

## 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 certain groups are faring compared to others and to the overall population.

### 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 employment.

The unemployment rates shown here differ from rates derived from registered unemployed at labour offices which 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.

### Overview

When looking at total unemployment rates averaged over the three years ending in 2008, countries can be divided into three groups: a low unemployment group with rates below 4.0% (Iceland, Norway, the Netherlands, Korea, Switzerland, Denmark, Mexico, and New Zealand); a middle group with unemployment rates between 4.0% and 8.5%; and a high unemployment group with unemployment rates of 8.5% and above (France, Germany, Poland, Slovak Republic, Spain, and Turkey).

In most OECD countries, unemployment rates averaged over the three years to 2008 were below those recorded in the three years to 1997, with marked declines in Finland, Ireland, Italy and Spain. These declines obviously preceded the global recession of 2008-2009, whose labour market impacts are described later in this volume.

There is no obvious pattern when looking at differences in unemployment rates for men and women. Unemployment rates for women are usually higher than for men, but the gap has narrowed more recently, with some countries either showing very little difference (Japan, Norway, Turkey and the United States) or having lower unemployment for women (the Slovak Republic, Spain, and Turkey) than for men. Part of the reason may be that, in these countries, women are more likely than men to withdraw from the labour force when unemployed.

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. 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 fairly consistent over time.

### Sources

- OECD (2010), *Main Economic Indicators*, OECD, Paris.
- For Non-Member Countries: National Sources.

### Further information

#### Analytical publications

- OECD (2007), *Society at a Glance: OECD Social Indicators – 2006 Edition*, OECD, Paris.

#### Statistical publications

- OECD (2004), *Quarterly Labour Force Statistics*, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2009), *OECD Employment Outlook*, OECD, Paris.

#### Online databases

- *Employment Statistics*.

#### Web sites

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



**Unemployment rates: total**

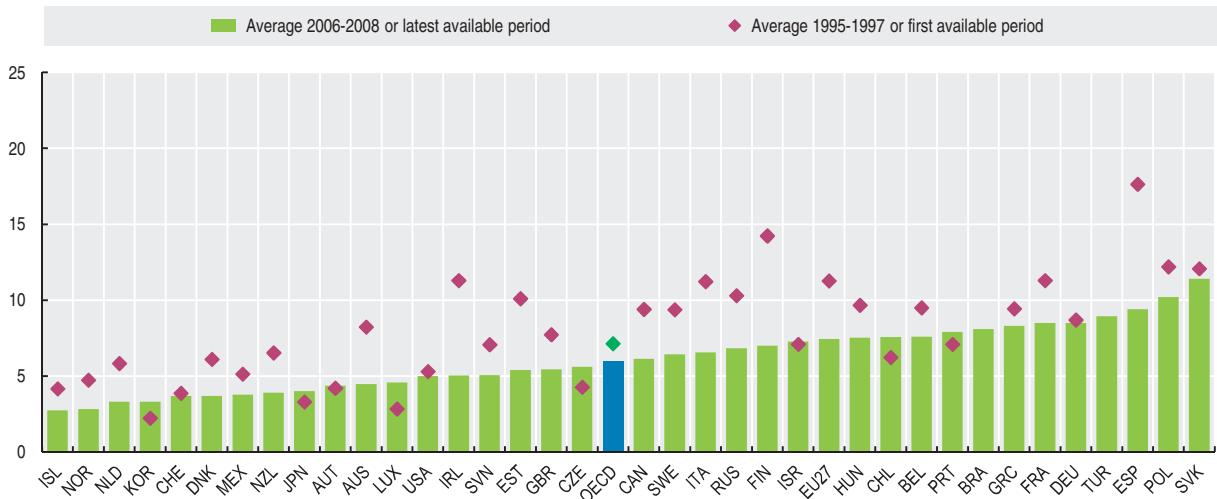
As a percentage of labour force

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Australia	8.2	8.2	8.3	7.7	6.9	6.3	6.8	6.4	5.9	5.4	5.0	4.8	4.4	4.2
Austria	3.9	4.3	4.4	4.5	3.9	3.6	3.6	4.2	4.3	4.9	5.2	4.8	4.4	3.9
Belgium	9.7	9.6	9.2	9.3	8.5	6.9	6.6	7.5	8.2	8.4	8.5	8.3	7.5	7.0
Canada	9.5	9.6	9.1	8.3	7.6	6.8	7.2	7.7	7.6	7.2	6.8	6.3	6.0	6.1
Czech Republic	4.1	3.9	4.8	6.4	8.6	8.7	8.0	7.3	7.8	8.3	7.9	7.1	5.3	4.4
Denmark	6.8	6.3	5.2	4.9	5.1	4.3	4.5	4.6	5.4	5.5	4.8	3.9	3.8	3.4
Finland	15.1	14.9	12.7	11.4	10.3	9.6	9.1	9.1	9.1	8.8	8.3	7.7	6.9	6.4
France	11.0	11.5	11.4	11.0	10.4	9.0	8.3	8.6	9.0	9.2	9.3	9.3	8.3	7.9
Germany	8.0	8.7	9.4	9.1	8.3	7.5	7.6	8.4	9.3	9.8	10.6	9.8	8.4	7.3
Greece	9.0	9.7	9.6	11.0	12.0	11.2	10.7	10.3	9.7	10.5	9.9	8.9	8.3	7.7
Hungary	10.4	9.6	9.0	8.4	6.9	6.4	5.7	5.8	5.9	6.1	7.2	7.4	7.4	7.8
Iceland	4.9	3.7	3.9	2.7	2.0	2.3	2.3	3.3	3.4	3.1	2.6	2.9	2.3	3.0
Ireland	12.3	11.7	9.9	7.6	5.7	4.4	3.9	4.5	4.8	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.6	6.0
Italy	11.2	11.2	11.3	11.4	11.0	10.2	9.1	8.6	8.5	8.0	7.7	6.8	6.1	6.8
Japan	3.1	3.4	3.4	4.1	4.7	4.7	5.0	5.4	5.3	4.7	4.4	4.1	3.9	4.0
Korea	2.1	2.0	2.6	7.0	6.6	4.4	4.0	3.3	3.6	3.7	3.7	3.5	3.2	3.2
Luxembourg	2.9	2.9	2.7	2.7	2.4	2.2	1.9	2.6	3.8	5.0	4.6	4.6	4.2	4.9
Mexico	6.2	5.5	3.7	3.2	2.5	2.5	2.8	3.0	3.4	3.9	3.6	3.6	3.7	4.0
Netherlands	6.6	6.0	4.9	3.8	3.2	2.8	2.2	2.8	3.7	4.6	4.7	3.9	3.2	2.8
New Zealand	6.5	6.3	6.8	7.7	7.0	6.1	5.4	5.3	4.8	4.0	3.8	3.8	3.7	4.2
Norway	5.5	4.8	3.9	3.1	3.0	3.2	3.4	3.7	4.2	4.3	4.5	3.4	2.6	2.5
Poland	13.3	12.4	10.9	10.2	13.4	16.2	18.3	20.0	19.7	19.0	17.8	13.8	9.6	7.2
Portugal	7.2	7.3	6.8	5.0	4.5	4.0	4.0	5.1	6.4	6.7	7.7	7.8	8.1	7.8
Slovak Republic	13.1	11.3	11.8	12.6	16.3	18.8	19.3	18.7	17.6	18.2	16.2	13.4	11.2	9.6
Spain	18.4	17.8	16.7	15.0	12.5	11.1	10.4	11.1	11.1	10.6	9.2	8.5	8.3	11.4
Sweden	8.8	9.5	9.8	8.1	6.7	5.6	5.9	6.1	6.8	7.6	7.7	7.0	6.1	6.2
Switzerland	3.5	3.9	4.2	3.5	3.0	2.6	2.6	3.2	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.0	3.6	3.5
Turkey	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	8.4	8.6	9.8
United Kingdom	8.5	7.9	6.8	6.1	5.9	5.4	5.0	5.1	5.0	4.7	4.8	5.4	5.3	5.6
United States	5.6	5.4	4.9	4.5	4.2	4.0	4.7	5.8	6.0	5.5	5.1	4.6	4.6	5.8
EU27 total	11.3	11.4	11.1	10.5	9.7	8.7	8.5	8.9	9.0	9.1	8.9	8.2	7.1	7.0
OECD total	7.3	7.2	6.9	6.8	6.7	6.2	6.5	7.1	7.3	7.1	6.8	6.2	5.7	6.1
Brazil	..	..	..	..	..	..	9.4	9.1	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.7	8.3	7.3
Chile	..	6.3	6.1	6.3	9.8	9.2	9.1	9.0	8.5	8.8	8.0	7.7	7.2	7.8
Estonia	..	..	9.7	9.2	11.4	12.8	12.3	10.3	10.0	9.6	7.9	5.9	4.7	5.6
Israel	6.9	6.7	7.7	8.5	8.9	8.8	9.4	10.3	10.7	10.4	9.0	8.4	7.3	6.1
Russian Federation	9.4	9.7	11.8	13.3	13.0	10.6	9.0	7.9	8.2	7.8	7.2	7.2	6.1	..
Slovenia	..	6.9	6.9	7.4	7.4	6.8	6.2	6.3	6.7	6.3	6.5	6.0	4.8	4.4

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**Unemployment rates: total**

As a percentage of labour force



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/820615781567>

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

Unemployment rates: men

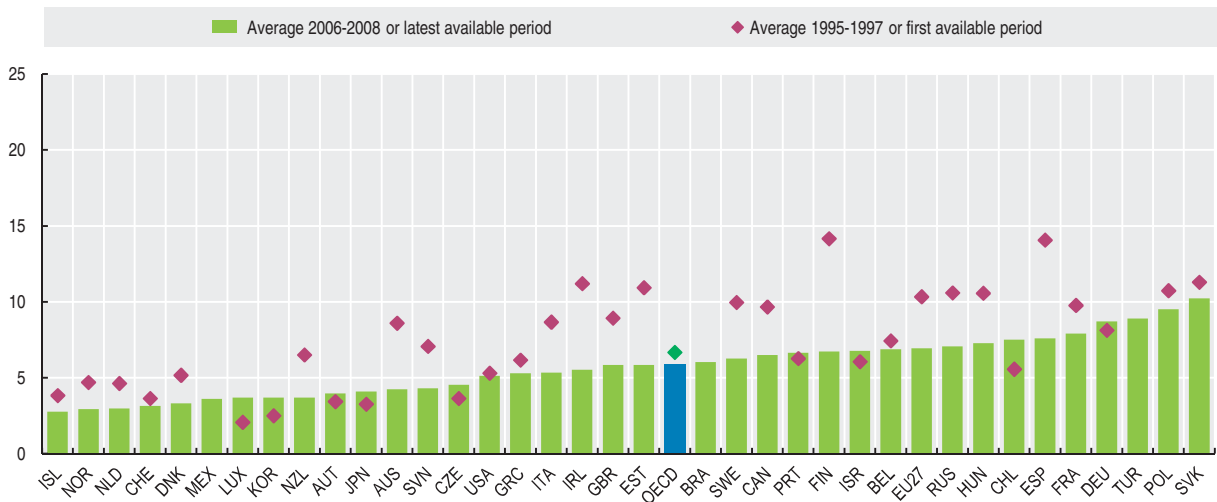
As a percentage of male labour force

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Australia	8.7	8.5	8.6	8.1	7.2	6.5	7.1	6.6	5.9	5.3	4.9	4.7	4.1	3.9
Austria	3.1	3.6	3.6	3.8	3.3	3.0	3.2	4.0	4.0	4.4	4.9	4.3	4.0	3.6
Belgium	7.6	7.4	7.3	7.6	7.2	5.6	5.9	6.6	7.7	7.5	7.6	7.4	6.7	6.5
Canada	9.8	9.9	9.3	8.5	7.8	6.9	7.5	8.1	7.9	7.5	7.0	6.5	6.4	6.6
Czech Republic	3.5	3.4	4.0	5.0	7.3	7.3	6.7	6.0	6.2	7.1	6.5	5.8	4.3	3.5
Denmark	5.7	5.3	4.5	3.9	4.5	3.9	4.1	4.3	4.9	5.1	4.4	3.4	3.4	3.1
Finland	15.2	15.0	12.3	10.9	9.7	8.7	8.7	9.1	9.3	8.8	8.1	7.4	6.6	6.2
France	9.3	10.0	10.0	9.4	8.9	7.5	7.0	7.7	8.1	8.4	8.4	8.5	7.8	7.4
Germany	7.2	8.2	9.0	8.8	8.1	7.5	7.8	8.8	9.9	10.3	11.2	10.2	8.5	7.4
Greece	6.2	6.0	6.3	7.3	7.9	7.4	7.2	6.8	6.2	6.6	6.1	5.6	5.2	5.1
Hungary	11.8	10.2	9.7	9.0	7.4	7.0	6.3	6.1	6.1	6.1	7.0	7.1	7.1	7.6
Iceland	4.8	3.4	3.3	2.2	1.4	1.8	2.1	3.6	3.6	3.2	2.6	2.7	2.3	3.3
Ireland	12.2	11.5	9.9	7.7	5.8	4.4	4.0	4.7	5.0	4.9	4.6	4.6	4.9	7.1
Italy	8.6	8.7	8.7	8.8	8.5	7.9	7.1	6.7	6.5	6.4	6.1	5.5	5.0	5.5
Japan	3.1	3.3	3.4	4.2	4.8	4.9	5.2	5.5	5.5	4.9	4.6	4.3	3.9	4.1
Korea	2.3	2.4	2.8	7.8	7.4	5.0	4.5	3.7	3.8	3.9	4.0	3.8	3.7	3.6
Luxembourg	2.0	2.2	2.0	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.6	2.0	3.0	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.4	4.1
Mexico	..	..	..	..	..	..	2.4	2.6	2.9	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.5	3.9
Netherlands	5.5	4.7	3.7	3.0	2.3	2.2	1.8	2.5	3.5	4.3	4.4	3.5	2.8	2.6
New Zealand	6.4	6.3	6.8	7.8	7.3	6.3	5.5	5.1	4.5	3.6	3.5	3.6	3.4	4.1
Norway	5.7	4.7	3.7	3.0	3.2	3.4	3.5	3.8	4.5	4.6	4.7	3.5	2.6	2.7
Poland	12.1	11.0	9.1	8.5	11.8	14.4	16.9	19.1	19.0	18.2	16.6	13.0	9.0	6.5
Portugal	6.4	6.4	6.0	4.0	3.9	3.2	3.2	4.2	5.5	5.9	6.8	6.6	6.7	6.6
Slovak Republic	12.6	10.2	11.1	12.2	16.3	18.9	19.8	18.6	17.4	17.4	15.5	12.3	10.0	8.4
Spain	14.8	14.3	13.1	11.2	9.0	7.9	7.5	8.1	8.2	8.0	7.1	6.3	6.4	10.1
Sweden	9.7	10.1	10.1	8.2	6.6	5.9	6.1	6.4	7.2	7.8	7.7	6.9	5.9	6.0
Switzerland	3.0	3.7	4.2	3.1	2.6	2.2	2.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	3.9	3.4	3.0	3.0
Turkey	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	8.4	8.6	9.7
United Kingdom	9.9	9.2	7.7	6.8	6.5	5.9	5.5	5.7	5.5	5.1	5.2	5.8	5.6	6.1
United States	5.6	5.4	4.9	4.4	4.1	3.9	4.8	5.9	6.3	5.6	5.1	4.6	4.7	6.1
EU27 total	10.3	10.5	10.2	9.5	8.7	7.8	7.8	8.3	8.4	8.5	8.3	7.6	6.6	6.6
OECD total	6.8	6.8	6.4	6.4	6.3	5.9	6.3	7.0	7.2	6.9	6.6	6.0	5.6	6.1
Brazil	..	..	..	..	..	..	7.5	7.2	7.8	7.0	7.3	6.6	6.2	5.3
Chile	..	5.6	5.4	5.7	9.4	8.7	8.9	8.6	7.9	7.9	7.0	6.7	6.3	9.5
Estonia	..	..	10.4	9.9	12.5	13.8	12.6	10.8	10.2	10.3	8.6	6.2	5.4	5.9
Israel	5.6	5.8	6.8	8.0	8.5	8.4	8.9	10.1	10.2	9.5	8.5	7.8	6.8	5.7
Russian Federation	9.7	10.0	12.1	13.5	13.2	10.8	9.3	8.1	8.5	8.0	7.3	7.5	6.4	..
Slovenia	..	7.1	6.8	7.3	7.2	6.5	5.7	5.9	6.4	5.9	6.1	4.9	4.0	4.0

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Unemployment rates: men

As a percentage of male labour force



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/820632115210>



**Unemployment rates: women**

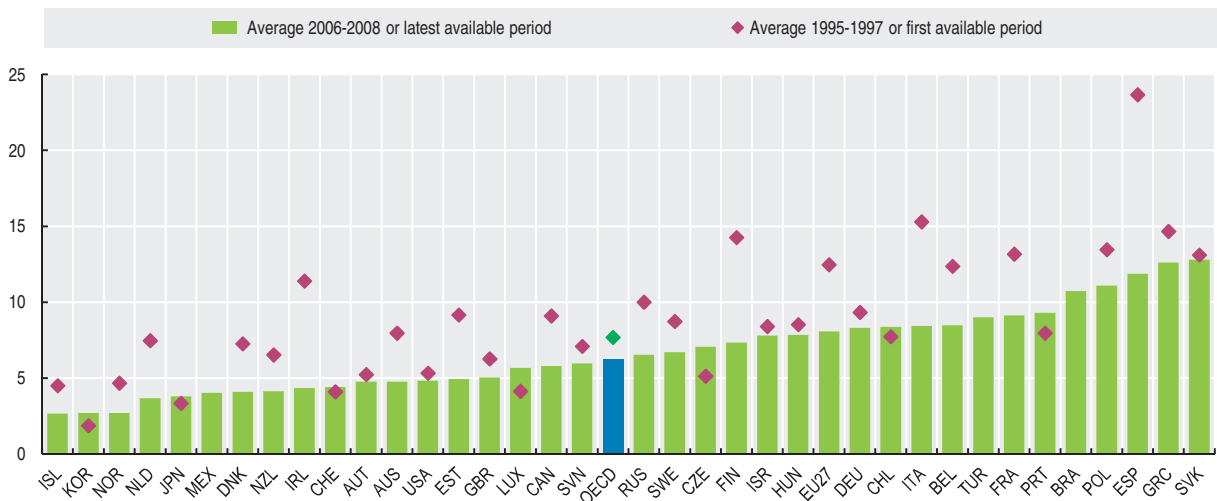
As a percentage of female labour force

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Australia	7.9	7.9	8.1	7.5	6.8	6.2	6.5	6.2	6.0	5.6	5.2	4.9	4.8	4.6
Austria	5.0	5.3	5.4	5.4	4.7	4.3	4.2	4.4	4.7	5.4	5.5	5.2	5.0	4.1
Belgium	12.7	12.5	11.9	11.6	10.3	8.5	7.5	8.7	8.9	9.6	9.5	9.3	8.5	7.6
Canada	9.1	9.3	8.9	8.0	7.3	6.7	6.9	7.1	7.2	6.9	6.5	6.1	5.6	5.7
Czech Republic	4.8	4.7	5.9	8.1	10.3	10.4	9.7	9.0	9.9	9.9	9.8	8.8	6.8	5.6
Denmark	8.1	7.5	6.2	6.0	5.7	4.8	5.0	5.0	6.1	6.0	5.3	4.5	4.1	3.7
Finland	15.0	14.8	13.0	11.9	10.8	10.5	9.7	9.1	8.9	9.0	8.6	8.1	7.2	6.7
France	13.0	13.3	13.2	12.8	12.1	10.8	9.9	9.8	10.0	10.2	10.3	10.1	8.9	8.4
Germany	9.0	9.2	9.8	9.3	8.5	7.5	7.4	7.9	8.7	9.1	10.0	9.4	8.3	7.2
Greece	13.8	15.4	14.8	17.0	18.2	17.1	16.1	15.7	15.0	16.2	15.3	13.6	12.8	11.4
Hungary	8.7	8.8	8.1	7.8	6.3	5.6	5.0	5.4	5.6	6.1	7.4	7.8	7.7	8.0
Iceland	4.9	4.1	4.5	3.2	2.6	2.9	2.5	2.9	3.1	2.9	2.6	3.1	2.3	2.6
Ireland	12.5	11.8	9.9	7.3	5.7	4.3	3.8	4.1	4.3	4.1	4.0	4.2	4.2	4.6
Italy	15.4	15.2	15.3	15.4	14.9	13.7	12.2	11.5	11.4	10.5	10.1	8.8	7.9	8.6
Japan	3.2	3.4	3.4	4.0	4.5	4.5	4.7	5.1	4.9	4.4	4.2	3.9	3.7	3.8
Korea	1.7	1.6	2.3	5.7	5.3	3.6	3.3	2.7	3.3	3.4	3.4	2.9	2.6	2.6
Luxembourg	4.3	4.2	3.9	4.0	3.3	2.9	2.4	3.5	4.9	6.8	6.0	6.0	5.2	5.8
Mexico	..	..	..	..	..	..	3.5	3.7	4.3	5.1	4.0	3.9	4.1	4.1
Netherlands	8.1	7.7	6.6	5.0	4.4	3.7	2.8	3.1	3.9	4.9	5.1	4.4	3.6	3.0
New Zealand	6.5	6.3	6.8	7.6	6.7	6.0	5.4	5.5	5.1	4.5	4.1	4.2	4.0	4.2
Norway	5.1	4.8	4.1	3.2	2.9	3.1	3.3	3.5	3.9	3.9	4.3	3.3	2.5	2.3
Poland	..	..	13.0	12.2	15.2	18.2	19.9	20.9	20.4	20.0	19.1	14.9	10.4	8.0
Portugal	8.1	8.2	7.6	6.2	5.1	5.0	5.1	6.1	7.3	7.7	8.7	9.2	9.6	9.1
Slovak Republic	13.8	12.7	12.8	13.2	16.4	18.6	18.7	18.7	17.8	19.2	17.2	14.7	12.7	11.0
Spain	24.7	23.7	22.6	21.2	18.1	16.1	14.8	15.7	15.3	14.3	12.2	11.6	10.9	13.1
Sweden	7.8	9.0	9.4	8.0	6.8	5.3	5.7	5.8	6.4	7.4	7.7	7.2	6.4	6.5
Switzerland	4.0	4.2	4.1	4.0	3.5	3.2	3.4	3.5	4.6	4.9	5.1	4.7	4.4	4.1
Turkey	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	8.4	8.6	10.0
United Kingdom	6.7	6.3	5.8	5.3	5.1	4.8	4.4	4.5	4.3	4.3	4.3	5.0	5.0	5.1
United States	5.6	5.4	5.0	4.6	4.3	4.1	4.7	5.6	5.7	5.4	5.1	4.6	4.5	5.4
EU27 total	12.5	12.5	12.4	11.8	10.9	9.8	9.4	9.7	9.7	9.8	9.6	8.9	7.8	7.5
OECD total	7.8	7.7	7.5	7.4	7.2	6.7	6.8	7.3	7.4	7.3	7.1	6.5	6.0	6.2
Brazil	..	..	..	..	..	..	11.9	11.6	12.4	11.9	12.5	11.3	11.1	9.8
Chile	..	7.9	7.7	7.6	10.7	10.0	9.7	9.6	9.7	10.5	9.8	9.5	8.8	6.8
Estonia	..	..	8.9	8.4	10.2	11.7	12.1	9.7	9.8	8.9	7.1	5.6	3.9	5.3
Israel	8.6	7.8	8.8	9.2	9.4	9.2	9.9	10.6	11.3	11.4	9.5	9.0	7.9	6.5
Russian Federation	9.2	9.3	11.5	13.0	12.9	10.4	8.6	7.6	8.0	7.5	7.0	6.8	5.8	..
Slovenia	..	6.7	7.1	7.5	7.6	7.0	6.8	6.8	7.1	6.9	7.1	7.2	5.9	4.8

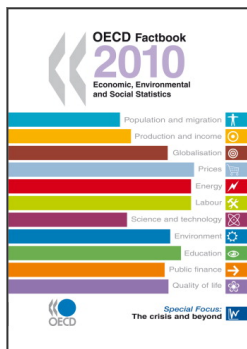
StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/825622685822>

**Unemployment rates: women**

As a percentage of female labour force



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/820722572804>



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