

International Seminar on Labour and Social Security in the Digital Age
ILO Beijing Office in collaboration with Sichuan University

New Forms of Employment in Japan: Classifications and Statistics

Slight modifications were made after the presentation.
The original title was “Non-standard Forms of Employment in Japan: Classifications and Statistics.”

April 25, 2025

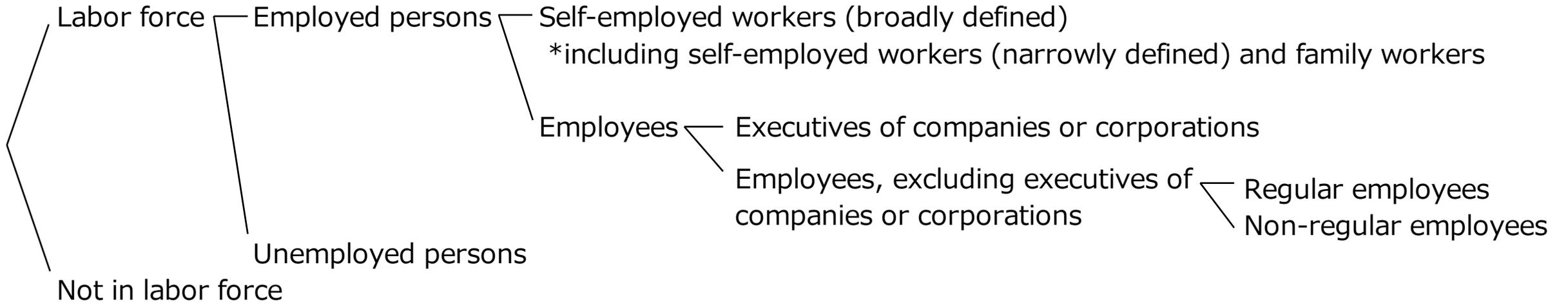
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1. Terms used in the *Labour Force Survey*



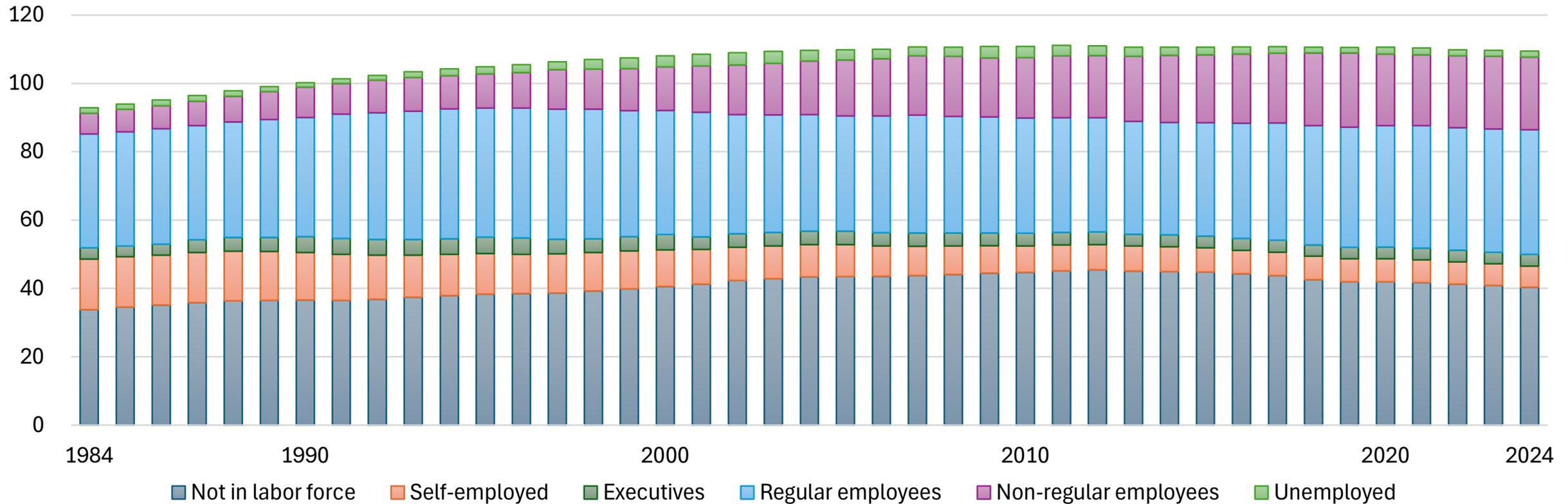
- “Employees, excluding executives of companies or corporations” are individuals working under an employment contract, whereas “self-employed workers (broadly defined)” are those working without such a contract.

- The definition of “non-regular employees” in the *Labour Force Survey* is based on the classification of workers within each company or corporation. Generally, part-time, fixed-term contract, or temporary agency (dispatched) workers are classified as “non-regular employees” in many companies/corporations. However, under the Japanese-style employment system, the term “non-regular employees” refers to individuals performing supplementary tasks with less stability, whereas regular employees typically hold long-term employment.
- Non-regular employees include married women whose husbands are regular employees, part-time student workers, and those working after reaching mandatory retirement age. Until the mid-2010s, young people who graduated during the “employment ice age” (generally known as the period between 1993 and 2004) also occupied a considerable portion of non-regular employees.

- “Self-employed workers (broadly defined)” include, for example, farmers, forestry workers, fishers, small shop owners, small factory owners, truck and taxi drivers, carpenters, artists, actors, and writers.
- Among “self-employed workers (broadly defined),” there are those called “freelancers,” who are self-employed workers but neither hire employees nor own stores (excluding farmers, forestry workers, and fishers).

2. Changes in the number of workers in Japan

Composition of the population aged 15 years and over (million people)



Source: Author's calculation combining the "basic tabulations" and "detailed tabulations" of the *Labour Force Survey* (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications).

Note: Actual numbers are available in the appendix.

- Traditionally, the workforce primarily consisted of “regular employees” who worked full-time, held permanent contracts, and were under the direct control of their employers.
- However, since the 1990s, the number and proportion of non-regular employees have increased, and the disparity in working conditions, such as job security and compensation between regular and non-regular employees, has become a severe social problem.
- The number and proportion of “self-employed workers (broadly defined)” are expected to decline in the long term, primarily owing to the decline in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, as well as the closure of small family businesses.

3. Worker protection and social security

Eligibility for worker protection and social security schemes

	Labor Standards Act (LSA)	Employment Insurance*	Pension and Health Insurance**	Labor Union Act (LUA)	Industrial Accident Compensation Insurance
Regular employee	○	○	○	○	○
Non-regular employee	○	△	△	○	○
Self-employed (broadly defined)	×	×	× (Need to apply for themselves)	△ (Definition of "labor" is slightly broader in LUA than in LSA)	△ (Self-employed workers can apply for the insurance through "special" procedure)

*If “the scheduled working hours is 20 hours or more per week” and “the period of employment is 31 days or longer” and “the worker is not a student,” the worker is enrolled in Employment Insurance. The criteria do not exactly coincide with the distinction between regular and non-regular employees, but almost all regular employees are enrolled in.

**If the scheduled working hours is 20 hours or more per week, the worker is automatically enrolled in pension and health insurance by the employer. The criteria do not exactly coincide with the distinction between regular and non-regular employees, but almost all regular employees are automatically enrolled in.

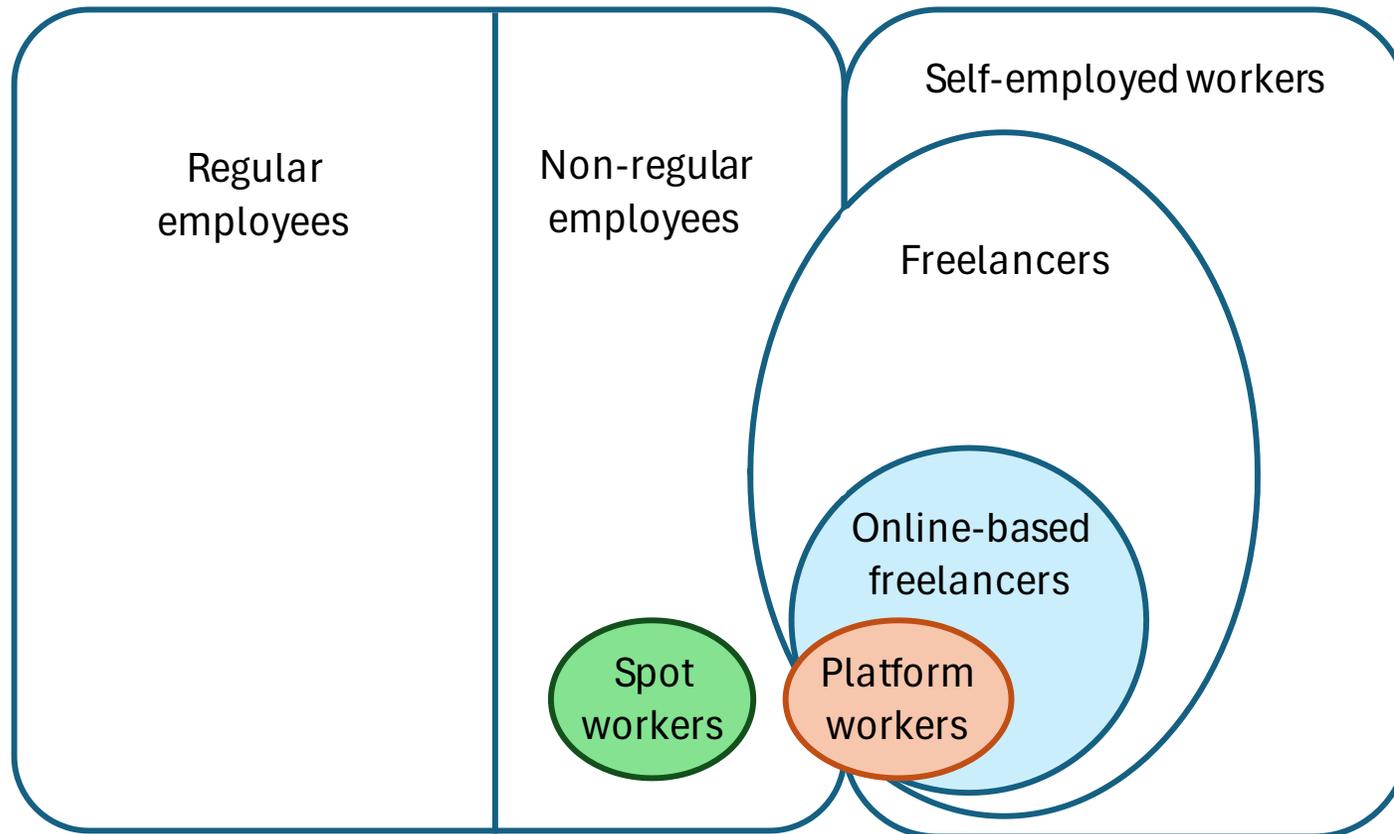
- The Labor Standards Act, the most basic employment regulation, is only applicable to employees.
- Employment insurance is available to employees working 20 hours or more per week and under terms of employment that continue for 31 days or longer, with the exception of students.
- Employees working 20 hours or more per week are automatically enrolled in pension and health insurance by their employers. Employees working fewer than 20 hours per week and self-employed workers need to apply on their own.
- Both employees and certain self-employed workers have the right to join labor unions and are eligible for industrial accident compensation insurance.

4. Diversification of employment forms and policy responses

- The increase in number of non-regular employees and the disparity between regular and non-regular employees have been considered as serious social problems, resulting in changes in labor policies from “de-regulation” to “re-regulation” in the 2010s (Takahashi 2023).
- Although the number and proportion of “self-employed workers” are decreasing in the long term, those in between “employees” and “self-employed workers” have attracted the attention of jurists and policy-makers in the late 2010s.
- After many twists and turns, the “Freelance Act” (The Act on Ensuring Proper Transactions Involving Specified Entrusted Business Operators) was enacted in 2023 to protect persons working as freelancers (Japan Institute for Labor Policy and Training 2024).
- In addition to the above, new forms of employment have become prevalent under the digitalization of the labor market and the labor process.

5. New forms of employment in Japan

A diagram of “new forms of employment” in Japan



- (1) Online-based freelancers
- (2) Platform workers (app workers)
- (3) Spot workers

are among the most recognized new forms of employment in Japan.

(1) Online-based freelancers

- Among “freelancers,” some find jobs or undertake tasks through matching websites. *Crowdworks*, *Lancers*, and *FreelanceBoard* are popular examples of such websites.
- IT tasks, website design, typing, and questionnaire responses are popular jobs/tasks outsourced through such matching websites.
- Individuals undertaking such jobs or tasks are classified as self-employed; however, their working conditions are similar to those of non-regular employees.

Images taken from <https://crowdworks.jp/>

クラウドソーシング・仕事依頼・求人情報は日本最大級のクラウドワークス

クラウドワークス 仕事を探す クラウドワーカーを探す ログイン 会員登録 (無料)

新規会員登録
メールアドレスを入力してください
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今すぐ会員登録する (無料)

Googleではじめる
Yahoo! JAPAN IDではじめる
Facebookではじめる

利用規約および個人情報の取り扱いについて同意の上、登録してください。

働きたい方はこちら

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すぐ見つかる

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ロゴ・イラスト作成
動画制作
翻訳・通訳
記事執筆・編集
アンケート
データ入力
シスアド開発

※クラウドソーシングを専門に取り扱っている企業 (上場企業) において、フリーランス登録数No.1 (会社発表内資料比較)

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動画編集・制作
短尺動画の場合
納期: 最短3日
10,000円から

企業サイトやメディア、EC構築など。

ホームページ作成・サイト構築
デザインから
コーディングまで
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200,000円から

サウンドメディアやブログ記事に。

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専門記事やSEOも!
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1記事2,000円から

ビジネスサービスから飲食店のロゴまで。

納得のコンペ
ロゴ作成
平均70提案
10,000円から

サイトの構築だけではなく、
保守・運用も。

システム管理・
保守・運用
管理・保守・運用
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アンケート調査・モニター
最短1時間
約200人からの回答が集まる
1回答50円から

キャラクターやゲームイラストも。

イラスト・漫画作成
コンペなら平均20提案集まる
納期: 10日前後
30,000円から

スマートフォンアプリや
業務システム開発も。

ソフトウェア・
アプリ開発
納期: 約1か月
300,000円から

名簿入力も、アンケートの集計も。

データ入力
最短納期
当日発注・当日納品
1件10円から

(2) Platform workers (app workers)

- The number of platform workers (app workers) working under the control of algorithms embedded in smartphone apps increased during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Food delivery apps *Uber Eats* and *Demae-can* are the two largest platforms in Japan.
- Most platform workers fall into the category of “freelancers.”
- Ridesharing (taxi) platforms are rare in Japan owing to strict regulations in the taxi industry.



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Images taken from <https://www.uber.com/jp/ja/deliver/> and https://service.demae-can.co.jp/gig_personal/

(3) Spot workers (short-period part-time workers)

- Smartphone apps that connect employers with job seekers are becoming increasingly prevalent. Job seekers find jobs through these apps and work part-time for very short periods (e.g., one day). They are classified as non-regular employees, both legally and statistically.
- *Timee* and *Sharefull* are well-known examples of such apps.
- Jobs in delivery, packaging, food service, and office support are available through these apps.

Images taken from <https://timee.co.jp/>

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調査機関: 日本マーケティングリサーチ機構
調査期間: 2024年4月9日~2024年5月29日



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<※初任者以上の有資格者限定>
13:00~16:00 ¥4,220

6. Statistics on new forms of employment

- Japan does not have official statistics on the number of workers of new forms of employment.
- The current lack of specific laws and regulations regarding new forms of employment limits the government's willingness to keep track of the number of workers in new forms of employment.
- However, a few survey results and estimates are available.

Freelancers

- According to the *Basic Survey on Employment Status* conducted in 2022 by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, the number of freelancers (both traditional and online-based) is estimated at 2.57 million (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2023).
- This figure drops to 2.09 million when limited to those for whom freelancing is their “main job,” representing 3.0% of the labor force.

Online-based freelancers

- According to a survey conducted by the Japan Institute for Labor Policy and Training in 2017, the number of online-based freelancers was estimated at 3.1 million.
- Of this figure, 0.2 million (comprising 0.3% of the labor force) were those for whom online freelancing was their “main job” (Takahashi 2018).
- Although the number is presumed to have increased since then, its proportion remains well below that of China.

Platform workers (app workers)

- The Freelance Association estimates the number of food delivery platform workers (app workers) to be “between 0.2 and 0.3 million people,” as of 2021.
- However, this figure drops to “between 40,000 and 60,000 people (below 0.1% of the labor force)” when limited to those for whom food delivery is their “main job” (Freelance Association 2024).

Spot workers

- The number of registrants of the largest spot workers' app, *Timee*, exceeded 10 million by the end of 2024 (including those who had never found a job through the app) (Timee 2025).
- However, this number may be overestimated (even exaggerated).

7. No problem?

- Japan has no official statistics on the number of workers of new forms of employment owing to the lack of specific laws and regulation.
- According to the limited numbers of surveys, the proportion of workers of new forms of employment in Japan seems to be smaller than that of other countries.
- However, the superiority of algorithm-based control and customer/employer evaluation may cause problems for which Japan may be unprepared.

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- Timee (2025) “Press Release.” (<https://corp.timee.co.jp/news/detail-4006/>) (in Japanese)

Appendix

Composition of the population aged 15 years and over (million people)

Year	Not in labor force	Self-employed	Executives	Regular employees	Non-regular employees	Unemployed	Year	Not in labor force	Self-employed	Executives	Regular employees	Non-regular employees	Unemployed
1984	33.73	14.84	3.29	33.33	6.04	1.61	2005	43.46	9.32	4.00	33.75	16.34	2.94
1985	34.50	14.75	3.14	33.43	6.55	1.56	2006	43.58	8.81	3.94	34.15	16.78	2.75
1986	35.13	14.58	3.23	33.83	6.73	1.67	2007	43.75	8.61	3.87	34.49	17.35	2.57
1987	35.84	14.64	3.80	33.37	7.11	1.73	2008	44.07	8.33	3.81	34.10	17.65	2.65
1988	36.35	14.53	4.06	33.77	7.55	1.55	2009	44.46	8.00	3.77	33.95	17.27	3.36
1989	36.55	14.27	4.10	34.52	8.17	1.42	2010	44.73	7.72	3.70	33.74	17.63	3.34
1990	36.57	13.95	4.66	34.88	8.81	1.34	2011	45.18	7.56	3.68	33.55	18.12	3.02
1991	36.49	13.48	4.66	36.39	8.97	1.36	2012	45.43	7.40	3.69	33.45	18.16	2.85
1992	36.79	12.99	4.55	37.05	9.58	1.42	2013	45.10	7.29	3.45	33.02	19.10	2.65
1993	37.40	12.32	4.59	37.56	9.86	1.66	2014	44.94	7.27	3.47	32.88	19.67	2.36
1994	37.91	12.03	4.60	38.05	9.71	1.92	2015	44.79	7.08	3.49	33.17	19.86	2.22
1995	38.36	11.81	4.83	37.79	10.01	2.10	2016	44.30	6.84	3.51	33.72	20.25	2.08
1996	38.52	11.47	4.79	38.00	10.43	2.25	2017	43.79	6.80	3.50	34.34	20.40	1.90
1997	38.63	11.48	4.28	38.12	11.52	2.30	2018	42.58	6.86	3.31	34.92	21.26	1.67
1998	39.24	11.28	4.01	37.94	11.73	2.79	2019	41.91	6.76	3.36	35.15	21.73	1.62
1999	39.89	11.10	4.18	36.88	12.25	3.17	2020	41.97	6.67	3.45	35.56	21.00	1.92
2000	40.57	10.71	4.53	36.30	12.73	3.20	2021	41.71	6.62	3.45	35.87	20.75	1.95
2001	41.25	10.18	3.70	36.40	13.60	3.40	2022	41.28	6.47	3.43	35.88	21.01	1.79
2002	42.29	9.75	3.97	34.89	14.51	3.59	2023	40.84	6.38	3.37	36.06	21.24	1.78
2003	42.85	9.56	3.95	34.44	15.04	3.50	2024	40.31	6.24	3.44	36.45	21.26	1.76
2004	43.36	9.46	3.97	34.10	15.64	3.13							

Source: Author's calculation combining the "basic tabulations" and "detailed tabulations" of the *Labour Force Survey* (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications).

Thank you for your attention!