Labour market and Labour force survey (LFS) statistics

Data extracted in January 2019.
Planned article update: May 2019.

Private households by working status, 2017 (% of private household) - Source: Eurostat (lfst_hhnhwhtc)

This article presents some of the main results for 2017 of the EU Labour force survey (LFS) for the European Union (EU) as a whole, for all EU Member States individually, as well as for three EFTA countries and three candidate countries.

This article namely complements the articles Employment Statistics, Employment rates and Europe 2020 national targets, Underemployment and potential additional labour force statistics and Unemployment statistics and beyond.

This article is divided into two parts: the first part analyses the labour market using household information while the second part is dedicated to the labour market analysis at individual level.

Labour market analysis using household information

Main household types
The most common household type in the EU-28 in 2017, seen from a labour market perspective, was the household where all adults were working (44 % of all private households) (Figure 1). This was followed by the household where none of the adults were working (35 %). In the remaining 20 % of the households, at least one adult was working and at least one adult was not working.

Among the EU Member States, Sweden had the highest percentage of households where all adults were working (65 %), Greece the highest percentage of households where no adults were working (45 %) and Malta the highest percentage of households where at least one adult was working and at least one adult was not working (35 %).

For further information about household composition, please look at the Statistics Explained article Household composition statistics.

Figure 1: Private households by working status, 2017 (% of private household) - Source: Eurostat (lfst_hhnhwhtc)

Effect of having children

Another approach to household-based labour market analysis is to compare the situation of persons with and without children. Figures 2 and 3 are limited to persons aged 25-49 years, so that different national situations for pupils, students and retired do not influence the results and do not compromise the comparability between countries. In 2017 in the EU-28, more than 1 women in 3 with children worked on a part-time basis (36.1 %). Figure 2 shows that part-time work differs significantly between men and women. This difference by sex is even bigger for persons having children. In all countries, the proportion of women aged 25-49 having children who were employed on a part-time basis is higher than the same indicator for men. The gap between men with children and women with children for the part-time work rate was 30.8 p.p. in EU-28 in 2017. Concerning men and women without children this gap is lower (10.6 p.p.).

In Romania, Bulgaria, Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the difference men versus women and presence versus absence of children are the least visible. In these countries, part-time employment rates are low. On the other hand, the presence of children influences a lot the female part-time work rate in Germany (24.5 % of women without children worked on part-time vs. 65.6% of women with children), in Austria (29.3 % vs. 66.0 %) and in the United Kingdom (16.2 % vs. 52.7 %). This means that women in these 3 countries rather shift to part-time work when they have children.
Figure 2: Part-time employment by sex and existence of children, 2017 (% of employed aged 25-49) - Source: Eurostat (lfst_hhptechi)

Figure 3 shows that the part-time rate of women and men increase when they have young children (less than 6 years). In the EU-28, 39.3 % of women who are employed and who have young children, worked part-time in 2017. The corresponding figure for women who have children aged 6 years or more is 34.0 %. On the opposite, the part-time work rate of men is not affected by the age of the children: it nearly always stays below 10 %. In 26 of the 28 EU Member States, the part-time work rate of men with young children is less than 10 %. The only exceptions were in the Netherlands, where 15.2 % of men with young children worked on a part-time basis, and in Sweden (10.3 %).

Figure 3: Part-time employment by sex and age of the youngest child, 2017 (% of employed aged 25-49) - Source: Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey, special calculation made for this article.

Labour market analysis at individual level

Population by labour status

Infographic 1 shows the main sub-populations and their relative and absolute size, as they are defined in the Labour Force Survey (LFS). Among the total EU population in 2017, 380.2 million were aged 15-74 (which is the focus population for employment and unemployment). Of these, 245.8 million were economically active; 134.4 million were consequently economically inactive. Furthermore, 227.0 million persons were in employment.
while 18.8 million were unemployed. Among people in employment, employees (192.0 million) far outnumbered self-employed (32.7 million), and full-time work (181.3 million) was much more common than part-time work (45.7 million).

Employees versus self-employed

The vast majority of persons who are working are employees, namely 85.0% of the EU-28 population aged 15-74 in 2017 (Figure 4). Some differences exist across countries but the general pattern holds for all of them: employees outnumber self-employed by a wide margin everywhere. In only four countries is the proportion of employees below 75% (Romania, Greece as well as the candidate countries Serbia and Turkey). Seven countries have more than nine out of ten working persons as employees (Denmark, Luxembourg, Sweden, Germany, Estonia, Hungary as well as the EFTA country Norway).
One in ten persons in employment was self-employed without employees (own-account workers) (10.3 %) and 4.1 % was an employer (self-employed with employees) in the EU-28 in 2017. The levels nevertheless differ substantially between countries, as own-account workers make up close to a quarter of persons in employment in Greece (22.8%) and only 4.7% in Denmark. Self-employed with employees are less common, ranging from 1.1 % in Romania to 7.3 % in Greece.

Figure 5 shows that 48.1 % of the employees were women in the EU-28 in 2017 (and 51.9 % of the employees were men). Consequently, we are close to the gender balance for the rate of employees. Among EU Member States, the percentage of women among employees ranges from 52.8 % in Lithuania to 43.0% in Malta.

When it comes to self-employed, the picture changes markedly, especially for the self-employed with employees. At EU level, there were about two self-employed men without employees for each self-employed woman without employees in 2017 (34.5 % of self-employed without employees were women) and about three self-employed men with employees for each self-employed woman with employees in 2017 (26.7 % of self-employed with employees were women). In Malta less than one self-employed with employees in six was a women (16.2 %) and in Turkey less than 9 % of the self-employed with employees were women in 2017.

For further information about the self-employed persons, please look at the Statistics Explained article Self-employment statistics.

Working hours in the main job
The usual working week for employed people, considering only their main job, in the EU in 2017 was 37.1 hours. Among EU Member States, the longest working weeks can be found in Greece (42.0 hours per week) and the shortest in the Netherlands (30.3 hours per week). If all EU-LFS participating countries are taken into account, the longest working weeks were recorded in Turkey (46.4 hours per week) (Map 1). It is important to note that these numbers are influenced by the proportion of the work force which works part-time (more part-time means lower average hours), the composition of the economic activities (working weeks are longer for farmers, construction workers, manufacturing workers), the proportion of self-employed (self-employed work longer hours) and the activity rate of women (women have a higher rate of part-time work).

Map 1: Average number of usual weekly hours of work in the main job (2017, hours) - Source: Eurostat (lfsa_ewhun2)
When only full-time employees are considered, the EU average working week in the main job in 2017 corresponds to 40.2 hours (Map 2). Men had a longer working week than women, working on average 40.9 hours compared with 39.3 hours for women. Those in the mining and quarrying industry worked the longest hours (42.0 hours), while the shortest working week is to be found in the education sector (38.0 hours). Looking at countries’ situation, only one EU Member State (the United Kingdom, 42.1 hours) had an average working week (full-time employees) superior to 42 hours. Outside the EU, full-time employees had an average working week larger than 42 hours in five countries: the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (42.3 hours), Serbia (42.9 hours), Montenegro (43.6 hours), Iceland (44.0 hours) and Turkey where 49.1 hours per week were recorded. Most of the countries (18 countries) had full-time employees working between 40 and less than 42 hours per week; this group mainly contains Eastern countries.

Economically inactive persons

In order to complement the analysis of the employment and unemployment rates, this section looks at the inactivity rate, which informs on the percentage of economically inactive persons out of the total adult population in the country. These people can stay outside the labour market for many different reasons: they can be for instance in education, retired, staying at home to look after children, ill or incapacitated dependants.

Figure 6 shows that the situation of men and women in 2017 in the EU-28 was very similar to each other for inactivity due to education and inactivity due to retirement. In the age group 15-24, 49.1 % of men were economically inactive due to education, and 52.3 % of women. In the older age group (50-74 years), the share
of inactivity because of retirement or illness was 39.4% for men and 40.4% for women. However, when it comes to staying outside the labour market because of family obligations, the shares for men and women differ widely. For persons aged 25-49, only 0.6% of men were economically inactive for this reason in 2017 whereas the corresponding percentage for women was more than 17 times higher, i.e. 10.3%.  

Figure 6: Economically inactive persons, by main reason for being inactive, age and sex, EU-28, 2017 (% of people aged 15-74) - Source: Eurostat (lfsa_igar)

Discouraged job seekers can be found among economically inactive people (Figure 7). They are those who would have liked to work, but have given up looking for a job because they believe that it is not possible to find one. It is a key point to understand that a high inactivity rate will push the unemployment rate down, as it takes these persons out of the equation for the unemployment rate. At the EU level the discouraged job seekers made up 0.9% of men and 1.3% of women aged 15-74 in 2017.

Figure 7: Discouraged job-seekers by sex, 2017 (% of people aged 15-74) - Source: Eurostat (lfsa_igar)

There are notable differences between countries: Portugal, Italy and Croatia as well as the candidate country Serbia and Montenegro have relatively many discouraged job seekers, whereas this group of persons is quasi non-existent in Austria and in the United Kingdom. In 20 EU Member States, women are more frequently
discouraged job-seekers than men. This gap is the largest in Portugal (2.1 p.p.) followed by Italy (1.6 p.p.) and Croatia (1.4 p.p.). However, in seven EU Member States (Bulgaria, Latvia, Finland, Estonia, Ireland, Lithuania and the United Kingdom) men tend to be more often discouraged job-seekers than women.

A more comprehensive analysis of all the aspects of underemployment is published at Underemployment and potential additional labour force statistics.

Foreign workers in the EU

Another interesting analysis of the labour market concerns the influence of the country of birth on the employment rate. Figure 8 shows that during the period 2006-2017 the EU-born migrants (those born in a different EU Member State to the one in which they were living) recorded systematically higher employment rates than the non-EU-born migrants (migrants born outside the EU) and the native-born population (those born in the same country as the one in which they were living). Until 2008, the non-EU-born migrants have slightly higher employment rates than the native-born population but starting from 2009 onwards, the employment rate of non-EU-born migrants falls under the one of the native-born population.

In 2017, the EU-28 employment rate for the EU-born migrants aged 15-74 was 65.4%, which was 5.7 pp higher than the rate recorded for native-born population (59.7%) and 8.5 p.p. higher than for non-EU-born migrants (56.9%).

Figure 8: Employment rate by country of birth, 2006-2017 (% people aged 15-74) - Source: Eurostat (lfsa_ergacob)

Figures 9 shows the employment rate of EU-born migrants aged 15-74 by sex. In EU-28, the employment rate of men born in another EU Member State that their country of residence was 72.1 % in 2017, whereas it was 59.3% for women (gap 12.8 p.p.). In all countries the employment rate of males EU-born migrants was superior to the employment rate of female EU-born migrants. This gap is the largest in Greece (20.9 p.p.) followed by Latvia (19.4 p.p.) while the gap is the smallest in Slovenia (2.5 p.p.). Portugal and Iceland are the only countries where both male and female rates are higher than 75 %.
Figure 9: Employment rate of EU-born migrants by sex, 2017 (% people aged 15-74) - Source: Eurostat (lfsa_ergacob)

Figure 10: Employment rate of non-EU born migrants by sex, 2017 (% people aged 15-74) - Source: Eurostat (lfsa_ergacob)

Figure 10 illustrates the gender gap in the employment rate for the non-EU born migrants. The employment rate of female non-EU-born migrants is lower than the employment rate of male non-EU-born migrants in all countries except in Cyprus. In 7 of the 27 EU Member States for which data are available in 2017 (no data available for Romania), the employment gap is larger than 20 p.p. (namely Czechia, Malta, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, Italy, Greece and Belgium). In Turkey the gap even reaches 45.3 p.p. with only 18.0 % of female non-EU-born migrants in employment. In three EU Member States, the employment rate for female non-EU-born migrants was less than 40 %: Greece (39.3 %), France (39.1 %) and Belgium (36.8 %).

A more in-depth analysis of migrant statistics is published at Migrant integration statistics.

Data sources

Source: the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) is a large sample, quarterly survey providing results for the population in private households in the EU, EFTA and the candidate countries. Conscripts in military or community service are not included in the results.

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

Coverage: The data for France cover the metropolitan territory (excluding overseas regions). 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), the United Kingdom (UK), Iceland (IS), Norway (NO), Switzerland (CH), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (MK), Turkey (TR). The abbreviation MK used for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a provisional code which does not prejudice in any way the definitive nomenclature for this country, which will be agreed following the conclusion of negotiations currently taking place on this subject at the United Nations.

European aggregates: EU refers to the sum of EU-28 Member States and EA to the sum of the 19 euro area 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.

Definitions: The concepts and definitions used in the survey follow the guidelines of the International Labour Organisation.

Employment covers persons aged 15 years and over (16 and over in Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom, 15-74 years in 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. 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.

- Self-employed persons with employees are defined as persons who work in their own business, professional practice or farm for the purpose of earning a profit, and who employ at least one other person.

- Self-employed persons without employees are defined as persons who work in their own business, professional practice or farm for the purpose of earning a profit, and who do not employ any other person.

- Employees are defined as persons who work for a public or private employer and who receive compensation in the form of wages, salaries, fees, gratuities, payment by results or payment in kind; non-conscripted members of the armed forces are also included.

- 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;

- Unemployment covers persons aged 15-74 (16-74 in Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and Iceland) who were not employed during the reference week, were currently available for work and had either been actively seeking work in the past four weeks or had already found a job starting within the next three months.

- Reason for inactivity is the main reason why somebody is not seeking employment. The main reason may or may not be the only reason. Only the main one is retained for analysis in this article.

Definitions of indicators reported in this publication are available on the EU-LFS Statistics Explained website: [EU Labour Force Survey (Statistics Explained)]

Context

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 is an important source of information about the situation and trends in the EU labour market.

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.
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