

International Comparisons of Annual Labor Force Statistics, 1970-2012



International Labor Comparisons

June 7, 2013

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Elimination of ILC

BLS has eliminated the International Labor Comparisons (ILC) program.

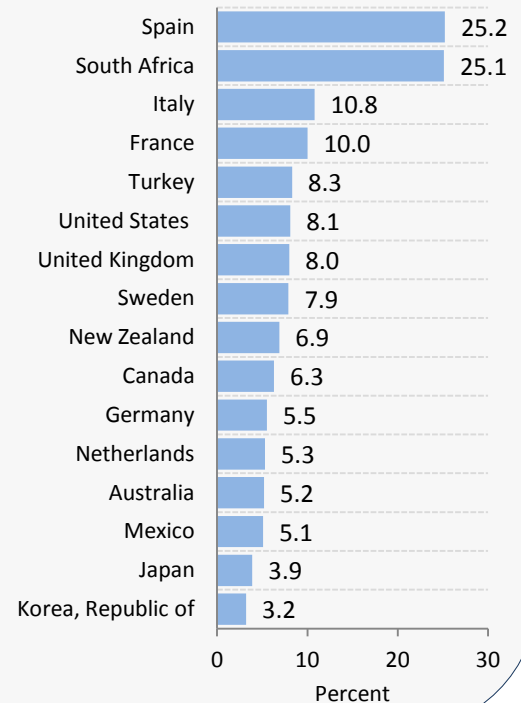
This is the last scheduled release of new data on international comparisons of annual labor force statistics.

The **unemployment rate** is the unemployed as a percentage of the labor force; it is the most widely used measure of an economy's unused labor supply.

In 2012, the United States had the 6th highest unemployment rate of the 16 countries covered. Spain ranked the highest followed closely by South Africa, while the Republic of Korea maintained the lowest unemployment rate for the year.

For more details on unemployment rates, see page 2 or the Technical Notes.

Unemployment rates, 2012



The **employment growth rate** measures the change in the number of persons working for a given period.

From 2011 to 2012, employment increased in 12 of the 16 countries compared. Mexico had the highest growth, followed by Turkey. New Zealand showed no change. Spain experienced the steepest decline in employment.

For more details on employment, see page 7 or the Technical Notes.

Employment, % Change, 2011-12

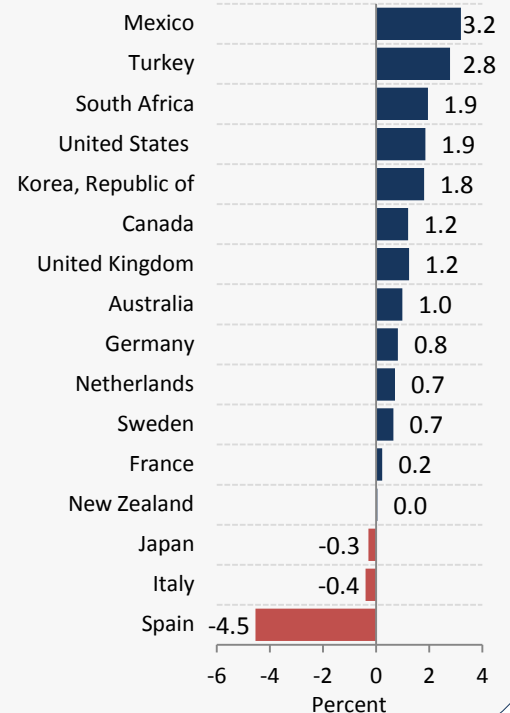
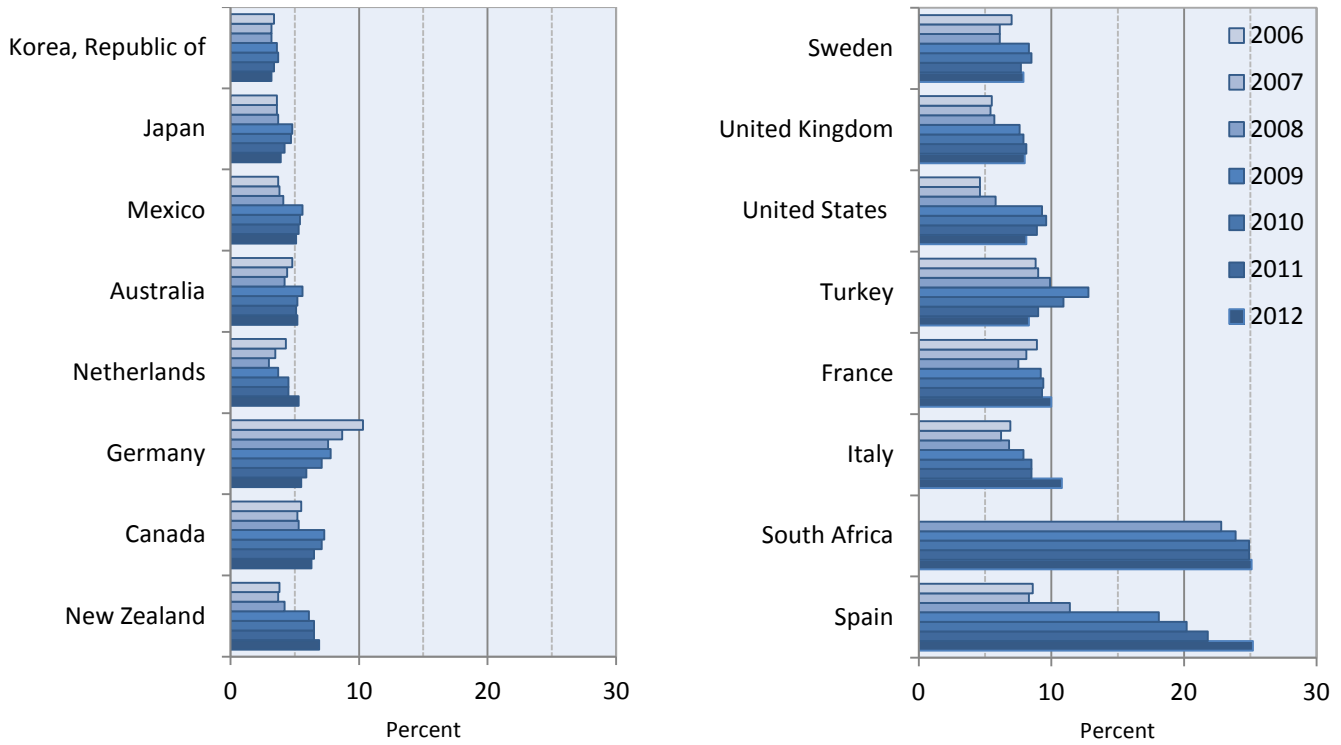


Chart 1. Unemployment rates, 2006-2012



Over the last 7 years, the unemployment rates for the United States and most other countries remained below 10 percent, even during the downturn of the 2009 global recession. However, rates in Spain and South Africa were higher than 15 percent during the period.

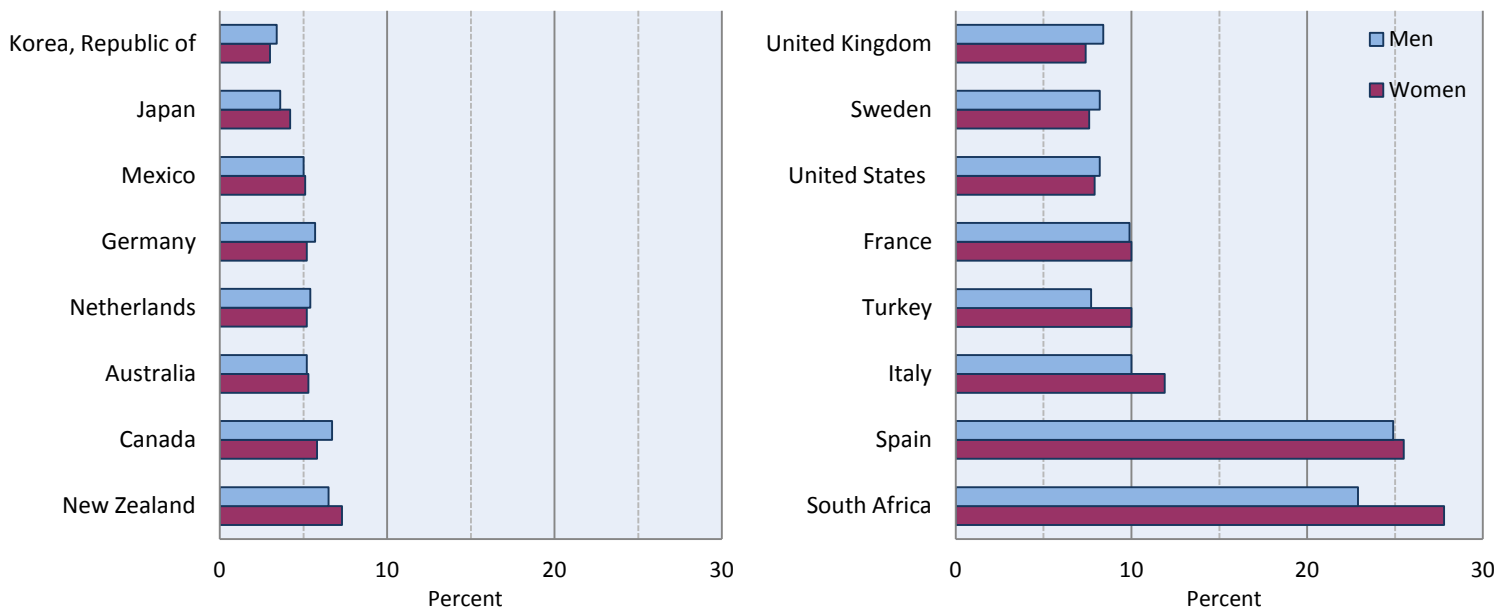
**Table 1. Unemployment rates
(In percent)**

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
United States	4.9	7.1	5.6	4.0	4.6	4.6	5.8	9.3	9.6	8.9	8.1
Australia	1.7	6.1	6.9	6.3	4.8	4.4	4.2	5.6	5.2	5.1	5.2
Canada	5.7	7.3	7.7	6.1	5.5	5.2	5.3	7.3	7.1	6.5	6.3
France	2.5	5.6	8.0	8.6	8.9	8.1	7.5	9.2	9.4	9.3	10.0
Germany	0.5	2.8	5.0	7.8	10.3	8.7	7.6	7.8	7.1	5.9	5.5
Italy	3.2	4.4	7.0	10.1	6.9	6.2	6.8	7.9	8.5	8.5	10.8
Japan	1.2	2.0	2.0	4.4	3.6	3.6	3.7	4.8	4.7	4.2	3.9
Korea, Republic of	4.4	5.2	2.4	^b 4.4	3.4	3.2	3.2	3.6	3.7	3.4	3.2
Mexico	NA	NA	NA	NA	3.7	3.8	4.1	5.6	^b 5.4	5.3	5.1
Netherlands	NA	6.0	7.6	^b 3.1	4.3	3.5	3.0	3.7	^b 4.5	4.5	5.3
New Zealand	NA	NA	8.0	6.1	3.8	3.7	4.2	6.1	6.5	6.5	6.9
South Africa	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	22.8	23.9	24.9	24.9	25.1
Spain	NA	11.3	15.2	12.0	8.6	8.3	11.4	18.1	20.2	21.8	25.2
Sweden	1.5	2.0	1.8	5.8	7.0	6.1	6.1	8.3	8.5	7.7	7.9
Turkey	NA	NA	NA	NA	8.8	9.0	9.9	12.8	10.9	9.0	8.3
United Kingdom	NA	6.8	7.1	5.5	5.5	5.4	5.7	7.6	7.9	8.1	8.0

NA Not available.

^b Indicates a break in series; see [country notes](#) for break year and more information.

Chart 2. Unemployment rates by sex, 2012



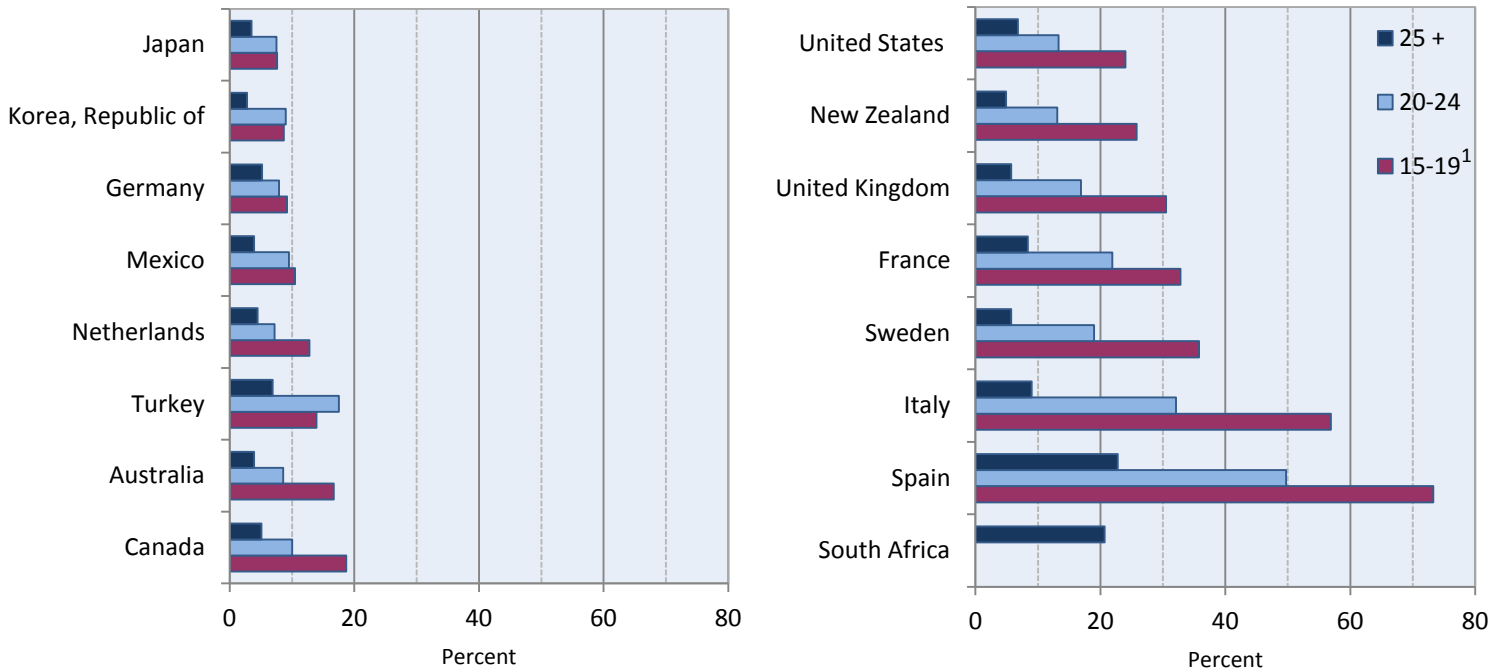
Historically, unemployment rates have been higher for women than for men; however, in recent years the reverse has been true in an increasing number of countries. In 2012, unemployment rates for men were higher than for women in 7 of the 16 countries compared: the United States, Canada, Germany, Republic of Korea, Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

Table 2. Unemployment rates by sex (In percent)

	2008		2009		2010		2011		2012	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
United States	6.1	5.4	10.3	8.1	10.5	8.6	9.4	8.5	8.2	7.9
Australia	4.0	4.6	5.7	5.4	5.1	5.4	4.9	5.3	5.2	5.3
Canada	5.8	4.8	8.5	6.1	7.8	6.2	7.0	5.9	6.7	5.8
France	7.0	7.9	9.1	9.4	9.1	9.7	8.9	9.7	9.9	10.0
Germany	7.5	7.7	8.2	7.3	7.6	6.5	6.2	5.6	5.7	5.2
Italy	5.6	8.5	6.9	9.3	7.7	9.7	7.7	9.6	10.0	11.9
Japan	3.2	4.3	4.4	5.2	4.5	5.0	4.1	4.4	3.6	4.2
Korea, Republic of	3.6	2.6	4.1	3.0	4.0	3.3	3.6	3.1	3.4	3.0
Mexico	3.9	4.3	5.5	5.6	^b 5.5	^b 5.4	5.3	5.3	5.0	5.1
Netherlands	2.8	3.3	3.7	3.7	^b 4.4	^b 4.5	4.5	4.4	5.4	5.2
New Zealand	4.1	4.2	6.1	6.1	6.2	6.9	6.3	6.7	6.5	7.3
South Africa	19.8	26.4	22.0	26.2	22.8	27.5	22.5	27.8	22.9	27.8
Spain	10.1	13.1	17.9	18.5	19.9	20.6	21.4	22.2	24.9	25.5
Sweden	5.8	6.3	8.6	7.9	8.6	8.4	7.8	7.6	8.2	7.6
Turkey	9.6	10.5	12.6	13.3	10.4	12.0	8.3	10.7	7.7	10.0
United Kingdom	6.2	5.1	8.7	6.4	8.7	6.9	8.8	7.3	8.4	7.4

^b Indicates a break in series; see [country notes](#) for break year and more information.

Chart 3. Unemployment rates by age, 2012



For nearly all countries shown, unemployment rates for teens (15-19) have historically been higher than rates for the other age groups compared. Turkey and the Republic of Korea were the only two countries to have higher unemployment rates for young adults (20-24) than for teens. Japan's unemployment rates for teens and young adults were virtually the same. Spain and Italy had the largest increases in teen unemployment over the 2009-2012 period.

Table 3. Unemployment rates by age (In percent)

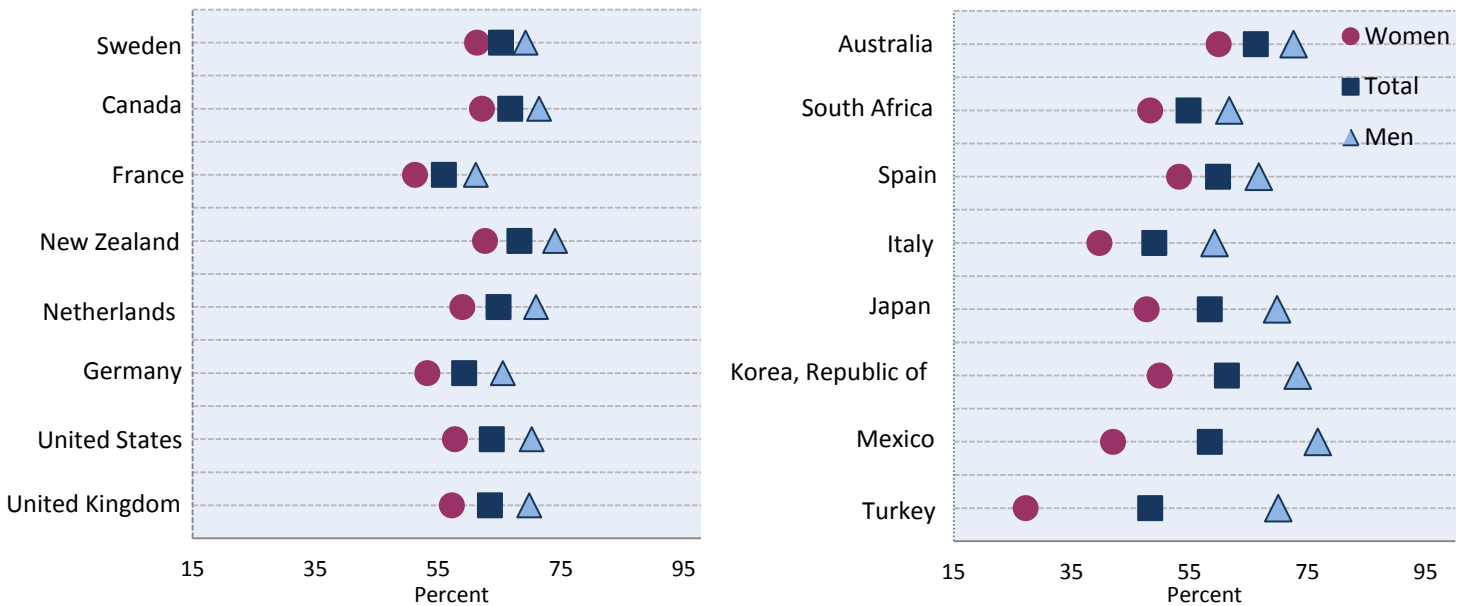
	2009			2010			2011			2012		
	15-19 ¹	20-24	25+	15-19 ¹	20-24	25+	15-19 ¹	20-24	25+	15-19 ¹	20-24	25+
United States	24.3	14.7	7.9	25.9	15.5	8.2	24.4	14.6	7.6	24.0	13.3	6.8
Australia	16.5	8.2	4.3	16.8	8.1	3.8	16.1	8.3	3.7	16.7	8.6	3.9
Canada	18.5	11.2	6.1	18.6	10.7	5.9	17.7	10.1	5.4	18.7	10.0	5.1
France	30.9	21.6	7.6	29.7	21.4	7.9	29.4	20.5	7.9	32.8	21.9	8.4
Germany	11.3	11.1	7.3	10.7	9.5	6.8	10.0	8.2	5.6	9.2	7.9	5.2
Italy	40.3	23.0	6.5	45.8	25.0	7.1	48.7	26.3	7.0	56.9	32.1	9.0
Japan	9.5	8.9	4.4	9.9	9.0	4.3	9.0	7.9	3.9	7.6	7.5	3.5
Korea, Republic of	12.3	9.5	3.2	12.1	9.4	3.3	10.6	9.4	3.0	8.7	9.0	2.8
Mexico	11.2	10.1	4.3	^b 11.0	^b 9.5	^b 4.2	10.9	9.7	4.1	10.5	9.5	3.9
Netherlands	9.4	6.1	2.9	^b 11.2	^b 7.0	^b 3.7	10.5	5.7	3.9	12.8	7.2	4.5
New Zealand	23.4	11.5	4.0	24.7	12.0	4.5	25.7	12.2	4.4	25.8	13.1	4.9
South Africa	NA	NA	19.3	NA	NA	20.3	NA	NA	20.6	NA	NA	20.7
Spain	56.4	34.0	16.0	62.3	37.7	18.1	64.6	43.2	19.5	73.3	49.7	22.8
Sweden	35.9	20.0	5.9	35.6	19.9	6.2	33.9	18.1	5.5	35.8	19.0	5.7
Turkey	22.0	24.3	10.5	17.7	21.9	8.9	15.0	18.5	7.3	13.9	17.5	6.9
United Kingdom	26.8	15.3	5.6	29.1	15.3	5.8	31.2	16.5	5.8	30.5	16.9	5.7

NA Not available.

^b Indicates a break in series; see [country notes](#) for break year and more information.

¹ Lower age limits vary by country, see [technical notes](#).

Chart 4. Labor force participation rates by sex, 2012



The labor force participation rate is the ratio of the actual labor force (employed and unemployed) as a percent of the potential labor force (working age population). For more information, see the [technical notes](#).

In 2012, labor force participation rates were higher for men than for women in all 16 countries compared. The lowest gender gaps were in Sweden and Canada, while the largest disparity in gender participation existed in Turkey, Mexico and the Republic of Korea.

Table 4. Labor force participation rates by sex (In percent)

	2009			2010			2011			2012		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
United States	72.0	59.2	65.4	71.2	58.6	64.7	70.5	58.1	64.1	70.2	57.7	63.7
Australia	73.3	60.1	66.7	73.2	59.8	66.4	73.1	60.0	66.5	72.6	59.9	66.2
Canada	72.0	62.5	67.2	71.8	62.4	67.0	71.7	62.2	66.8	71.4	62.1	66.7
France	61.1	50.9	55.8	61.0	51.0	55.8	60.7	50.9	55.6	61.1	51.2	55.9
Germany	65.3	52.1	58.5	65.1	52.4	58.6	65.6	53.2	59.2	65.5	53.2	59.2
Italy	59.4	38.2	48.4	59.0	38.2	48.1	58.7	38.4	48.1	59.2	39.7	49.0
Japan	71.3	48.1	59.3	70.9	48.1	59.1	70.5	47.7	58.7	69.8	47.7	58.4
Korea, Republic of	73.1	49.2	60.8	73.0	49.4	61.0	73.1	49.7	61.1	73.3	49.9	61.3
Mexico	76.7	41.1	57.9	^b 76.5	^b 40.7	^b 57.6	76.4	41.2	57.8	76.7	42.0	58.4
Netherlands	72.9	59.8	66.2	^b 71.1	^b 58.4	^b 64.6	70.3	58.3	64.2	70.9	58.9	64.8
New Zealand	74.6	62.2	68.2	74.4	62.1	68.1	74.6	62.5	68.4	74.0	62.6	68.2
South Africa	63.7	49.0	56.1	61.8	47.4	54.3	61.2	47.9	54.3	61.7	48.3	54.8
Spain	68.4	51.4	59.7	67.8	52.1	59.8	67.2	52.8	59.8	66.7	53.2	59.8
Sweden	68.9	60.7	64.8	69.3	60.3	64.7	69.3	61.0	65.1	69.2	61.3	65.2
Turkey	69.1	24.1	46.2	69.6	25.6	47.2	70.6	26.7	48.3	70.0	27.2	48.3
United Kingdom	70.2	56.8	63.4	69.8	56.8	63.2	69.7	57.0	63.2	69.8	57.2	63.4

^b Indicates a break in series; see [country notes](#) for break year and more information.

Chart 5. Labor force participation rates by age, 2012



In 2012, participation rates were highest among young adults between the ages of 20 to 24 in 6 of the 10 countries for which data were available. The United Kingdom had the highest participation rates for young adults while the Republic of Korea had the lowest rates for this age group.

Adults over 25 had higher participation rates than young adults and teens (15-19) in the other 4 countries compared, which included the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Spain and Turkey.

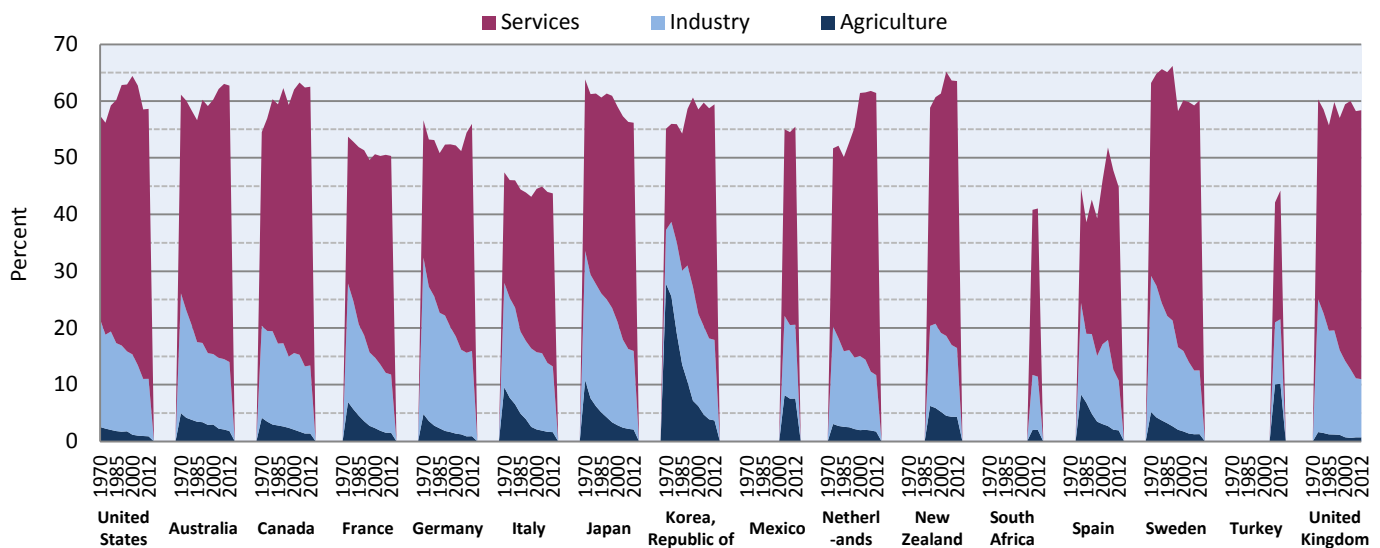
Table 5. Labor force participation rates by age (In percent)

	2009			2010			2011			2012		
	15-19 ¹	20-24	25+	15-19 ¹	20-24	25+	15-19 ¹	20-24	25+	15-19 ¹	20-24	25+
United States	37.5	72.9	67.0	34.9	71.4	66.5	34.1	71.3	65.8	34.3	70.9	65.4
Canada	58.6	76.7	66.9	57.2	76.2	66.9	57.2	76.1	66.6	55.4	75.2	66.6
Germany	31.3	70.3	59.6	30.3	69.5	59.7	30.3	70.3	60.3	28.4	68.9	60.5
Japan	14.9	68.3	61.4	14.5	68.1	61.3	14.0	68.0	60.8	14.2	67.5	60.5
Korea, Republic of	6.2	49.2	67.0	7.0	48.9	67.1	7.6	48.0	67.3	7.7	48.9	67.3
Mexico	29.0	60.1	64.3	^b 28.9	^b 60.6	^b 63.8	28.7	60.1	63.9	28.4	60.5	64.6
New Zealand	51.0	73.4	69.7	47.8	73.2	69.8	45.6	74.6	70.2	44.3	75.0	70.0
Spain	24.3	65.9	61.1	21.2	64.0	61.5	19.2	62.6	61.7	17.3	60.6	61.9
Turkey	25.6	48.9	49.0	25.0	49.6	50.3	24.9	51.5	51.3	23.7	50.4	51.5
United Kingdom	46.4	82.0	63.1	44.4	81.9	63.0	43.4	81.6	63.1	44.0	81.8	63.2

^b Indicates a break in series; see [country notes](#) for break year and more information.

¹ Lower age limits vary by country, see [technical notes](#).

Chart 6. Employment-population ratios and composition of employment by sector, 1970-2012



The percentage of the working age population employed has remained between 50 and 65 percent in most countries covered over the past 40 years, but the share of the working age population employed in each sector has shifted over time. The share of the working age population employed in agriculture dropped by more than half in all countries covered except the Netherlands, and the share of the working age population employed in industry (manufacturing, mining, and construction) fell in all countries covered except the Republic of Korea and Turkey. In contrast, the share of the working age population employed in services increased in all countries covered, and by 2012, the share was nearly at or above 40 percent in the majority of countries covered.

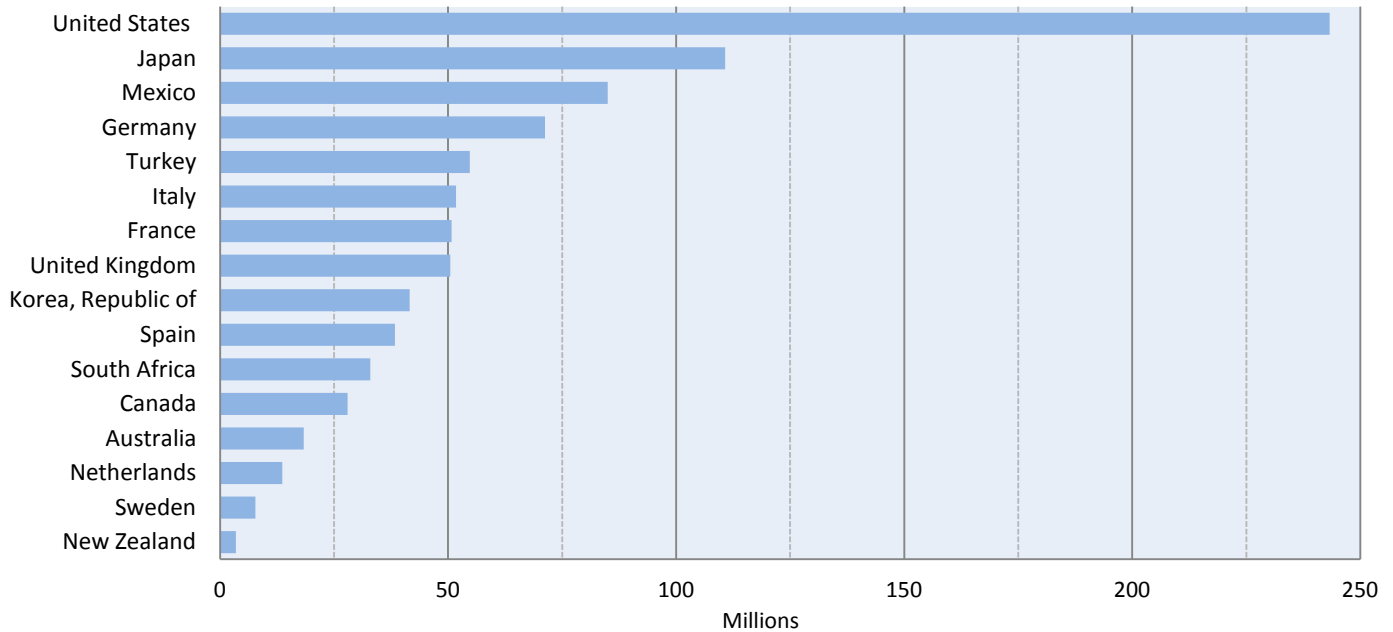
Table 6. Employment shares by sector (In percent)

	1980				2012			
	Agriculture	Industry	Services	Not employed	Agriculture	Industry	Services	Not employed
United States	2.0	17.3	39.8	40.8	0.9	10.1	47.6	41.4
Australia	3.8	16.7	37.8	41.7	1.8	12.2	48.7	37.3
Canada	3.0	16.5	40.9	39.7	1.4	12.0	49.1	37.5
France	5.6	19.1	28.1	47.2	1.5	10.3	38.5	49.7
Germany	2.8	22.8	27.6	46.9	0.9	15.0	40.0	44.0
Italy	6.5	17.0	22.4	54.0	1.6	11.6	30.5	56.3
Japan	6.2	21.5	33.6	38.7	2.1	13.9	40.2	43.8
Korea, Republic of	19.0	16.0	20.9	44.1	3.7	14.2	41.5	40.6
Mexico	NA	NA	NA	NA	7.5	13.0	34.9	44.5
Netherlands	2.7	15.5	33.9	47.9	1.7	9.9	49.7	38.6
New Zealand	NA	NA	NA	NA	4.3	12.1	47.1	36.5
South Africa	NA	NA	NA	NA	2.0	9.4	29.6	59.0
Spain	8.3	16.1	20.3	55.3	1.9	8.8	34.1	55.2
Sweden	3.7	20.7	41.3	34.4	1.3	11.2	47.6	39.9
Turkey	NA	NA	NA	NA	10.2	11.4	22.7	55.8
United Kingdom	1.5	21.1	35.9	41.5	0.7	10.3	47.4	41.6

NA Not available.

Details on employment, see [technical notes](#).

Chart 7. Working age population, 2012



The working age population is the noninstitutional population generally 16 years and over, or the potential population available to work. For more information on working age population, see the [technical notes](#).

The United States working age population was more than twice as large as the next largest country compared (Japan). Between 2006 and 2012, the working age population in the United States grew faster than in Japan and in all European countries compared, but grew more slowly than in the remaining countries.

Table 7. Working age population
(In thousands)

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
United States	137,085	167,745	189,164	212,577	228,815	231,867	233,788	235,801	237,830	239,618	243,284
Australia	8,819	10,778	13,051	14,902	16,371	16,701	17,020	17,400	17,773	18,052	18,332
Canada	14,528	18,032	20,852	23,687	25,711	26,094	26,486	26,883	27,250	27,578	27,922
France	36,980	40,601	44,152	46,871	49,250	49,559	49,826	50,057	50,294	50,557	50,782
Germany	46,094	49,848	53,438	69,365	70,892	70,968	71,021	70,943	70,858	70,978	71,274
Italy	40,279	43,860	48,016	48,029	49,913	50,301	50,711	51,064	51,311	51,579	51,729
Japan	78,616	89,078	100,656	108,120	110,059	110,419	110,630	110,761	110,881	110,882	110,752
Korea, Republic of	17,468	24,463	30,887	36,186	38,762	39,170	39,598	40,092	40,590	41,052	41,582
Mexico	NA	NA	NA	NA	74,282	75,538	76,761	78,314	^b 81,969	83,399	85,023
Netherlands	NA	10,588	11,865	^b 12,703	13,128	13,190	13,271	13,368	13,460	13,540	13,629
New Zealand	NA	NA	2,612	2,938	3,252	3,297	3,335	3,379	3,427	3,465	3,492
South Africa	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	30,967	31,494	32,007	32,494	32,959
Spain	NA	26,370	30,160	33,430	36,920	37,575	38,112	38,325	38,375	38,398	38,334
Sweden	6,106	6,441	6,823	7,043	7,312	7,387	7,467	7,547	7,620	7,682	7,732
Turkey	NA	NA	NA	NA	49,174	49,994	50,772	51,686	52,541	53,593	54,724
United Kingdom	NA	42,582	44,717	46,085	48,197	48,611	48,998	49,355	49,726	50,095	50,473

NA Not available.

^b Indicates a break in series; see [country notes](#) for exact break year and more information.

Technical Notes

This report presents selected labor force statistics adjusted to U.S. concepts for 1970 onward for the United States and fifteen foreign countries: Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. For more information see [technical notes](#) or [country notes](#).

UNEMPLOYMENT

In the United States, unemployment includes all persons who, during the reference week:

- Had no employment,
- Were available for work, except for temporary illness, and
- Had actively sought work during the 4-week period ending with the reference week.

Active job search methods are those that have the potential to result in a job offer without further action on the part of the jobseeker. For example, sending a resume to an employer would be considered active, whereas simply reading newspaper advertisements would not.

Persons who were waiting to start a new job must have fulfilled these criteria to be considered unemployed. However, persons who were waiting to be recalled to a job from which they had been laid off need not have been looking for work.

The unemployment rate represents the percentage of persons in the labor force who are unemployed.

EMPLOYMENT

According to U.S. definitions, employment includes all persons who, during the reference week:

- Worked at least 1 hour as paid employees, worked in their own business, profession, or on their own farm, or worked at least 15 hours as unpaid workers in a family-operated enterprise, and
- All those who did not work but had jobs or businesses from which they were temporarily absent due to vacation, illness, bad weather, childcare problems, maternity or paternity leave, labor-management dispute, job training, or other family or personal reasons, regardless of whether they were paid for the time off or were seeking other jobs.

Each employed person is counted only once, even if he or she holds more than one job. For purposes of industry classification, multiple jobholders are counted in the job at which they worked the greatest number of hours during the reference week.

Persons whose only activity consisted of work around their own house (painting, repairing, or own home housework) or volunteer work for religious, charitable, and other organizations are excluded.

EMPLOYMENT BY SECTOR

Employment levels and distributions are shown for four broad economic sectors: agriculture, industry, manufacturing (a sub-sector of industry), and services.

Sectoral employment data are based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) for the United States for 2000 onward, Canada for 1976 onward, and Mexico for 2005 onward. Data for Japan are based on the Japanese Standard Industrial Classification System (JSIC). For all other countries covered, sectoral employment data are based on the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC). Effects of the change in classification system are discussed in the country notes.

LABOR FORCE

The labor force is comprised of persons who are in employment and unemployment. All members of the working-age population are eligible for inclusion in the labor force, and those 16 and over (in the United States; age limits vary by country) who have a job or are actively looking for one are so classified. All others—those who have no job and are not looking for one—are counted as "not in the labor force."

The labor force participation rate represents the proportion of the working-age population that is in the labor force. Conversely, the inactivity rate represents the proportion of the working-age population that is not in the labor force. All persons in the civilian non-institutional working-age population who are neither employed nor unemployed are considered not in the labor force. Many who do not participate in the labor force are going to school or are retired. Family responsibilities keep others out of the labor force. Still others have a physical or mental disability which prevents them from participating in labor force activities.

WORKING-AGE POPULATION

The labor market statistics provided in this report describe the working-age population. In the United States, the working-age population is more specifically known as the civilian non-institutional working-age population:

- "Civilian" refers to persons who are not on active duty in the military;
- "Non-institutional" refers to persons who are not in institutions, such as prison inmates or those in a mental institution; and
- "Working-age" refers to persons 16 years of age and older.