Labour market and Labour force survey (LFS) statistics

Private households by working status, 2018 (% of private household) - Source: Eurostat (lfs_hnhwhhtc)

This article presents some of the main results from 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 (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) and four candidate countries (Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey).

This article complements the articles Employment Statistics, Employment rates and Europe 2020 national targets, Underemployment and potential additional labour force statistics and Unemployment statistics and beyond. It consists of two sections: the first part focuses on the labour market characteristics using household information, while the second part is dedicated to specific individual components.

Labour market analysis using household information

In most households all adults are working

The most common household type in the EU-28 in 2018, seen from a labour market perspective, was the household where all adults were working (45.0 % of all private households) (Figure 1). This was followed by the household where none of the adults were working (35.0 %). In the remaining 20.0 % of the households, at least one adult was working.

Among the EU Member States, in 2018, Sweden had the highest percentage of households where all adults were working (64.3 %), Greece had the highest percentage of households where no adults were working (44.4 %) and Croatia had the highest percentage of households where at least one adult was working (34.1 %).
For further information about household composition see: Statistics Explained article Household composition statistics.

Figure 1: Private households by working status, 2018 (% of private household) - Source: Eurostat (lst_hhnhwhtc)

Having children affects the part-time employment rate

Whether or not a person has children in the household does effect the way he or she participates in the labour market. The number of children and the age of the youngest child influence furthermore the participation in the labour market. Figures 2 and 3 show these effects for the male and female population separately, as these differ considerably. Note that all results are limited to persons aged 25-49 years, so that different national situations for being a pupil, student and/or retired person do not influence the results and do not compromise the comparability between countries.

In 2018, more than 1 in 3 women (aged 25-49 years) with children worked on a part-time basis in the EU-28 (35.4 %). Figure 2 shows that the share of part-timers differs greatly between men and women and that this difference by gender becomes even bigger when persons have children. In all countries, the proportion of women with children that are employed on a part-time basis is higher compared to men. The gap between men and women with children for the part-time work rate was 30.3 percentage points (p.p.) in the EU-28 in 2018. Concerning men and women without children, the gap is smaller (10.6 p.p.).

In Romania and North Macedonia, differences between men and women and between people with and without children, are rather small. In these two countries, the proportion of part-time workers is low. In Denmark, Finland, Greece, Slovenia and Portugal, there are almost no differences in the share of part-time work between women with or without children. However, the most common pattern is that having children does influence the female part-time work rate. For example, in Germany 24.2 % of women without children worked part-time in 2018 vs. 65.3 % of women with children, in Austria these rates were 28.1 % vs. 65.6 % and in the United Kingdom 15.5 % vs. 51.3 %. This suggests that women in these countries tend to shift to part-time work from the moment they have children.
The age of their youngest child further influences the proportion of women working part-time, as shown in Figure 3. In the EU-28, 39.1% of women (aged 25-49 years) in employment and having one or more children, of which the youngest child is 5 years or younger, worked part-time in 2018. The corresponding figures for women where the youngest child is 6-11 years old and 12 years or older is 36.3% and 29.0% respectively. By contrast, the part-time work rate of men (aged 25-49 years) having children is, relatively seen, not affected by the age of the youngest child: it nearly always stays below 10%. The only exception is in the Netherlands, where 17.3% of men with a youngest child of 5 years or younger, 13.2% with a youngest child aged 6-11 years and 12.2% with a youngest child aged 12 years or older, worked on a part-time basis. In addition, the Swedish part-time employment rate of men having their youngest child aged 5 years or younger (9.8%) is more than twice that of men having their youngest child aged 6-11 years (4.7%) and aged 12 years or more (3.5%).

Moreover, the higher the number of children in a household, the higher the part-time employment rate of both men and women, especially where the youngest child is aged 11 years or younger.

Figure 3: Part-time employment by sex and age of the youngest child, 2018 (% of employed aged 25-49 years) - Source: Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey, special calculation made for this article.

Labour market analysis at individual level

Labour force sub-populations

The main sub-populations and their relative and absolute size, as defined in the Labour Force Survey (LFS) are shown in Infographic 1. Among the total EU population in 2018, 380.4 million were aged 15-74 years (which is the focus age interval for employment and unemployment) and 246.7 million of them were in the labour force (also called economically active population): 133.8 million were consequently outside the labour force. Furthermore, 229.8 million persons were in employment, while 16.9 million were unemployed. Among people in employment, employees (195.0 million) outnumbered self-employed persons (32.6 million) by far, and full-time work (183.9 million) was much more common than part-time work (45.9 million).
Employees versus self-employed persons

Of the working population, the vast majority of persons are employees, namely 84.9% of the EU-28 population aged 15-74 in 2018 (Figure 4). In general, employees outnumber self-employed persons by a wide margin in all EU-28 countries. The proportion of employees is below 75% in only four countries (in Romania and Greece, as well as in the candidate countries Serbia and Turkey). Five countries have more than nine out of ten working persons as employees (Denmark, Luxembourg, Sweden, Germany as well as the EFTA country Norway).
One in ten persons (10.2%) in employment was self-employed without employees (own-account workers) and 4.0% were self-employed with employees (an employer) in the EU-28 in 2018. However, the levels differ substantially between countries; in Greece own-account workers make up close to a quarter of persons in employment (22.2%) while in Denmark the same group accounts for 4.5%. Self-employed persons with employees are less common, ranging from 1.1% in Romania to 7.6% in Greece.

In the EU-28, 48.1% of employees (15-74 years) were women in 2018, and 51.9% men (Figure 5). Consequently, the 28 EU Member States are close to the gender balance for the rate of employees. However, shares differ between EU Member States: the percentage of women among employees ranges from 52.0% in Lithuania to 43.5% in Malta.

When it comes to self-employed people, 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 2018 (34.7% of self-employed persons without employees were women) and almost three self-employed men with employees for each self-employed woman with employees (26.6% of self-employed persons with employees were women). In Malta, one in five self-employed persons with employees was female (21.4%) and in Turkey this was less than 9% in 2018.

For additional information about self-employed persons, see the article [Self-employment statistics](https://europa.eu/).
Considering the main job, the average working week of employed people in the EU-28 in 2018 consisted of 37.1 hours. Among EU Member States, the longest working week can be found in Greece (42.0 hours per week) and the shortest in the Netherlands (30.4 hours per week). If all EU-LFS participating countries are taken into account, the longest working weeks are recorded in Turkey (45.7 hours per week) (Map 1). It is important to note that these numbers are influenced by several components, e.g. 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 the 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 (2018, hours) - Source: Eurostat (lfsa_ewhun2)
Map 2: Average number of usual weekly hours of work in the main job - full time employees (2018, hours)- Source: Eurostat (lfsa_ewhun2)

When only full-time employees are considered, the EU average working week in the main job in 2018 corresponds to 40.2 hours (Map 2). Men had a longer working week than women, working on average 42.1 hours compared with 39.8 hours for women. Those in the mining and quarrying industry worked the longest hours (42.4 hours), while the shortest working week is to be found in the education sector (38.2 hours). Looking at national level, only one EU Member State, the United Kingdom (42.0 hours) had an average working week (full-time employees) of 42 hours or more. Outside the EU, almost all full-time employees had an average working week longer than 42 hours (Norway and Switzerland were the exceptions). North Macedonia (42.0 hours per week were recorded), Serbia (42.8 hours), Iceland (43.8 hours), Montenegro (44.2 hours) and Turkey (48.5 hours). The majority of the EU Member States (17 countries) had full-time employees working between 40 and less than 42 hours per week.

Being outside the labour force due to education, illness, retirement or care responsibilities

In order to complement the analysis of the employment and unemployment rates, the following part focuses on people outside the labour force. The inactivity rate gives an indication of the percentage of people outside the labour force out of the total adult population in a country. People can be 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 dependents.

Figure 6 shows the situation of men and women in 2018 in the EU-28 as regards being outside the labour force due to education and due to retirement. No particular difference can be observed between sexes. In the
age group 15-24, 49.3 % of men were outside the labour force due to education, in comparison to 52.4 % of women. In the older age group (50-74 years), the share of inactivity because of retirement or ill health was 38.9 % for men and 40.0 % for women. However, when it comes to family obligations, the shares for men and women differ widely. In 2018, for persons aged 25-49, only 0.3 % of men were outside the labour force because they had to look after children or incapacitated adults, with the same percentage due to other family or personal responsibilities. The corresponding shares for women were, respectively, more than 24 and 10 times higher, i.e. 7.3 % and 3.0 %.

Figure 6: People outside the labour force, by main reason, age and sex, EU-28, 2018 (% of people aged 15-74) - Source: Eurostat (lfsa_igar)

Discouraged job seekers can be found among people outside the labour force (Figure 7). These are people who would like to work, but have given up looking for a job because they believe that it is not possible to find one. It is key 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 EU level, the discouraged job seekers made up 0.8 % of men and 1.2 % of women aged 15-74 in 2018.

Figure 7: Discouraged job-seekers by sex, 2018 (% of people aged 15-74) - Source: Eurostat (lfsa_igar)

There are notable differences between countries: Portugal and Italy as well as the candidate countries Serbia and Montenegro have relatively many discouraged job seekers. This group of persons, however, is almost non-existent in Czechia, Denmark, the United Kingdom and Luxembourg. In 13 EU Member States, women are more frequently discouraged job-seekers than men. This gap is the largest in Portugal (2.3 p.p.) followed by...
Italy (1.4 p.p.), Spain (0.8 p.p.) and Croatia (0.7 p.p.). However, in five EU Member States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Hungary and Ireland) men tend to be more often discouraged job-seekers than women. In the remaining countries there are no differences between sexes.

A more comprehensive analysis of all the aspects of underemployment is published in the article 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 2006-2018, the EU-born migrants (those born in a different EU Member State than the one they live in) recorded systematically higher employment rates than the non-EU-born migrants (migrants born outside the EU) and the native-born population (persons born in the same country as the one they living in). Until 2008, the non-EU-born migrants have slightly higher employment rates than the native-born population. Starting from 2009 onwards, the employment rate of non-EU-born migrants falls under that of the native-born population.

In 2018, the EU-28 employment rate for the EU-born migrants aged 15-74 years, was 66.4 %; this is 6.2 p.p. and 8.2 p.p. higher than the rate recorded for native-born population (60.6 %) and non-EU-born migrants (58.3 %) respectively.

![Figure 8: Employment rate by country of birth, 2006-2018 (% people aged 15-74 years) - Source: Eurostat (lfsa_ergacob)](image-url)

The employment rate of EU-born migrants aged 15-74 years crossed by gender is shown Figure 9. In the EU-28, the employment rate of men born in an EU Member State other than the country of residence was 73.3 % in 2018. For women, this was 60.3 % (gender gap of 13.0 p.p.). In all countries the employment rate of male EU-born migrants was higher than the employment rate of female EU-born migrants. This gap is the largest in Slovakia (42.9 p.p.) and the smallest in Lithuania (2.2 p.p.). Portugal and Iceland are the only countries where both male and female rates are higher than 75 %.
The gender gap in the employment rate for the non-EU born migrants is illustrated in Figure 10. The employment rate of female non-EU-born migrants is lower than the employment rate of male non-EU-born migrants in all countries. In 3 out of the 27 EU Member States for which data are available in 2018 (data for non-EU-born women for Romania have very low reliability), the gender gap is larger than 20 p.p. (namely Bulgaria, Italy and Greece). In Turkey the gap even reaches 42.3 p.p. with only 20.8 % of female non-EU-born migrants in employment. In four EU Member States, the employment rate for female non-EU-born migrants was less than 45 %: Greece (37.9 %), France (40.6 %), Belgium and Croatia (both 40.7 %).

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

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 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), Montenegro (ME), North Macedonia (MK), Serbia (RS) and Turkey (TR).

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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