

Labour reserve in Europe in Spring 2001

EU-wide, one woman in six aged 25-54 is inactive due to family responsibilities

Half of men aged 55-64 are inactive

The EU activity¹ rate for prime-aged women (those aged between 25 and 54) was 72% in 2001, while 28% of women in this age group were inactive. The activity rate for men in this age range was 92%, and the inactivity rate was 8% (20 percentage points lower than for women).

The EU inactivity rate of 28% for prime-aged women masks considerable differences between Member States: the **Nordic** countries (**Denmark, Finland and Sweden**) with inactivity rates between 15% and 17% contrast with the southern Member States, **Italy, Spain and Greece**, and **Luxembourg**, where between 35% and 40% of women between 25 and 54 were outside the labour force. Inactivity rates for prime-aged men were more narrowly grouped, ranging from 5.8% in **Luxembourg** to 9.6% in **Sweden**.

These data come from a report² issued today by **Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Communities in Luxembourg**, focusing on the labour reserve, i.e. those people who are inactive and who make up a pool of additional labour supply. Information about the size of the labour reserve and the reasons for inactivity are of major importance in the framework of the European Employment Strategy, which aims to raise, by 2010, the overall EU employment rate to 70% (64.3% in 2002) and the number of women in employment to more than 60% (55.6% in 2002).

Age and sex as determining factors

Along with the two determining factors of age and sex, the report identifies five main reasons why people are inactive - education, illness or disability, family responsibilities, retirement and the belief that there are no jobs available (which accounted for fewer than 1% of the total working age population on average in the EU). The report in particular emphasises those people who are inactive, but have previous work experience.

Among young people aged between 15 and 24, 56% of women in the EU and 49% of men were inactive in 2001, although most of these young people were inactive due to being in education. For women aged 55-64, 69% were inactive on average in the EU in 2001: 31% of women of this age group were inactive due to retirement, 21% due to family responsibilities and 7% due to illness or disability. For men of this age the inactivity rate was 48% in 2001. The main reason for inactivity was also retirement (35% of men of this age group), followed by illness or disability (8%).

Fewer than 2% of Swedish women aged 25-54 are inactive due to family responsibilities

Inactivity rates for prime-aged women were around 30 percentage points higher than for prime-aged men in **Greece, Italy, Spain and Luxembourg**, while in the **Nordic** countries the gap was less than 10 percentage points. Among prime-aged men, of which 8% were inactive on average across the EU, 3% were inactive due to illness or disability, 2% were in education and less than 1% had family responsibilities. Among prime-aged women, of which 28% were inactive in the EU, 18% were inactive due to family responsibilities, 3% were inactive due to illness or disability and 2% were in education. Nearly two in three of those prime-aged women who were inactive due to family responsibilities had previous work experience.

While less than 2% of all prime aged women in **Sweden**, 3% in **Denmark** and 7% in **Finland**, were inactive due to family responsibilities, this group accounted for 34% in **Greece**, and 31% in **Luxembourg** and **Italy**.

**Active and inactive prime-age men and women
as % of total prime-age population, Spring 2001**

	% of total prime-age population				
	Active		Inactive		Women inactive due to family responsibility
	Men	Women	Men	Women	
EU15	92.4	72.3	7.7	27.7	17.6
B	90.9	70.7	9.1	29.3	17.2
DK	91.4	83.5	8.6	16.5	3.4
D	93.5	77.5	6.5	22.6	13.8
EL	94.0	61.3	6.0	38.7	33.8
E	91.6	60.8	8.4	39.2	16.9
F	94.0	78.4	6.0	21.6	15.5
IRL	91.8	66.1	8.2	33.9	29.1
I	90.6	59.4	9.4	40.6	30.6
L	94.2	65.0	5.8	35.0	31.3
NL	94.0	74.2	6.0	25.8	16.5
A	93.5	76.9	6.5	23.1	17.6
P	92.7	78.1	7.4	21.9	14.2
FIN	91.0	85.3	9.0	14.7	6.8
S	90.4	85.4	9.6	14.6	1.8
UK	91.3	76.3	8.7	23.7	14.1
IS	95.2	85.9	4.8	14.1	4.9
NO	91.5	83.3	8.5	16.7	2.5
EEA	92.4	72.4	7.7	27.6	17.0

- The population can be divided into the **economically active population** or labour force (comprising **employed** and **unemployed** persons) and the **inactive population**.
Employed persons are those who during the reference week performed work, even for just one hour per week, for pay, profit or family gain, or were not at work but had a job or business from which they were temporarily absent.
Unemployed persons are persons who were without work during the reference week, were currently available for work and were actively seeking work or who found a job to start later.
Inactive persons are those who during the reference week were neither employed nor unemployed.
The activity and inactivity rates are all calculated relative to the total population of the age concerned.
- Eurostat, Statistics in focus, Population and social conditions, No 14/2003, "Labour reserve: people outside the labour force"**.

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