Actual and usual hours of work

Statistics Explained

Data extracted in May 2025 Planned article update: May 2026

Highlights

In 2024, the average working week at EU level lasted 36.0 hours. This varied across the EU, from 32.1 actual hours of work in the Netherlands to 39.8 in Greece.In most EU countries, in 2024, own-account workers worked more hours per week than employees, with some exceptions including Cyprus and Estonia where employees worked on average significantly more than own-account workers (+5.6 and +4.6 hours more, respectively). This article highlights the main aspects of working hours for different groups of workers (e.g. men and women, part-time and full-time workers, employees and self-employed people) and across various economic activities and occupations. More specifically, it focuses on the average number of weekly actual and usual hours of work which employed people spent in their main job in 2024. For more details on usual and actual hours of work, in line with the regulations in force from 1 January 2021, see Working hours methodological note.

Results are presented for the European Union (EU) as a whole, individual EU countries, 3 EFTA countries (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) and 2 candidate countries (Serbia and Türkiye). Data in this article come from the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS). This article complements the article Employment - annual statistics.

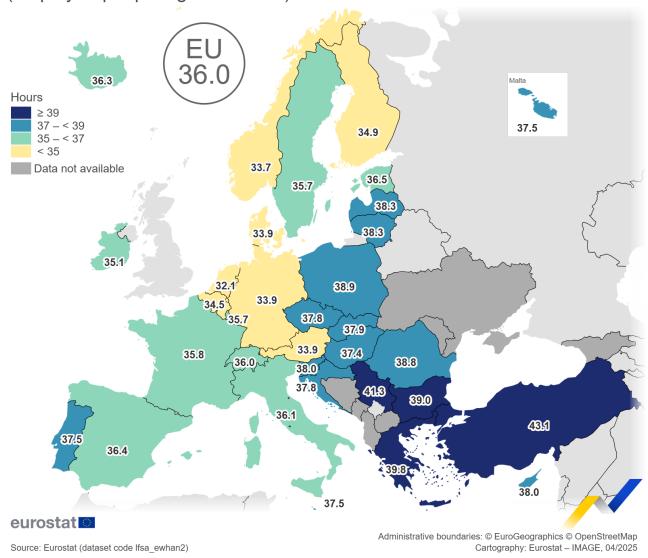
Overview

In the EU, in 2024, people aged 20-64 years in employment worked 36.0 hours on average per week, including full and part time work. This number refers to the hours people worked in their main job in the reference week (see methodological notes for the difference between actual and usual hours of work).

The average actual working hours per week differ between EU countries (see Map 1). Those with the longest working week were Greece (39.8 hours), Bulgaria (39.0), Poland (38.9), and Romania (38.8).

By contrast, amongst the EU countries, the Netherlands had the shortest working week (32.1 hours), followed by Austria, Germany and Denmark (all with 33.9 hours).

Average number of actual weekly hours of work in main job, 2024 (employed people aged 20 to 64)



Map 1: Average number of actual weekly hours of work in main job, 2024 Source: Eurostat (Ifsa_ewhan2)

Employed people by the average actual working hours in a week

In the EU, in 2024, 37.3% of employed people worked on average between 40.0 and 44.5 hours in a week, whilst only 7.2% recorded less than 20 actual hours of work per week, in the main job (see Figure 1). The 40.0-44.5 range of actual working hours represents the largest share in most countries, with a few exceptions such as Ireland, Finland, Belgium, France and Denmark, where the greatest share of employed people was for the range of 35.0-39.5 average worked hours per week.

The same range of hours (40.0 to 44.5) also showed the greatest differences across countries. The largest shares were recorded in Bulgaria (84.5 %), Romania and Latvia (78.0%), while the lowest shares were found in Belgium (15.6%), France (13.4%) and Denmark (11.7%).

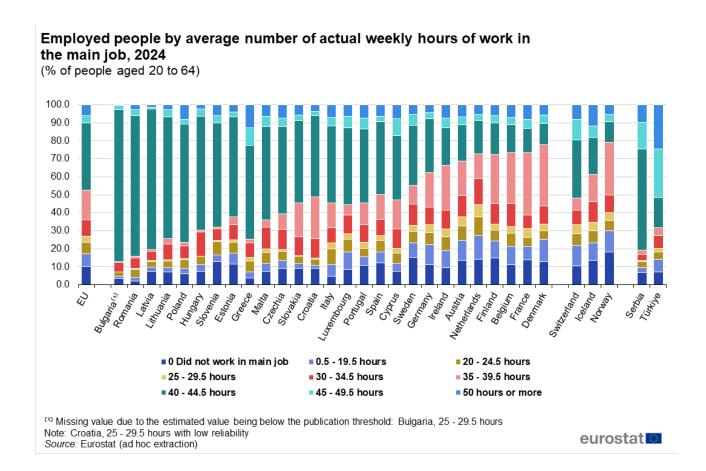


Figure 1: Employed people by average number of actual weekly hours of work in the main job, 2024 Source: Eurostat (ad hoc extraction)

In general, consistency between the number of actual and usual hours of work can be observed, with a few exceptions, with a higher prevalence of actual hours of work being less than usual hours. This is explained by the fact that usual working hours are not affected by any absence from work while actual working hours in the reference week are affected by holidays, sick leaves or other kinds of absences.

When comparing the distribution of actual and usual working hours in the main job, by professional status of employed people, it emerges that self-employed people are the most represented in the higher share of both usual and actual hours of work (i.e. 40.0-44.5 and 45.0 hours or more) - see Figure 2.

The highest share of employees is found in the range of 40.0-44.5 hours (38.3%), whilst there are more self-employed in the range of 45.0 hours or more (33.4%).

Figure 2

Patterns in average actual working week: by full-time and part-time workers and sex

In the EU, in 2024, men who were employed full time worked 39.6 hours weekly, compared to 37.7 hours for women in the same group (see Figure 3).

For women, the longest working week was found in Latvia (39.3 hours) followed by Bulgaria, Greece (both 39.1) and Lithuania (39.0). The shortest working week for women was detected in the Netherlands (35.1 hours) followed by Finland (35.9), Ireland (36.1) and Belgium (36.4).

For men, in 2024, only 3 EU countries showed a working week longer than 40 hours on average: Greece (42.4 hours per week), Poland (40.7) and Cyprus (40.5) – while in 2023, it was 7 EU countries (i.e. Greece, Cyprus,

Poland, Ireland, Italy, Romania and Slovenia, in descending order). Men in full time employment worked the least amount of hours per week in Finland (38.3 hours) and Hungary (38.5).

Average number of actual weekly hours of work in the main job for fulltime, by sex, 2024

(people aged 20 to 64)

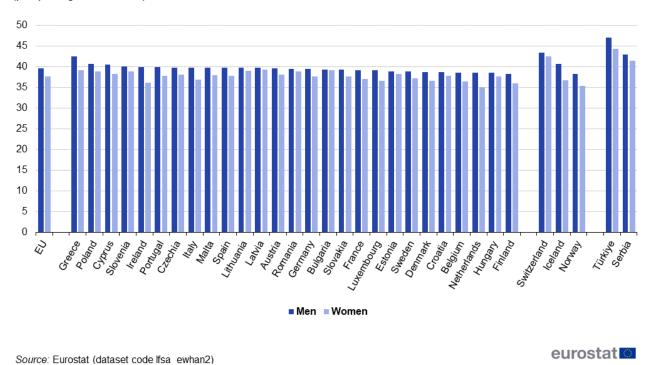


Figure 3: Average number of actual weekly hours of work in the main job for full-time, by sex, 2024 Source: Eurostat (Ifsa_ewhan2)

The most significant differences between sexes, among the EU countries, were found in Greece – with 42.4 weekly hours worked for men and 39.1 for women, Italy – with 39.8 hours for men and 36.9 for women, Luxembourg – with 39.1 for men and 36.6 for women, Ireland – with 39.9 for men and 36.1 for women, and the Netherlands – with 38.6 for men and 35.1 for women.

The weekly working hours pattern by sex was not the same for part-time workers (see Figure 4). At EU level, both men and women worked the same number of hours, approximately 22 hours per week. However, in many EU countries, part-time women workers recorded longer working weeks compared to men in the same category. Denmark stood out with the greatest difference in the number of actual weekly hours of work between women and men part-time workers (21.1 and 18.1 hours, respectively). In contrast, on average, in Romania men employed in a part-time job worked more hours than women in a week (26.5 and 24.5, respectively).

Average number of actual weekly hours of work in the main job for part-time, by sex, 2024

(people aged 20 to 64)

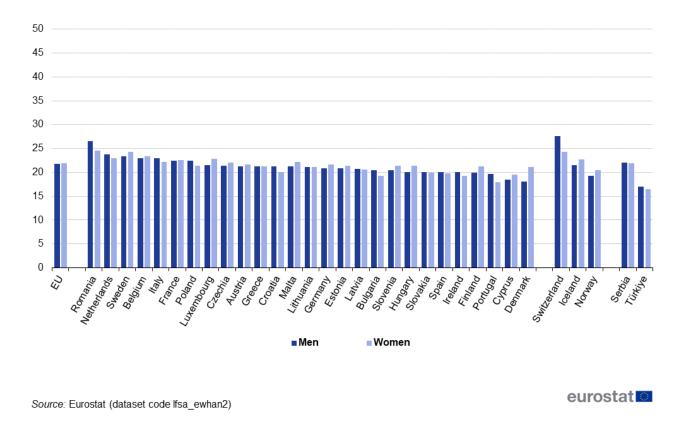


Figure 4: Average number of actual weekly hours of work in the main job for part-time, by sex, 2024 Source: Eurostat (Ifsa_ewhan2)

How did the average actual working week vary across economic activities and occupations?

The length of the average working week measured in actual hours of work varies across different sectors of economic activities (NACE Rev. 2) (see Figure 5). In 2024, the economic activities recording the longest working week were **Agriculture**, **forestry and fishing** (41.2 actual working hours), **Mining and quarrying** (38.8) and **Construction** (38.7). Activities of **Households as employers** (26.7 actual working hours), **Education** (31.9) and **Arts**, **entertainment and recreation** (32.9) recorded the shortest working weeks.

Average number of actual weekly hours of work in the main job by economic activity (NACE Rev. 2), EU, 2024

(people aged 20 to 64)

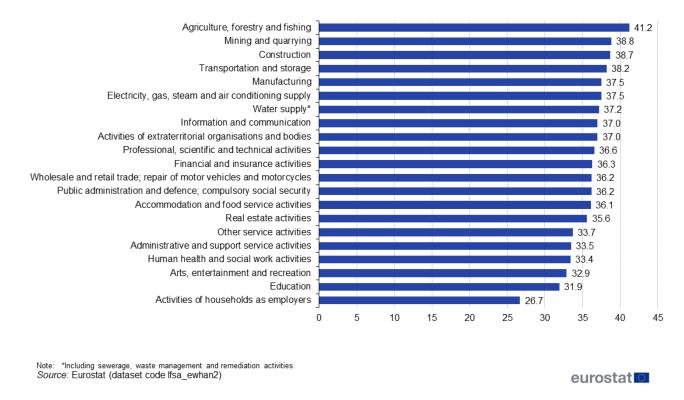


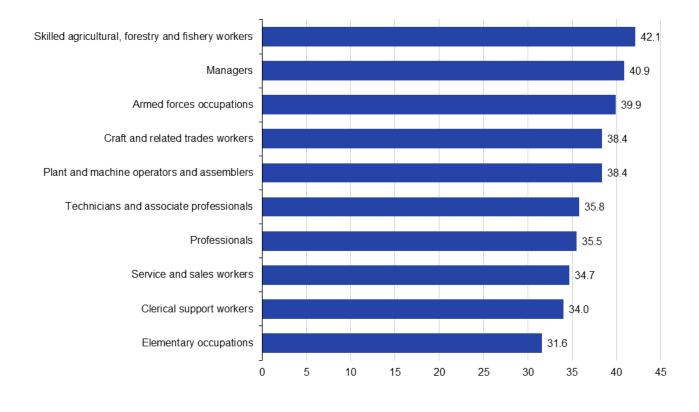
Figure 5: Average number of actual weekly hours of work in the main job by economic activity (NACE Rev 2), EU, 2024 Source: Eurostat (Ifsa_ewhan2)

When looking at different groups of occupations (by ISCO-08), **Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers** (42.1 actual working hours), **Managers** (40.9) and **Armed forces occupations** (39.9) had the longest average working weeks in the EU in 2024 (see Figure 6). By contrast, **Workers with elementary occupations** (31.6 actual work-

ing hours), Clerical support workers (34.0) and Service and sales workers (34.7) had the shortest working weeks.

Average number of actual weekly hours of work in the main job by occupation (ISCO-08), EU, 2024

(people aged 20 to 64)



Source: Eurostat (dataset code Ifsa ewhais)

eurostat

Figure 6: Average number of actual weekly hours of work in the main job by occupation (ISCO-08), EU, 2024 Source: Eurostat (Ifsa_ewhais)

What were the differences between the usual average working week for employees and that for the self-employed?

At EU level, in 2024, self-employed people with employees (i.e. employers) had the greatest number of usual weekly hours of work in their main job – 46.7 hours, followed by self-employed people without employees (also known as 'own-account workers') with 39.9, compared to employees with 36.6 hours per week (see Figure 7).

Countries with the longest average working week for employers were France (50.7 hours) and Belgium (50.4). Moreover, Belgium shows the greatest difference in the number of usual hours of work per week, between employees (35.3) and own-account workers (43.1).

In many EU countries, own-account workers worked more hours per week than employees, in 2024. However, in Cyprus, Romania, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia employees worked significantly more than own-account workers. The greatest difference between these 2 professional statutes emerged in Cyprus and Estonia, where employees worked on average 5.6 and 4.6 hours per week, respectively, more than own-account workers.

In 2024, amongst all EU countries, the longest working week for own-account workers was in Greece (46.6 usual hours of work per week), Spain (43.3), Belgium and Poland (each 43.1). Employees worked on average more hours per week in Cyprus and Romania (each 40.2). In all the other EU countries, the average working week for employees counted less than 40 worked hours. The Netherlands, Germany and Denmark showed the shortest working week for employees (32.1, 34.6 and 34.0 usual hours of work per week, respectively).

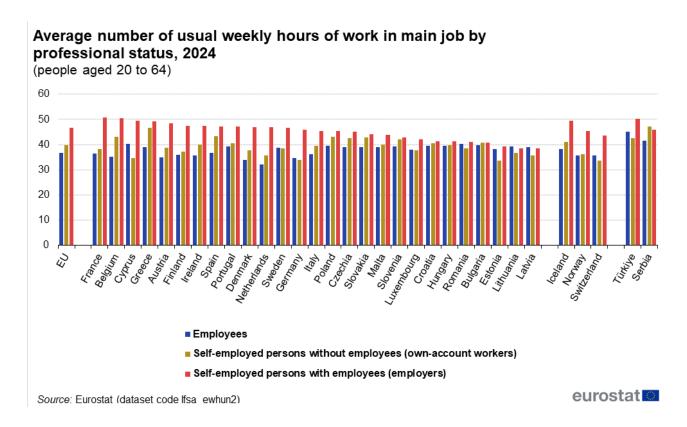


Figure 7: Average number of usual weekly hours of work in main job by professional status, 2024 Source: Eurostat (Ifsa_ewhun2)

Source data for tables and graphs

Data on Hours of work 2024

Methods and definitions

Data sources

Data in this article are based on the European Union labour force survey (EU-LFS) .

Source: The EU-LFS is the largest European household sample survey providing quarterly and annual results on labour participation of people aged 15 years and over 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 1.2 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.

Reference period: Yearly results are obtained as averages of the 4 quarters in the year. Most of the information collected during the survey relates to the respondent's situation during a reference week (being generally a week from Monday to Sunday preceding the interview).

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 Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and

Türkiye. 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 available period. Such cases are indicated.

Definitions

The concepts and definitions used in the EU-LFS follow the resolutions of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians, hosted every five years by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Employment covers persons living in private households, who during the reference week performed work, for at least 1 hour, for pay, profit or family gain, or were not at work but had a job or business from which they were temporarily absent, for example because of illness, holidays, maternal or paternal leave or training.

Employment can be measured in terms of the number of persons, number of jobs, in full-time equivalents number of persons or in hours worked. All the estimates presented in this article use the number of persons; the information presented for employment rates is also built on estimates for the number of persons.

The EU-LFS employment concept differs from national accounts domestic employment, as the latter sets no limit on age or type of household, and also includes the non-resident population contributing to the gross domestic product (GDP) and excludes the resident population contributing to the GDP of another country and conscripts in military or community service.

Main concepts: Some main employment and working time characteristics, as defined by the EU-LFS, include:

- professional status means the status in employment of employed people, in line with the variable STAPRO in the EU-LFS (reference definitions in force since 1 January 2021) and the ILO classification of International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE). In the context of this article, the focus is on employees and self-employed people.
- employees are defined as those who work for a public or private employer and who receive compensation in the form of wages, salaries, payment by results, or payment in kind; non-conscript members of the armed forces are also included;
- self-employed persons work in their own business, farm or professional practice. A self-employed person is considered to be working during the reference week if she/he meets one of the following criteria: works for the purpose of earning profit; spends time on the operation of a business; or is currently establishing a business. Self-employed persons with employees are called employers. Self-employed persons without employees are called own-account workers.
- the distinction between full-time and part-time work is generally based on a spontaneous response by the
 respondent. The main exceptions are the Netherlands and Iceland where a 35-hour threshold is applied,
 Sweden where a threshold is applied to the self-employed, and Norway where the thresholds are up to 32
 hours for part-time, more than 36 hours for full-time, and the persons working between 32 and 36 hours are
 asked whether this is a full- or part-time position;
- actual hours worked in the reference week are the hours the person spends in work activities during the reference week. they provide measurement of direct labour input. Working hours are collected in time intervals based on a half-hour scale (i.e. 0-0.5 hours, 0.5-1.0 hours, 1.0-1.5 hours, etc..). Specifically, average actual weekly hours are the number of hours actually worked per week in the main job, in the reference week, namely the hours spent in work activities including unpaid overtime. Periods of absence from work, such as sick leave, holidays and commuting time, account for 0 hours of work.
- usual hours worked are the number of hours per week usually worked in the main job. They are the modal value of the actual hours worked per week over a long reference period, excluding weeks when an absence from work occurs (e.g. holidays, leaves, strikes). They provide measurement of the organisation of working time. Working hours are collected in time intervals based on a half-hour scale (i.e. 0-0.5 hours, 0.5-1.0 hours, 1.0-1.5 hours, etc..). Specifically, average usual weekly hours are the number of hours usually worked per week in the main job that comprises all hours including extra hours, either paid or unpaid, which the person normally works. It excludes the travelling time between home and workplace, the time for the main meal break, education and non-job-related training. It includes production activities, ancillary activities (travel

between different places of work, personnel management), education and training necessary for carrying out the work.

- economic activity refers to that of the economic unit where the work is performed. For reference, please consult the classification NACE. In the EU-LFS, the sector 'activities of households as employers' excludes 'undifferentiated goods and services producing activities of households for own use'.
- occupation: for reference, please consult the classification ISCO .

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 EU Labour Force Survey - new methodology from 2021 onwards . Detailed information on coding lists, explanatory notes and classifications used over time can be found under EU labour force survey - documentation .

For more information on the background definitions on hours of work, please consult Topic 6 "Working conditions including working hours" from EU Labour Force Survey Explanatory Notes .

Context

Employment statistics can be used for several different analyses, including macroeconomic (looking at labour as a production factor), productivity or competitiveness studies. They can also be used to study a range of social and behavioural aspects related to an individual's employment situation or employment as a source of household income.

Employment is both a structural indicator and a short-term indicator. As a structural indicator, it may shed light on the structure of labour markets and economic systems, as measured through the balance of labour supply and demand, or the quality of employment. As a short-term indicator, employment follows the business cycle; however, it has limits in this respect, as employment is often referred to as a lagging indicator.

Statistics on the hours of work adds a new dimension to employment. The "average number of usual weekly hours of work in the main job" is an indicator providing a perspective to the organisation of working time and social conditions on the labour market.

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- European Union Labour force survey selection of articles (Statistics Explained)

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