This article presents the most recent European Union (EU) employment statistics based on the EU Labour Force Survey (LFS). Overall, employment statistics show considerable differences by sex, age and educational attainment level. There are also considerable labour market disparities across EU Member States.

Please take note that numbers and rates shown in the tools and mentioned in the text of this article may differ in some cases, due to continuous revision of the source data: the tools refer to the most recent data (as shown in the Eurostat database under Employment and unemployment (Labour Force Survey)) while the text refers to data from April 2020.

**Highest employment rate ever recorded since 2005**

In 2019, the EU-27 employment rate for persons aged 20 to 64, as measured by the EU labour force survey (EU LFS), stood at 73.1%, the highest annual average ever recorded for the EU. Behind this average, large differences between countries can nevertheless be found (Map 1 and Tool 1). Sweden displays the highest employment rate in the EU so far: 82.1%. Such a high rate is also observed in the EFTA countries Iceland (85.9%) and Switzerland (82.9%).
In 2010, the European Council adopted the Europe 2020 strategy. The emphasis was on the reinforcement of the EU economy and on the preparation of challenges for the next decade. One of the main targets of this strategy at EU level is to raise, by the year 2020, the employment rate of the population aged 20-64 to at least 75%.

Although the EU-27 as a whole, had not yet reached its target in 2019, 17 EU Member States had reached or even exceeded the EU 2020 goal. These countries include three Nordic Member States (Sweden, Denmark and Finland), the three Baltic Member States (Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia) as well as the Netherlands, Germany, Czechia, Slovenia, Portugal, Cyprus, Hungary, Malta, Ireland, Austria, and Bulgaria (Map 1). The United Kingdom as well as Iceland, Switzerland and Norway had also employment rates above 75%. At the other end of the scale, the employment rate was far from the EU target, i.e. below 70%, in Croatia, Italy, Spain and Greece, with the latter country recording the lowest rate among the EU Member States (61.2%). The candidate countries Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey registered employment rates of 65% or below.

In the period between 2005 and 2019, the employment rate for the total population aged 20-64 has increased by 6.3 percentage points (p.p.) in the EU-27, from 66.8% to 73.1%. However, countries have experienced very different labour market situations over the past years. The employment rate has increased in the aforementioned period in all countries except Greece (-3.2 p.p.). The largest increases are observed in Malta (19.8 p.p.: from 57.4% to 77.2%) and in Poland (14.7 p.p.: from 58.3% to 73.0%).

Female employment rate increases over time

The employment rate for men was higher than for women in 2019 for all 27 EU Member States. This is also true for the whole period from 2005 to 2019, with two exceptions: Latvia in 2010 and Lithuania in 2009 and 2010. The evolution of the employment rate of men and women over the period from 2005 to 2019, however,
differed (second and third icon of Tool 1).

Since 2005, the employment rate of women has increased overall in Europe, with an increase of 8.6 p.p. at EU level. The largest increases for female employment rates between 2005 and 2019 were observed in Malta (+31.9 p.p.), Bulgaria and Poland (both +13.6 p.p.). In 2019, the highest employment rates for women were found in Sweden (79.7%), whereas the lowest female employment rates were recorded in Italy (53.8%) and Greece (51.3%).

By contrast, the increase at EU level of the employment rate for men was more limited (+3.9 p.p.) than for women during the period from 2005 to 2019. The male employment rate even decreased in seven EU Member States, with the most visible changes observed in Greece (-8.0 p.p.: from 79.3 % in 2005 to 71.3 % in 2019) and Spain (-5.8 p.p.: from 79.8 % to 74.0 %).

The employment rate gap between the two sexes consequently decreased at EU level from 16.4 p.p. in 2005 to 11.7 p.p. in 2019. The same trend was observed in all EU Member States except Hungary, Poland, Estonia and Romania. The decrease was especially strong in Malta (employment gender gap changed by -24.9 p.p.) due to the increasing female employment rate. The gap also shrunk a lot in Spain (-12.8 p.p.) and Luxembourg (-11.9 p.p.), because of a combined decrease in the male employment rate and increase in the female employment rate.

**Senior employment increases, youth employment tends to decrease**

Although the youth employment rate (persons aged 15-24) shows a slight increase at EU level between 2005 and 2019 (+0.2 p.p.), almost half of the EU Member States (13 countries) display a decrease in their national figures. The decrease in youth employment is particularly visible in Ireland, Spain, Greece, Denmark, Portugal, Italy and Cyprus. The senior employment rate (persons aged 55-64) on the other hand, has overall increased during the same period with Bulgaria, Germany, Slovakia and the Netherlands recording the largest increases in the senior employment rate (fourth and fifth icons of Tool 1).

**The higher the educational attainment level, the bigger the employment rates**

The level of educational attainment can affect employment rates considerably (Tool 2). The employment rate of persons (aged 20-64) who had completed education at high level, i.e. short-cycle tertiary, bachelor’s, master’s or doctoral levels (or equivalents) (ISCED levels 5-8) was 84.8 % at EU level in 2019. This is much higher than the rate for those who have only attained education at low level, i.e. primary or lower secondary education (ISCED levels 0-2) which was 55.8 %. The EU-27 employment rate of persons who have completed their education at medium level at most, i.e. an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED levels 3-4) is situated between the two previous rates, at 73.4 %. These numbers may be an indication that, with an increase in educational attainment level, the probability of getting a job will increase as well.

In addition to having the lowest probability of getting a job (among the three education level groups), persons with low educational attainment level were hit the hardest during the last crisis: the employment rate for this group fell by 5.4 p.p. between 2007 and 2013 at EU level. The corresponding number for those with a medium level or high level of education was -1.8 p.p (for both levels).

Please note that in Tool 2 a high educational attainment level refers to tertiary education (short-cycle tertiary, bachelor’s, master’s or doctoral levels; ISCED levels 5-8). A medium educational attainment level means having completed an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED levels 3-4), while a low educational attainment level refers to having only attained a primary or lower secondary education (ISCED levels 0-2).
Tool 2: Employment rate by level of education, 2005-2019 (% of the population with low/medium/high level of education aged 25 to 64) – Source: Eurostat (lfsa_ergaed)

Available online at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/infographs/statexpl-info/tool2/

Tool 2 gives an indication of the importance of education for increasing the chances of getting a job. Indeed, for example in Slovakia, in 2019 the employment rate of persons with a low level of educational attainment was 36.1%; this rate is much smaller than the employment rate of persons with a medium and high level of educational attainment (75.6% and 80.6% respectively). This situation is comparable to the situation in Croatia (39.5% for low level against 66.6% for medium level), Czechia (53.4% against 81.3%), Bulgaria (51.2% against 76.0%) and Poland (44.6% against 69.2%). The case of France is also worth noting, with an employment rate of 51.7%, 70.1% and 83.3% for persons with low, medium and high educational attainment level respectively, when overseas departments are taken into account. Nevertheless, when excluding overseas departments, the employment rate for persons with low, medium and high educational attainment level stands at 52.5%, 70.4% and 83.4% respectively. The difference between France metropolitan (without overseas departements) and the whole of France (with overseas departements) gets consequently smaller with the increase in the educational
In terms of occupation (ISCO), professionals represented the largest group in the EU-27 in 2019 (Figure 1) with almost 20% of employed persons. This was followed by technicians and associate professionals and service and sales workers, with 16.6% on average. At the other end of the scale, the two smallest groups were skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers and armed forces occupations (3.3% and 0.6%).

However, considering occupation alone provides a restricted view of the economic, social and cultural characteristics of employed persons. For this reason, a broader classification, called the ESeG (European Socio-economic Groups, i.e socio-economic groups) has been introduced. It combines occupation with the status in employment. Using this classification, professionals remained the largest group in the EU-27 in 2019 (19.4%, Figure 2), but this time followed by the lower status employees with 18.6%, and skilled industrial employees with 17.1% of employed persons.

**Source data for tables and graphs**

- Employment statistics, Figure 1

**Data sources**

**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 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.

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

**Coverage:** The results from the survey currently cover all European Union Member States, the United Kingdom, the EFTA Member States of Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, as well as the candidate countries Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey. For Cyprus, the survey covers only the areas of Cyprus controlled by the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

**European aggregates:** EU refers to the sum of EU-27 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.
Estonia, Latvia, Hungary, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark, and 16-74 years in Iceland), living in private households, who during the reference week performed work, even for just one 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, industrial dispute or education and training.

Employment can be measured in terms of the number of persons or jobs, in full-time equivalents 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. Employment statistics are frequently reported as employment rates to discount the changing size of countries’ populations over time and to facilitate comparisons between countries of different sizes. These rates are typically published for the working age population, which is generally considered to be those aged between 15 and 64 years, although the age range of 16 to 64 is used in Spain and the United Kingdom, as well as in Iceland. The 15 to 64 years age range is also a standard used by other international statistical organisations (although the age range of 20 to 64 years is given increasing prominence by some policymakers as a rising share of the EU population continue their studies into tertiary education).

The 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 GDP and conscripts in military or community service.

Five different articles on detailed technical and methodological information is linked from the overview page EU labour force survey.

Please note that Eurostat provides two sets of indicators linked to the annual employment rate, which serve different purposes and which in some cases differ from each other:

1) The main indicators, which are seasonally adjusted. They include the headline indicators under the EU2020 Strategy and are consequently used for monitoring the EU 2020 targets (at EU and national levels). They have only a few breakdowns and normally refer to the age group 20-64. Please note that for France, two series are published: one including overseas departments starting in 2003, and one for metropolitan France, excluding overseas departments, starting in 1992. The latter is evaluated in the EU2020 strategy, and also included in the relevant EU and EA aggregates.

2) The detailed results, which are not seasonally adjusted. They have a large number of breakdowns and can therefore be used for more detailed analysis. For France, only one data series is published. This series contains data for metropolitan France until the fourth quarter of 2013, and from 2014 on, also the French overseas departments.

This article presents annual results for most indicators from the "main indicators" set.

Main concepts: Some main employment characteristics, as defined by the EU LFS, include:

- 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;

- 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 hours threshold is applied, Sweden where a threshold is applied to the self-employed, and Norway where persons working between 32 and 36 hours are asked whether this is a full- or part-time position;

- indicators for employed persons with a second job refer only to people with more than one job at the same time; people having changed job during the reference week are not counted as having two jobs;

- an employee is considered as having a temporary job if employer and employee agree that its end is determined by objective conditions, such as a specific date, the completion of an assignment, or the return of an employee who is temporarily replaced. Typical cases include: people in seasonal employment; people
engaged by an agency or employment exchange and hired to a third party to perform a specific task (unless there is a written work contract of unlimited duration); people with specific training contracts.

The level of education refers to the educational attainment level, i.e. the highest level of education successfully completed. Low level of education refers to ISCED levels 0-2 (less than primary, primary and lower secondary education), medium level refers to ISCED levels 3 and 4 (upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education) and high level of education refers to ISCED levels 5-8 (tertiary education).

The European Socio-economic Groups (ESeG) is a derived classification which allows the grouping of individuals with similar economic, social and cultural characteristics throughout the European Union, based only on core social variables to ensure comfortable use in all social surveys providing comparable results. The main core social variables used are “ILO working status”, “Status in employment”, “Occupation in employment” (according to ISCO-08) and “Self-declared labour status”. For the detailed classification and explanatory notes, please consult ESeG page on the Eurostat classification server RAMON.

**Context**

Employment statistics can be used for a number of 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, such as the social integration of minorities, 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.

Employment statistics are at the heart of many EU policies. The European employment strategy (EES) was launched at the Luxembourg jobs summit in November 1997 and was revamped in 2005 to align the EU’s employment strategy more closely to a set of revised Lisbon objectives, and in July 2008, employment policy guidelines for the period 2008–2010 were updated. In March 2010, the European Commission launched the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth; this was formally adopted by the European Council in June 2010. The European Council agreed on five headline targets, the first being to raise the employment rate for women and men aged 20 to 64 years old to 75 % by 2020. EU Member States may set their own national targets in the light of these headline targets and draw up national reform programmes that include the actions they aim to undertake in order to implement the strategy. In line with the Europe 2020 strategy, the EES encourages measures to help meet three headline targets by 2020, namely, for:

- 75 % of people aged 20 to 64 to be in work;
- rates of early school leaving to reduce below 10 %, and for at least 40 % of 30 to 34-year-olds to have completed a tertiary education;
- at least 20 million fewer people to be in or at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion.

The slow pace of recovery from the financial and economic crisis and mounting evidence of rising unemployment led the European Commission to make a set of proposals on 18 April 2012 for measures to boost jobs through a dedicated employment package. These proposals, among others, targeted the demand-side of job creation, setting out ways for EU Member States to encourage hiring by reducing taxes on labour or supporting business start-ups. The proposals also aimed to identify economic areas with the potential for considerable job creation, such as the green economy, health services and information and communications technology.

In December 2012, in the face of high and still rising youth unemployment in several EU Member States, the European Commission proposed a Youth employment package (COM(2012) 727 final). This package was a follow-up to the actions on youth laid out in the wider employment package and made a range of proposals, including:

- that all young people up to the age of 25 should receive a quality offer of a job, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed (a youth guarantee);
- a consultation of European social partners on a quality framework for traineeships to enable young people to acquire high-quality work experience under safe conditions;
• a European alliance for apprenticeships to improve the quality and supply of apprenticeships available and outlining ways to reduce obstacles to mobility for young people.

Efforts to reduce youth unemployment continued in 2013 as the European Commission presented a Youth employment initiative (COM(2013) 144 final) designed to reinforce and accelerate measures outlined in the Youth employment package. It aimed to support, in particular, young people not in education, employment or training in regions with a youth unemployment rate above 25%. There followed another Communication titled ‘Working together for Europe’s young people – A call to action on youth unemployment’ (COM(2013) 447 final) which was designed to accelerate the implementation of the youth guarantee and provide help to EU Member States and businesses so they may recruit more young people.

One of the main priorities of the College of Commissioners that entered into office in 2014 is to focus on boosting jobs, growth and investment, with the goal of cutting regulation, making smarter use of existing financial resources and public funds. In February 2015, the European Commission published a series of country reports, analysing the economic policies of EU Member States and providing information on EU Member States priorities for the coming year to boost growth and job creation. In the same month, the European Commission also proposed to make EUR 1 billion from the Youth employment initiative available in 2015 so as to increase by up to 30 times the pre-financing EU Member States could receive to boost youth employment rates, with the aim of helping up to 650 000 young people into work.

In June 2016, the European Commission adopted a Skills Agenda for Europe (COM(2016) 381/2) under the heading ‘Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness’. This is intended to ensure that people develop the skills necessary for now and the future, in order to boost employability, competitiveness and growth across the EU.

More recently, the European Pillar of Social Rights has been jointly signed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on 17 November 2017. Employment and social policies are the main fields of interest of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which is about delivering new and more effective rights for citizens. It has 3 main categories: (1) Equal opportunities and access to the labour market, (2) Fair working conditions and (3) Social protection and inclusion. In particular, today’s more flexible working arrangements provide new job opportunities especially for the young but can potentially give rise to new precariousness and inequalities. Building a fairer Europe and strengthening its social dimension is a key priority for the Commission. The European Pillar of Social Rights is accompanied by a ‘social scoreboard’ which will monitor the implementation of the Pillar by tracking trends and performances across EU countries in 12 areas and will feed into the European Semester of economic policy coordination. The scoreboard will also serve to assess progress towards a social ‘triple A’ for the EU as a whole.

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.

**Other articles**

- All articles on employment
- Employment rates and Europe 2020 national targets
- Job vacancy statistics
- Labour market statistics at regional level
- People outside the labour force
- The EU in the world - labour market
- Underemployment and potential additional labour force statistics
Publications

- European social statistics, 2013 edition

Main tables

- Employment and unemployment (Labour Force Survey) (t_employ), see:
  LFS main indicators (t_lfsi)
    Population, activity and inactivity - LFS adjusted series (t_lfsi_act)
    Employment - LFS adjusted series (t_lfsi_emp)
    Unemployment - LFS adjusted series (t_une)
  LFS series - Detailed annual survey results (t_lfsa)
  LFS series - Specific topics (t_lfst)

Database

- Employment and unemployment (Labour Force Survey) (employ), see:
  LFS main indicators (lfsi)
    Employment and activity - LFS adjusted series (lfsi_emp)
    Unemployment - LFS adjusted series (une)
    Labour market transitions - LFS longitudinal data (lfsi_long)
  LFS series - Detailed quarterly survey results (from 1998 onwards) (lfsq)
  LFS series - Detailed annual survey results (lfsa)
  LFS series - Specific topics (lfsst)
  LFS ad-hoc modules (lfso)

Dedicated section

- Employment and unemployment (Labour force survey)

Methodology

Publications

- EU labour force survey — online publication

ESMS metadata files and EU-LFS methodology

- Employment and unemployment (Labour Force Survey) (ESMS metadata file — employ_esms)
- Employment growth and activity branches - annual averages (ESMS metadata file — lfsi_grt_a_esms)
- LFS ad-hoc modules (ESMS metadata file — lfso_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)
External links

- European Commission — Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion — European employment strategy
- OECD — Employment

View this article online at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Employment_statistics