Monthly data

Data up to January 2020
Planned article update: 1 April 2020

This article presents the very latest unemployment figures for the European Union (EU), the euro area and individual Member States. Additional information about long-term trends can be found in the article Unemployment statistics and beyond.

Unemployment in the EU and the euro area

Eurostat estimates that 14.086 million men and women in the EU-27, of whom 12.179 million in the euro area (EA-19), were unemployed in January 2020. Compared with December 2019, the number of persons unemployed increased by 16 000 in the EU-27 and by 1 000 in the euro area. Compared with January 2019, unemployment fell by 746 000 in the EU-27 and by 593 000 in the euro area.

1In line with Eurostat’s guidelines for disseminating data when the EU is enlarged, aggregate data series in this article refer to the official composition of the EU in the most recent month for which data are available; from February 2020 onwards this is the EU with 27 Member States, EU-27.

2In line with Eurostat’s guidelines for disseminating data when the euro area is enlarged, aggregate data series in this article refer to the official composition of the euro area in the most recent month for which data are available; from the reference month of January 2015 onwards this will be the euro area with 19 Member States, EA-19.
Figure 1: Change in the number of unemployed persons (compared to previous month, in thousands), seasonally adjusted, January 2011 - January 2020

The euro area seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate was 7.4 % in January 2020, stable compared with December 2019 and down from 7.8 % in January 2019. The EU-27 unemployment rate was 6.6 % in January 2020, stable compared with December 2019 and down from 6.9 % in January 2019.

Unemployment in the Member States

Among the Member States, the lowest unemployment rates in January 2020 were recorded in Czechia (2.0 %), Poland (2.9 %) and the Netherlands (3.0 %). The highest unemployment rates were observed in Greece (16.5 % in November 2019) and Spain (13.7 %).
Compared with a year ago, the unemployment rate fell in 19 Member States, remained stable in Germany and Romania, while it increased in Estonia (from 4.3 % to 4.5 % between December 2018 and December 2019), Slovenia (from 4.5 % to 4.7 %), Portugal (from 6.6 % to 6.9 %), Lithuania (from 6.1 % to 6.6 %), Luxembourg (from 5.2 % to 5.7 %) and Sweden (from 6.5 % to 7.0 %). The largest decreases were registered in Greece (from 18.6 % to 16.5 % between November 2018 and November 2019), Cyprus (from 7.6 % to 6.0 %), and Croatia (from 7.2 % to 6.1 %).

In January 2020, the unemployment rate in the United States was 3.6 %, up from 3.5 % in December 2019 and down from 4.0 % in January 2019.
Youth unemployment

In January 2020, 2.719 million young persons (under 25) were unemployed in the EU-27, of whom 2.249 million were in the euro area. Compared with January 2019, youth unemployment decreased by 110 000 in the EU-27 and by 75 000 in the euro area. In January 2020, the youth unemployment rate was 14.9 % in the EU-27 and 15.6 % in the euro area, compared with 15.5 % and 16.1 % respectively in January 2019. In January 2020, the lowest rates were observed in Czechia (5.3 %), Germany (5.6 %) and the Netherlands (6.4 %), while the highest were recorded in Greece (36.1 % in November 2019), Spain (30.6 %) and Italy (29.3 %).
Data sources

An unemployed person is defined by Eurostat, according to the guidelines of the International Labour Organization, as someone aged 15 to 74 without work during the reference week who is available to start work within the next two weeks and who has actively sought employment at some time during the last four weeks. The unemployment rate is the number of people unemployed as a percentage of the labour force.

In addition to the unemployment measures covered here, Eurostat also publishes statistics for persons who fulfil only partially the definition of unemployment. These persons are not included in the official ILO unemployment concept and have a varying degree of attachment to the labour market. The indicators on underemployment and potential additional labour force participants supplement the unemployment rate to provide a more complete picture of the labour market.

There is currently no specific legal basis for producing and disseminating monthly unemployment data. However, these monthly data are estimates based on results of the European Union Labour force survey (EU LFS), which is a continuous household survey carried out in all Member States in accordance with European legislation and on the basis of harmonised definitions. These results are interpolated/extrapolated to monthly data using national survey data and/or national monthly series on registered unemployment. The quarterly LFS results are always used as a benchmark to ensure international comparability. As for most Member States the results from the LFS for a full quarter are available 90 days after the end of the reference period, the most recent figures are usually provisional. For many countries monthly unemployment data are calculated by Eurostat, while several countries actually supply those figures directly from the LFS.

The following LFS data are used in the calculations of the monthly unemployment rates published in this article:

- For Czechia, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Romania, Finland and Sweden: monthly LFS data up to and including January 2020.
- For Greece: monthly data up to and including November 2019.
- For Denmark and Portugal: monthly data (3 month moving average) up to and including December 2019 as well as January and February 2020.
• For Estonia and Hungary: monthly data (3 month moving average) up to and including November and December 2019 as well as January 2020.

• For Belgium, Ireland, Croatia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Slovakia: quarterly data up and including Q3 2019.

• For Bulgaria, Cyprus, Spain, France, Latvia, Malta, Poland: quarterly data up and including Q4 2019.

• For the United Kingdom: monthly data (3 month moving average) up to and including October, November and December 2019.

Monthly unemployment and employment series are calculated first at the level of four categories for each Member State (males and females 15-24 years, males and females 25-74 years). These series are then seasonally adjusted and all the national and European aggregates are calculated. Monthly unemployment figures are published by Eurostat as rates (as a percentage of the labour force) or levels (in thousands), by gender and for two age groups (persons aged 15-24, and those aged 25-74). The figures are available as unadjusted, seasonally adjusted and trend series. There are monthly estimates for all EU-27 Member States. Data for the EU-27 aggregate start in 2000 and for the euro area (EA-18) in April 1998; the starting point for individual Member States varies. Member States may publish other rates such as register-based unemployment rates, or rates based on the national LFS or corresponding surveys. These rates may vary from those published by Eurostat due to a different definition or methodological choices.

Source data for tables and graphs

The detailed tables are available here.

Context

The unemployment rate is an important indicator with both social and economic dimensions. Rising unemployment results in a loss of income for individuals, increased pressure with respect to government spending on social benefits and a reduction in tax revenue. From an economic perspective, unemployment may be viewed as unused labour capacity.

The International Labour Organization 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.

The time series on unemployment are used by the European Commission, other public institutions, and the media as an economic indicator; banks may use the data for business cycle analysis. Finally, the general public might also be interested in changes in unemployment.

The unemployment rate is considered to be a lagging indicator. When there is an economic downturn, it usually takes several months before the unemployment rate begins to rise. Once the economy starts to pick up again, employers usually remain cautious about hiring new staff and it may take several months before unemployment rates start to fall.

Male, youth and long-term unemployment appear to be more susceptible to cyclical economic changes than overall unemployment. Indeed, social policymakers often face the challenge of remedying these situations by designing ways to increase employment opportunities for various groups of society, those working in particular economic activities, or those living in specific regions.

Globalisation and technological progress have an ever-increasing effect on daily life, and the demand for different types of labour and skills is evolving at a rapid pace. While enterprises try to improve their productivity and
become more competitive and innovative, they may well seek to pass on risk to the labour force through greater flexibility - both in relation to those already in employment, as well as those searching for a new job. Within the context of the European employment strategy (EES), there are a number of measures that are designed to help encourage people to remain in work or find a new job, including: the promotion of a life-cycle approach to work, encouraging lifelong learning, improving support to those seeking a job, as well as ensuring equal opportunities. The integrated employment guidelines for 2008-2010 encouraged Member States, among others, to:

- work with renewed endeavour to build employment pathways for young people and reduce youth unemployment, in particular, through adapting education and training systems in order to raise quality, broaden supply, diversify access, ensure flexibility, respond to new occupational needs and skills requirements, and;
- take action to increase female participation and reduce gender gaps in employment, unemployment and pay, through better reconciliation of work and private life and the provision of accessible and affordable childcare facilities and care for other dependants.

The guidelines also set a number of additional benchmarks, whereby Member States were encouraged:

- to ensure that by 2010 every unemployed person is offered a job, apprenticeship, additional training or another employability measure (for young persons leaving school within four months, and for adults within no more than 12 months), and;
- to work towards 25% of the long-term unemployed participating in training, retraining, work practice, or other employability measures by 2010.

The current economic crisis has however reversed much of the progress achieved in Europe since 2000. The Europe 2020 strategy put forward by the European Commission sets out a vision of Europe’s social market economy for the 21st century. As part of the flagship initiatives, ‘An agenda for new skills and jobs’ and ‘Youth on the move’, (youth) unemployment rates will be targeted via a range of policies, including proposals aimed at education and training institutions, or measures for the creation of a (work) environment conducive to higher activity rates and higher labour productivity. There are also initiatives aimed at improving the entry rate of young people into the labour market.

Other articles

- Unemployment statistics and beyond
- Job vacancy statistics
- Underemployment and potential additional labour force statistics
- Youth unemployment

Publications

- Impact of the crisis on unemployment so far less pronounced in the EU than in the US – Statistics in focus 20/2010
- Sharp increase in unemployment in the EU – Statistics in focus 53/2009
- Unemployment news release, 35/2020, 3 March 2020 (Latest release, PDF)

Main tables

- Employment and unemployment (Labour force survey) (t_employ), see:
  
  LFS main indicators (t_lfis)
  
  Unemployment - LFS adjusted series (t_une)
  
  LFS series - detailed annual survey results (t_lfsa)
  
  Unemployment rates of the population aged 25-64 by level of education (tps00066)
Database

- Employment and unemployment (Labour force survey) (employ), see:
  - LFS main indicators (lfsi)
    - Unemployment - LFS adjusted series (une)
  - LFS series - detailed quarterly survey results (from 1998)
    - Total unemployment - LFS series (lfsq_unemp)
  - LFS series - Detailed annual survey results (lfsa)
    - Total unemployment - LFS series (lfsa_unemp)

Dedicated section

- Employment and unemployment (Labour force survey)

Methodology

- EU Labour Force Survey - main concepts and definitions
- Labour Force Survey in the EU, candidate and EFTA countries - Main characteristics of the 2011 national surveys (publication)
- Unemployment - LFS-adjusted series (ESMS metadata file — une_esms)

External links

- International Labour Organization - ILO Global Job Crisis Observatory
- OECD Statistics Portal - Labour

Notes

Unemployment statistics