Labour market data: Quick reference guide

What is the primary source for labour market data?

The ABS Labour Force Survey is the official source of labour force statistics. The survey covers approximately 24,000 dwellings, resulting in a sample of approximately 50,000 people. The survey provides consistent definitions and estimates for employment, unemployment, the unemployment rate and labour force participation rate. Data are published in original, trend and seasonally adjusted terms. For more information on these series and other common labour market statistics definitions and calculations, see the glossary on page 4.

Links to the data

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

Labour Force Survey

The ABS Labour Force Survey contains key estimates of labour market activity at the national, state/territory and regional level. The ABS currently releases two sets of regional labour force estimates – the direct survey Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4) estimates and new, higher quality modelled SA4 estimates that supplement the Labour Force Survey results with auxiliary administrative data. The ABS has advised that the new modelled estimates should be used and are preferred (rather than the direct survey SA4 estimates), where available, as they provide a more stable and reliable series. For more information on ABS regional labour force data, please see the ABS Regional labour market data guide.

New data are typically released monthly, with the direct survey SA4 estimates released a week after the headline estimates, followed by the release of the modelled SA4 estimates a week later (i.e. fortnight after the headline estimates). The ABS publish release dates six months in advance.

- The monthly headline release includes key labour market indicators, e.g. data on employed persons, underemployed workers, unemployed persons, the unemployment rate, hours worked and the participation rate, at the National, State and Territory level.

- The detailed monthly and quarterly release contains more detailed labour market data, including duration of unemployment, regional (direct survey and modelled SA4 estimates), and by age.

- Industry and occupation data are included in this release but are only collected and updated quarterly (February, May, August and November) each year.

ABS 2021 Census of Population and Housing

The Census is the best source of detailed data and can provide useful benchmarks at the regional level. However, the information may be dated as it relates to a single point in time and may not reflect the impact of COVID-19.

- Search Census data has taken the place of the Census Quick stats and Community profiles. You can find a broad range of data, including detailed data tables, for a wide range of geographies (such as Local Government Areas and Statistical Area Level 2). Census data includes data by age, gender, education, culture, language and diversity and employment.

Jobs and Skills Australia website

- Jobs and Skills Atlas provides an overview of the labour market at national, state and regional level by occupations, skills and industries.

- Industry Profiles explore employment trends at the national, state and territory, and Employment Region level. Profiles also examine gender and age distribution of the workforce for each region.

- Recruitment Trends and Employers Needs Profiles provide an update on recruitment activity at the state and territory level, and for all 51 Employment Regions.

- Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey provides insights into recruitment and the difficulties associated with recruitment. Also looks at the recruitment methods used by employers looking to employ staff.

- Internet Vacancy Index (IVI) provides detailed data for vacancies advertised online, for around 350 occupations (at all skill levels), as well as for states/territories and 37 IVI Regions (updated monthly). The IVI is based on a count of online job advertisements newly lodged on SEEK, CareerOne and Workforce Australia during the month.

- Small Area Labour Market (SALM) data, updated quarterly, are regional estimates of unemployment and the unemployment rate at the Statistical Area Level 2 and Local Government Area level.

- Nowcast of Employment by Region and Occupation (NERO) is an experimental dataset providing information on employment in 355 occupations across 88 regions in Australia.

Labour Market Insights (LMI)

The Labour Market Insights website brought together data from a range of official sources (including the ABS data noted above) to help users better understand their local labour market. Please note that the content on the LMI website has been migrated to the Jobs and Skills Australia website, and the LMI website is no longer operational.

- Occupation profiles allowed users to look at different industries and occupations, their current labour market profiles and projections. These include occupation profiles as well as skills and training requirements.

Australian Jobs publication

- Australian Jobs provides an overview of trends in the Australian labour market.

It is designed to support a range of users, including students, career advisers, job seekers and employment service providers, those considering future training and work and people interested in labour market issues.

Glossary of common labour market terms and calculations

The definitions provided in the table below are sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics website and can be found on the [Labour Force Australia Methodology Release](#), [Labour Force Framework](#) and [Labour Statistics Guide](#).

The definitions used by the ABS have remained largely unchanged since the 1960s and align closely with the standards and guidelines set out in Resolutions of International Conferences of Labour Statisticians.

Term	Definition	Summary
Civilian population aged 15 years and over	All usual residents of Australia aged 15 years and over, except members of the permanent defence forces, certain diplomatic personnel of overseas governments customarily excluded from census and estimated population counts, overseas residents in Australia, and members of non-Australian defence forces (and their dependants) stationed in Australia.	Persons aged 15 and over
Employed	All persons aged 15 years and over who met one of the following criteria during the reference week: Worked for one hour or more for pay, profit, commission, or payment in kind, in a job or business or on a farm (employees and owner managers of incorporated or unincorporated enterprises). Worked for one hour or more without pay in a family business or on a farm (contributing family workers). Were employees who had a job but were not at work and were: • away from work for less than four weeks up to the end of the reference week; or • away from work for more than four weeks up to the end of the reference week and received pay for some or all of the four-week period to the end of the reference week; or • away from work as a standard work or shift arrangement; or • on strike or locked out; or • on workers' compensation and expected to return to their job. • Were owner managers who had a job, business, or farm, but were not at work.	Total employed (includes full-time, part-time, away from work and hours worked not stated)

Term	Definition	Summary
Employed full-time	Employed persons who usually work 35 hours or more a week (in all jobs) and those who, although usually working less than 35 hours a week, worked 35 hours or more during the reference week.	≥ 35 hours per week
Employed part-time	Employed persons who usually work less than 35 hours a week (in all jobs) and either did so during the reference week or were not at work in the reference week.	< 35 hours per week
Unemployed	Persons aged 15 years and over who were not employed during the reference week, and: • had actively looked for full-time or part-time work at any time in the four weeks up to the end of the reference week and were available for work in the reference week; or • were waiting to start a new job within four weeks from the end of the reference week and could have started in the reference week if the job had been available then.	Not working but actively looking for work and are available to start work
Labour force	Persons who were employed or unemployed, as defined.	$= Total\ employed$ $+ Total\ unemployed$
Labour force status	A classification of the civilian population aged 15 years and over into employed, unemployed or not in the labour force. These categories are mutually exclusive: a person can only be defined as one of these.	A person can be: • employed, or • unemployed, or • not in the labour force
Unemployment rate	For any group, the number of unemployed persons expressed as a percentage of the labour force in the same group.	$= \dfrac{Unemployed}{Labour\ Force}$
Working age population	Civilian population aged 15 to 64 years.	Persons aged 15 to 64
Youth	Civilian population aged 15 to 24 years. *Students:* Educational attendance is not a factor determining labour force status. For example, if a student (full-time or part-time) satisfies the definitions outlined above, they are counted as employed, unemployed or not in the labour force.	Persons aged 15 to 24

Term	Definition	Summary
Long-term unemployed (LTU)	Persons unemployed for 52 weeks or more. Additionally: • Very long-term unemployed: persons unemployed for 104 weeks (2 years) or more. • Extremely long-term unemployed: persons unemployed for 5 years or more (this is a commonly used term but data for this group are not available from the LFS).	Unemployed for 52 weeks or more
Participation rate	For any group, the labour force expressed as a percentage of the civilian population aged 15 years and over in the same group.	$= \dfrac{Labour\ Force}{Civilian\ Population}$

Time series adjustments	There are a few different estimations for Labour Force Survey time series data:
	
	 • Original series: Raw, unadjusted data, that include;
	
	    – systematic calendar related events;
	    – short-term irregular fluctuations; and
	    – long-term cyclical behaviour
	
	 • Seasonally adjusted series: a time series of estimates with the estimated effects of normal seasonal variation removed (such as spikes in retail activity in December or seasonal crop harvesting).
	 • Trend series: Seasonally adjusted estimates can be smoothed to reduce the impact of irregular or non-seasonal influences. Smoothed seasonally adjusted series are called trend estimates.	