

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

The unemployment rate is one measure of the extent of labour market slack, as well as being an important indicator of economic and social well-being. Breakdowns of unemployment by gender show how women are faring compared to men.

Definition

Unemployed persons are defined as those who report that they are without work, that they are available for work and that they have taken active steps to find work in the last four weeks. The ILO Guidelines specify what actions count as active steps to find work; these include answering vacancy notices, visiting factories, construction sites and other places of work, and placing advertisements in the press as well as registering with labour offices.

The unemployment rate is defined as the number of unemployed persons as a percentage of the labour force, where the latter consists of the unemployed plus those in paid or self-employment.

Overview

When looking at total unemployment rates averaged over the three years ending 2014, countries can be divided into three groups: a low unemployment group with rates below 5% (Korea, Norway, Japan, Switzerland and Mexico); a middle group with unemployment rates between 5% and 10%; and a high unemployment group with unemployment rates of 10% and above (Italy, Ireland, the Slovak Republic, Portugal, South Africa, Spain and Greece).

In almost two thirds of countries, unemployment rates decreased in 2014, with marked declines (by more than 1.5 percentage point) in Hungary, Portugal, Ireland and Spain.

The breakdown of unemployment by gender shows that, in line with the overall rate, OECD unemployment rates for both men and women was significantly higher in 2014 than in 2008. The unemployment rate for men, which had been lower than the rate for women in 2008, rose considerably faster and by 2009 was higher than the rate for women. This is first explained by the fact that job losses over the early stages of the crisis were particularly severe in sectors which traditionally have been occupied by men – namely construction, manufacturing and mining and quarrying. Between 2009 and 2010, the rise in the overall OECD unemployment rates decelerated faster for men, and between 2010 and 2014, the men to women unemployment ratio has decreased in about two third of the countries. However, in 2014, the rate for men was still higher than the rate for women in about half of the countries.

When unemployment is high, some persons become discouraged and stop looking for work; they are then excluded from the labour force. This implies that the unemployment rate may fall, or stop rising, even though there has been no underlying improvement in the labour market.

Comparability

All OECD countries use the ILO Guidelines for measuring unemployment in their national labour force surveys. The operational definitions used in national labour force surveys may, however, vary slightly across countries. Unemployment levels are also likely to be affected by changes in the survey design and the survey conduct. Despite these limits, unemployment rates are of good international comparability and fairly consistent over time.

Unemployment rates differ from rates derived from registered unemployed at labour offices that are often published in individual countries. Data on registered unemployment have limited international comparability, as the rules for registering at labour offices vary from country to country.

There are series breaks due to a major redesign of the national labour force survey in Chile between 2009 and 2010, in Israel between 2011 and 2012 and in Turkey between 2013 and 2014. For Israel there was a change from a quarterly to a monthly survey as well as a change in concept from “civilian” to “total” labour force.

Sources

- OECD (2015), *Main Economic Indicators*, OECD Publishing.
- For non-member countries: National sources.

Further information

Analytical publications

- OECD (2015), *OECD Employment Outlook*, OECD Publishing.
- Venn, D. (2012), “Eligibility Criteria for Unemployment Benefits”, *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, No. 131.

Statistical publications

- OECD (2014), *OECD Labour Force Statistics*, OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2014), *Society at a Glance: OECD Social Indicators*, OECD Publishing.

Online databases

- *OECD Employment and Labour Market Statistics*.

Websites

- Employment policies and data, www.oecd.org/employment/emp.
- Labour statistics, www.oecd.org/employment/labour-stats.



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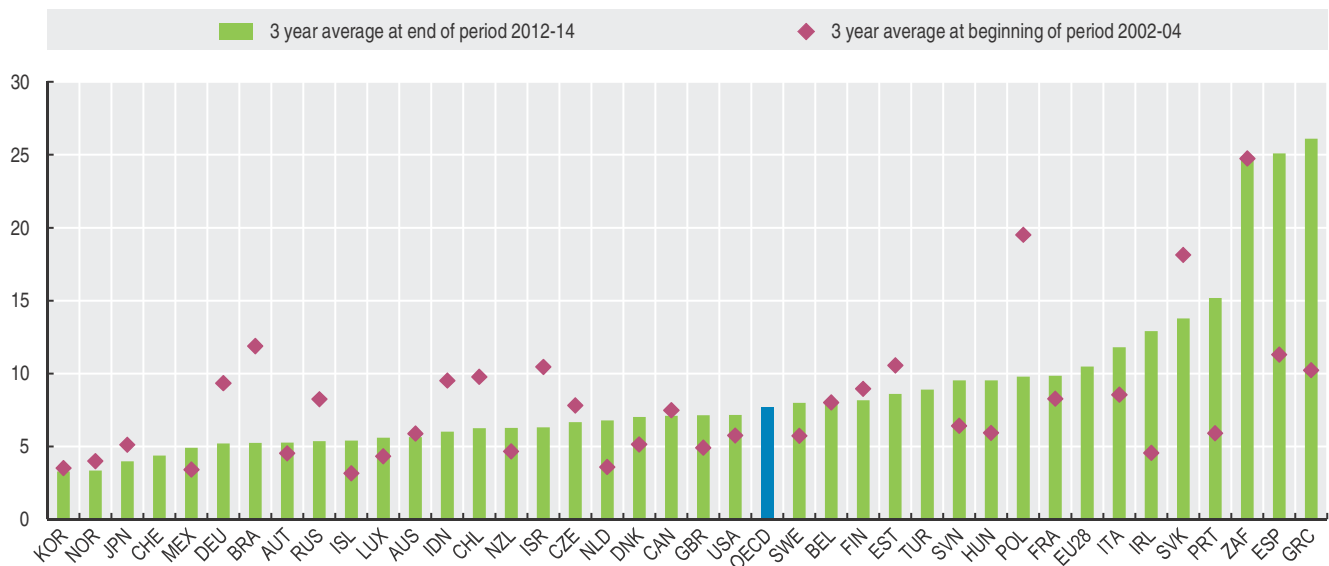
Unemployment rates

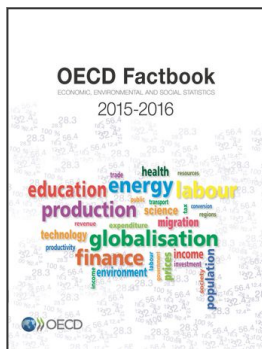
As a percentage of labour force

	Women				Men				Total			
	2000	2008	2013	2014	2000	2008	2013	2014	2000	2008	2013	2014
Australia	6.1	4.6	5.6	6.2	6.5	4.0	5.7	6.0	6.3	4.2	5.7	6.1
Austria	3.8	4.4	5.3	5.4	3.3	3.9	5.4	5.8	3.5	4.1	5.3	5.6
Belgium	8.7	7.6	8.2	7.9	5.8	6.5	8.6	9.0	7.0	7.0	8.4	8.5
Canada	6.7	5.6	6.6	6.4	7.0	6.6	7.5	7.4	6.8	6.1	7.1	6.9
Chile	10.3	9.5	6.9	6.9	9.3	6.8	5.3	6.0	9.7	7.8	5.9	6.4
Czech Republic	10.5	5.6	8.3	7.4	7.4	3.5	5.9	5.1	8.8	4.4	7.0	6.1
Denmark	5.2	3.7	7.3	6.8	4.1	3.2	6.7	6.4	4.6	3.4	7.0	6.6
Estonia	13.3	5.1	8.2	6.8	15.9	5.7	9.1	7.9	14.6	5.4	8.6	7.4
Finland	10.6	6.7	7.5	7.9	9.1	6.1	8.8	9.3	9.8	6.4	8.2	8.7
France	..	7.4	9.8	10.0	..	6.7	10.0	10.5	..	7.1	9.9	10.3
Germany	8.1	7.7	4.9	4.6	7.5	7.4	5.5	5.3	7.8	7.5	5.2	5.0
Greece	17.2	11.5	31.3	30.2	7.5	5.1	24.5	23.6	11.4	7.8	27.5	26.5
Hungary	5.6	8.0	10.1	7.9	7.1	7.7	10.2	7.6	6.4	7.8	10.2	7.7
Iceland	..	2.6	5.1	4.8	..	3.3	5.6	5.0	..	2.9	5.4	4.9
Ireland	4.2	4.9	10.7	9.4	4.4	7.5	15.0	12.8	4.3	6.4	13.0	11.3
Israel	9.2	6.5	6.3	5.9	8.4	5.7	6.2	5.9	8.8	6.1	6.2	5.9
Italy	14.5	8.5	13.1	13.8	8.1	5.5	11.5	11.9	10.6	6.7	12.1	12.7
Japan	4.5	3.9	3.7	3.4	4.9	4.1	4.3	3.8	4.7	4.0	4.0	3.6
Korea	3.7	2.6	2.9	3.5	5.0	3.6	3.3	3.6	4.4	3.2	3.1	3.5
Luxembourg	..	6.0	6.4	5.8	..	4.3	5.4	5.9	..	5.1	5.8	5.9
Mexico	..	4.1	5.0	4.9	..	3.8	4.9	4.8	2.5	3.9	4.9	4.8
Netherlands	3.8	3.0	7.3	7.7	2.3	2.5	7.2	7.1	2.9	2.8	7.2	7.4
New Zealand	6.0	4.3	7.0	6.6	6.3	4.1	5.6	5.1	6.2	4.2	6.2	5.8
Norway	3.2	2.4	3.2	3.2	3.4	2.7	3.6	3.7	3.3	2.5	3.4	3.5
Poland	18.1	8.0	11.1	9.6	14.4	6.4	9.7	8.5	16.1	7.1	10.3	9.0
Portugal	5.0	8.8	16.4	14.3	3.2	6.5	16.0	13.5	4.0	7.6	16.2	13.9
Slovak Republic	18.6	10.9	14.5	13.6	18.9	8.4	14.0	12.8	18.8	9.5	14.2	13.2
Slovenia	7.1	4.8	10.9	10.5	6.5	4.0	9.4	8.9	6.7	4.4	10.1	9.7
Spain	20.5	12.8	26.7	25.4	9.6	10.1	25.6	23.6	13.9	11.2	26.1	24.4
Sweden	..	6.6	7.9	7.7	..	5.9	8.2	8.2	..	6.2	8.1	8.0
Switzerland	..	..	4.5	4.7	..	..	4.3	4.4	..	..	4.4	4.5
Turkey	..	10.0	10.6	11.8	..	9.6	7.9	9.0	..	9.7	8.7	9.9
United Kingdom	5.0	5.1	7.0	5.8	6.1	6.1	8.0	6.4	5.6	5.6	7.5	6.1
United States	4.1	5.4	7.1	6.1	3.9	6.1	7.6	6.3	4.0	5.8	7.4	6.2
EU 28	..	7.4	10.9	10.3	..	6.6	10.8	10.1	..	7.0	10.8	10.2
OECD	..	6.0	7.9	7.5	..	5.8	7.8	7.3	..	5.9	7.9	7.3
Brazil	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	12.7	7.9	5.4	4.9
China	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
India	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Indonesia	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	6.1	8.4	6.0	5.8
Russian Federation	10.4	6.1	5.2	4.8	10.6	6.6	5.8	5.5	10.5	6.4	5.5	5.2
South Africa	26.5	25.9	26.7	27.2	20.4	19.9	23.1	23.3	23.3	22.5	24.7	25.1

 1 2 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933336753>
Unemployment rates: total

As a percentage of labour force


 1 2 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933335684>



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