

## 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 2011, countries can be divided into three groups: a low unemployment group with rates below 5% (Austria, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Norway, the Netherlands and Switzerland); a middle group with unemployment rates between 5% and 10%; and a high unemployment group with unemployment rates of 10% and above (Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, the Slovak Republic and Turkey).

In most OECD countries, unemployment rates grew over the last three years, with marked increases in Estonia, Greece, Ireland and Spain.

The breakdown of unemployment by gender shows that, in line with the overall rate, the unemployment rates for both men and women increased sharply from 2007 to 2010. The unemployment rate for men, which had been lower than the rate for women, 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 stage of the crisis were particularly severe in sectors which traditionally have been occupied by men – namely construction, manufacturing, mining and quarrying. Between 2009 and 2010, the rise in the overall OECD unemployment rates decelerated faster for men so that the men to women unemployment ratio began to decrease. In 2011, the OECD rate fell for the first time since the crisis began, and the rate for men had dropped back to a lower level than the rate for women.

The unemployment rates shown here 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.

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 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, the unemployment rates shown here are of good international comparability and fairly consistent over time.

### Sources

- OECD (2012), *Main Economic Indicators*, OECD Publishing.
- For non-member countries: National sources.

### Further information

#### Analytical publications

- OECD (2012), *OECD Employment Outlook*, OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2011), *Society at a Glance: OECD Social Indicators*, OECD Publishing.
- Venn, D. (2012), "Eligibility Criteria for Unemployment Benefits", *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, No. 131.

#### Statistical publications

- OECD (2011), *Labour Force Statistics*, OECD Publishing.

#### Online databases

- *OECD Employment and Labour Market Statistics*.

#### Websites

- OECD Employment Data, [www.oecd.org/els/employment/data](http://www.oecd.org/els/employment/data).
- OECD Employment Policies, [www.oecd.org/els/employment](http://www.oecd.org/els/employment).
- OECD Labour Statistics, [www.oecd.org/statistics/labour](http://www.oecd.org/statistics/labour).

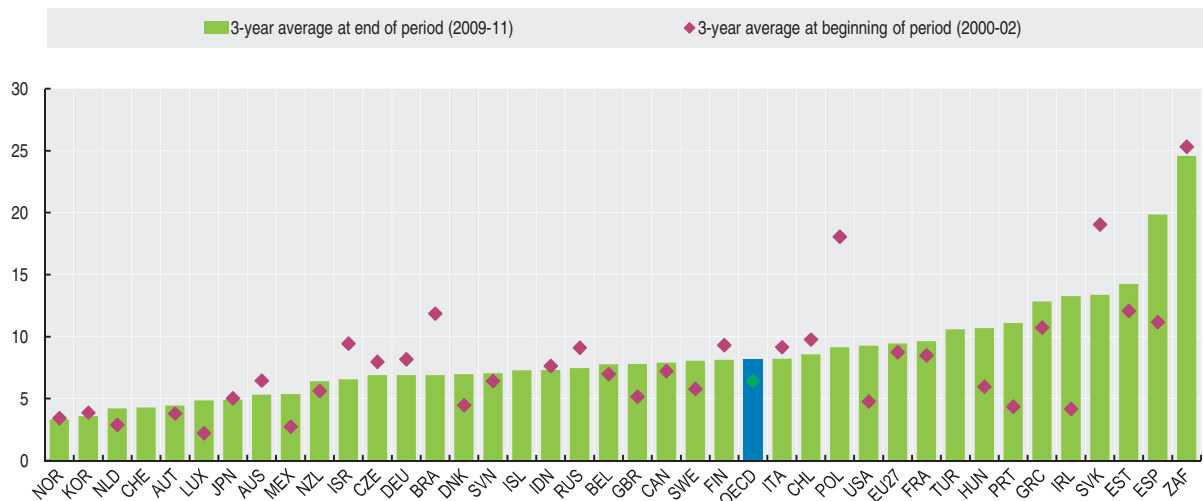


**Unemployment rates**  
As a percentage of labour force

	Women				Men				Total			
	2000	2008	2010	2011	2000	2008	2010	2011	2000	2008	2010	2011
Australia	6.1	4.6	5.4	5.3	6.5	4.0	5.1	4.9	6.3	4.2	5.2	5.1
Austria	4.3	4.1	4.2	4.3	3.1	3.6	4.6	4.0	3.6	3.8	4.4	4.1
Belgium	8.5	7.6	8.5	7.2	5.6	6.5	8.1	7.1	6.9	7.0	8.3	7.2
Canada	6.7	5.7	7.2	7.0	7.0	6.6	8.7	7.8	6.8	6.1	8.0	7.5
Chile	10.3	9.5	9.7	8.7	9.3	6.8	7.2	6.1	9.7	7.8	8.2	7.1
Czech Republic	10.3	5.6	8.4	7.9	7.3	3.5	6.4	5.8	8.7	4.4	7.3	6.7
Denmark	4.8	3.7	6.5	7.5	3.9	3.2	8.4	7.7	4.3	3.4	7.5	7.6
Estonia	12.7	5.2	14.3	11.8	14.7	5.8	19.5	13.1	13.7	5.5	16.9	12.5
Finland	10.6	6.7	7.6	7.1	9.1	6.1	9.1	8.4	9.8	6.4	8.4	7.8
France	10.8	8.4	10.2	10.3	7.5	7.3	9.4	9.2	9.0	7.8	9.8	9.7
Germany	8.4	7.7	6.6	5.7	7.8	7.4	7.5	6.2	8.0	7.5	7.1	5.9
Greece	17.1	11.4	16.2	21.4	7.4	5.1	9.9	15.0	11.2	7.7	12.6	17.7
Hungary	5.6	8.0	10.7	10.9	7.0	7.7	11.6	11.0	6.4	7.8	11.2	10.9
Iceland	..	2.6	6.7	6.2	..	3.3	8.3	7.9	..	3.0	7.6	7.1
Ireland	4.1	4.9	9.7	10.6	4.3	7.5	16.9	17.5	4.2	6.3	13.7	14.4
Israel	9.2	6.5	6.5	5.6	8.4	5.7	6.8	5.6	8.8	6.1	6.6	5.6
Italy	13.6	8.5	9.7	9.6	7.7	5.5	7.6	7.5	10.1	6.7	8.4	8.4
Japan	4.5	3.9	4.6	4.2	4.9	4.1	5.4	4.9	4.7	4.0	5.1	4.6
Korea	3.7	2.6	3.4	3.1	5.0	3.6	4.0	3.6	4.4	3.2	3.7	3.4
Luxembourg	2.9	5.9	5.5	6.2	1.8	4.1	3.8	3.9	2.2	4.9	4.6	4.9
Mexico	..	4.1	5.3	5.3	..	3.9	5.4	5.2	2.5	4.0	5.4	5.2
Netherlands	3.9	3.4	4.5	4.4	2.4	2.8	4.4	4.5	3.1	3.1	4.5	4.5
New Zealand	6.0	4.2	6.9	6.7	6.3	4.1	6.2	6.4	6.2	4.2	6.5	6.5
Norway	3.1	2.4	3.0	3.1	3.4	2.7	4.1	3.5	3.2	2.6	3.6	3.3
Poland	18.2	8.0	10.0	10.5	14.4	6.5	9.3	9.0	16.1	7.1	9.7	9.7
Portugal	5.0	9.0	12.1	13.2	3.2	6.6	10.0	12.7	4.0	7.7	11.0	12.9
Slovak Republic	18.7	11.0	14.7	13.7	19.1	8.4	14.3	13.6	18.9	9.6	14.5	13.6
Slovenia	7.0	4.8	7.1	8.2	6.5	4.0	7.4	8.2	6.7	4.4	7.3	8.2
Spain	17.0	13.0	20.5	22.2	8.2	10.1	19.7	21.2	11.7	11.3	20.1	21.6
Sweden	5.3	6.5	8.3	7.5	5.9	5.9	8.5	7.5	5.6	6.2	8.4	7.5
Switzerland	..	..	5.0	4.5	..	..	4.2	3.7	..	..	4.5	4.1
Turkey	..	10.0	11.4	10.1	..	9.6	10.4	8.3	..	9.7	10.7	8.8
United Kingdom	4.8	5.1	6.8	7.3	5.9	6.1	8.6	8.7	5.4	5.7	7.8	8.0
United States	4.1	5.4	8.6	8.5	3.9	6.1	10.5	9.4	4.0	5.8	9.6	9.0
EU 27	10.1	7.6	9.6	9.8	7.8	6.7	9.7	9.6	8.8	7.1	9.7	9.7
OECD	..	6.1	8.1	8.0	..	5.9	8.5	7.9	6.1	6.0	8.3	8.0
Brazil	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	12.7	7.9	6.8	6.0
China	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
India	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Indonesia	..	9.5	..	..	..	7.7	..	..	6.1	8.4	7.3	6.7
Russian Federation	10.4	6.1	6.9	6.2	10.6	6.6	8.0	7.0	10.5	6.4	7.5	6.6
South Africa	26.5	26.3	27.5	27.9	20.4	20.0	22.8	22.4	23.3	22.9	24.9	24.9

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932708693>

**Unemployment rates: total**  
As a percentage of labour force



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932708712>



**From:**  
**OECD Factbook 2013**  
Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics

**Access the complete publication at:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/factbook-2013-en>

**Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2013), "Unemployment rates", in *OECD Factbook 2013: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/factbook-2013-57-en>

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