

Unemployment rate by sex, age and persons with disabilities



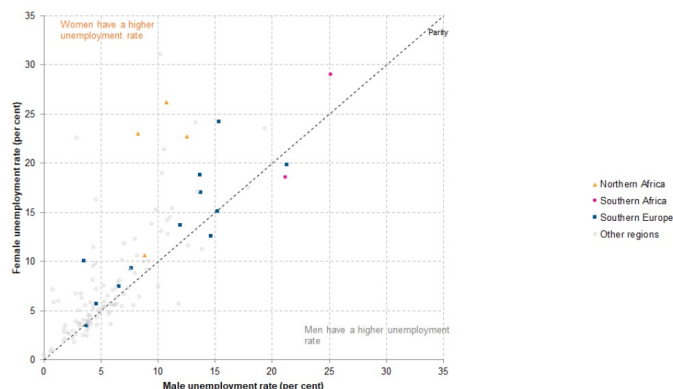
Key points

- In 2019, the worldwide unemployment rate for women aged 15 and older (5.6%) was slightly higher than that for men in the same age group (5.3%).
- Women's unemployment rates were higher than men's in 85 out of 129 countries with available data between 2015 and 2019 (66%), with higher rates observed in Northern Africa, resulting in a 12 percentage points gender gap in unemployment.
- Overall, the age gap in unemployment appears more significant than the gender gap. In 2019, global unemployment rates for young women and young men were more than twice as high as those for the overall working age population and more than three times as high as those for the adult population aged 25 years or older.
- In 2019, unemployment among women was particularly pervasive in countries in Northern Africa (21.5%) and Western Asia (15.1%).
- Disability status is an exacerbating factor in unemployment both for women and men: in 68% of countries with comparable data, the unemployment rate was higher for persons with disabilities, and in 54% of countries the rate was higher for women.

The unemployment rate is higher for women than men in most countries

In 2019, in 85 countries and territories among 129 with available data (66%), the unemployment rate for women was higher than that for men. This pattern was particularly evident in Northern Africa, where the gender gap in the unemployment rate amounted to 12 percentage points (see figure I).

Figure I: Unemployment rate among persons aged 15 years and older by sex: 2015–2019 (latest available)



Source: Global SDG Indicators Database (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/>); ILO modelled estimates (last accessed on 10 August 2020).

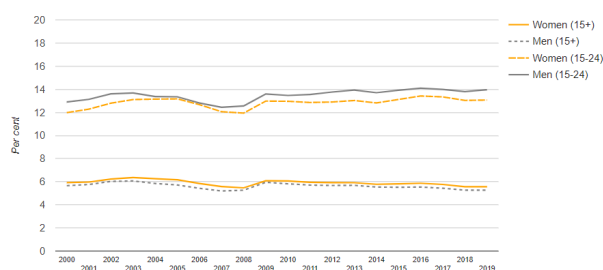
Note: Individual countries have been highlighted.

During the period 2000–2019, unemployment among youth has been persistently higher than among the overall working-age population

In 2019, the unemployment rate for women aged 15 years and older was 5.6% worldwide, slightly higher than that for men in the same age group (5.3%). The proportion of unemployed among working-age women and men in the labour force has remained steady since 2000, with a slight increase observed between 2008 and 2009.

With regard to youth unemployment, since 2000, on average, young men aged 15–24 have been slightly more likely (14%) to be unemployed than young women (13%), although young women have faced a significantly higher incidence of not being engaged in education, employment or training (NEET),¹ which may indicate a level of discouragement about entering into the labour market and thus their exclusion from the count of unemployed persons. Overall, the age gap in unemployment appears more significant than the gender gap (see figure II). In 2019, unemployment rates for young women and young men were more than twice as high as those for the overall working-age population and more than three times as high as those for adult population aged 25 years or older. The difference between the unemployment rates for youth and total unemployment rates has been relatively stable since 2000.

Figure II: Unemployment rate among persons aged 15 years and older and youth aged 15–24 by sex: 2000–2019

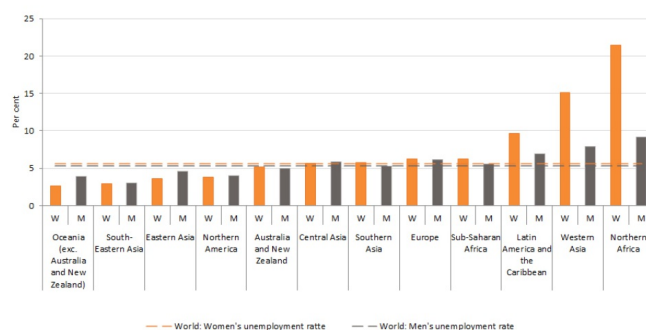


Source: Global SDG Indicators Database (last accessed on 17 July 2020).

Unemployment rates are higher for women than men in many regions

In 2019, women were more likely to be unemployed than men in 7 out of 12 regions, and unemployment among women was particularly pervasive in Northern Africa (21.5%), Western Asia (15.1%) and Latin America and the Caribbean (9.6%) (see figure III). The gender gap was the highest in countries in Northern Africa (12 percentage points), where historically women's participation rate in the **labour force** has been considerably lower than men's over time.

Figure III: Unemployment rate among persons aged 15 years and older by sex and region: 2019

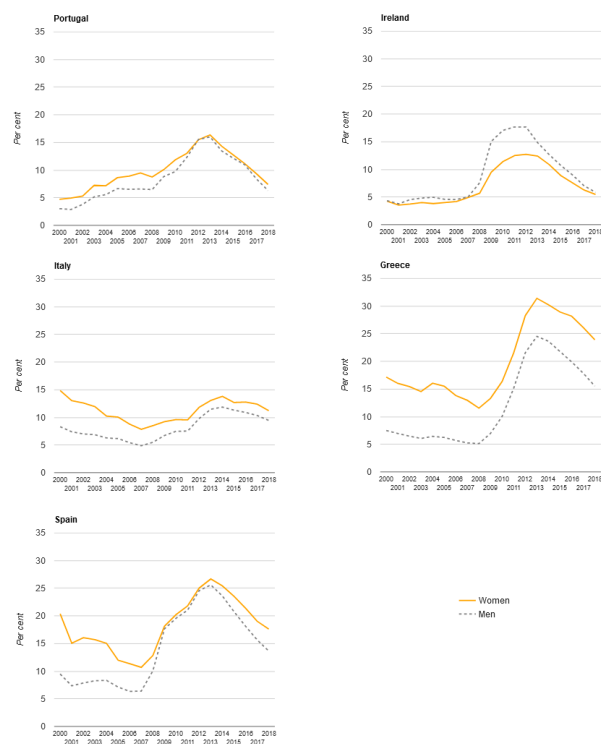


Source: Global SDG Indicators Database (last accessed on 17 July 2020).

Sharper increases in unemployment among men was significant during and after the global economic crisis in 2008 in selected advanced economies in the Eurozone

Following the global economic crisis in 2008, unemployment rates among women and men experienced an immediate increase, including long-lasting negative effects that have levelled out over subsequent years. The increase in unemployment rates were generally higher for men, who dominated employment in severely impacted subsectors, such as construction, in particular in selected advanced economies in Europe, namely in Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain. In those countries, while unemployment rates among men increased at a faster pace than among women during and immediately after 2008, they also fell at higher rates in subsequent years (see figure IV).

Figure IV: Unemployment rates in selected countries in the Eurozone among persons aged 15 years and older by sex: 2000–2018



Source: ILO estimates, Global SDG Indicators Database (last accessed on 4 October 2019).

Disability is an exacerbating factor in unemployment among women and men

In 40 out of 59 countries with latest available data (68%), the unemployment rate as of 2018 was higher for persons with disabilities.² Furthermore, in 24 countries with available sex-disaggregated data since 2016, the unemployment rate was higher among women with disabilities than among those without disabilities in 58% of countries and among men with disabilities than those without disabilities in 71% of countries. In the Russian Federation in 2018, women with disabilities were three times more likely (15.3%) to be unemployed than women without disabilities (4.6%). The corresponding unemployment rate for men with disabilities was four times higher (19.4%) than for men without disabilities (4.8%).³ Overall, among persons with disabilities, unemployment rates were higher for women than for men in 13 out of 24 countries with available sex-disaggregated data since 2016.

Social protection

In 10 out of 17 countries with available sex-disaggregated data since 2016, the proportion of the population receiving unemployment cash benefits was higher among unemployed women than among unemployed men. In 2017, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, however, only 1% of unemployed women received unemployment cash benefits, compared with 12% of unemployed men.⁴

Covid-19

During the recovery from the global economic crisis of 2008, unemployment rates went down worldwide, despite large disparities across regions. In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused abrupt and adverse changes in the labour markets, and "in fact, we can expect the biggest increase in global unemployment since World War II".⁵

"The pandemic is expected to have a devastating impact on global unemployment, which may reach an historic high in 2020, depending on the policies adopted. The eventual increase in global unemployment over 2020 will depend on how effectively policy measures preserve existing jobs and boost labour demand once the recovery phase begins."⁶

Preliminary estimates by the International Labour Organization indicate a significant rise in unemployment by approximately 13 million, or possibly by almost 25 million in a "high" scenario. For comparison, during the global economic crisis in 2008, the number of unemployed worldwide increased by 22 million.^{7 8}

Covid-19 and Northern America

The pandemic and the lockdown measures to prevent its contagion paralysed economies in developed regions, including countries in Northern America. Employed persons with the least "teleworkable" jobs were the hardest hit in the United States of America, where new claims for unemployment benefits increased by more than 10 million in just two weeks. In the United States, the unemployment rates among adult women and men aged 20 years and over were the same in July 2019 (3.3%): as of July 2020, the unemployment rate for women was 10.5% and 9.4% for men. The young are also likely to bear the brunt of the pandemic in Canada: in June 2020, the unemployment rate among young women was 27% (an increase from 11% in June 2019) and the unemployment rate among young men was 28% (an increase from 13% in June 2019).⁹

About the data

Definitions

- **Unemployment rate by sex, age and persons with disabilities:** This indicator provides information on the proportion of unemployed persons in the labour force and is one of the key measures of labour underutilization. Unemployed persons include working-age individuals who were not in employment, actively seeking and available for work during the reference period. The working-age population is usually defined as persons aged 15 years and older to facilitate international comparability.

Unemployment rate (%) = (unemployed persons) / (employed persons + unemployed persons) x 100. ¹⁰

Coverage

Working-age women and men in 129 United Nations Member States and territories (with latest available data between 2015 and 2019).

Limitations

The unemployment rate is not a robust measure of the performance of the labour market, especially in developing regions where women and men, due to economic pressures to find work, may take up jobs that have vulnerable employment conditions.

Looking at the unemployment rate in isolation does not capture the situation of people outside the labour force who may still have some connection to the labour force.

Since 2013, the international statistical standards (19th ICLS) recommend reporting the unemployment rate as part of a wider set of measures of labour underutilization, to support more informed monitoring of labour markets and to shed light on differences in access to employment opportunities among women and men, youth and older age groups, and persons living in urban and rural areas.

Footnotes

1. The [youth NEET rate](#) provides information about the proportion of youth (aged 15–24) not in education, employment or training as part of the total youth population.
2. UNDESA, Statistics Division, The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020, New York, 2020.
3. Global SDG Indicators Database; ILO modelled estimates (last accessed on 10 August 2020).
4. Source: Global SDG Indicators Database; ILO modelled estimates (last accessed on 10 August 2020).
5. [Global SDG Indicators Database, Sustainable Development Goal 8](#).
6. [ILO, "Covid-19 and the world of work: updated estimates and analysis", 2nd edition, 7 April 2020](#).
7. [ILO, "Covid-19 and the world of work: Impact and policy responses", ILO Monitor, 1st edition, 18 March 2020](#).
8. Source: UNDESA, Statistics Division, The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020, New York, 2020.
9. Sources: [UNDESA, Responding to Covid-19 and Recovering Better, Policy Brief Series, Spring/Summer 2020](#); [United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, "The Employment Situation – July 2020"](#); [United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, "The Employment Situation – July 2020"](#) (seasonally adjusted labour force characteristics data); [Statistics Canada](#) (last accessed on 10 August 2020).
10. [International Labour Organization \(ILO\), Key Indicators of the Labour Market, ninth edition, Geneva, 2016](#).