



Swiss Earnings Structure Survey (ESS)

Description

The Swiss Earnings Structure Survey (ESS) is a survey carried out every two years among private and public enterprises and administrations in Switzerland. It allows a regular description to be made of the earnings structure in all economic activities of the secondary and tertiary sector based on representative data. It not only enquires after the economic activity and the size of the enterprise concerned but also the individual characteristics of employees and their jobs.

The ESS has been conducted since 1994. To meet the changing information needs of national and international stakeholders, the ESS was revised in 2012, leading to a change in certain variables. Despite this revision, continuity with previous surveys is largely guaranteed.

Methodology

Type of survey

Sample survey of private and public enterprises and administrations. Participation in the survey is compulsory. Around 46 000 enterprises were drawn for the 2024 ESS sample. The gross response rate was 74%. The data of around 2.9 million employees were collected.

Sampling procedure

The survey is based on a complex random sampling procedure. Enterprises (private and public) are stratified according to the three following criteria: business size (3 classes), economic activity (39 sections) and geographical location (7 major regions). The survey sample of public administrations is collected according to specific criteria. The sample size is calculated so that the coefficient of variation is below 3% where possible in all of the relevant statistics, in particular those on the median wage by major region and by economic activity as well as by major region and economic activity combined. There are 2800 strata in the ESS. To obtain representative data at cantonal and city level, eight cantons and one city have requested that their sample size be enlarged.

Survey population

Employees (according to the domestic concept) of secondary and tertiary sector enterprises with at least three employees. Data concerning the wages of administrative bodies and organisations of the Confederation have been included from the start (1994). Since 1998 the survey has also provided data on earnings in the public sector at cantonal level and since 2006 at communal level and since 2012 for church wages. Up to and including 2010, the following categories of employee were not included in the survey: apprentices, trainees, salaried persons working at home, persons paid solely on a commission basis, and persons whose professional activities take place mainly abroad. These categories have been included in the survey since 2012.

Variables recorded:

Enterprise:

- Number of employees
- Type of wage agreement

Employees:

- OASI number used as a key for demographic characteristics such as sex, civil status, age and nationality (Swiss nationals and foreign nationals by residence category)
- Education
- Higher education qualification
- Professional position
- Current occupation
- Starting data in enterprise
- Type of contract

-
- Working hours
 - Work-time percentage
 - Holidays
 - Gross wage in the month of October (basic wage plus allowances for shift work and other hardship premiums).
 - Family allowances
 - Employee's social insurance contribution
 - 13th wage, 14th and subsequent wages
 - Payment of overtime
 - Special payments
 - BER number as key enabling place of work and economic activity of establishments to be identified.

Degree of regionalisation:
Switzerland/major regions:

Periodicity of publication:
Every two years

Reference period:
Month of October

Data linkages with:
Population and Household Statistics (STATPOP)
Central Migration Information System (CEMIS)
Statistics on the Swiss Abroad

Quality of statistical information:
Findings with a coefficient of variation greater than 5% (numerical value statistically uncertain) are shown inside brackets [] .

Policy on revisions

Regular revisions (or continuous revision):
Revisions are undertaken as needed (e.g. revision of sources).

Revision due to a change in methodology (or general revision):
Methodological revisions are undertaken as needed (e.g. to adapt definitions).

Legal bases

Federal Statistics Act (FStatA) of 9 October 1992 (RS 431.01), Ordinance of 30 April 2025 on Federal Statistics (SR 431.011)

Organisation

Federal Statistical Office (FSO)

LOHN information
+41 58 463 64 29
lohn@bfs.admin.ch
