

110/2020 - 8 July 2020

EU labour market in the first quarter 2020

Absences from work at record high

Sharp drop in hours worked

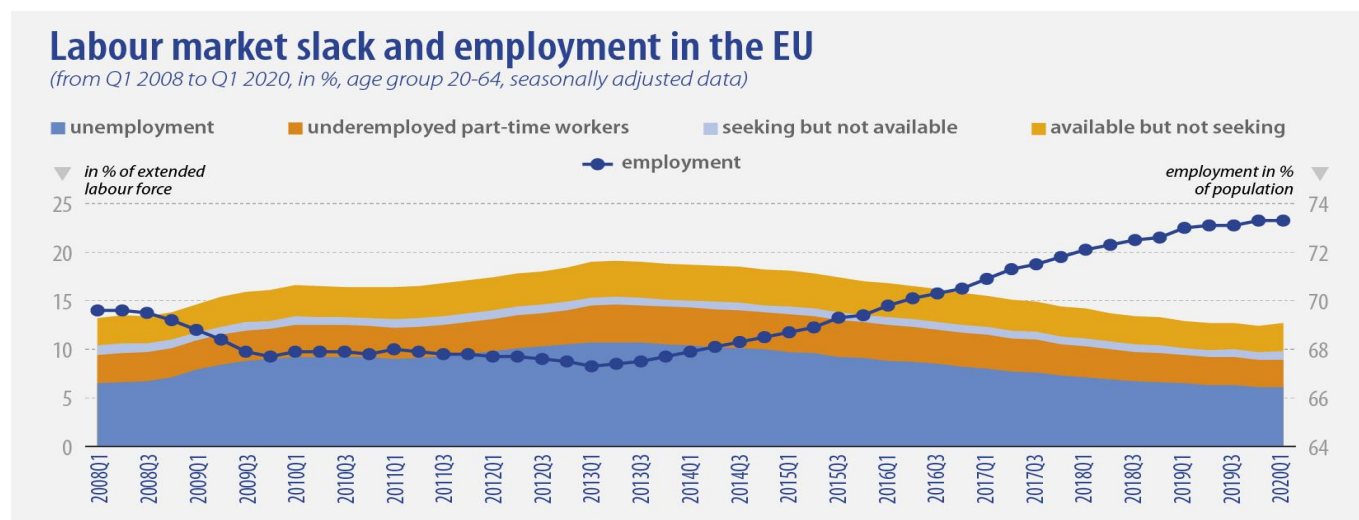
The first quarter 2020 is the first quarter in which the labour market across the **European Union (EU)** has been affected by COVID-19 measures taken by Member States. Employment and unemployment as defined by the ILO concept are, in this particular situation, not sufficient to describe all the developments taking place in the labour market. In this first phase of the crisis, active measures to contain employment losses led to absences from work rather than dismissals, and individuals could not search for work or were not available due to the containment measures, thus not counting as unemployed according to the ILO concept.

In this release, **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union**, is publishing a set of additional seasonally adjusted quarterly indicators which help to capture the most recent movements on the labour market in the 27 EU Member States.

These additional indicators include **total labour market slack**, which comprises all persons who have an unmet need for employment either because they are unemployed according to the ILO definition, are close to unemployment while not fulfilling all ILO criteria, or are working part-time and would like to work additional hours. Further, **absences from work** broken down by reason are published, as well as an index of **total actual hours worked** in the main job. More **new indicators** on recent job leavers and starters, as well as weekly total absences and transitions out of employment are published in the Eurostat database.

Labour market slack increased by 0.3 percentage points in first quarter 2020 compared to fourth quarter 2019, employment stable

In the first quarter of 2020, 190.9 million persons in the **EU** were employed. The **EU** seasonally adjusted employment rate for people aged 20-64 stood at 73.3%, unchanged compared to the fourth quarter 2019 and up from 73.0% in the first quarter 2019. 12.8 million persons were unemployed and the **EU** seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 6.3%, down from 6.4% in the fourth quarter 2019 and from 6.7% in the first quarter 2019. At the same time, seasonally adjusted total labour market slack in the **EU**, consisting in unmet demand for labour, amounted to 26.8 million persons, which represented 12.7% of the extended labour force in the first quarter 2020, up from 12.4% in the fourth quarter of 2019. This was the first quarter-on-quarter increase since the peak in the second quarter 2013, when the labour market slack had stood at 19.0%.

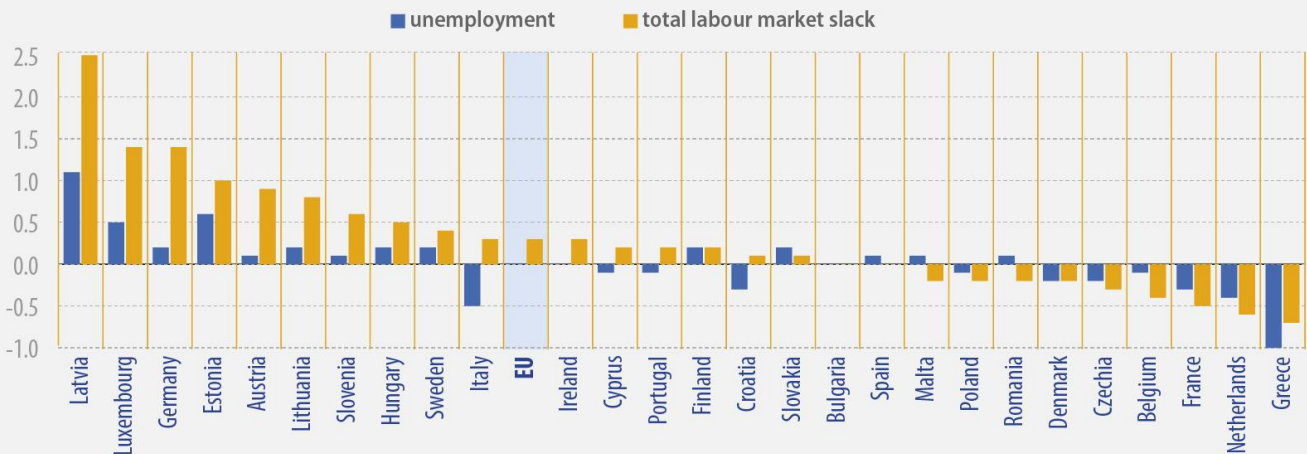


Labour market slack increased most in Latvia, Luxembourg, Germany and Estonia

Among the Member States, overall labour market slack increased in 16 countries, dropped in 9 countries and remained stable in **Bulgaria** and **Spain**. In **Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Austria, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland** and **Sweden** both overall labour market slack and unemployment, in percentage of the extended labour force, increased. In **Ireland** labour market slack increased and unemployment remained stable. In **Croatia, Italy, Cyprus** and **Portugal** overall labour market slack increased and unemployment decreased. In **Malta** and **Romania** overall labour market slack decreased while unemployment increased. In **Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Greece, France, the Netherlands** and **Poland** both overall labour market slack and unemployment decreased. No changes in either indicator were recorded in **Bulgaria**, and in **Spain** only unemployment increased slightly.

Change in labour market slack and unemployment in the EU Member States

(Q1 2020 compared to Q4 2019, in % of extended labour force, age group 20-64, seasonally adjusted data)



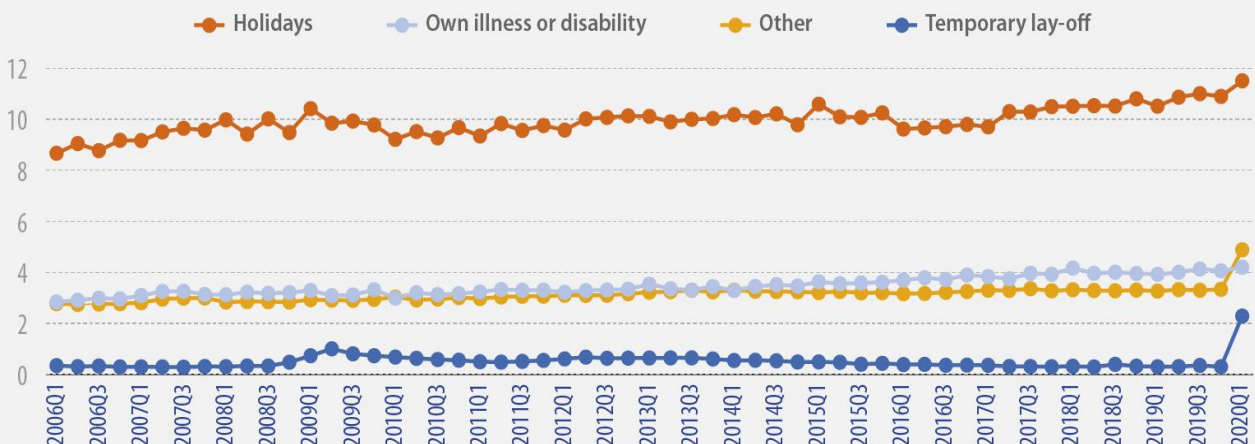
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4.3 million more employed persons were absent from work in the first quarter 2020 compared to the fourth quarter 2019

In the first quarter 2020, a total of 22.9 million persons were absent from work in the **EU**, an increase of 4.3 million compared to the fourth quarter 2019. This increase is to a large extent due to a sharp increase in temporary lay-offs, which rose from 0.3 million persons to 2.3 million persons.

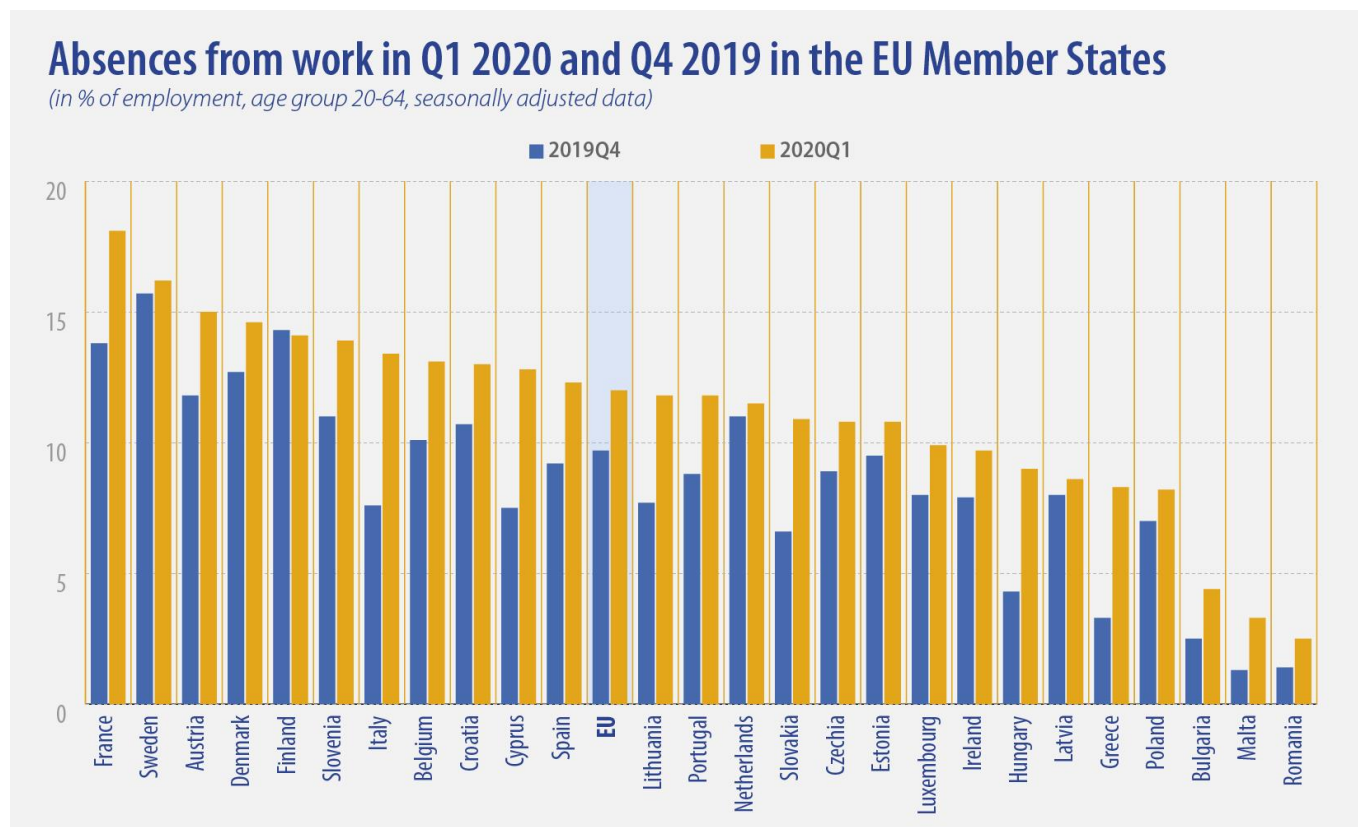
Absences from work by reason in the EU

(from Q1 2006 to Q1 2020, in million persons, age group 20-64, seasonally adjusted data)



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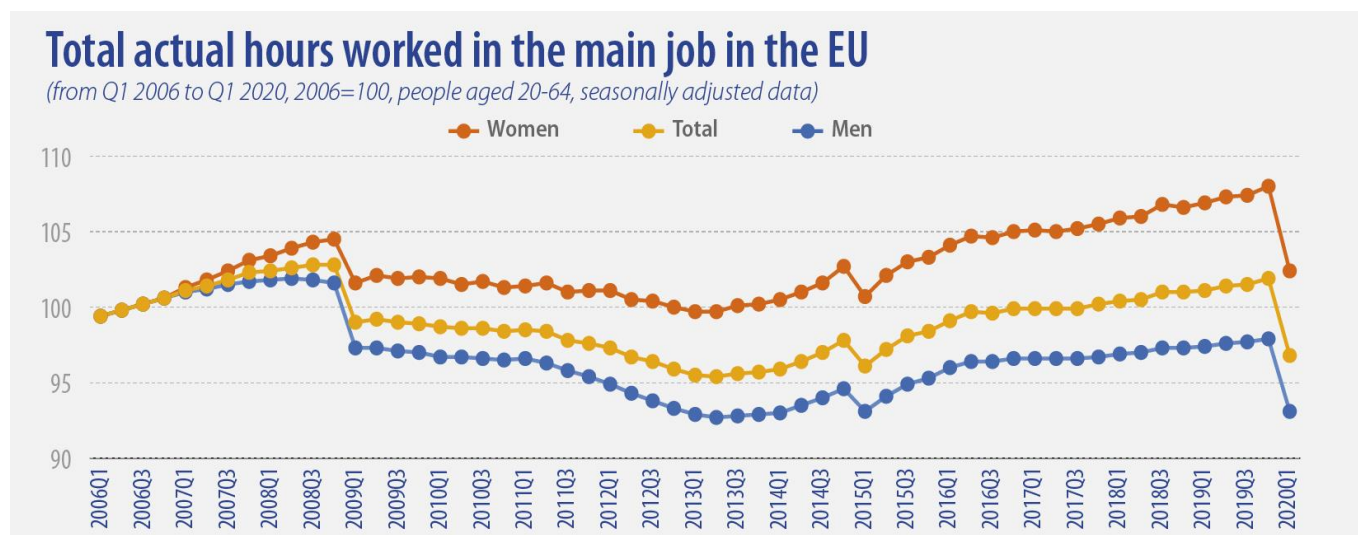
Among the Member States for which data are available, the highest rates of absences from work in the first quarter 2020 were observed in **France** (18.1%), **Sweden** (16.2%) and **Austria** (15.0%) and the lowest rates in **Romania** (2.5%), **Malta** (3.3%), and **Bulgaria** (4.4%). In comparison to the fourth quarter 2019, all Member States except Finland experienced a rise in overall absences from work. Absences due to temporary lay-offs rose in all Member States for which data is available, and increased more than tenfold in **France**, **Cyprus** and **Spain**.



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Sharp fall of hours worked in the first quarter 2020

Total actual hours worked have dropped sharply in the **EU** between the fourth quarter 2019 and the first quarter 2020, but have not reached the low values observed during the debt crisis. The levels of total actual hours worked are influenced by the total number of persons working, as well as the number of hours worked by each of these persons. Women have been harder hit than men, with a drop from 108 to 102 index points between the fourth quarter 2019 and the first quarter 2020, compared to a drop of 98 to 93 for men. In the first quarter 2020, total actual hours worked were nevertheless above the level of 2006 for women but lower for men.

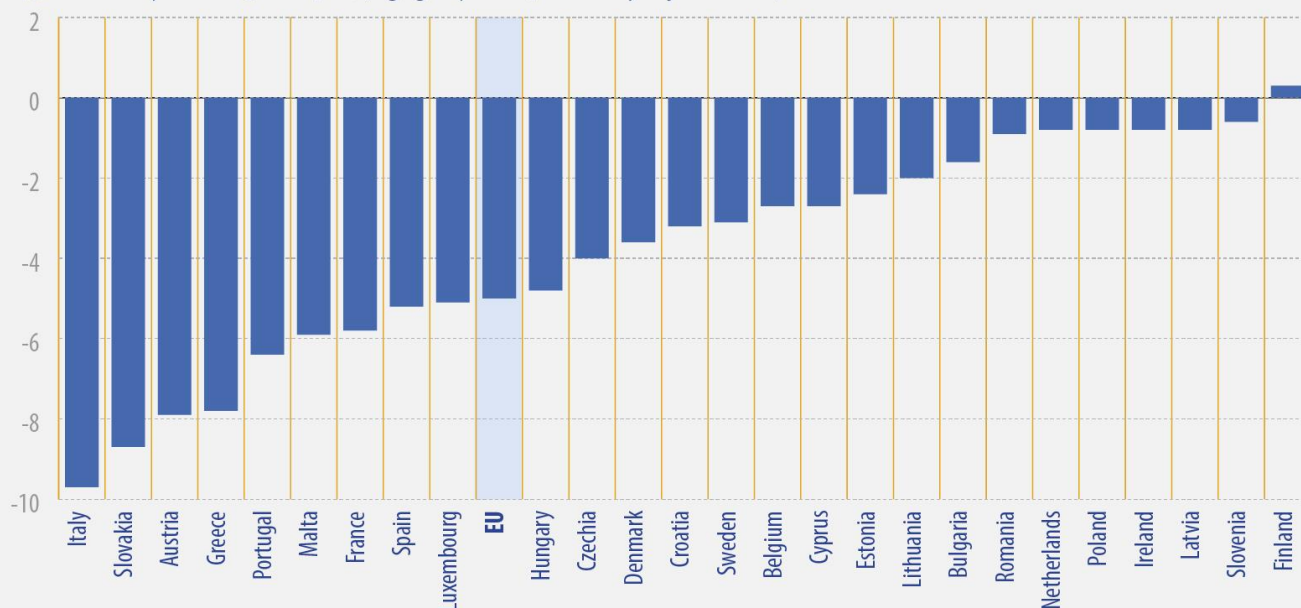


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All Member States for which data are available experienced a drop in total actual hours worked between the fourth quarter 2019 and the first quarter 2020 except **Finland** (+0.2%). The highest overall falls were observed in **Italy** (-9.7%), **Slovakia** (-8.7%), and **Austria** (-7.9%).

Quarterly change in total actual hours worked in the main job in the EU Member States

(Q1 2020 compared to Q4 2019, in %, age group 20-64, seasonally adjusted data)



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Geographical information

The **European Union (EU27)** includes Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland, and Sweden.

Methods and definition

Eurostat produces harmonised labour market data for individual EU Member States, the euro area and the EU.

Employed persons are all persons who worked at least one hour for pay or profit during the reference week or unpaid for a business owned by a member of the family, or were temporarily absent from such work. The employment rate is the percentage of employed persons in relation to the total population.

Unemployed persons are all persons who:

- are without work;
- are available to start work within two weeks;
- and have actively sought employment at some time during the previous four weeks.

The **labour market slack** is the sum of unemployed persons, underemployed part-time workers, persons seeking work but not immediately available and persons available to work but not seeking, expressed as percentage of the extended labour force.

Underemployed part-time workers are persons working part-time who wish to work additional hours and are available to do so. Part-time work is recorded as self-reported by individuals.

Persons seeking work but not immediately available are the sum of persons neither employed nor unemployed who: (a) were actively seeking work during the last 4 weeks but are not available for work in the next 2 weeks; or (b) found a job to start in less than 3 months and are not available for work in the next 2 weeks; or (c) found a job to start in 3 months or more; or (d) were passively seeking work during the last 4 weeks and are available for work in the next 2 weeks.

Persons available to work but not seeking are persons neither employed nor unemployed who want to work, are available for work in the next 2 weeks but were not seeking work.

The **extended labour force** is the total number of people employed plus unemployed, plus those seeking work but not immediately available plus those available to work but not seeking. In this news release data cover persons aged 20 to 64.

Absences from work: persons absent from work are considered as employed if there is a formal attachment to the job. This can be for example the continued receipt of wage or salary, AND an assurance of a return to work (or an agreement as to the date of return) following the end of the contingency. Persons can be absent from work due to a number of reasons, among which **holidays**, **own illness**, and **temporary lay-offs**. **Lay-offs** are classified as employed if they have an assurance of return to work within a period of 3 months or receive $\geq 50\%$ of their wage or salary from their employer.

Total actual hours worked in the main job are the total actual hours worked by all employees and self-employed in their main occupation during the quarter. Data are indexed to be equal to 100 in 2006 for reasons of comparability between countries.

Figures on employment and on hours worked are available from the **Labour Force Survey** and also from **National Accounts** domains. As the two data collections are compiled for different purposes, their underlying methodologies and definitions differ to some extent. In consequence, figures should not be compared directly, and not be used interchangeably.

Country notes

Germany: due to technical issues with the introduction of the new German system of integrated household surveys, including the LFS, the figures for Germany for the first quarter 2020 are not direct estimates from LFS microdata, but based on a larger sample including additional data from other integrated household surveys.

For more information

Eurostat [website section](#) on employment and unemployment

Eurostat [database section](#), including non-seasonally adjusted and trend data

Eurostat "Statistics Explained" articles on quarterly data on [labour market slack](#), on [absences from work](#) and on [hours of work](#)

Eurostat [metadata](#) on LFS Main Indicators

European Statistics [Code of Practice](#)

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Employment, unemployment and labour market slack in first quarter 2020
(age group 20 to 64, seasonally adjusted data)

	Employment (as % of population)			Unemployment (as % of labour force)			Labour market slack (as % of extended labour force)		
	Q1 2019	Q4 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2019	Q4 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2019	Q4 2019	Q1 2020
EU	73.0	73.3	73.3	6.7	6.4	6.3	13.0	12.4	12.7
Belgium	69.8	70.5	70.4	5.3	5.0	5.0	11.4	11.3	10.9
Bulgaria	74.5	75.0	74.5	4.6	4.0	4.0	8.0	7.6	7.6
Czechia	80.3	80.4	80.3	1.9	2.0	1.8	3.0	3.0	2.7
Denmark	78.2	78.6	78.6	4.6	4.7	4.4	9.1	9.9	9.7
Germany	80.7	80.2	80.4bp	3.2	3.1	3.4bp	7.6	7.2	8.6bp
Estonia	79.9	81.2	80.7	4.4	4.1	4.6	8.5	7.6	8.6
Ireland	75.4	75.4	75.5	4.6	4.4	4.4	11.8	11.3	11.6
Greece	60.7	61.6	61.7	18.3	16.4	15.5	25.2	23.6	22.9
Spain	67.9	68.1	67.9	13.9	13.6	13.7	22.3	22.0	22.0
France	71.5	71.8	72.1	8.5	7.9	7.6	15.9	15.3	14.8
Croatia	66.5	67.4	67.1	6.6	6.1	5.8	14.6	12.3	12.4
Italy	63.3	63.8	63.6	10.3	9.4	8.9	21.8	20.7	21.0
Cyprus	75.4	75.9	75.9	7.3	6.5	6.5	13.8	12.9	13.1
Latvia	77.1	77.6	77.9	6.8	6.2	7.4	12.4	11.6	14.1
Lithuania	78.5	78.5	78.7	6.0	6.4	6.7	8.5	8.4	9.2
Luxembourg	72.0	73.1	71.2	5.1	5.5	6.1	10.4	10.1	11.5
Hungary	75.3	75.4	75.3	3.2	3.3	3.4	5.7	6.0	6.5
Malta	76.7	77.2	78.8	3.4	2.9	3.0	5.6	5.5	5.3
Netherlands	80.0	80.3	80.6	3.0	3.0	2.6	9.7	9.1	8.5
Austria	76.8	76.8	76.4	4.5	4.1	4.3	10.1	9.5	10.4
Poland	72.7	73.4	73.7	3.6	2.9	2.8	6.8	5.7	5.5
Portugal	75.9	76.3	75.8	6.5	6.5	6.4	12.8	12.0	12.2
Romania	70.6	71.6	72.1	3.7	3.7	3.9	7.4	6.5	6.3
Slovenia	76.6	76.5	76.9	4.4	4.0	4.1	6.7	6.1	6.7
Slovakia	73.6	73.2	73.2	5.7	5.6	5.8	8.2	7.9	8.0
Finland	76.9	77.5	77.6	6.0	6.0	6.1	12.7	12.9	13.1
Sweden	82.3	82.0	81.7	5.7	6.1	6.2	11.1	11.4	11.8
United Kingdom	79.2	79.6	79.8	3.3	3.3	3.4	9.2	9.2	9.2
Iceland	86.9	85.7	:	2.6	3.1	:	7.0	8.2	:
Norway	79.3	79.4	79.8	3.4	3.4	3.2	8.0	8.6	8.6
Switzerland	82.8	83.0	83.1	4.7	4.0	4.2	14.4	13.6	13.7
Montenegro	61.4	61.0	:	14.6	15.9	:	24.3	26.1	:
North Macedonia	58.7	60.1	60.5	17.6	16.7	16.0	23.1	23.1	22.1
Serbia	64.7	66.0	66.3	11.4	9.7	9.5	20.8	19.0	19.4
Turkey	54.2	53.5	52.6	13.5	13.0	12.5	18.2	18.2	19.4

* EU represents the European Union of 27 Member States after 1 February 2020.

: data not available p provisional b break in series

Source datasets: [lfsi_emp_q](#) (employment rate), [une_rt_q](#) (unemployment rate) and [lfsi_sla_q](#) (labour market slack)

Absences from work and total actual hours worked in first quarter 2020
(age group 20 to 64, seasonally adjusted data)

	Absences from work (% of persons employed)			Total actual hours worked in the main job (2020 Q1 % change compared to the previous quarter and to the same quarter of the previous year)					
	Q1 2019	Q4 2019	Q1 2020	% change/Q1 2019			% change/Q4 2019		
				Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
EU*	9.4	9.7	12.0	-4.2	-4.4	-4.3	-5.2	-4.9	-5.0
Belgium	10.3	10.1	13.1	-4.8	-2.6	-3.6	-4.4	-1.5	-2.8
Bulgaria	2.1	2.5	4.4	-2.4	-1.2	-1.8	-1.9	-1.4	-1.7
Czechia	8.1	8.9	10.8	-6.5	-4.6	-5.4	-5.5	-3.0	-4.1
Denmark	12.3	12.7	14.6	-4.1	-3.5	-3.7	-4.9	-2.7	-3.6
Germany	11.7	12.1	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Estonia	8.3	9.5	10.8	-3.6	-5.6	-4.7	-2.4	-2.3	-2.3
Ireland	7.6	7.9	9.7	-2.6	0.1	-1.0	-1.3	-0.4	-0.7
Greece	4.0	3.3	8.3	-5.5	-7.0	-6.4	-8.3	-7.5	-7.9
Spain	8.5	9.2	12.3	-2.2	-5.3	-4.0	-4.6	-5.7	-5.2
France	13.7	13.8	18.1	-4.1	-6.6	-5.4	-4.3	-7.1	-5.8
Croatia	9.7	10.7	13.0	-4.9	-8.1	-6.6	-3.6	-2.8	-3.1
Italy	7.3	7.6	13.4	-10.1	-9.8	-9.9	-10.3	-9.3	-9.7
Cyprus	7.8	7.5	12.8	-3.6	-1.7	-2.7	-2.9	-2.5	-2.7
Latvia	7.1	8.0	8.6	-1.8	-0.5	-1.2	-0.8	-0.8	-0.8
Lithuania	7.2	7.7	11.8	-5.6	-1.2	-3.3	-3.6	-0.5	-2.0
Luxembourg	9.0	8.0	9.9	-1.1	-6.4	-4.3	-5.1	-5.0	-5.0
Hungary	4.0	4.3	9.0	1.1	-2.3	-0.8	-0.7	-7.9	-4.8
Malta	1.2	1.3	3.3	-1.9	-3.3	-2.8	-3.1	-7.6	-5.9
Netherlands	10.6	11.0	11.5	0.4	-0.8	-0.3	-0.2	-1.3	-0.8
Austria	12.0	11.8	15.0	-5.3	-6.8	-6.2	-7.8	-8.0	-7.9
Poland	6.5	7.0	8.2	-3.6	-3.4	-3.5	-1.5	-0.3	-0.9
Portugal	8.9	8.8	11.8	-5.3	-5.5	-5.4	-6.3	-6.5	-6.4
Romania	1.5	1.4	2.5	-1.6	0.9	-0.1	-1.8	-0.3	-0.9
Slovenia	10.9	11.0	13.9	-0.3	-2.6	-1.6	-1.2	0.0	-0.5
Slovakia	6.9	6.6	10.9	-10.0	-7.5	-8.5	-10.2	-7.6	-8.7
Finland	13.1	14.3	14.1	-0.2	-2.5	-1.5	1.1	-0.4	0.2
Sweden	15.5	15.7	16.2	-3.8	-2.4	-3.1	-3.8	-2.6	-3.2
United Kingdom	9.8	10.3	11.8	0.2	-2.4	-1.3	-0.6	-1.0	-0.8
Iceland	13.5	11.0	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Norway	15.6	17.0	20.0	-3.0	-4.0	-3.5	-3.4	-3.0	-3.2
Switzerland	12.5	12.6	13.0	1.3	-1.0	-0.1	0.3	-0.6	-0.3
North Macedonia	3.2	4.2	8.0	-8.3	-8.4	-8.3	-11.1	-4.1	-6.8
Serbia	6.6	6.7	8.2	:	:	:	:	:	:
Turkey	4.0	4.2	6.6	-6.7	-2.0	-3.4	-4.8	-0.9	-2.1

* EU represents the European Union of 27 Member States after 1 February 2020. The EU aggregate includes estimates for missing Member States.

: data not available

Source datasets: [lfsi_abs_q](#) (absences from work) and [lfsi_ahw_q](#) (total actual hours worked)