

# Unemployment statistics and beyond

Statistics Explained

*Data from April 2020.  
Planned article update: April 2021.*

This article presents annual statistics on [unemployment](#) in the [European Union \(EU\)](#) , as well as a brief analysis of underemployment and the potentially available [labour force](#) . A separate [article on unemployment statistics](#) presents the monthly unemployment figures for the European Union (EU), the [euro area](#) and individual Member States. An [article on Labour market slack – annual statistics on unmet needs for employment](#) is also available, focusing on the three measures of labour market attachment supplementing the unemployment rate.

Unemployment levels and rates move in a cyclical manner, largely related to the general [business cycle](#) . However, other factors such as [labour market](#) policies and demographic changes may also influence the short and long-term development of unemployment.

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 \(Labour Force Survey\) \(employ\)](#) ), while the text refers to data from April 2020.

## How has unemployment evolved in the last 15 years ?

The interactive line chart (see Tool 1) shows how the unemployment rate has changed since 2005 by country. By clicking on the icons at the bottom of the tool, development for specific breakdowns of the unemployment rate can be observed: from left to right, you can switch from the total population to women, men, youth and senior population, respectively.

The unemployment rate for the total population aged 15-74 decreased between 2005 and 2019 by 2.9 percentage points (p.p.) in the EU-27, from 9.6 % to 6.7 %. Twenty EU Member States recorded lower unemployment rate in 2019 compared with 2005. The decrease was largest in Poland (14.5 p.p), followed by Slovakia (10.5 p.p.), Germany (8.0 p.p.), Croatia (6.1 p.p.), Bulgaria and Czechia (both 5.9 p.p.). On the other hand, some EU Member States recorded an increase of their unemployment rate between 2005 and 2019, where the largest increases can be found in Greece (7.3 p.p.), Spain (4.9 p.p), Italy (2.3 p.p.) and Cyprus (1.8 p.p.).

Countries have consequently experienced very different labour market situations in the period between 2005 and 2019. In 2008, the financial crisis took place. Unemployment then increased between 2008 and 2009 in all EU Member States, with Latvia (+9.8 p.p.), Estonia and Lithuania (both +8.0 p.p.), Spain (+6.6 p.p.) and Ireland (+5.8 p.p.) being the most impacted countries. At EU level, the unemployment rate jumped from 7.2 % in 2008 to 9.1 % in 2009, and then rose constantly until 2013, reaching 11.4 %. In the 5-year period between 2008 and 2013, the unemployment rate increased more than fourfold in Cyprus (from 3.7 % in 2008 to 15.9 % in 2013) and more than trebled in Greece (from 7.8 % in 2008 to 27.5 % in 2013), while it doubled in 9 other EU Member States over the same period. The highest unemployment rate recorded in that 5-year period was 27.5 % in Greece in 2013.

Since 2013, unemployment has decreased overall in the EU Member States. In 2018, the EU-27 unemployment rate returned to the level of 2008 (7.2 %) and continued to decrease in 2019. There were 14.2 million persons unemployed in the EU-27 in 2019, corresponding to 6.7 % of the total labour force. This is 1.2 million persons fewer than in 2018.

### **Differences persist between men and women**

The unemployment rate of women and men between 2005 and 2019 for each country is available in the second and third icons of Tool 1. For a large majority of years and countries, women record a higher unemployment rate than men. This is also true for the EU-27 as a whole, where the gender unemployment gap has nevertheless narrowed from 1.8 p.p. in 2005 to 0.6 p.p. in 2019.

Looking at the particular situation of each country, differences are visible as regards the unemployment gender gap. Greece is the EU Member State where the unemployment rate of women is the highest compared to that of men; between 2005 and 2019 the gap was always greater than 6 p.p. but slightly decreased from 9.2 p.p. to 7.5 p.p. in that period. By contrast, Latvia and Romania always recorded in the last 15 years a higher unemployment rate for men than for women. This was also the case for Estonia, except in 2019 where the unemployment rate was lower for men than for women by 0.7 p.p. In 2019, the unemployment gender gap was smaller than 1 percentage point in 17 of the 27 EU Member States.

### **Youths are more exposed to unemployment than seniors**

Tool 1 shows that the youth unemployment rate (persons between 15 and up to 24 years old) has always been higher than the total unemployment rate (persons aged 15-74) for all countries since 2005 (comparing data via the fourth and the first icon of Tool 1). However, this is the opposite for persons aged 55-74: in most countries the senior unemployment rate has been lower than the total unemployment rate (comparing data via the fifth and the first icon of Tool 1); only Germany and the Netherlands recorded higher unemployment rates for older people in several consecutive years.

The younger members of the labour force were severely hit by the financial and economic crisis in 2008. The youth unemployment rate then followed an upward path peaking at 24.4 % in 2013, but since then it has steadily decreased to 15.0 % in 2019, the lowest rate since 2005. Nevertheless, the youth unemployment rate was still in 2019 very high in Greece (35.2 %), Spain (32.5 %), Italy (29.2 %) and Sweden (20.1 %). France was the next Member State with a high youth unemployment rate; this is particularly true when including the overseas departments: the 2019 youth unemployment rate for France metropolitan is 19.0 % while it reached 19.6 % when the overseas departments are added.

The unemployment rate of persons aged 15-24 (youth) and 55-74 (senior) decreased at EU level between 2005 and 2019. The decrease in the senior unemployment rate is particularly visible in Germany, Slovakia and Poland (a decrease of more than 7 p.p.). On the other hand, Greece, Spain and Cyprus recorded the largest increase in the unemployment rate of persons aged 55-74 in that period.

High youth unemployment rates reflect, to some degree, the difficulties faced by young people in finding jobs. However, this does not necessarily mean that the group of unemployed persons aged between 15 and 24 is large, as many young people, as opposed to older people, are studying full-time and are therefore neither working nor looking for a job (so they are not part of the labour force which is used as the denominator for calculating the unemployment rate). For this reason, the youth unemployment ratio is calculated as an alternative indicator for the purpose of analysis — it presents the share of unemployed youths among the whole youth population.

Table 1 shows that the youth unemployment ratio in the EU-27 was, unsurprisingly, much lower than the youth unemployment rate. The EU-27 youth unemployment ratio shows that 5.9 % of those aged 15-24 were unemployed in 2019, down from 7.0 % in 2017.

## Youth unemployment rate and ratio, 2017-2019

(%)

|                              | Percentage of active population |      |      | Percentage of total population |      |      |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|------|------|--------------------------------|------|------|
|                              | 2017                            | 2018 | 2019 | 2017                           | 2018 | 2019 |
| EU-27                        | 17.9                            | 16.0 | 15.0 | 7.0                            | 6.3  | 5.9  |
| EA-19                        | 18.6                            | 16.8 | 15.6 | 7.4                            | 6.7  | 6.3  |
| <b>Belgium</b>               | 19.3                            | 15.8 | 14.2 | 5.4                            | 4.7  | 4.4  |
| <b>Bulgaria</b>              | 12.9                            | 12.7 | 8.9  | 3.4                            | 3.0  | 2.1  |
| <b>Czechia</b>               | 7.9                             | 6.7  | 5.6  | 2.5                            | 2.0  | 1.7  |
| <b>Denmark</b>               | 12.4                            | 10.5 | 10.1 | 7.5                            | 6.3  | 6.1  |
| <b>Germany</b>               | 6.8                             | 6.2  | 5.8  | 3.4                            | 3.1  | 3.0  |
| <b>Estonia</b>               | 12.1                            | 11.8 | 11.1 | 5.6                            | 5.6  | 4.9  |
| <b>Ireland</b>               | 14.4                            | 13.8 | 12.5 | 6.7                            | 6.4  | 5.9  |
| <b>Greece</b>                | 43.6                            | 39.9 | 35.2 | 10.9                           | 9.3  | 7.9  |
| <b>Spain</b>                 | 38.6                            | 34.3 | 32.5 | 12.9                           | 11.3 | 10.7 |
| <b>France</b>                | 22.1                            | 20.8 | 19.6 | 8.2                            | 7.8  | 7.2  |
| <b>France (metropolitan)</b> | 21.5                            | 20.1 | 19.0 | 8.0                            | 7.6  | 7.1  |
| <b>Croatia</b>               | 27.4                            | 23.7 | 16.6 | 9.8                            | 7.9  | 5.5  |
| <b>Italy</b>                 | 34.7                            | 32.2 | 29.2 | 9.1                            | 8.4  | 7.6  |
| <b>Cyprus</b>                | 24.7                            | 20.2 | 16.6 | 9.0                            | 7.9  | 6.4  |
| <b>Latvia</b>                | 17.0                            | 12.2 | 12.4 | 6.8                            | 4.6  | 4.5  |
| <b>Lithuania</b>             | 13.3                            | 11.1 | 11.9 | 4.6                            | 4.1  | 4.4  |
| <b>Luxembourg</b>            | 15.4                            | 14.2 | 17.0 | 4.7                            | 4.7  | 5.9  |
| <b>Hungary</b>               | 10.7                            | 10.2 | 11.4 | 3.5                            | 3.3  | 3.7  |
| <b>Malta</b>                 | 10.6                            | 9.1  | 9.2  | 5.6                            | 5.1  | 5.1  |
| <b>Netherlands</b>           | 8.9                             | 7.2  | 6.7  | 6.1                            | 4.9  | 4.7  |
| <b>Austria</b>               | 9.8                             | 9.4  | 8.5  | 5.5                            | 5.3  | 4.8  |
| <b>Poland</b>                | 14.8                            | 11.7 | 9.9  | 5.2                            | 4.1  | 3.5  |
| <b>Portugal</b>              | 23.9                            | 20.3 | 18.3 | 8.1                            | 6.9  | 6.3  |
| <b>Romania</b>               | 18.3                            | 16.2 | 16.8 | 5.5                            | 4.8  | 5.0  |
| <b>Slovenia</b>              | 11.2                            | 8.8  | 8.1  | 4.4                            | 3.4  | 2.9  |
| <b>Slovakia</b>              | 18.9                            | 14.9 | 16.1 | 6.3                            | 4.8  | 4.8  |
| <b>Finland</b>               | 20.1                            | 17.0 | 17.2 | 10.7                           | 9.0  | 9.3  |
| <b>Sweden</b>                | 17.9                            | 17.4 | 20.1 | 9.8                            | 9.4  | 11.1 |
| <b>United Kingdom</b>        | 12.1                            | 11.3 | 11.2 | 7.0                            | 6.4  | 6.3  |
| <b>Iceland</b>               | 7.9                             | 6.1  | 8.7  | 6.5                            | 4.9  | 6.9  |
| <b>Norway</b>                | 10.4                            | 9.7  | 10.0 | 5.6                            | 5.3  | 5.5  |
| <b>Switzerland</b>           | 8.1                             | 7.9  | 8.0  | 5.5                            | 5.4  | 5.3  |
| <b>Montenegro</b>            | 31.7                            | 29.4 | 25.2 | 9.9                            | 9.7  | 9.2  |
| <b>North Macedonia</b>       | 46.7                            | 45.4 | 35.6 | 15.3                           | 14.5 | 11.4 |
| <b>Serbia</b>                | 31.9                            | 29.7 | 27.5 | 9.8                            | 8.9  | 8.2  |
| <b>Turkey</b>                | 20.5                            | 20.2 | 25.2 | 8.9                            | 8.8  | 11.2 |

Source: Eurostat (online data code: une\_rt\_a)

eurostat 

Table 1: Youth unemployment rate and ratio, 2017-2019(%)Source: Eurostat (une\_rt\_a)

### How does educational level affect unemployment ?

Unemployment rates also vary considerably according to the level of educational attainment (see Tool 2, which shows results for people aged 25-74). Unemployment rates tend to be higher for persons with lower levels of educational attainment (when compared with persons having a tertiary level of educational attainment). This can be observed in all EU Member States in all years from 2005.

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 to have 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).

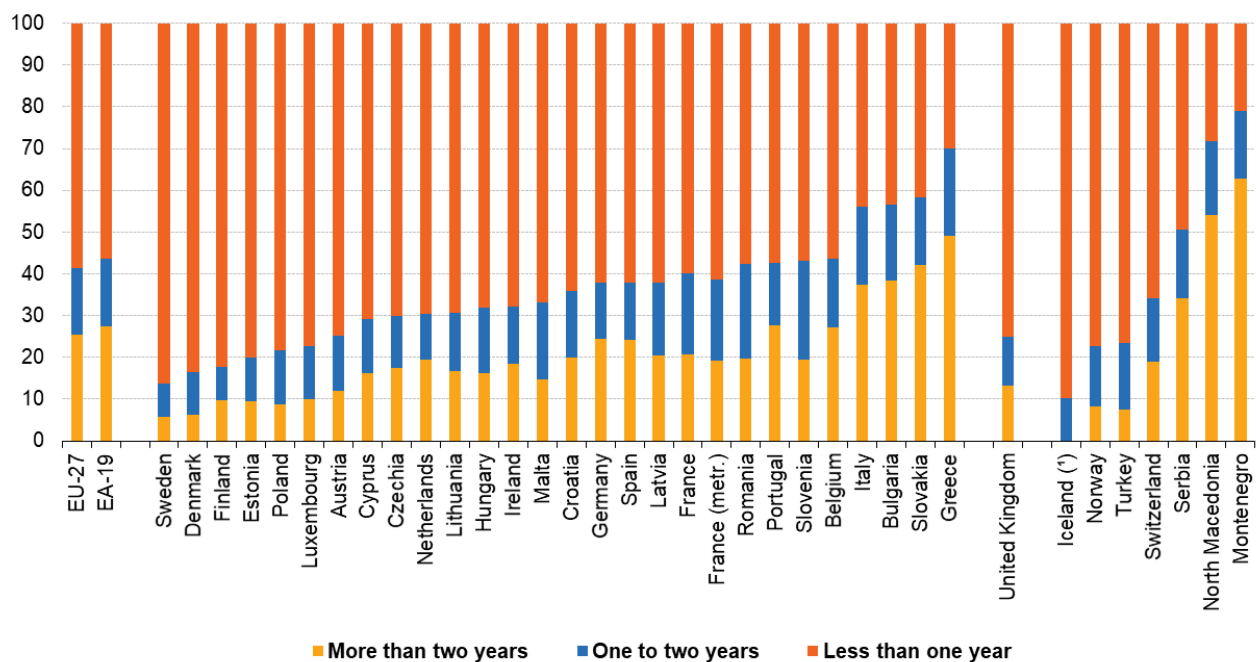
At EU-27 level, the unemployment rate of persons having a low level of education attainment increased from 10.7 % in 2005 to 12.0 % in 2019, while it decreased for those having a high level of educational attainment from 4.9 % to 3.9 %. The gap in unemployment rates between those who had attained a high or a low educational attainment level had consequently widened from 5.8 p.p. in 2005 to 8.1 p.p. in 2019 in the EU-27.

Among the EU Member States, the gap between those who had attained a tertiary level of education and those who had attained at most a lower secondary education was particularly pronounced in 2019 in Slovakia (25.8 p.p.), Lithuania (15.6 p.p.), Sweden (11.5 p.p.), Bulgaria (11.1 p.p.) and Spain (10.7 p.p.). On the other hand, the gap was narrowest in Malta (1.0 p.p.), Cyprus and Portugal (both 1.4 p.p.). The situation in France is also worth noting: there was a smaller gap in France metropolitan (7.9 p.p.) than in the whole France with the overseas departments (8.6 p.p.) due to a lower unemployment rate in France metropolitan for those who had attained at most a lower secondary education (12.5 % versus 13.2 %), while the unemployment rate for those with a tertiary level of education is exactly the same when including or excluding the French overseas departments (4.6 %).

## What about long-term unemployment ?

Long-term unemployment is one of the main concerns of policy-makers. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of the unemployed by unemployment duration. At EU level, more than half (58.6 %) of those unemployed have been unemployed for less than one year. However, this average hides large differences between EU Member states. More than 86 % of the unemployed in Sweden were in this group, followed by Denmark (83.6 %), Finland (82.4 %) and Estonia (80.0 %). Greece is on the other end of the scale, with 29.9 %, followed by Slovakia (41.8 %), Bulgaria (43.4 %) and Italy (44.0 %). In Greece in 2019 about half of the unemployed persons were looking for a job for more than 2 years, followed by 42.2 % in Slovakia and 38.4 % in Bulgaria.

## Unemployment by duration (among persons aged 15-74 years), 2019 (%)



(\*) 2018 instead of 2019.  
Source: Eurostat (une\_ltu\_a)



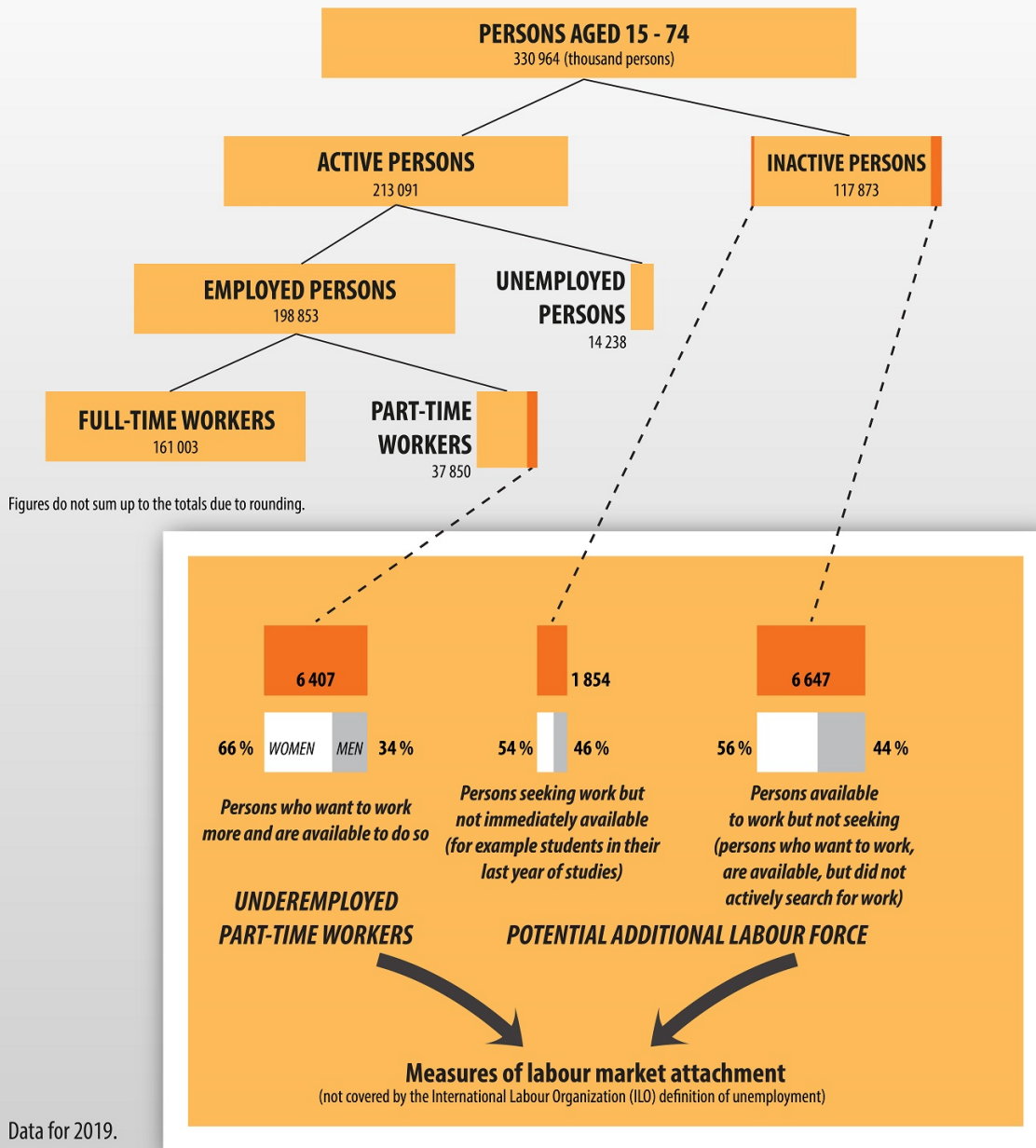
Figure 1: Unemployment by duration, 2019(%)Source: Eurostat (une\_ltu\_a)

### Beyond unemployment: underemployment and potential additional labour force

Infographic 1 presents a graphical description of the populations included in the supplementary indicators, their absolute and relative sizes, and their relation to the other main groups covered by the labour force survey. In 2019, the 6.4 million underemployed part-time workers are a sub-population of the 37.9 million part-time workers. The 8.5 million persons in the potential additional labour force are a sub-population of the 117.9 million inactive persons.

# EU LABOUR MARKET 2019

## UNDEREMPLOYMENT AND POTENTIAL ADDITIONAL LABOUR FORCE



[ec.europa.eu/eurostat](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat)

Infographic 1: The EU labour market

### Source data for tables and graphs

- [Unemployment statistics and beyond: tables and figures](#)

### 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.

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

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 unemployment rate, which serve different purposes and which in some cases differ from each other:

1) The **main indicators** , which are seasonally adjusted. They have only a few breakdowns and normally refer to the age group 20-64 for employment and to the age group 15-74 for unemployment. 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 indicators from the "main indicators" set.

## Unemployment

Eurostat publishes unemployment statistics based on a definition of unemployment provided by the [International Labour Organisation \(ILO\)](#) for which there are three criteria, namely:

- being without work;
- actively seeking work;
- and being available for work.

The ILO 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.

There is currently no legal basis for producing and disseminating monthly unemployment data and few countries actually supply monthly unemployment data and few countries actually supply monthly unemployment figures directly from the LFS. Nevertheless, Eurostat calculates monthly data for many countries by using additional monthly figures from unemployment registers. The quarterly LFS results are always used as a benchmark to ensure international comparability.

Monthly unemployment figures are published by Eurostat as rates (as a percentage of the labour force) or levels (in thousands), by sex and for two age groups (persons aged 15 to 24, and those aged 25 to 74). The figures are available as unadjusted, [seasonally adjusted](#) and as a [trend](#) series. The [time series](#) for data for the EU-28 and the euro area (EA-19) aggregates start in 2000; the starting point for individual EU Member States

varies.

Quarterly and annual unemployment figures from the LFS are also published, with more detailed breakdowns (for example, a wider range of age groups, by nationality, or by educational attainment); there are also figures available on long-term unemployment (unemployed for more than 12 months) and very long-term unemployment (unemployed for more than 24 months).

Unemployment rates are also presented according to the educational attainment of the population. The different levels of education are defined by the United Nations International Standard Classification of Education ([ISCED 2011](#)).

### Underemployment and potential additional labour force

Many persons only partially fulfil the three unemployment criteria above and are therefore not considered as unemployed. In order to provide information on people who are not unemployed, Eurostat also publishes indicators on the following groups.

- Underemployed part-time workers: persons working part-time who wish to work additional hours and are available to do so.
- The potential additional labour force: jobless persons who want to work and are either available to work or are searching for work but not both at the same time. This group includes, among others, discouraged job seekers and persons prevented from job seeking due to personal or family circumstances. This group is split into two groups: persons seeking work but not immediately available; persons available to work but not seeking work.

## 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.

Time series for unemployment are used by the [European Commission](#), other public institutions, and the media as an economic indicator, while banks may use the data for [business cycle](#) analysis. Finally, there is interest among the general public for information concerning 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 workers 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 developments appear to have an ever-increasing effect on daily life, and the demand for different types of labour and skills changes, sometimes 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 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 were 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.



The financial and economic crisis and the subsequent slow pace of recovery reversed much of the progress achieved in European labour markets. In response to increasingly high levels of unemployment, the European Commission launched in April 2012 a set of measures to boost jobs, the so called [Employment package](#) .

One of the main concerns for policymakers was the high level of youth unemployment recorded in many of the EU Member States. Aside from the focus on youth unemployment within the flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 strategy, the EU subsequently agreed on a range of follow-up initiatives which aim to reduce youth unemployment. The [Youth employment package](#) (2012) built on actions in the Employment package and included:

- a proposal — adopted by the Council in April 2013 — that all EU Member States should establish a [Youth guarantee](#) (which should ensure that every young person aged less than 25 should get a good-quality, concrete job offer within four months of them leaving formal education or becoming unemployed);
- renewed consultation with EU social partners on establishing a quality framework for traineeships;
- co-ordinating the [European alliance for apprenticeships](#) , by bringing together public authorities, businesses, social partners, training providers, youth representatives, and other key actors in order to promote apprenticeship schemes and initiatives across Europe.

The [Youth employment initiative](#) (2013) reinforced and accelerated measures in this field, aiming to support young people who are not in education and employment or training in those regions where youth unemployment rates are above 25 %.

## Other articles

- [Job vacancy statistics](#)
- [Labour market and household statistics](#)
- [Labour market statistics at regional level](#)
- [Participation of young people in education and the labour market](#) (background article)
- [Labour market slack – annual statistics on unmet needs for employment](#)
- [Unemployment statistics](#)
- [Unemployment statistics at regional level](#)
- [Youth unemployment](#) (background article)

## Publications

- [Unemployment news release August 2019](#)

## Tables

- [Employment and unemployment \(Labour force survey\) \(t\\_employ\)](#) , see:

LFS main indicators (t\_lfsi)

Unemployment - LFS adjusted series (t\_une)

LFS series - detailed annual survey results (t\_lfsa)

Unemployment rates of the population aged 25-64 by educational attainment level (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 onwards) (lfsq)

Total unemployment - LFS series (lfsq\_unemp)

LFS series - Detailed annual survey results (lfsa)

Total unemployment - LFS series (lfsa\_unemp)

## Dedicated section

- [Employment and unemployment \(LFS\)](#)

## Methodology

- [Labour force survey \(LFS\) – Main concepts](#)
- [Labour Force Survey in the EU, candidate and EFTA countries - Main characteristics of national surveys, 2014](#) (publication)
- [Unemployment - LFS-adjusted series](#) (ESMS metadata file — une\_esms)

## External links

- [International Labour Organisation](#)
- [OECD — Employment outlook](#)

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