"In 2021, the EU unemployment rate (denominator being the labour force) and ratio (denominator being the total population) for people aged 15-29 was 13.0 % and 7.1 % respectively."

"In the EU, in 2021, 33.6 million and 5.0 million young people aged 15-29 were employed and unemployed respectively, giving a EU youth unemployment rate of 13.0 %.

"In 2021, there were 71.0 million people aged 15-29 in the EU, of whom 5.0 million were unemployed, leading to a EU unemployment ratio of 7.1 %.

This article reports on unemployment of young people aged 15 to 29 in the European Union (EU), its Member States, three EFTA countries (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) and one candidate country (Serbia). It explains how unemployment rates of this age category are affected by the transition of young adults from formal education to labour market.

Young people, according to the United Nations definition, refer for statistical purposes to the age group 15-24. However, the age category 15-29 also deserves attention as it is considered the reference in the Year of Youth context. For this reason, the current article presents information specifically for young people aged 15-29. However, some figures relate to people aged 15 to 34 to cover more extensively the transition from formal education to labour.
Two factors are particularly relevant. First, the majority of 15-19 year olds are predominantly in formal education and there is a steep rise in participation in the labour market between the ages of 15 and 29. Second, young people in formal education are sometimes also employed or unemployed, so there is an overlap between the education and the labour market.

This article has a companion article called 'Participation of young people in education and the labour market' which further develops on the interplay between formal education and labour market participation.

The latest monthly Eurostat data on youth unemployment can be found in the article Unemployment statistics. For annual results, visit the article Unemployment statistics and beyond. An analysis of the regional aspects of youth unemployment is provided in the chapter Labour market statistics at regional level in Eurostat regional yearbook.

Definition of unemployment and youth unemployment indicators

A person's labour force status falls into one of the three categories: employed, unemployed or outside the labour force. Eurostat follows the employment and unemployment definitions from the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The labour force, which may also be referred to as the active population, consists of employed and unemployed persons. An employed person is a person who during a reference week (defined for the survey) performed work, even if just for one hour, for pay, profit or family gain, or had a job or business from which they were temporarily absent due to illness, holiday, industrial dispute or education and training. On the other hand, an unemployed person is not employed, is currently available for work and actively seeking work. A thorough explanation of these concepts is available in an article on the EU-LFS methodology.

The same definitions apply to young people as to any other age group. In 2021, EU-LFS counted 71.0 million young people aged 15-29 residing in the EU. Among them, 33.6 million were employed, and 5.0 million were unemployed. As those two groups offer their work in the labour market, they are considered part of the so-called labour force. Alternately, the remaining 32.4 million who were neither employed, nor unemployed comprised the group of people outside the labour force.

Figure 1 shows the long-term trend of the share of young people according to their labour status over the period from 2009 to 2021. Over that period, the consequences of two global crises are visible: the financial and economic crisis of the late 2000s and the more recent crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Both crises caused a decrease in employment. However, the decrease in employment during the financial and economic crisis led primarily to an increase in unemployment (see years 2009 to 2013). By contrast, the decrease in employment during the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 was accompanied by a much higher increase in the proportion of people outside the labour force than in unemployment.
People are classified as being employed or unemployed irrespective of whether they are in formal education or not. In other words, Eurostat unemployment statistics, in line with ILO standards, do not exclude students from unemployment just because they are students. The same criteria that apply to the rest of the population also apply to them. This means that whether someone is in formal education or not is irrelevant for his/her status regarding employment or unemployment. However, participation in education of the population as a whole has an indirect effect on youth unemployment indicators.

The main indicator of youth unemployment is the youth unemployment rate for the age group 15-24 or 15-29. This uses the same standard definition as the unemployment rate for the working-age population. For a given age group, it is the number of those unemployed divided by the total number of people in the labour force (employed plus unemployed). In the EU, in 2021, there were 5.0 million unemployed persons aged 15-29 and 38.6 million persons of that age group in the labour force. This gives a youth unemployment rate of 13.0%.

Given that not every young person is in the labour force, the youth unemployment rate does not reflect the proportion of young adults who are unemployed among all young people. Youth unemployment rates are frequently misinterpreted in this sense. For example, when the youth unemployment rate equals 25%, it does not mean that ‘one quarter of the whole young population is unemployed’ but it means that among the young people in the labour force, so either employed or unemployed, one quarter is unemployed and three quarters are employed. Young people outside the labour force are not included (or not taken into account) in this rate, they are neither in the numerator nor in the denominator. Also, the youth unemployment rate may be high even if the number of unemployed persons is limited, the rate depending on the number of young persons who are employed. This issue is not present for the unemployment rate of the whole working age population due to the higher participation of that population in the labour market.

Another indicator of youth unemployment published by Eurostat is the youth unemployment ratio. This has the same numerator as the youth unemployment rate, but the denominator is the total population aged 15 to 29. It thus gives an unemployment-to-population measure. The size of the young labour force only triggers minor effects in the youth unemployment ratio, contrary to the unemployment rate.
In 2021, there were 71.0 million people aged 15-29 in the EU, of whom 5.0 million were unemployed. This gives a youth unemployment ratio of 7.1%. Figure 2 shows youth unemployment rates alongside youth unemployment ratios for 2021 for each country.

The youth unemployment ratio is by definition always smaller than the youth unemployment rate, typically around half of it. This difference is entirely due to the different denominators. However, it is worth noticing that in some countries the values of the rate and ratio are closer to each other than in others, meaning that in some instances young people in the labour force overlap more closely with the total population of the same age. See for example Austria, Czechia, Germany, Malta and the Netherlands, where the difference between the youth unemployment rate and the youth unemployment ratio is less than 3.0 percentage points. By contrast, this difference exceeds 13.0 percentage points in Greece, Spain and Italy.

Figure 3 below shows the different denominators involved in the calculation of the youth unemployment rate and youth unemployment ratio. As can be seen, both indicators use the same numerator but the denominators differ.
As explained above, the unemployment rate and unemployment ratio differ because the unemployment rate includes in the denominator only the part of the population that is in the labour force. There is also a strong link between labour force participation and educational status, which becomes particularly clear when looking at young people's situation at different ages. This section analyses this issue in detail.

At 15 years of age, nearly 100% of the population in the EU and its Member States are still at school. As the young grow older, many move into the labour force, becoming employed or unemployed, or remain outside the labour force. Not all young people make this transition at the same age, so there is a gradual rise in the number of young people in the labour force.

Figure 4 below shows the proportion of young people in formal education and/or in the labour force at each year of age from 15 to 34 (data for EU, 2021). All those who state they have been in formal education or training during the previous four weeks are considered as being a student or apprentice and are represented by a light colour shade (light blue, light orange or light reddish orange). Those not in formal education are coded in a darker colour shade. Each colour corresponds to a labour status (orange for employed, reddish orange for unemployed, and blue for outside the labour force). As can be seen from Figure 4, there is a steep rise in the labour force participation, from 5.2% at age 15 to 73.2% at age 24, 85.2% at age of 29 and 86.4% at age of 34. This steep increase explains the difference between the youth unemployment rates and youth unemployment ratios, introduced in the previous section. This is a distinctive feature of the young population and it has no equivalent at other ages, except for the gentle decrease in labour participation by older workers as they retire.
Youth population in education and/or in the labour force by age, EU, 2021

Figure 4: Youth population in education and or in the labour force by age, EU, 2021

Figure 4 is based on EU-LFS data and it counts all those who state they have been in formal education or training during the previous four weeks. It does not include people who exclusively participated in non-formal training sessions such as attending a course, a seminar or taking private lessons.

A second feature in Figure 4 is that many young people join the labour force before they finish their studies or they participate in formal education while already in the labour force. This means that people can be simultaneously in education and in the labour force. (It is noted that participation in the labour force, according to ILO definitions, occurs by working as little as 1 hour in the week, or looking and being available for such work). Otherwise said, those in formal education and those in the labour force are not always different groups as an overlap exists between the two groups. The transition from education to the labour market is not a simple switch of status but a complex overlap of different situations. This topic is further developed in the article Participation of young people in education and the labour market.

Source data for tables and graphs
- Youth unemployment - Graphs

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 to 89 as well as on persons outside the labour force. It covers residents in private households. Conscripts in military or community service are not included in the results. The EU-LFS is based on the same target 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 1.8 million interviews are conducted throughout the participating countries to obtain statistical information for some 100 variables. 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.

Please note that Eurostat provides two sets of indicators, which serve different purposes and which in some cases differ from each other:

1) The **LFS main indicators**, which contain seasonally adjusted and break-corrected series. They include the labour market headline indicators used e.g. in the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure Scoreboard or the European Statistical Recovery Dashboard and are consequently used for monitoring policy. They have only a few breakdowns.

2) The **detailed results**, which contain series that are not seasonally adjusted and not break-corrected. They have a large number of breakdowns and can therefore be used for more detailed analysis.

This article presents annual results from the “LFS main indicators” set combined with ad hoc extractions from the LFS micro-data.

**Reference period:** Yearly results are obtained as averages of the four quarters in the year.

**Coverage:** The results from the EU-LFS currently cover all European Union Member States, the EFTA Member States Iceland, Norway and Switzerland, as well as the candidate countries Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey. However, at the time of writing this article, 2021 EU-LFS data were not yet available for Montenegro, North Macedonia and Turkey. For Cyprus, the survey covers only the areas of Cyprus controlled by the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

**European aggregates:** EU and EU-27 refer to the sum of the 27 EU Member States. 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.

**Country codes:** Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Czechia (CZ), Denmark (DK), Germany (DE), Estonia (EE), Ireland (IE), Greece (EL), Spain (ES), France (FR), Croatia (HR), Italy (IT), Cyprus (CY), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Luxembourg (LU), Hungary (HU), Malta (MT), the Netherlands (NL), Austria (AT), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovenia (SI), Slovakia (SK), Finland (FI), Sweden (SE), Montenegro (ME), North Macedonia (MK), Serbia (RS) and Turkey (TR).

**Country notes** In the Netherlands, the 2021 LFS data remains collected using a rolling reference week instead of a fixed reference week, i.e. interviewed persons are asked about the situation of the week before the interview rather than a pre-selected week.

**Definitions** The concepts and definitions used in the EU-LFS follow the guidelines of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

**Unemployment**

Eurostat publishes unemployment statistics based on a definition of unemployment provided by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) for which there are three criteria, namely:

- being without work;
- actively seeking work;
- and being available for work.

The ILO definition of the unemployment rate is the most widely used labour market indicator because of its international comparability and relatively timely availability. Besides the unemployment rate, indicators such as
employment and job vacancies also give useful insights into labour market developments.

Monthly unemployment figures are published by Eurostat as rates (as a percentage of the labour force) or levels (in thousands), by sex and for two age groups (persons aged 15 to 24, and those aged 25 to 74). The figures are available as unadjusted, seasonally adjusted and as a trend series. The time series for data for the EU and the euro area (EA-19) aggregates start in 2000; the starting point for individual EU Member States varies.

Quarterly and annual unemployment figures from the EU-LFS are published with more detailed breakdowns (for example, a wider range of age groups, by nationality, or by educational attainment); there are also figures available on long-term unemployment (unemployed for more than 12 months) and very long-term unemployment (unemployed for more than 24 months).

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 Member States. In order to monitor the evolution of employment and unemployment despite of the break in the time series, Member States 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 via the online publication EU Labour Force Survey, which includes eight articles on the technical and methodological aspects of the survey. The EU-LFS methodology in force from the 2021 data collection onwards is described in methodology from 2021 onwards. Detailed information on coding lists, explanatory notes and classifications used over time can be found under documentation.

Context Young people are a priority for the European Union’s social vision, and the COVID-19 crisis further highlighted the need to sustain the young human capital.

The European Pillar of Social Rights sets out 20 key principles and rights essential for fair and well-functioning labour markets and social protection systems. Principle 4 (‘Active support to employment’) states that ‘young people have the right to continued education, apprenticeship, traineeship or a job offer of good standing within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education’.

In October 2020, all EU countries have committed to the implementation of the reinforced Youth guarantee in a Council Recommendation which steps up the comprehensive job support available to young people across the EU and makes it more targeted and inclusive, also when it comes to the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other articles

- All articles on labour market
- Participation of young people in education and the labour market
- Unemployment statistics and beyond
- Employment - annual statistics
- People outside the labour force
- Labour market in the light of the COVID 19 pandemic — online publication
• Age of young people leaving their parental household
• Education and training statistics introduced
• EU Labour Force Survey — online publication

Publications
• Labour market in the light of the COVID 19 pandemic — online publication
• EU Labour Force Survey — online publication
• Being young in Europe today — online publication
• Youth in Europe
• Labour force survey in the EU, EFTA and candidate countries — Main characteristics of national surveys, 2020, 2022 edition
• European Union Labour Force Survey - selection of articles (Statistics Explained)

Methodology
• Employment and unemployment (Labour Force Survey) (ESMS metadata file — employ_esms)

Dedicated section
• Employment and unemployment (LFS)
• Labour market (including Labour Force Survey)
• Education and training
• Youth
• European Pillar of Social Rights

External links
• European Commission — European employment strategy
• European Commission — Youth policies
• European Commission — New Skills Agenda for Europe
• European Commission — Education and training policies