

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

Most OECD countries publish unemployment rates that are based on the numbers of persons who are registered as unemployed at government labour offices. Because they are available soon after the end of the month or quarter to which they refer, the numbers of registered unemployed are treated as the “headline” unemployment figures by many countries. However, the rules for registering at labour offices vary from country to country, so that unemployment statistics based on this source are not comparable between countries. The unemployment rates shown here use ILO Guidelines that provide common definitions of unemployment and of the labour force.

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 and 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.

Long-term trends

In almost all countries, unemployment rates rose in the early part of the 1990s but have been falling since then. Falls have been particularly marked in Australia, Finland, Denmark and Canada.

There is no obvious pattern in the differences in unemployment rates for men and women. Unemployment rates for women are usually higher than for men, but in several countries unemployment rates for women are lower – Canada, Hungary, Korea, Sweden and the United Kingdom, for example. This is also true in Japan for the recent years. Part of the reason may be that women are more easily discouraged than men and so withdraw in larger numbers from the labour force when unemployment rises.

The charts shows unemployment rates averaged over the last decade. As regards total unemployment rates, countries can be divided into three groups: a low unemployment group with rates below 5% (Luxembourg to Japan); a middle group with unemployment rates between 5% and 8.5% (United States to Germany); and a high unemployment group with average rates of 10% and above (Italy to the Slovak Republic).

The unemployment rate is defined as the number of unemployed persons as a percentage of the civilian labour force, where the latter consists of the unemployed plus those in civilian employment, which are defined as persons who have worked for one hour or more in the last week.

When unemployment is high, some persons become discouraged and stop looking for work. They are then excluded from the labour force so 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, but the operational definitions used in national labour force surveys vary slightly in Iceland, Mexico and Turkey. Unemployment levels are also likely to be affected by changes in the survey design and/or the survey conduct, but unemployment rates are likely to be fairly consistent over time.

Source

- OECD (2006), *Main Economic Indicators*, OECD, Paris.

Further information

Analytical publications

- OECD (2006), *Society at a Glance: OECD Social Indicators – 2006 Edition*, OECD, Paris.

Statistical publications

- OECD (2004), *Quarterly Labour Force Statistics*, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2006), *OECD Employment Outlook*, OECD, Paris.

Online databases

- *Employment Statistics*.

Websites

- OECD Labour Statistics Database, www.oecd.org/statistics/labour.
- OECD Employment Policy, www.oecd.org/els/employment.

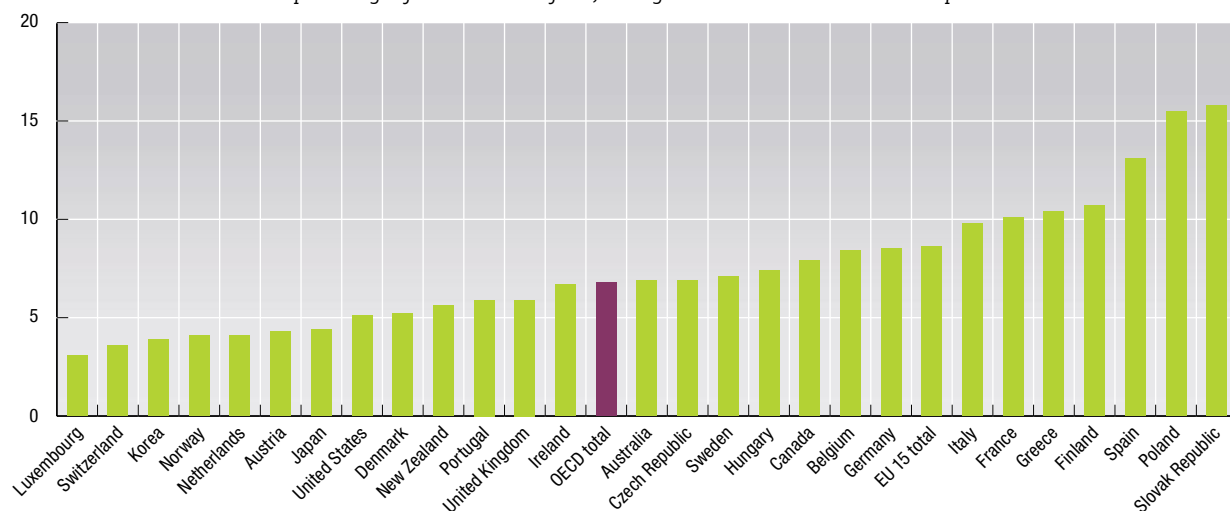

Unemployment rates: total

As a percentage of civilian labour force

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Australia	10.5	10.6	9.5	8.2	8.2	8.3	7.7	6.9	6.3	6.8	6.4	6.1	5.5	5.1
Austria	..	4.0	3.8	3.9	4.3	4.4	4.5	3.9	3.6	3.6	4.2	4.3	4.9	5.2
Belgium	7.1	8.6	9.8	9.7	9.5	9.2	9.3	8.5	6.9	6.6	7.5	8.2	8.4	8.4
Canada	11.2	11.4	10.4	9.5	9.6	9.1	8.3	7.6	6.8	7.2	7.7	7.6	7.2	6.8
Czech Republic	..	4.4	4.3	4.1	3.9	4.8	6.4	8.6	8.7	8.0	7.3	7.8	8.3	7.9
Denmark	8.6	9.6	7.7	6.8	6.3	5.2	4.9	5.1	4.3	4.5	4.6	5.4	5.5	4.8
Finland	11.7	16.4	16.9	15.2	14.6	12.7	11.3	10.2	9.7	9.1	9.1	9.0	8.9	8.4
France	9.9	11.1	11.7	11.1	11.6	11.5	11.1	10.5	9.1	8.4	8.9	9.5	9.6	9.9
Germany	6.4	7.7	8.3	8.0	8.5	9.2	8.8	7.9	7.2	7.4	8.2	9.1	9.5	9.4
Greece	7.8	8.6	8.9	9.1	9.7	9.6	11.1	12.0	11.3	10.8	10.3	9.7	10.5	9.8
Hungary	9.9	12.1	11.0	10.4	9.6	9.0	8.4	6.9	6.4	5.7	5.8	5.9	6.1	7.2
Ireland	15.4	15.6	14.3	12.3	11.7	9.9	7.5	5.7	4.3	4.0	4.5	4.7	4.5	4.4
Italy	8.8	9.8	10.6	11.2	11.2	11.2	11.3	11.0	10.1	9.1	8.6	8.4	8.0	7.7
Japan	2.2	2.5	2.9	3.1	3.4	3.4	4.1	4.7	4.7	5.0	5.4	5.3	4.7	4.4
Korea	2.5	2.9	2.5	2.1	2.0	2.6	7.0	6.6	4.4	4.0	3.3	3.6	3.7	3.7
Luxembourg	2.1	2.6	3.2	2.9	2.9	2.7	2.7	2.4	2.3	2.1	2.8	3.7	5.1	4.5
Netherlands	5.3	6.2	6.8	6.6	6.0	4.9	3.8	3.2	2.8	2.2	2.8	3.7	4.6	4.7
New Zealand	10.4	9.5	8.1	6.3	6.1	6.6	7.4	6.8	6.0	5.3	5.2	4.6	3.9	3.7
Norway	6.5	6.6	6.0	5.4	4.8	4.0	3.2	3.2	3.4	3.6	3.9	4.5	4.4	4.6
Poland	..	14.0	14.4	13.3	12.3	10.9	10.2	13.4	16.1	18.2	19.9	19.6	19.0	17.7
Portugal	4.3	5.6	6.9	7.3	7.3	6.8	5.1	4.5	4.0	4.0	5.0	6.2	6.7	7.6
Slovak Republic	..	..	13.7	13.1	11.3	11.9	12.6	16.3	18.8	19.3	18.7	17.6	18.2	16.3
Spain	14.7	18.3	19.5	18.4	17.8	16.7	15.0	12.5	11.1	10.4	11.1	11.1	10.6	9.2
Sweden	5.6	9.0	9.4	8.8	9.6	9.9	8.2	6.7	5.6	4.9	4.9	5.6	6.4	..
Switzerland	3.0	3.9	3.9	3.5	3.9	4.2	3.6	3.0	2.7	2.6	3.2	4.2	4.4	4.5
United Kingdom	9.7	10.2	9.3	8.5	7.9	6.8	6.1	5.9	5.4	5.0	5.1	4.9	4.7	4.8
United States	7.5	6.9	6.1	5.6	5.4	4.9	4.5	4.2	4.0	4.7	5.8	6.0	5.5	5.1
EU 15 total	9.1	10.1	10.4	10.1	10.1	9.9	9.3	8.5	7.6	7.2	7.6	8.0	8.1	7.9
OECD total	7.4	7.8	7.7	7.3	7.2	6.9	6.8	6.6	6.2	6.4	6.9	7.1	6.9	6.6

 StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/716703343438>
Unemployment rates: total

As a percentage of civilian labour force, average 1995-2005 or latest available period



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UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

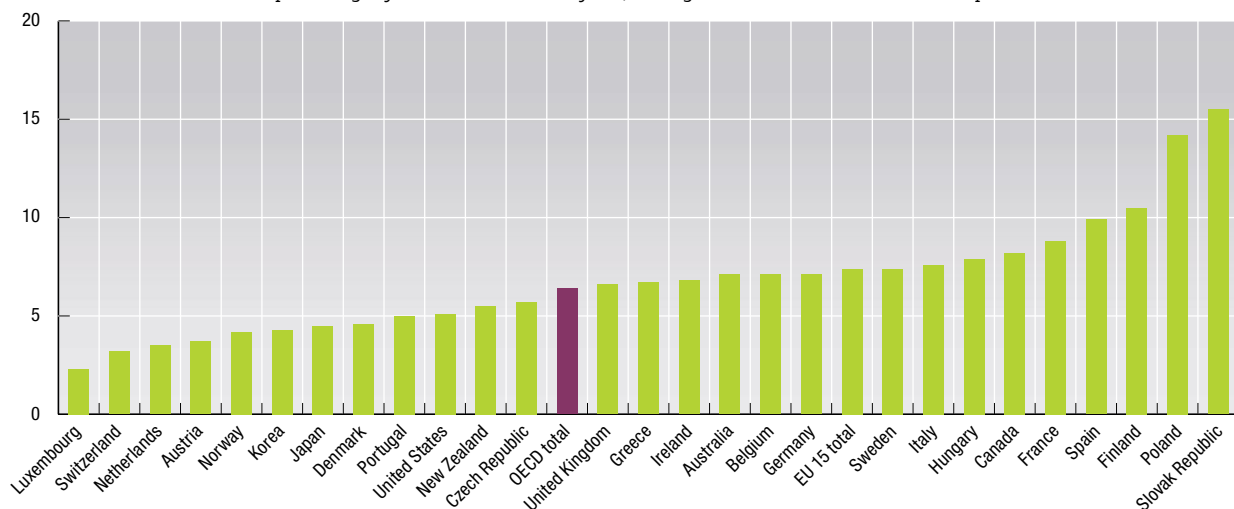

Unemployment rates: men

As a percentage of male civilian labour force

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Australia	11.2	11.4	9.9	8.7	8.5	8.6	8.1	7.2	6.5	7.1	6.6	5.9	5.5	5.0
Austria	..	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.6	3.6	3.8	3.3	3.1	3.2	4.0	4.0	4.5	4.9
Belgium	5.1	6.7	7.7	7.6	7.4	7.3	7.6	7.2	5.6	5.9	6.6	7.7	7.5	7.6
Canada	12.0	11.9	10.9	9.8	9.9	9.3	8.5	7.8	6.9	7.5	8.1	7.9	7.5	7.0
Czech Republic	..	3.5	3.7	3.5	3.4	4.0	5.0	7.3	7.3	6.7	6.0	6.2	7.1	6.5
Denmark	8.0	9.3	7.1	5.7	5.3	4.5	3.9	4.5	4.0	4.1	4.3	4.8	5.1	4.4
Finland	13.6	18.1	18.7	15.3	14.5	12.3	10.8	9.7	9.0	8.6	9.1	9.1	8.8	8.2
France	8.0	9.6	10.1	9.4	10.0	10.1	9.5	9.0	7.6	7.0	7.9	8.6	8.7	9.0
Germany	4.4	5.3	5.9	5.8	6.6	7.3	7.0	6.4	6.0	6.3	7.2	8.2	8.7	8.8
Greece	4.9	5.7	6.0	6.2	6.0	6.2	7.3	7.9	7.5	7.3	6.8	6.2	6.6	6.1
Hungary	11.0	13.5	12.3	11.8	10.2	9.7	9.0	7.5	7.0	6.3	6.2	6.1	6.1	7.0
Ireland	15.1	15.4	14.2	12.2	11.5	9.9	7.7	5.7	4.3	4.1	4.7	5.0	4.9	4.6
Italy	6.4	7.4	8.2	8.6	8.7	8.7	8.8	8.5	7.8	7.1	6.7	6.5	6.4	6.1
Japan	2.1	2.4	2.8	3.1	3.3	3.4	4.2	4.8	4.9	5.2	5.5	5.5	4.9	4.6
Korea	2.8	3.3	2.8	2.3	2.4	2.8	7.8	7.4	5.0	4.5	3.7	3.8	3.9	4.0
Luxembourg	1.7	2.2	2.6	2.0	2.2	2.0	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.7	2.1	3.0	3.7	3.5
Netherlands	4.1	5.4	6.0	5.5	4.7	3.7	3.0	2.3	2.3	1.8	2.5	3.5	4.3	4.4
New Zealand	11.0	10.1	8.5	6.2	6.1	6.6	7.5	7.0	6.1	5.3	5.0	4.3	3.5	3.4
Norway	7.2	7.3	6.6	5.7	4.7	3.9	3.1	3.4	3.6	3.7	4.1	4.9	4.8	4.8
Poland	..	12.7	13.1	12.1	11.0	9.1	8.5	11.8	14.4	16.9	19.1	19.0	18.2	16.6
Portugal	3.6	4.8	6.1	6.5	6.4	6.1	4.1	4.0	3.2	3.2	4.1	5.4	5.9	6.6
Slovak Republic	..	..	13.3	12.6	10.2	11.1	12.2	16.3	18.9	19.8	18.6	17.4	17.4	15.5
Spain	11.6	15.4	16.2	14.8	14.3	13.1	11.2	9.0	7.9	7.5	8.1	8.2	8.0	7.0
Sweden	6.7	10.6	10.8	9.7	10.2	10.3	8.3	6.6	5.9	5.2	5.3	6.0	6.6	..
Switzerland	2.4	3.3	3.4	3.0	3.6	4.3	3.2	2.6	2.2	2.0	3.0	3.9	4.0	3.9
United Kingdom	11.5	12.1	11.0	9.9	9.2	7.6	6.8	6.5	5.8	5.5	5.6	5.5	5.0	5.1
United States	7.9	7.2	6.2	5.6	5.4	4.9	4.4	4.1	3.9	4.8	5.9	6.3	5.6	5.1
EU 15 total	7.4	8.8	9.2	8.7	8.8	8.4	7.8	7.1	6.4	6.1	6.6	7.0	7.1	7.0
OECD total	..	..	7.2	6.7	6.6	6.3	6.3	6.1	5.7	6.0	6.6	6.8	6.6	6.2

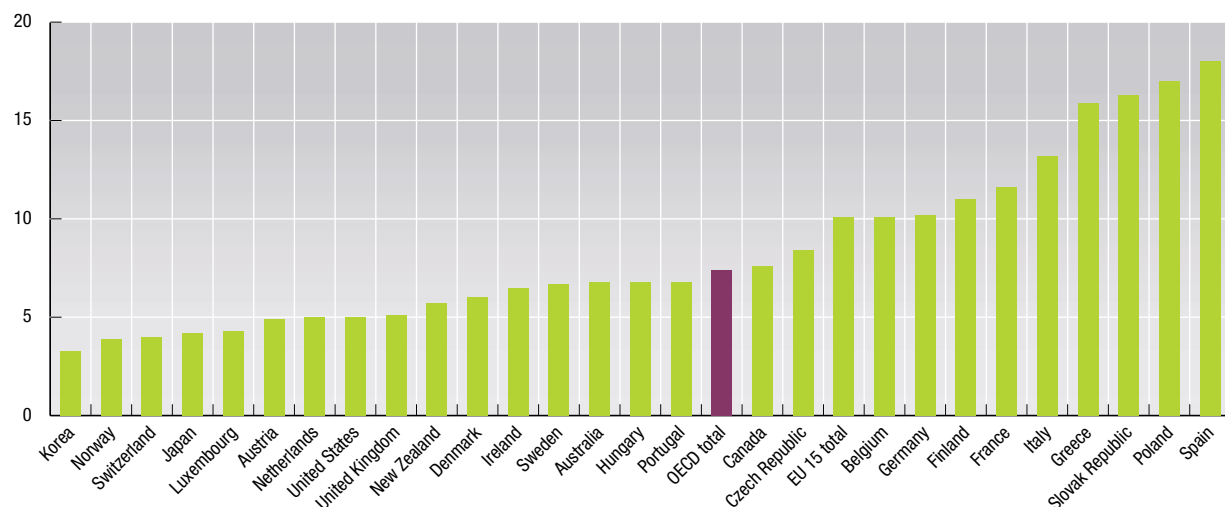
 StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/427421482475>
Unemployment rates: men

As a percentage of male civilian labour force, average 1995-2005 or latest available period


 StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/635031340604>


Unemployment rates: women
As a percentage of female civilian labour force

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Australia	9.5	9.8	9.0	7.9	7.9	8.1	7.5	6.8	6.2	6.6	6.2	6.2	5.7	5.3
Austria	..	5.1	5.0	5.0	5.3	5.4	5.4	4.7	4.3	4.2	4.5	4.7	5.3	5.5
Belgium	10.0	11.5	12.7	12.7	12.5	11.9	11.6	10.2	8.5	7.5	8.7	8.9	9.5	9.5
Canada	10.2	10.7	9.8	9.1	9.3	8.9	8.0	7.3	6.7	6.9	7.1	7.2	6.9	6.5
Czech Republic	..	5.4	5.2	4.8	4.7	5.9	8.0	10.3	10.4	9.7	9.0	9.9	9.9	9.8
Denmark	9.2	9.8	8.5	8.1	7.5	6.2	6.0	5.8	4.8	5.0	5.0	6.1	6.0	5.3
Finland	9.5	14.5	14.9	15.0	14.7	13.2	11.9	10.7	10.5	9.6	9.1	8.9	9.0	8.6
France	12.2	13.0	13.6	13.2	13.4	13.3	12.9	12.2	10.9	10.0	10.0	10.5	10.5	10.9
Germany	8.9	10.9	11.4	10.9	11.0	11.6	11.1	9.9	8.7	8.9	9.4	10.1	10.5	10.3
Greece	12.9	13.6	13.7	13.8	15.4	14.8	17.1	18.1	17.2	16.2	15.6	15.0	16.2	15.3
Hungary	8.7	10.4	9.4	8.7	8.8	8.1	7.7	6.3	5.6	5.0	5.4	5.6	6.1	7.4
Ireland	16.0	16.0	14.6	12.5	11.8	9.9	7.3	5.6	4.2	3.8	4.1	4.3	4.1	4.0
Italy	12.9	13.9	14.6	15.3	15.2	15.3	15.4	14.8	13.6	12.2	11.5	11.3	10.5	10.1
Japan	2.2	2.6	3.0	3.2	3.4	3.4	4.0	4.5	4.5	4.7	5.1	4.9	4.4	4.2
Korea	2.1	2.3	2.0	1.7	1.6	2.3	5.7	5.3	3.6	3.3	2.7	3.3	3.4	3.4
Luxembourg	2.8	3.3	4.1	4.3	4.2	3.9	4.0	3.3	3.1	2.7	3.8	4.7	7.0	5.9
Netherlands	7.2	7.4	7.9	8.1	7.7	6.6	5.0	4.4	3.6	2.8	3.1	3.9	4.8	5.1
New Zealand	9.5	8.8	7.6	6.3	6.1	6.6	7.4	6.5	5.8	5.3	5.3	5.0	4.4	4.0
Norway	5.7	5.7	5.3	5.1	4.8	4.2	3.3	3.1	3.2	3.4	3.6	4.0	4.0	4.4
Poland	..	15.6	16.0	14.7	13.9	13.0	12.2	15.3	18.1	19.8	20.9	20.4	19.9	19.1
Portugal	5.2	6.7	7.9	8.2	8.2	7.6	6.3	5.2	4.9	5.0	6.0	7.2	7.6	8.6
Slovak Republic	..	..	14.1	13.8	12.7	12.8	13.1	16.4	18.6	18.7	18.7	17.8	19.2	17.2
Spain	20.5	23.5	25.4	24.6	23.7	22.6	21.1	18.1	16.0	14.8	15.7	15.3	14.4	12.2
Sweden	4.4	7.3	7.8	7.9	9.0	9.5	8.0	6.8	5.3	4.5	4.6	5.2	6.1	..
Switzerland	3.7	4.7	4.5	4.1	4.2	4.1	4.0	3.5	3.2	3.4	3.4	4.5	4.9	5.1
United Kingdom	7.5	7.8	7.2	6.8	6.3	5.8	5.3	5.1	4.8	4.4	4.5	4.3	4.2	4.3
United States	7.0	6.6	6.0	5.6	5.4	5.0	4.6	4.3	4.1	4.7	5.6	5.7	5.4	5.1
EU 15 total	10.4	11.8	12.2	12.0	11.9	11.8	11.2	10.3	9.2	8.7	8.9	9.2	9.2	9.0
OECD total	..	..	8.3	8.0	7.9	7.7	7.6	7.3	6.8	6.9	7.4	7.5	7.3	7.1

 StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/170588788754>
Unemployment rates: women
As a percentage of female civilian labour force, average 1995-2005 or latest available period

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