

2020



03

Work and income

Neuchâtel 2021

SLFS 2020 in brief

The Swiss Labour Force Survey



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

Federal Department of Home Affairs FDHA
Federal Statistical Office FSO

1 About the survey

Since 1991, the Federal Statistical Office (FSO) has conducted the Swiss Labour Force Survey (SLFS) at the behest of the Federal Council. The SLFS is carried out on a representative sample of the population (120 000 annual interviews). From 1991 to 2020, the interviews only took place by telephone. As of 2021, the survey will mainly be conducted by internet but respondents may still answer by telephone if they wish to do so. Thanks to the application of international definitions, the SLFS helps to position Switzerland in the international context of unemployment and employment.

The questions asked

The questions mainly concern the labour market situation (current or previous employment, unemployment, retirement, working conditions, occupation, salary, job seeking, professional mobility), education and training (including continuous education), household composition and demographic characteristics.

Use of data from the SLFS

The SLFS data are of great interest in terms of social and labour market policies. The survey provides information on difficulties in finding employment, reintegration into the labour market, childcare, wage inequality, retirement behaviour and the integration of the foreign population. The SLFS is a survey that is essential for the Swiss statistical system. It is the main source for employment statistics, work volume statistics used to calculate labour productivity, labour market accounts and forecasts of the economically active population in the context of the demographic scenarios.

Legal bases and data processing

The protection of data is guaranteed by the Federal Statistics Act (RS 431.01), by the Ordinance on the Conduct of Federal Statistical Surveys (RS 431.012.1) and by the Federal Act on Data Protection (RS 235.1). The employees of the FSO and of the institute commissioned with carrying out the survey are strictly bound by official secrecy and subject to these laws. The data collected in the survey are processed anonymously since they are aggregated, extrapolated and finally expressed in a general way that does not allow persons who took part in the survey to be identified.

2 Conduct of the survey

You have been randomly selected from the FSO's sample register. The FSO's sample register is based on the official communal and cantonal registers. Only persons aged at least 15 can be chosen for the survey.

How does the interview take place?

The FSO shall inform the persons selected at random in writing about the objectives and implementation of the SLFS. In this letter you will find a link, your username and a password to access the **online questionnaire**. You can also use your smartphone to scan the personalised QR code found on your letter, giving you direct access to your questionnaire.

Online questionnaire: www.eLabour.ch

The questionnaire is optimised for use on a **smartphone**, but it also works on a **tablet** or **personal computer**. The questionnaire is available in English, French, German and Italian. If you prefer to answer **by telephone**, simply contact the LINK Institute, commissioned by the SFO to conduct the interview on the freephone number: 0800 511 411. Computer-assisted telephone interviews are conducted by professional interviewers who are themselves managed by supervisors.

Everyone's participation is important

Participation in this survey is voluntary, but your collaboration is very important for the relevance and quality of the study. We need your answers regardless of your age, nationality or employment status (employed, unemployed, retired, at home, in training, or other economically inactive status).

Any questions?

If you have any questions regarding the conduct of the survey, if you wish to inform us of any change to your contact details or make an appointment to carry out the interview, please contact the LINK hotline for the SLFS on **0800 511 411**. You can also send an email to the following address: hotline.sake@bfs.admin.ch or take a look at our website: www.slfs.bfs.admin.ch.

3 Main results of the SLFS

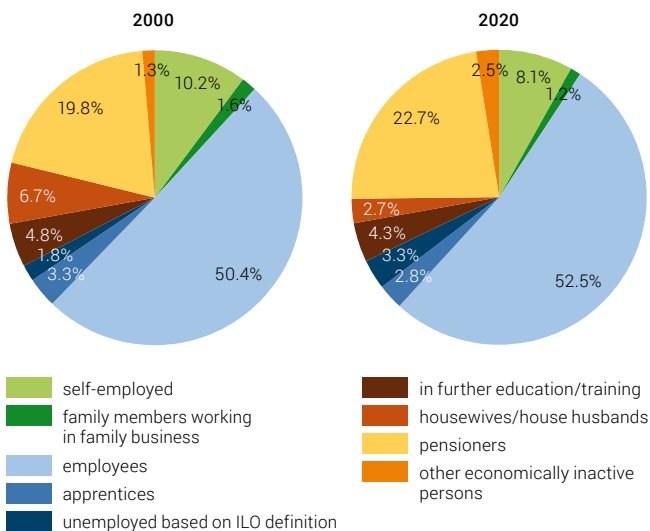
Composition of the permanent resident population

The Swiss population is made up of economically active persons and economically inactive persons. Economically active persons – which represent the labour supply – include employed persons (the self-employed, family members working in a family business, employees and apprentices) and the unemployed as per the definition of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Economically inactive persons are made up of persons in education, homemakers of both sexes and pensioners.

Over the last twenty years, the share of economically active persons in the population aged 15 and over has remained stable despite sharp demographic ageing (67.9% of economically active persons in 2020 and 67.4% in 2000). Within the economically active population, the shares of self-employed and family members working in a family business have fallen while the proportion of employees has risen. Among economically inactive persons, the share of pensioners has risen sharply at the expense of the share of homemakers.

Employment status¹

of the Swiss resident population aged 15 or over



¹ Sociological definition: employees in their own business count as self-employed.

Active population

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Employed persons



4.696 m

ILO Unemployed



238 000



37.4%
work part-time (<90%)

Underemployed persons



372 000

12.5%
are self-employed

9.3%
usually work on Sunday

4.2%
usually work at night

21.4%
work mainly or regularly
from home



35.7
number of persons aged
65 and older per 100
economically active persons
aged 20 to 64

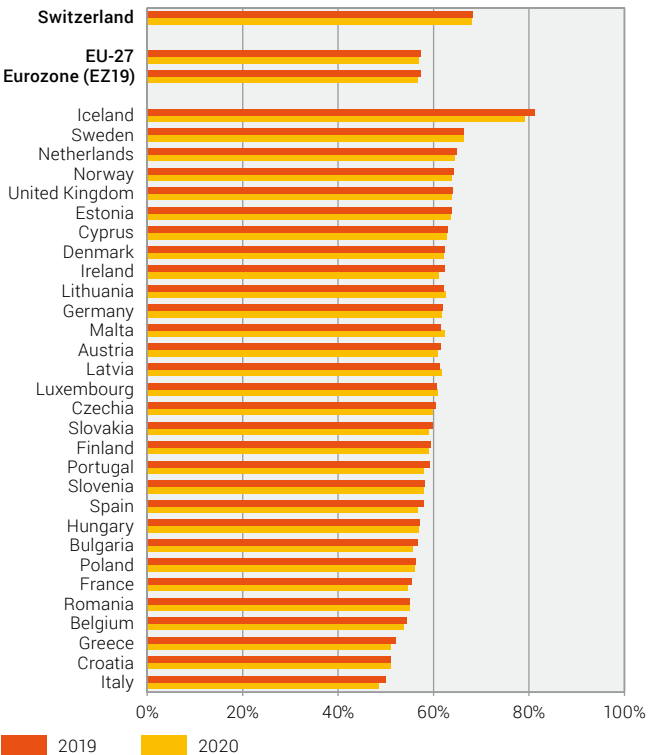
Source: FSO – Swiss Labour Force Survey (SLFS)

Labour force participation in Switzerland and in Europe

In 2020, the activity rate of the population aged 15 and over reached 67.9% in Switzerland, one of the highest rates in Europe. Only Iceland (79.0%) registered a higher activity rate. Switzerland's neighbouring countries recorded considerably lower rates (Germany: 61.6%, Austria: 60.8%; France: 54.5%, Italy: 48.5%). Alongside Italy, Croatia (51.0%) and Greece (51.0%) had the lowest rates in Europe. The EU-27 average was 56.8%.

Standardised activity rate (age 15 and over) in Switzerland and in EU and EFTA states

Annual average 2019 and 2020, in %



United Kingdom: age 16 and over

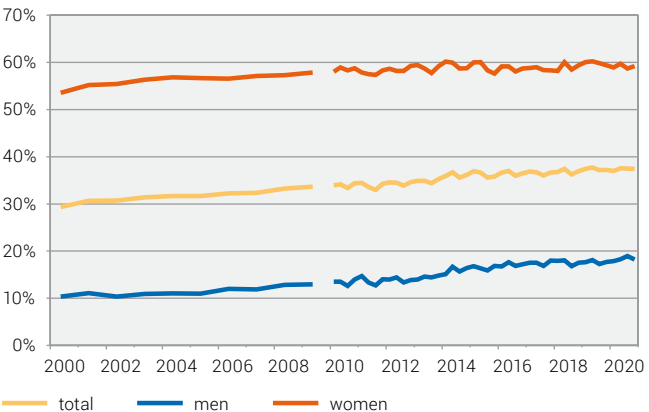
Part-time work

Part-time work (employment rate below 90%) has risen sharply in Switzerland over the past 20 years and now accounts for more than a third of employed persons.

It mainly concerns women, who in 2020 accounted for 73.9% of part-time employed persons (1.296 million compared with 459 000 men). Childcare and other family responsibilities are the main reasons cited for part-time employment.

Among these, 372 000 were underemployed, i. e. they would have liked to work more and were available to do so in the near future. The underemployment rate was 7.5% of the economically active population.

Persons employed part-time according to gender

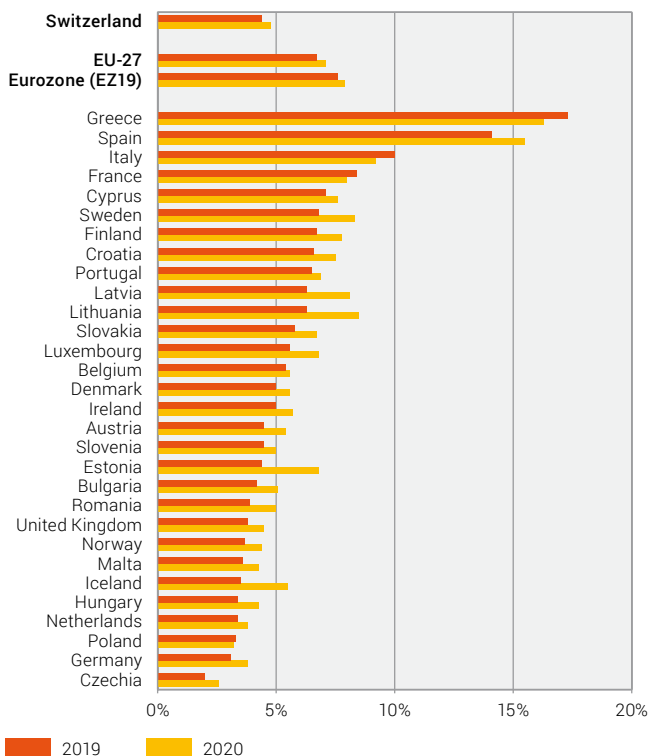


Unemployment in Switzerland and Europe

In 2020, 238 000 persons were unemployed in Switzerland as defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), i. e. 21 000 more persons than one year previously. These unemployed persons represented 4.8% of the economically active population, a greater share compared with 2019 (4.4%). Between 2019 and 2020, the unemployment rate rose in both the European Union (EU-27: from 6.7% to 7.1%) and the Euro zone (EZ19: from 7.6% to 7.9%).

Unemployment rate as defined by ILO (age 15–74), in Switzerland and EU and EFTA states

Annual average 2019 and 2020, in %



United Kingdom: age 16 and over

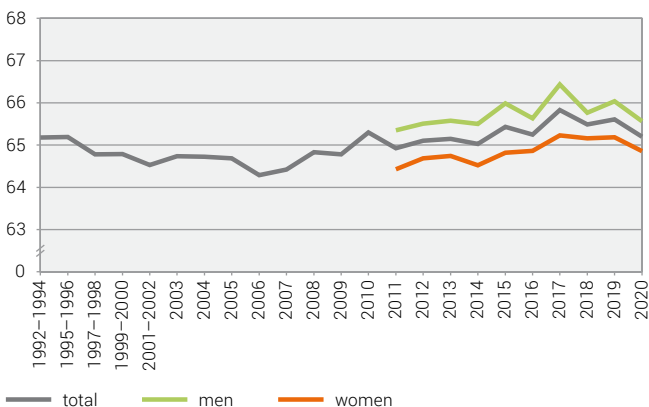
Employment and retirement

From the age of 50, the older people become, the more their activity rate (share of economically active persons in the population) declines. Whereas in the period from 2018–2020, 90% of men and 82% of women were still working at the age of 57 (i. e. one year before the minimum age at which a pension can be withdrawn from the 2nd pillar), at the age of 64 the activity rate of men was 56% and that of women at age 63 was 52%. At age 65 36% of men were still economically active and at age 64 28% of women. 74 year-olds also continue to be active on the labour market to some extent (14% of men; 7% of women).

The average age on leaving the labour market was 65.2 in 2020, down from the peak in 2017 (65.8). Men leave the labour market on average slightly later than women (65.6 versus 64.9).

In 2020, the number of persons aged 65 or more per 100 economically active persons aged 20 to 64 was 35.7. Over the past 10 years, demographic ageing has led to a rapid increase in this ratio (+10%) despite growing labour force participation: in 2010 there were only 32.3 persons aged 65 or older per 100 economically active persons aged 20 to 64.

Average age on leaving the labour market¹ by sex²



¹ Exits = changing from employment of at least 1 hour per week to no employment. Persons leaving aged 58–75 years.

² Due to sample size, men and women can only be distinguished from 2011 onward.

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Information: LINK hotline for the SLFS interview on 0800 511 411,
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