

EU labour force survey – main features and legal basis

Statistics Explained

This article explains the main features of the [European labour force survey \(EU-LFS\)](#) and gives an overview on the legal basis of the EU-LFS. Recently, a new legal framework covering the EU-LFS entered into force; this one is called the “Integrated European Social Statistics Framework Regulation” (IESS FR) and is applicable to the EU-LFS data collection since 1 January 2021. While this article gives references to this new legal framework, it also refers to previous frameworks (up to 2020).

This article is part of a [set of online articles](#) on the EU-LFS.

Main features of the EU-LFS

Type of survey and scope of the data

The EU-LFS is the largest European household sample survey providing quarterly and annual results on labour participation of people aged 15 and over as well as on persons outside the labour force. It covers residents in private households.

The EU-LFS currently covers thirty-four countries (participating countries) providing [Eurostat](#) with data from national labour force surveys: the [Member States](#) of the European Union, three [EFTA countries](#) (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland), and four [candidate countries](#) (Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey). The EU-LFS is conducted by the National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 and the data are centrally processed by Eurostat. The NSIs are responsible for designing national questionnaires, drawing the sample, conducting interviews and sending results to the Commission (Eurostat) in accordance with a common coding scheme established by Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/2240. Eurostat is in charge of monitoring the implementation of the regulation, providing assistance to NSIs, promoting harmonised concepts and methods, and disseminating comparable national and European labour market statistics.

Due to the diversity of information and the large sample size, the EU-LFS is also an important source for other European statistics, like education statistics or regional statistics.

Statistical objectives and data typology

The main statistical objective of the EU-LFS is to divide the resident population of working age (15 years and above) into three mutually exclusive and exhaustive groups - persons [employed](#), [unemployed](#) and [outside the labour force](#) according to the classification of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) - and to provide descriptive and explanatory data on each of these three groups. Respondents of the EU-LFS are assigned to one of these groups on the basis of the information obtained through the survey questionnaire, which principally relates to their actual activity within a particular reference week.

Please note that the EU-LFS defines the resident population as all persons usually residing in private households.

Topics and age coverage

The core of the EU-LFS data collection covers the following topics: person and household characteristics, labour market participation, educational attainment and background, job tenure, work biography and previous work experience, working conditions including working hours and working time arrangements, participation in education and training, health status and disability, income, consumption and elements of wealth.

Moreover, the EU-LFS includes modules on specific topics, among which some are collected with a regular periodicity (of eight years). For more details about modules, please consult the article on [EU-LFS modules](#) .

While demographic data is gathered for population of all ages, questions relating to the labour market status are restricted to persons aged 15 to 89 years.

From the EU-LFS 2021 data collection, information is collected for:

- (a) every person aged 15 to 74 on the 'participation in education and training' topic;
- (b) every person aged 15 to 89 for quarterly, annual and biennial variables on all other topics;
- (c) every person aged 15 to 74 for the eight-yearly variables of the detailed topics on 'labour market situation of migrants and their immediate descendants' and 'accidents at work and other work-related health problems';
- (d) every person aged 50 to 74 for the eight-yearly variables of the detailed topic on 'pensions and labour market participation';
- (e) every person aged 15 to 34 for the eight-yearly variables of the detailed topics on 'young people on the labour market' and 'educational attainment — details, including education interrupted or abandoned';
- (f) every person aged 18 to 74 for the eight-yearly variables of the detailed topic on 'reconciliation of work and family life';
- (g) every employed person aged 15 to 74 for the eight-yearly variables of the detailed topic on 'work organisation and working time arrangements'.

For more information on the concepts and definitions applicable from the 2021 data collection, please consult the article [EU-LFS methodology from 2021 onwards](#) , while those valid until the 2020 data collection are available at [EU-LFS methodology until 2020](#) . In addition, information on the classifications used in the EU-LFS, the explanatory notes and user guide describing the variables, as well as the national questionnaires used to collect the data, can be accessed through the article [EU-LFS documentation](#) .

Legal basis

The EU-LFS is based on European legislation since 1973. The principal legal acts, currently in force, are the Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 establishing a common framework for European social statistics, the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/256 establishing a multiannual rolling planning, the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/2181 regarding items common to several datasets, and the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/2240 which specifies the implementation rules, technical items and contents of the EU-LFS.

Regulations relevant for the EU-LFS are listed below, where those in force from the 2021 EU-LFS data collection onwards are presented first, followed by those in force for the previous data collections.

Users are advised to always work with the latest consolidated version of the regulations. The consolidated version and information on amendments are always listed with each regulation.

Regulations in force since the 2021 data collection

Framework regulation

- [Regulation \(EU\) 2019/1700 of the European Parliament and of the Council](#) of 10 October 2019 establishing a common framework for European statistics relating to persons and households, based on data at individual level collected from samples, amending Regulations (EC) No 808/2004, (EC) No 452/2008 and (EC) No 1338/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1177/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98

Delegated acts

- [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/257](#) of 16 December 2019 supplementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 of the European Parliament and of the Council by specifying the number and the title of the variables for the labour force domain.
- [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/256](#) of 16 December 2019 supplementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 of the European Parliament and of the Council by establishing a multiannual rolling planning.
- [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/1640](#) of 12 August 2020 supplementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 of the European Parliament and of the Council by specifying the number and the title of the variables for the 2022 ad hoc subject 'job skills' and the eight-yearly variables on 'pension and labour market participation' in the labour force domain.
- [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2022/2447](#) of 30 September 2022 supplementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 of the European Parliament and of the Council by specifying the number and the title of the eight-yearly variables in the labour force domain on 'young people on the labour market', 'educational attainment – details, including education interrupted or abandoned' and 'reconciliation of work and family life'.

Implementing acts

- [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) 2019/2240](#) of 16 December 2019 specifying the technical items of the data set, establishing the technical formats for transmission of information and specifying the detailed arrangements and content of the quality reports on the organisation of a sample survey in the labour force domain in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 of the European Parliament and of the Council.
- [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) 2019/2180](#) of 16 December 2019 specifying the detailed arrangements and content for the quality reports pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 of the European Parliament and of the Council.
- [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) 2019/2181](#) of 16 December 2019 specifying technical characteristics as regards items common to several datasets pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 of the European Parliament and of the Council.
- [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) 2020/1642](#) of 5 November 2020 specifying the technical items of the data set for the 2022 ad hoc subject 'job skills' and the eight-yearly variables on 'pension and labour market participation' in the labour force domain in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 of the European Parliament and of the Council.
- [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) 2022/2312](#) of 25 November 2022 on eight-yearly variables in the labour force domain on 'young people on the labour market', 'educational attainment – details, including education interrupted or abandoned' and 'reconciliation of work and family life' pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

Regulation concerning general classification of the EU-LFS

- [Regulation \(EU\) No 317/2013](#) of 8 April 2013 amending the Annexes to Regulations (EC) No 1983/2003, (EC) No 1738/2005, (EC) No 698/2006, (EC) No 377/2008 and (EU) No 823/2010 as regards the International Standard Classification of Education. *This regulation stipulates the use of the ISCED 2011 in the LFS from 2014 onwards.*
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1022/2009](#) of 29 October 2009 amending Regulations (EC) No 1738/2005, (EC) No 698/2006 and (EC) No 377/2008 as regards the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO). *This regulation stipulates the use of the ISCO-08 in the LFS from 2011 onwards.*
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 973/2007](#) of 20 August 2007 amending certain EC Regulations on specific statistical domains implementing the statistical classification of economic activities NACE Revision 2. *Article 9 stipulates the use of NACE rev 2 in the LFS from 2008 onwards.*
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1059/2003](#) of 26 May 2003, on the establishment of a common classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS). *This regulation provides the codification of NUTS regions. The changes in codification can be found in the respective amendments.*

Regulations on statistical confidentiality

- [Regulation \(EU\) No 557/2013](#) 17 June 2013 implementing Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council on European Statistics as regards access to confidential data for scientific purposes and repealing Commission Regulation (EC) No 831/2002.

Regulations applicable to the data collections between 1998 and 2020

General regulations

- [Regulation \(EC\) No 577/98](#) of 9 March 1998 on the organisation of a labour force sample survey in the Community.

This is the main regulation with provisions on design, survey characteristics and decision making processes.

- [Regulation \(EU\) No 545/2014](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98.

This regulation specifies the financing provision and the sample conditions for ad hoc modules.

- [Regulation \(EC\) No 596/2009](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98.

This regulation specifies the organisation of the ad hoc module within the LFS.

- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1372/2007](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2007 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98.

This regulation changes the status of the survey characteristic 'income' from optional to mandatory.

- [Regulation \(EC\) No 2257/2003](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 November 2003 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98.

This regulation introduces 6 new variables and allows the wave approach for structural variables.

- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1991/2002](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 8 October 2002 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98.

This regulation puts a time limit on the adoption of the continuous LFS.

This is a documentation is the latest consolidated version with all amendments for the [main regulations \(\(EC\) No 577/98\)](#) on the organisation of a labour force survey in the Community.

Implementation regulations of the core survey

- [Regulation \(EC\) No 377/2008](#) of 25 April 2008 implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98.

The regulation implements the codification to be used for data transmission from 2009 onwards including the compulsory survey characteristic 'income', the use of a sub-sample for the collection of data on structural variables and the definition of the reference quarters.

- [Regulation \(EC\) No 430/2005](#) of 15 March 2005 implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98

The regulation implements the codification to be used for data transmission from 2006 onwards and the use of a sub-sample for the collection of data on structural variables.

- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1897/2000](#) of 7 September 2000 implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98

This regulation implements the operational definition of unemployment and contains the 12 principles for constructing the questionnaire.

- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1575/2000](#) of 19 July 2000 implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98

This regulation provides the codification to be used for data transmission from 2001-2005. It was corrected twice: Corrigendum to Commission Regulation (EC) No 1575/2000, Corrigendum to Commission Regulation (EC) No 1575/2000.

- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1571/98](#) of 20 July 1998 implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98.

The Annex I of the regulation defines the reference quarters for the first two years of the continuous survey and Annex IV defines the codification in force for 1998 to 2000.

Regulations on ad hoc modules and their topics

- [Regulation \(EU\) No 1851/2016](#) of 14 June 2016 adopting the programme of ad-hoc modules (2019 to 2021).

- [Regulation \(EU\) No 1397/2014](#) of 22 October 2014 amending Regulation (EU) No 318/2013 adopting the programme of ad hoc modules (2016 to 2018).
- [Regulation \(EU\) No 318/2013](#) of 8 April 2013 adopting the programme of ad-hoc modules (2016 to 2018).
- [Regulation \(EU\) No 220/2010](#) of 16 March 2010 adopting the programme of ad hoc modules (2013 to 2015).
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 365/2008](#) of 23 April 2008 adopting the programme of ad hoc modules (2010 to 2012).
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 384/2005](#) of 7 March 2005 adopting the programme of ad hoc modules (2007 to 2009).
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 246/2003](#) of 10 February 2003 adopting the programme of ad hoc modules (2004 to 2006).
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1626/2000](#) of 24 July 2000 implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98 as regards the 2001 to 2004 programme of ad hoc modules.
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1924/1999](#) of 8 September 1999 implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98 as regards the 2000 to 2002 programme of ad hoc modules.
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1571/98](#) of 20 July 1998 implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98. *A programme of ad hoc modules covering years 1999 to 2001 is laid down in Annex II to the present Regulation.*

Regulations and ESS agreements on ad hoc modules - ad hoc modules description

- [Regulation \(EU\) 2018/1709](#) of 13 November 2018 specifying the technical characteristics of the 2020 ad hoc module on accidents at work and other work-related health problems.
- [Regulation \(EU\) 2017/2384](#) of 19 December 2017 specifying the technical characteristics of the 2019 ad hoc module on work organisation and working time arrangements.
- [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/2236](#) of 12 December 2016 specifying the technical characteristics of the 2018 ad hoc module on reconciliation between work and family life.
- [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/8](#) of 5 January 2016 specifying the technical characteristics of the 2017 ad hoc module on self-employment.
- [Regulation \(EU\) 2015/459](#) of 19 March 2015 specifying the technical characteristics of the 2016 ad hoc module on young people on the labour market.
- [ESS agreement](#) specifying the detailed information to be collected in the 2014 ad-hoc module on the labour market situation of migrants and their immediate descendants.
- [ESS agreement](#) specifying the detailed information to be collected in the 2013 ad-hoc module on accidents at work and other work-related health problems.
- [Regulation \(EU\) No 249/2011](#) of 14 March 2011 adopting the specifications of the 2012 ad hoc module on transition from work to retirement.
- [Regulation \(EU\) No 317/2010](#) of 16 April 2010 adopting the specifications of the 2011 ad hoc module on employment of disabled people.
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 20/2009](#) of 13 January 2009 adopting the specifications of the 2010 ad hoc module on reconciliation between work and family life.
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 391/2008](#) of 30 April 2008 amending Regulation (EC) No 102/2007 adopting the specifications of the 2008 ad hoc module on the labour market situation of migrants and their immediate descendants.
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 207/2008](#) of 5 March 2008 adopting the specifications of the 2009 ad hoc module on the entry of young people into the labour market.
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 102/2007](#) of 2 February 2007 adopting the specifications of the 2008 ad hoc module on the labour market situation of migrants and their immediate descendants.
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 341/2006](#) of 24 February 2006 adopting the specifications of the 2007 ad hoc module on accidents at work and work-related health problems.
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 388/2005](#) of 8 March 2005 adopting the specifications of the 2006 ad hoc module on transition from work into retirement.

- [Regulation \(EC\) No 29/2004](#) of 8 January 2004 adopting the specifications of the 2005 ad hoc module on reconciliation between work and family life.
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 247/2003](#) of 10 February 2003 adopting the specification of the 2004 ad hoc module on work organisation and working time arrangements.
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1313/2002](#) of 19 July 2002 implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98 concerning the specification of the 2003 ad hoc module on lifelong learning.
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1566/2001](#) of 12 July 2001 implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98 concerning the specification of the 2002 ad hoc module on employment of disabled people.
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1578/2000](#) of 19 July 2000 implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98 concerning the specification of the 2001 ad hoc module on length and patterns of working time.
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1925/1999](#) of 8 September 1999 implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98 concerning the specification of the 2000 ad hoc module on transition from school to working life.
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1571/98](#) of 20 July 1998 implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98. *Annex III defines the 1999 ad hoc module on Accidents at work and occupational diseases.*

Regulations applicable before 1998

- [Regulation \(EEC\) No 3711/91](#) of 16 December 1991 on the organisation of an annual labour force sample survey in the Community.
- [Regulation \(EEC\) No 3569/90](#) of 4 December 1990 laying down amendments for the purpose of implementing in Germany Regulation (EEC) No 3044/89 on the organization of a labour force sample survey in the spring of 1990 and 1991.
- [Regulation \(EEC\) No 3044/89](#) of 6 October 1989 on the organization of a labour force sample survey in the spring of 1990 and 1991.
- [Regulation \(EEC\) No 3473/88](#) of 7 November 1988 on the organization of a labour force sample survey in the Spring of 1989.
- [Regulation \(EEC\) No 3621/87](#) of 1 December 1987 on the organization of a labour force sample survey in the Spring of 1988.
- [Regulation \(EEC\) No 3605/86](#) of 24 November 1986 on the organization of a labour force sample survey in the spring of 1987.
- [Regulation \(EEC\) No 3530/84](#) of 13 December 1984 on the organization of a labour force sample survey in the spring of 1985.
- [Regulation \(EEC\) No 276/84](#) of 31 January on the organization of a labour force sample survey in the Spring of 1984.
- [Regulation \(EEC\) No 603/83](#) of 14 March 1983 on the organization of a labour force sample survey in the spring of 1983.
- Other regulations providing a legal basis for the European labour force sample survey, dating back to 1973 are not available in electronic form.

See also

- [European Labour Force Survey \(EU-LFS\)](#)

Dedicated section

- [Labour market \(including Labour Force Survey\)](#)