STATISTICS DENMARK

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DFG
Labour and Income

Statistics Denmark's Unemployment Concepts

Statistics Denmark measures unemployment using both register-based unemployment statistics and the quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS). While the register-based measure is the most used measure of unemployment in Denmark, LFS unemployment statistics follows international definitions and is therefore often used for international comparisons. This note first explains the conceptual differences between the two measures and then quantifies these differences, both at aggregate and individual level.

Under the international definition[1] of unemployment, a person must meet three criteria to be considered unemployed: (1) not be employed, (2) be actively seeking work, and (3) be available for work. These criteria are implemented in different ways in Statistics Denmark's two unemployment statistics: Register-based unemployment and the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Register-based unemployment is a monthly census based on administrative data collected by the Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment ("STAR") through job centres, etc. The register-based unemployment statistics measures the number of unemployed people on the basis of specific benefits paid to them during a month. The statistics cover job-ready recipients of unemployment benefits, cash benefit and wage subsidies aged 16–66, converted into full-time unemployed persons.

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a quarterly sample survey of people aged 15–89 who reside in Denmark[2]. Each quarter, approximately 36,000 people are selected for a sample and interviewed about their situation during a specific reference week - including whether they had paid work, were actively looking for work and could start a new job immediately. These responses are used to determine whether respondents are unemployed according to the international definition of unemployment. The responses are adjusted for non-response bias and are then used to produce an estimate of LFS unemployment in the population as a whole.

Differences between the two measures at aggregate level

The main difference between the two statistics is that register-based unemployment only includes people who receive a specific benefit. This means, among other things, that students and pensioners are generally not recorded as unemployed, as they do not normally receive unemployment benefits, cash assistance or wage subsidies. In addition, register-based unemployment is measured as the number of full-time unemployed persons, meaning that people are included in the unemployment figure in proportion to the part of the reference period during which they were unemployed. This differs from the LFS, where every unemployed person counts as one unemployed person, regardless of the extent of their unemployment.

[1] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Unemployment
[2] In this document, the figures from the Labour Force Survey (LSF) are restricted to the 15–74 age group.

Under the international definition of labour-market status, employment and unemployment are mutually exclusive, and employment takes precedence over unemployment when a person meets both conditions at the same time. Consequently, a person who is working and receives supplementary unemployment benefits is classified as employed in the LFS - but may simultaneously be partly unemployed in the register-based statistics.

These and several other differences result in different numbers of unemployed people in the two statistics; see Figure 1. In the fourth quarter of 2025, 207,600 people were unemployed according to the LFS. Excluding people whose main activity in the LFS was being a student reduces this figure by 48,900 to 158,700 unemployed people. LFS unemployment excluding students was 20,500 higher than register-based unemployment in the fourth quarter of 2025.

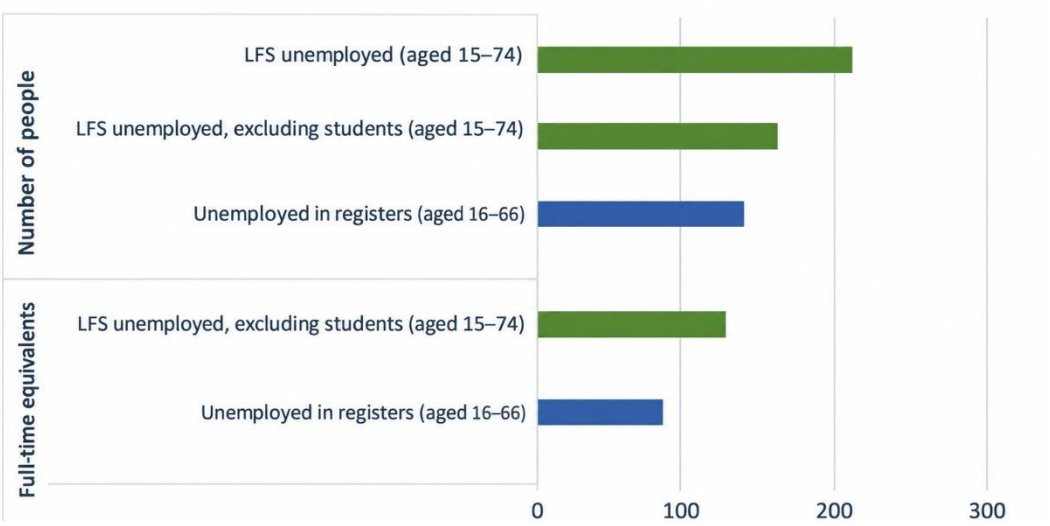


Figure 1. *LFS unemployment and register-based unemployment, fourth quarter of 2025.* Source: *https://statistikbanken.dk/AULK02* and a special tabulation of the LFS.

If we also adjust for the fact that not everyone is looking for full-time work and calculate the number of full-time unemployed people in the LFS, the figure falls by a further 28,100 to 130,600 full-time unemployed people. In the register, the number of full-time unemployed people was 83,400 in the fourth quarter of 2025. Although the two measures of full-time unemployment do not represent exactly the same concept, the figures are more comparable than the figures counting people. In the fourth quarter of 2025, the LFS recorded 47,100 more full-time unemployed people than the register-based statistics.

***Table 1**. LFS unemployment and register-based unemployment, fourth quarter of 2025*

	Age 15–29 years	Age 30+ years	Total
		1,000 persons	
Number of persons			
LFS unemployed	93	115	208
LFS unemployed, excluding students	46	112	159
Register-based unemployed	33	105	138
Number of full-time unemployed			
LFS unemployed, excluding students	39	92	131
Register-based unemployed	19	64	83

Table 1 shows that the difference between the two statistics is largely accounted for by young people under the age of 30. There were 93,000 unemployed people aged 15–29 according to the LFS, compared with only 33,000 register-based unemployed people—a difference of 60,000. When considering full-time unemployed LFS respondents aged 15–29 and excluding students, the difference falls from 60,000 to 20,000 people. Among people aged 30 and over, excluding students has very little effect. By contrast, LFS unemployment in this age group falls by 20,000 people when converted to full-time equivalents, as the calculation adjusts for people seeking part-time employment. The difference between the number of full-time LFS unemployed people aged 30 and over, excluding students, and the number of register-based unemployed people aged 30 and over is 28,000.

The remaining difference of approximately 48,000 full-time unemployed people (131,000–83,000) is harder to describe, but three factors can be quantified. The first is pensioners, who are not included in register-based unemployment but may be unemployed according to the LFS if they are not employed, are seeking work and can start immediately. The second is 15-year-olds, who are included in the LFS but not in register-based unemployment, which is limited to people aged 16 and over. The third is LFS unemployed people whose most recent job was as self-employed. These three groups receive unemployment-related benefits only to a very limited extent and therefore generally appear in the LFS unemployment figures but not in the register-based figures. Together, these factors explain a further 15,000 people of the difference, although the number is somewhat lower when measured as full-time unemployed people.

In addition, some people meet the LFS unemployment criteria without having registered as unemployed with the public employment system and therefore do not receive unemployment-related benefits. These people appear only in the LFS unemployment figures. There are also people recorded as unemployed in the register who are not unemployed according to the LFS. These differences are examined in greater detail in the following two sections.

Finally, it should be noted that the LFS unemployment estimate is subject to some statistical uncertainty, particularly because it is based on a sample survey. In addition to sampling uncertainty, the collected data may be biased as a result of non-random non-response among selected respondents, which cannot be corrected for sufficiently.

Identifying LFS unemployed people within the population as a whole

Figure 2 quantifies LFS unemployment and its composition. Using data from eIncome and the LFS questionnaire, the weighted sample of people aged 15–74 is divided into the following groups: *Register-based unemployed people; Students and recipients of the Danish student grant (SU); Recipients of other benefits; and others*. The population is then filtered according to the three unemployment criteria. First, everyone who worked during the reference week is excluded. Next, people who are not actively seeking work (i.e. have not looked for work within the past four weeks) are excluded. Finally, those who cannot start work immediately (within two weeks) are excluded. The remaining group, shown in the green box in Figure 2, is the total number of LFS unemployed people.

Figure 2 illustrates that LFS unemployment comprises not only people who are unemployed according to the register, but also a substantial number of students and recipients of benefits other than SU. In addition, one-third of total LFS unemployment comes from the group classified as *'Others'*. Conversely, not everyone recorded as unemployed in the register is classified as unemployed in the LFS; for example, 16,000 register-based unemployed people are classified as employed in the LFS. These are often people who have a job and receive supplementary unemployment benefits.

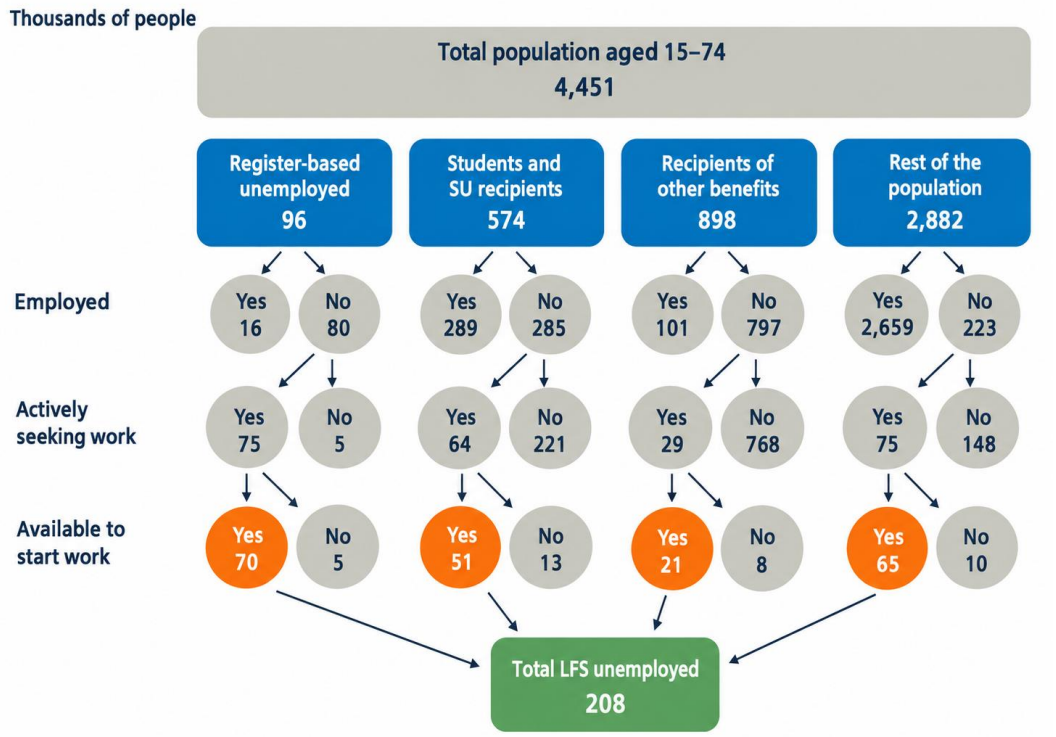


Figure 2. *Identifying LFS unemployment, fourth quarter of 2025.* Note: Totals may differ from the sum of their components due to rounding.

As many as 51,000 of the LFS unemployed people are students (defined as having student status as their main activity or receiving SU). They are unemployed according to the definition, but this differs from the usual concept of full-time unemployment, since students mostly want a job alongside their studies and, all else being equal, cannot be expected to work the same number of hours as an average recipient of unemployment benefits.

A further 21,000 LFS unemployed people receive other benefits, such as disability pension, early retirement pension, state pension or similar benefits. However, many of these people will prefer to work fewer hours (for example, because of reduced work capacity) and therefore contribute less to full-time unemployment.

The final group of 65,000 LFS unemployed people consists of a diverse range of people who are not employed, including people receiving other types of benefits or people entirely outside the benefit system, who are nevertheless seeking work and could start immediately. This group is a particular focus of the next section, which quantifies the overlap between the two measures to the extent possible.

Differences between the two groups at individual level

This section focuses on individuals who are either unemployed according to the register, unemployed according to the LFS, or both. The figures are based on the weighted LFS for the fourth quarter of 2025. Each person's register-based unemployment status during the relevant reference week is used to identify the overlap with LFS unemployment.

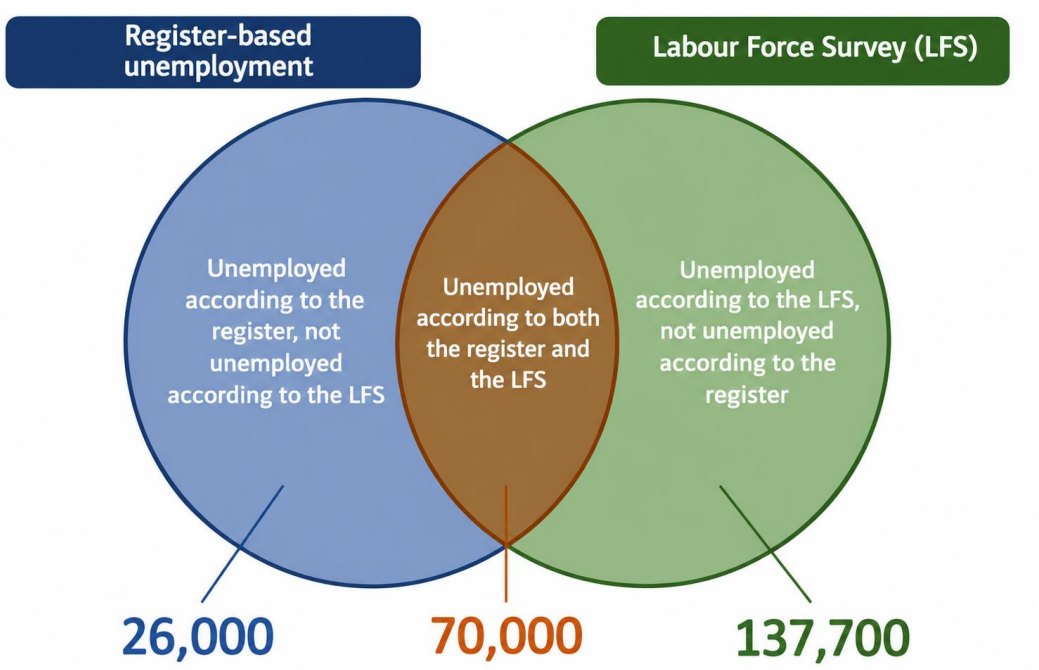


Figure 3. *Overlap between register-based unemployment and LFS unemployment, fourth quarter of 2025*

As Figure 3 shows, 234,000 people were either unemployed according to the register or unemployed according to the LFS in the fourth quarter of 2025. Of these, 70,000 were unemployed according to both measures, while 26,000 were unemployed only according to the register and 138,000 only according to the LFS. Just as the overall level of LFS unemployment is higher than register-based unemployment, the group of LFS unemployed people who are not unemployed according to the register is the larger group.

Table 2. *Further details of the differences between LFS unemployment and register-based unemployment, fourth quarter of 2025*

Register-based unemployed, not LFS unemployed		LFS unemployed, not register-based unemployed	
Total	26,000	Total	137,700
Register-employed	13,400	Students	51,400
LFS-employed	4,400	Not entitled to unemployment benefits or social assistance in 2024	59,600
Other reasons	8,300	Absent from work during the reference week	5,500
		Register-employed	8,000
		Recipients of other benefits	6,500
		Other reasons	6,700

The group of people who are unemployed according to the register but not according to the LFS (left-hand side of Table 2) consists largely of people who are employed. As noted above, employment takes precedence over unemployment when a person's labour-market status is determined in the LFS. Therefore, someone who is working and receives supplementary unemployment benefits is classified as employed in the LFS, but may be partly unemployed according to the register. This applies to 13,400 people in the weighted sample who received wage income during the period. The same may apply when someone is temporarily laid off because of weather conditions and receives unemployment benefits for that reason. A further 4,400 people did not receive wage income according to eIncome but reported having a job in the LFS; they may be self-employed or engaged in unregistered work, including work abroad or undeclared work.

The 137,700 people who were unemployed according to the LFS but not according to the register mainly fall into two groups. The first group consists of students, many of whom receive SU rather than unemployment-related benefits. They therefore cannot, by definition, be recorded as unemployed in the register, although they can be unemployed under the ILO definition.

The second group - *'No contributions to an unemployment insurance fund/trade union in 2024'* - captures people who do not pay contributions to an unemployment insurance fund and are therefore not entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. Some of these people will also not meet the requirements for receiving cash assistance. This group is approximated by checking whether deductions for contributions to trade unions or unemployment insurance funds appear in the 2024 annual tax statement. If not, it is assumed that the person has not contributed to an unemployment insurance fund for long enough to qualify for unemployment insurance benefits in the fourth quarter of 2025. This is not a precise measure of eligibility for unemployment insurance benefits, but is used to estimate the size of the group. Of the LFS unemployed people who are not unemployed according to the register, an estimated 59,600 are not entitled to unemployment-related benefits.

The next two groups are *'Absent from work during the reference week'* and 'Register-employed'. These include people who have, for example, been released from their work duties but continue to receive wages. If their absence lasts more than three months, they are not considered employed under the LFS, but are considered unemployed if they are seeking work and could start immediately. Finally, there is a group of LFS unemployed people who receive benefits other than unemployment-related benefits, such as a pension, early retirement pension or disability pension, and are therefore not included in register-based unemployment.

Conclusion

Statistics Denmark measures unemployment in two ways: through register-based unemployment statistics and the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The two measures differ fundamentally in their methods and principles of calculation, resulting in a substantial difference in the number of people recorded as unemployed.

The main structural difference is that register-based unemployment is restricted to recipients of specific unemployment-related benefits, whereas LFS unemployment follows the ILO's international definition and therefore also captures unemployed people who do not receive unemployment benefits - for example, recipients of SU. In addition, the headline figure for register-based unemployment is measured in full-time equivalents, while LFS unemployment is measured as a number of people. The age ranges also differ: LFS unemployment covers people aged 15–74, while register-based unemployment covers those aged 16–66. In the fourth quarter of 2025, total LFS unemployment was 207,600 people, compared with 83,400 register-based unemployed people - a difference of 124,200. LFS unemployment excluding students, measured in full-time equivalents, is 77,000 lower than the official LFS unemployment figure.

The overlap between the two unemployment concepts has also been examined. Of the 234,000 people who were either unemployed according to the register or according to the LFS in the fourth quarter of 2025, only 70,000 were unemployed according to both statistics at the same time. The 26,000 people who were unemployed according to the register but not according to the LFS are largely explained by their being classified as employed in the LFS—typically because they receive supplementary unemployment benefits alongside a job. The 138,000 people who were unemployed according to the LFS but not according to the register consist mainly of students and people who are not entitled to unemployment-related benefits.

The choice of unemployment measure should depend on the purpose of the analysis. Register-based unemployment is well suited to monitoring developments in the Danish labour market in greater detail, as it is published monthly and covers the group in direct contact with the public unemployment system. It also has the advantage of being a census, with no sampling uncertainty or sampling bias. It can therefore be used much more extensively to analyse unemployment at a detailed level, for example by municipality, narrow age groups or combinations of these.

LFS unemployment, by contrast, is the recommended measure for international comparisons because it follows the ILO definition and thus enables comparisons between countries with very different benefit systems. It is also better suited to analyses of youth unemployment, especially where the aim is to include recipients of SU. The two measures should therefore be seen as complementary: they are designed for different purposes and each has its own strengths.