 quarters in the year.

Coverage: The results from the EU-LFS currently cover all [EU](#) Member countries, the [EFTA](#) Member countries Iceland, Norway and Switzerland, and the [candidate countries](#) Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye. For Cyprus, it covers only the areas of Cyprus controlled by the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

European aggregates: EU and EU-27 refer to the total of the 27 EU Member countries. If data are unavailable for a country, the calculation of the corresponding aggregates takes into account the data for the same country for the most recent period available. Such cases are indicated. For the 2024 data, this approach did not apply.

Country notes

In **the Netherlands** , the LFS data are collected using a rolling reference week instead of a fixed reference week (the people interviewed are asked about the situation of the week before the interview rather than a pre-selected week).

Spain and France unlike the EU-LFS definition, have assessed the attachment to the job and included in employment those who, in their reference week, had an unknown duration of absence but expected to return to the same job once health measures allow it.

Definitions

Economic and health crises have highlighted the value of looking further than **unemployed** to better capture the unmet supply of employment. Indeed, to be unemployed according to the EU-LFS definitions - drafted according to the standards set up in the resolutions of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) - a person has to fulfil several specific criteria regarding their job search and availability to work.

Due to a significant slowdown in economic activity, jobless people who would have looked for a job and been available to work in other circumstances may leave the labour force without actually fully losing their attachment to the labour market. Some **employed** people working part-time might want to work more hours, which is another case of unmet supply of employment.

This article focuses on people who have an unmet supply of employment, i.e.

- (i) people who are unemployed
- (ii) people who are underemployed (i.e. those working part-time but who wish and are available to work more); and
- (iii) people who are associated with the labour force because they are available to work or seeking work, but not recorded as part of the labour force (because they meet some but not all of the criteria for unemployment)

It complements the [article on unemployment statistics](#) .

The EU-LFS definitions are as follow

- **Employed people** comprise: (a) persons who during the reference week worked for at least one hour for pay or profit or family gain; (b) persons who were not at work during the reference week but had a job or business from which they were temporarily absent.
- **Unemployed people** are people who were: (a) not employed according to the definition of employment above; (b) currently available for work, i.e. were available for paid employment or self-employment before the end of the 2 weeks following the reference week; (c) actively seeking work, i.e. had taken specific steps in the 4 week period ending with the reference week to seek paid employment or self-employment or who found a job to start later, i.e. within a period of at most 3 months from the end of the reference week.
- **Underemployed part-time workers** also known as involuntary part-time workers. These are persons working part-time who wish to work additional hours and are available to do so. Part-time work is recorded as self-reported by individuals.
- **Persons seeking work but not immediately available** are people neither employed nor unemployed who: (a) are actively seeking work during the last 4 weeks but not available to work in the next 2 weeks; or (b) found a job to start within a period of at most 3 months and are not available to work in the next 2 weeks; or (c) found a job to start in more than 3 months but are not available to work in the next 2 weeks.
- **Persons available to work but not seeking** are people neither employed nor unemployed who want to work and (a) are available to work in the next 2 weeks but are not seeking work, or (b) were passively seeking work during the last 4 weeks and are available to work in the next 2 weeks or (c) found a job to start in more than 3 months and are available to work in the next 2 weeks.

Note: Before 2020, the EU-LFS did not collect data on the availability to work for people who already found a job to start in more than 3 months. Back then, it classified people who had already found a job to start in more than 3 months as 'seeking work but not immediately available'.

The last 2 groups are jointly referred to as the **potential additional labour force** .

People in the 3 last categories above fall outside the bandwidth of unemployment and are classified as people employed with insufficient working time, or not available immediately, or not seeking a job in a very specific time period. However, these people may have an unmet supply of employment. These 3 last categories together are referred to as **supplementary indicators to the unemployment indicator** . Underemployed part-time workers are part of the labour force, but the 2 other groups (people seeking work but not immediately available and people

available to work but not seeking) are part of the population outside the labour force. These supplementary indicators complement the unemployment figures and provide a more complete picture of the labour market.

labour market slack is the total sum of all unmet supply of work, encompassing unemployment and the 3 supplementary indicators. The concept of the **extended labour force** is used to allow comparisons between these 4 groups which do not all belong to the labour force. This concept covers employed people, unemployed people, and also the 2 categories of people outside the labour force (i.e. those available but not seeking work, and those seeking but not available to work). The total labour market slack is expressed in a percentage of this extended labour force, and this denominator can be used to compare the relative size of each component of the labour market slack.

- **Persons outside the extended labour force** are persons not belonging to the extended labour force, meaning they are not employed, unemployed or in the potential additional labour force.

Time series

Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 came into force on 1 January 2021 and induced a break in the EU-LFS time series for several EU countries. To monitor trends in employment and unemployment despite the break in the time series, EU countries assessed the impact of the break in their country and computed impact factors or break-corrected data for a set of indicators. Break-corrected data are published on the Eurostat website for the LFS main indicators.

Additional methodological information More information on the EU-LFS can be found in the [EU Labour Force Survey online publication](#) . In the 'Contents' sidebar with 8 articles on the technical and methodological aspects of the survey, you can find information on the [EU-LFS methodology used until 2021](#) and on the new [methodology from 2021 onwards](#) . You can also find [documentation](#) , including detailed information on the coding lists, explanatory notes and classifications used over time.

Context

The 3 indicators supplementing the unemployment rate presented in this article provide a more enhanced and richer picture than the traditional labour status framework, which classifies people as employed, unemployed or outside the labour force (i.e. in just 3 categories). The indicators create 'halos' around unemployment. In the context of this article the reference age category is 15-74 years which is the reference age category for unemployment. This concept is further analysed in a "[New measures of labour market attachment](#)" Statistics in Focus publication, which also explains the rationale of the indicators and gives additional insight as to how they should be interpreted. The supplementary indicators neither alter nor challenge the unemployment statistics standards used by [Eurostat](#) . Eurostat publishes unemployment statistics according to the standards set up in the resolutions of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS), held by the International Labour Organization every 5 years in Geneva. The same definitions are used by statistical offices all around the world. Statistics based on these EU-LFS definitions remain the benchmark and headline indicators.

Explore further

Other articles

- [All articles on the labour market](#)
- [Unemployment statistics and beyond](#)
- [Employment - annual statistics](#)
- [Unemployment statistics](#)
- [Job vacancy statistics](#)
- [Labour market statistics at regional level](#)

- [EU labour force survey](#)

Database

- [Employment and unemployment \(Labour Force Survey\) \(employ\)](#) , see:

LFS main indicators (lfsi)

Unemployment - LFS adjusted series (une)

Supplementary indicators to unemployment - annual data (lfsi_sup_a)

Supplementary indicators to unemployment - quarterly data (lfsi_sup_q)

LFS series - Detailed annual survey results (lfsa)

Total unemployment - LFS series (lfsa_unemp)

Supplementary indicators to unemployment by sex and age (lfsa_sup_age)

Supplementary indicators to unemployment by sex and educational attainment level (lfsa_sup_edu)

Supplementary indicators to unemployment by sex and citizenship (lfsa_sup_nat)

LFS series - Detailed quarterly survey results (lfsq)

Total unemployment - LFS series (lfsq_unemp)

Supplementary indicators to unemployment by sex and age (lfsq_sup_age)

Supplementary indicators to unemployment by sex and educational attainment level (lfsq_sup_edu)

Thematic section

- [Labour Force Survey](#)

Publications

- [New measures of labour market attachment](#) - Statistics in focus 57/2011
- [Labour force survey in the EU, EFTA and candidate countries — Main characteristics of national surveys, 2021](#) , 2024 edition
- [Quality report of the European Union Labour Force Survey 2020](#) , 2022 edition
- [EU labour force survey — online publication](#)
- [European Union Labour force survey - selection of articles \(Statistics Explained\)](#)

Methodology

Publications

- [EU labour force survey — online publication](#)
- [Labour force survey \(LFS\) – Main concepts](#)
- [New measures of labour market attachment](#) - Statistics in focus 57/2011
- [Labour force survey in the EU, EFTA and candidate countries — Main characteristics of national surveys, 2021](#) , 2024 edition
- [Quality report of the European Union Labour Force Survey 2020](#) , 2022 edition
- [Statistical working papers / Manuals and guidelines](#)

ESMS metadata files and EU-LFS methodology

- [Employment and unemployment \(Labour Force Survey\)](#) (ESMS metadata file — employ_esms)
- [LFS main indicators](#) (ESMS metadata file — lfsi_esms)
- [LFS series - detailed annual survey results](#) (ESMS metadata file — lfsa_esms)
- [LFS series - detailed quarterly survey results \(from 1998 onwards\)](#) (ESMS metadata file — lfsq_esms)
- [LFS ad-hoc modules](#) (ESMS metadata file — lfso_esms)

External links

- [European Commission Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion \(DG EMPL\)](#)