

COMPARISON OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN POLAND AND SLOVAKIA

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Abstract:

Background: This study aimed to compare unemployment trends in Poland and Slovakia between 2024 and 2025, using both registered and harmonized (Eurostat/ILO) indicators. **Methods:** Monthly data from December 2024 to July 2025 were collected from the Polish Central Statistical Office (GUS), the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, the Slovak Labour Office, and Eurostat. Both national and harmonized unemployment rates were analyzed to identify trends and differences. **Results:** Poland exhibited lower harmonized unemployment rates (2.6–3.0%) compared to Slovakia (5.0–5.5%), while registered rates were similar (5.1–5.4% for both countries). Trends were stable, with minor monthly fluctuations. The gap between registered and harmonized rates highlights methodological differences, while cross-country differences reflect stronger labor market performance in Poland. **Discussion:** Differences are influenced by economic structure, labor mobility, and regional disparities. Harmonized data suggest Poland has higher labor market absorption and lower structural unemployment. **Conclusion:** Poland showed lower harmonized unemployment than Slovakia, despite similar registered rates. The study emphasizes the importance of harmonized measures for cross-country labor market analysis.

Keywords: unemployment; labor market; Poland; Slovakia; Eurostat; GUS; registered unemployment; harmonized unemployment; comparative analysis

Introduction

The Unemployment is a manifestation of an imbalance in the labor market. It is then a reaction to an undesirable development of an element of the labor market, that is, the supply of labor, the demand for labor and the price of labor, and the links and relationships between them. Simply put, it is a state in the labor market in which there are unemployed people. But who is unemployed? It would seem that every individual who does not work is actually unemployed, but this is a big mistake. Defining the term unemployed is more complicated and a large number of this definition can be found in the professional literature. I cannot help but quote one definition, the so-called bible of economics students, which defines the unemployed as, "persons who do not have a job but are actively looking for one, while these persons must, however, show demonstrable efforts to obtain a job." [9].

The definition therefore assumes that the unemployed person is actively looking for a job, e.g. responds to advertisements, visits companies, tries to start their own business, increases their qualifications and improves their knowledge. Such an approach is common for most unemployed people in Western Europe. However, it is typical for the Slovak Republic that the unemployed mostly just wait at the employment office for the payment of unemployment benefits, or other state social support benefits, and do not try any further. An active employment policy created by the state and the region must play an even greater role in solving unemployment [5].

The term work does not always have to mean performing an activity for which one receives remuneration in the form of a wage. People can work for their own pleasure or they can be at home. If a person is employed, they approach their work responsibly on the basis of a signed employment contract, for which they are entitled to an agreed remuneration. It follows that if a person loses their job, which they performed voluntarily and without entitlement to a wage, they are not unemployed [6].

Only someone who meets the following three requirements is unemployed:

- Able to work (due to health, age, personal situation).
- Want a job.
- Those who are willing to work even if they are currently unemployed.
- Were ready to start work, that is, were available immediately or within 14 days at the latest for paid employment or employment in their own business [5].

To be classified as unemployed, a person must meet all three conditions at the same time, with the only exception being people who are not looking for work

because they have already found it, but their start date is set for a later period (no later than three months), and these are also classified as unemployed [6]. It follows from the above that in every country there are people without work who are not unemployed, or who do not meet the definition of unemployed. These people either do not want to work or have had a negative experience that they are convinced that there is no vacancy for them. Therefore, they do not look for work and are not included in the unemployment register and statistics do not include them. Unemployment is not only about the fact that a person capable of working cannot apply himself in the labor market, but also about the fact that he is not satisfied with this state of unemployment and is looking for a job opportunity. Society expects every individual, whose situation allows it, to want to keep their job and, in the event of job loss, to actively find a new job as soon as possible [9]. For the unemployed, regular visits to the employment office are a condition, as a sign of effort to find a new job. The obligation to actively look for a job is mostly benevolent. Today, the emphasis is no longer on the unemployed moving to great distances for work, as was the case in the past [1,2].

Social support

Social support can create an effect by applying a buffering effect against the negative impacts of unemployment. Social support can be of particular importance for women, who are usually able to use its effect better than men. In times of increased need for social support, some potential providers may drop out, and financial resources are also being cut, so people cannot usually engage in activities that would be beneficial for expanding their social network, such as more expensive sports activities and hobbies. Social acceptance and the impact on the cognitive assessment of the situation are essential [1].

Social support from a life partner and family is important. Emotional support is also an essential part – financial resources will help, information will serve, but emotional support is also important for maintaining self-esteem. However, a life partner can also become a source of stress, which is one of the possible negative effects of social support. Another risk is the emergence of dependence on the person and persons providing long-term social support, lack of independence, and paradoxically also lower self-esteem in situations bordering on learned helplessness, which is when extremely strong and long-term social support has displaced independence, initiative and self-confidence. Unemployment, which brings negative social, psychological, behavioral and health consequences, cannot be considered only as a personal matter and

condition of an individual, but as a serious social problem, the adequate solution of which is in the interest of the entire society [4].

In everyday speech, we often talk about social support in terms of the amount of money that others are willing to lend us, or the number of arms in which we can cry, or the amount of advice that others are willing to give us. In this context, our awareness that these people care about us and that, if necessary, they will do everything they can for us is important, which is the essence of the psychological mechanism called social support. Social support is understood as the help that other actors provide to an individual, group or community. Social support acts as an effective buffer that counteracts stress, thereby dampening it. From the point of view of social psychology, social support is a summary expression for information or current actions that lead an individual to believe that other people value him, care about him and, if necessary, are willing to provide him with help and care. The main goal of the provided social support is to facilitate the management or experiencing of a specific adverse situation. Social support lies in good interpersonal relationships, in the social background of family, friends and acquaintances, or in interest and other groups and in the work collective. As a result of disturbed social conditions and relationships, people become more vulnerable in the area of physical health and mental well-being [2].

More frequent occurrence of more serious diseases, injuries and poisonings, worse results of treatment and rehabilitation in people in an unstable family environment. The identified handicaps are explained by the lack of social support, with the fact that these people accumulated adverse effects of psychosocial stressors and this caused a deterioration in their health. Social support is defined as the interaction of the following factors: - participation in activities of the nearest community (macro level) - richness of the structure and supporting functions of social support (meso level) - the quality of personal, intimate relationships between individuals (micro level) [4].

The risks of good interpersonal relationships and social support, which can sometimes lose their effectiveness and can be unexpected and undesirable, e.g.: create certain dependencies, dampen the opportunity to resolve conflicts, etc. In addition, interpersonal relationships can also create a path for social adversity and enable power manipulation. From the perspective of the mission, there are four types of social support, namely: instrumental social support, informational, emotional and evaluative social support. Instrumental support is a concrete, material form of assistance to a person in need, e.g. by providing financial or material assistance. The initiative to help comes from a person who has decided to help themselves, specifically, in a material way. Informational support is characterized as information provided that can be helpful to a person in

navigating the situation they have found themselves in. Emotional support for a person in need is emotional closeness (love, compassion) provided in an empathetic form, which gives them hope, a helping hand when they fall into hopelessness or depression. Evaluative support is about strengthening the positive self-evaluation and self-confidence of a person in need, and it supports their efforts for self-regulation. The goal of socialization is the inclusion of an individual in society through the process, tools and factors of socialization, when a human individual accepts values, norms, traditions and customs, dispositions to social roles recognized by society, at the same time evaluates them and influences them with their existence and gets rid of the unrecognized or unaccepted attributes mentioned. Socialization forms the sociality of a person, which is a significant characteristic. The fact that it concerns every person is generally expressed as an essential feature and condition of existence. More closely among the attributes of socialization (in addition to those already mentioned) through social learning and human learning, we include: the material, but mainly non-material culture of a given society, e.g. moral values; the form, content and method of interpersonal communication and their relationships; the form, content and scope of communication means; the relationship to nature, to people, to the world, etc. The result of socialization should be the psychological and social qualification of a person, which is a prerequisite for free participation in life in society [12,11].

Not every social support provided is helpful. An example can be excessive help, which deprives a person in need of the opportunity to cope with a difficult situation, independence, independence in a situation where it is necessary. For example, in caring for an elderly person, excessive help, support can be harmful, hurtful, because it reduces the independence, activity of the elderly person, causes a feeling of helplessness, dependence, deprives him of a feeling of independence, independence. It takes away his self-esteem and reduces the quality of life. Another example of inadequate social support is an inappropriate form of assistance, when the assistance does not respect the needs of the person to whom it is provided, but rather reflects the ideas of the person providing it [10].

The course of social interaction of the type of social support has 5 steps:

- Sending the signal "I am looking for help" by the person in need (success depends on the will of the person in need and the ability of the person in need to express a request for help, to send a signal).
- Receiving the signal by the potential provider of help (success depends on the availability of the provider of help, on whether or not he can see, hear the sent

signal, on the willingness to catch the signal of the call for help and on the understanding of the signal of the call for help).

Expression of willingness to help (success depends on the willingness of the potential provider of help to such an expression, his ability to provide the requested help, his ability to provide the requested help and his ability to be a support and helper).

- Receiving help (success depends on the will of the person in need (whether he wants to accept the help provided or not), the ability of the person in need to accept the offered help, and on the understanding, correct interpretation of the offered help).

- Feedback – a series of reciprocal activities – receiving and providing social support [10]. The function of social support is active listening. Active listening is understood as the possibility of ventilating a problem to an understanding individual without the need to receive specific advice or assessment of behavior. In social support, adequate professional appreciation of what a person does is also necessary. It is encouraging for a person if praise or encouragement is expressed to him for his performance, effort. Such support should be provided by a person who is an expert in a given field, that is, he is sufficiently erudite, and is also capable of objective feedback, praise thus strengthens a person's self-esteem and has a motivating effect, supporting him to continue working on himself.

When professionally appreciating work, behavior, other activities from a friend or family member is not helpful. A very important part of social support is emotional support or appreciation, which means that a person has someone who stands by his side even in situations when he himself may have a different opinion about the situation or actions of the other. It is mostly unconditional support from loved ones or in a situation of success or failure. In emotional support and emotional challenge, it is important that the helping individual knows the person well and has their trust, because only then does this support have meaning for the person. In the social environment of a person, social support can also be perceived as formal social support and informal social support. Informal social support includes family members, friendship groups, interest groups, colleagues, neighbors, other persons who help to empower the client and do not operate through a specific institution. From the factors/subjects of this part of social support, a person can be educated through social learning in all its forms as a characteristic tool for educating its member. To a lesser extent, it is a person's formal education. Formal social support for a person consists of institutions of the state, profit and non-profit sectors, whose help and support a person can use under certain conditions [7].

Support and help from this environment has a different nature, such as e.g. material, financial, socio-psychological, social, socio-educational, educational. In the educational area, to a minimum, it is support through informal means (social learning) and to a large extent it is support and development of the client through formal educational means (further education, preparation for the needs of the labor market - retraining, practice in the field of the client's education, etc.) [7].

Social support of an individual from the point of view of psychological understanding as a process and result of experiencing a feeling of help, support from others, and from the point of view of sociological perception as a set of factors existing in the client's social environment and acting in connection with the client's existing problem are entities that significantly affect the client in various areas of his life and his empowerment. They are used for the benefit of the client and clients both at the informal and formal levels [7,3].

Unemployment rate according to Eurostat

Unemployment in Poland has remained relatively low in recent times, despite slight fluctuations. According to official data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS) and the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy, the registered unemployment rate at the end of December 2024 was 5.1%, with approximately 786,200 registered unemployed people [6].

However, the situation appears even more favorable when compared to international statistics. According to Eurostat, the unemployment rate in Poland, calculated using the European methodology, reached approximately 3% at the end of December 2024, which places Poland among the countries with one of the lowest unemployment rates in the entire European Union, significantly below the EU average of around 5.9% [8].

This trend of low unemployment continued in the first months of 2025. For example, in January 2025, the unemployment rate according to Eurostat was around 2.6%, which again places Poland among the lowest in the EU, while Polish statistics showed a registered unemployment rate of around 5.4% in the same period.

Data from mid-2025 indicate that the average unemployment rate in the first six months reached around 5.1%, with regional differences persisting. In some districts, such as the Lower Silesian Voivodeship, the unemployment rate was diverse and exceeded 10% in some areas.

Table 1 Unemployment in Poland - 2024, 2025

Period	Registered unemployment (GUS) %	Harmonized rate (Eurostat / ILO) %
December 2024	5,1	3,0
January 2025	5,4	2,6
March 2025	5,3	2,7
June 2025	5,1	2,8
July 2025	5,4	2,9

Source: own elaboration

Legend:

The registered unemployment rate (GUS) is around 5–5.4%, which is slightly above the harmonised Eurostat rate.

The harmonised rate (Eurostat/ILO) is around 2.6–3%, which confirms Poland's relatively low unemployment rate within the EU.

The trend shows the stability of unemployment, with minor fluctuations between months.

The difference between GUS and Eurostat points to different measurement methodologies, with Eurostat monitoring a wider labour force and GUS only recording registered unemployed.

The differences between the measurement methods arise because Eurostat uses a harmonised methodology that monitors the active labour force (ILO definition), while the Polish authorities calculate registered unemployment according to their own criteria. This explains why the Eurostat figures (e.g. 2.6%–3%) are significantly lower than the figures registered by the labour offices (around 5.1%–5.4%).

Unemployment is one of the key indicators of the situation on the labor market and at the same time an important socio-economic indicator of economic stability. In Poland, the unemployment rate has recently been at relatively low levels, while national statistics and harmonized Eurostat data provide a comprehensive picture of its development and dynamics. According to official data from the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of Poland, the registered unemployment rate in Poland reached 5.1% at the end of December 2024, with the number of registered unemployed exceeding 786,200 people. These data were also confirmed by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (Statistics Poland / GUS), which stated that the unemployment rate increased by 0.1 percentage point in this period compared to November 2024. Although these figures show a higher level of unemployment than in other European countries according to the harmonized methodology, they show that

registered unemployment in Poland remains relatively stable. For example, in January 2025, according to GUS, the registered unemployment rate was 5.4%, with the number of registered unemployed reaching approximately 837.6 thousand.

A similar trend continued throughout 2025. In July 2025, the registered unemployment rate in Poland was again 5.4%, which represented an increase compared to July 2024 and confirmed the estimates of statistical offices. During this period, 830,800 unemployed persons were registered in employment offices. At the same time, analyses show that in some months, such as November 2025, unemployment reached as high as 5.6%, which represented the highest level in approximately three years.

However, these registered unemployment figures should be seen in conjunction with internationally comparable statistics used by Eurostat (the European Statistical Office). According to Eurostat, for example, the unemployment rate in Poland at the end of December 2024 was only 3%, which placed Poland among the countries with the lowest unemployment in the European Union. The average unemployment rate in the entire EU at that time was around 5.9%.

Eurostat also states that in January and February 2025, the unemployment rate according to its methodology was around 2.6%, which meant that Poland had the lowest unemployment level in the EU during this period. These differences are partly due to different measurement methodologies: while the GUS counts the unemployed registered at employment offices, Eurostat uses a harmonised methodology based on international recommendations from the ILO (International Labour Organization), which allows for direct comparisons between EU countries. Differences between the two approaches are also common in other countries and may reveal different aspects of the labour market – registered data often reflect administrative reality, while harmonised data better capture broader employment trends. In the case of Poland, however, the trend of both types of measurements is consistent: low unemployment rates with moderate monthly or seasonal fluctuations.

Regional differences within Poland are also significant. For example, within registered unemployment at the end of 2025, the unemployment rate ranged from around 3.6% in Wielkopolska to 9.2% in Podkarpackie and Warmia-Masuria. This suggests that even though the overall unemployment rate is relatively low, there are spatial inequalities that are important from the perspective of regional labour market policy and social interventions.

Analysts say that the increase in registered unemployment in 2025 may also be influenced by legislative changes and adjustments to the unemployment registration system, as well as a decrease in the number of job offers available on the market. These factors point to the complexity of the situation, which

depends not only on macroeconomic trends, but also on administrative and legislative conditions affecting the labor market.

Overall, it can be stated that Poland maintains one of the lowest unemployment rates in the European Union, which is the result of a combination of a flexible labor market, demographic factors and relatively strong economic activity. Nevertheless, the labor market situation is changing and requires ongoing monitoring, especially given regional differences and differences between different methods of measuring unemployment.

Comparison of unemployment in Poland and Slovakia (2024-2025)

Unemployment is one of the key indicators of the situation on the labor market and at the same time an important indicator of socio-economic stability. In the case of Poland and Slovakia, this indicator is particularly significant in the context of their position in the European Union, where both states have undergone similar transformation processes after 2004 and are an integral part of the European economic area.

Unemployment rate according to Eurostat

According to harmonized Eurostat data (Euro indicators), in 2025, Poland was among the countries with a low unemployment rate within the European Union. Specifically, in March 2025, the unemployment rate in Poland was only 2.7%, which was significantly below the EU average (~5.8%) and at the same time lower than in Slovakia (5.0%). In this respect, Poland has a better record in terms of lower unemployment, which may indicate a stronger labour market or a lower rate of active job seekers in these periods.

Similarly, in February 2025, the unemployment rate according to Eurostat again showed a value of 2.6% in Poland, while in Slovakia the unemployment rate was 5.0%. These data confirm a consistent trend of differences between the two countries, with Poland showing an unemployment rate approximately half lower than Slovakia for the same periods according to the harmonised European methodology.

Further data from September 2025 confirm a similar picture: Poland had an unemployment rate of 3.2%, while Slovakia recorded an unemployment rate of 5.5% in the same month. This trend suggests that unemployment in Poland

remains lower than in Slovakia even in later months, confirmed again by Eurostat data.

Registered unemployment and methodological differences

However, it is worth noting a methodological difference in measuring unemployment. Poland also provides a registered unemployment rate (GUS/employment office data), which is generally higher than the harmonized Eurostat data, as it includes all registered unemployed people regardless of their active job search or inclusion in the labor force. According to Polish official data, the registered unemployment rate was 5.1% at the end of December 2024 and in the first half of 2025 it reached approximately 5.1% to 5.4%.

For comparison, data from the Slovak Employment Institute indicate that the unemployment rate in Slovakia in 2024 reached approximately 5.4% (according to registered unemployment data and the employment office methodology). This means that the registered unemployment rate in Slovakia is approximately at the same level as the registered data from Poland, although it differs from the harmonised Eurostat rate.

This fact points to an important methodological difference: Eurostat uses the international ILO (International Labour Organization) methodology, which harmonises data for all EU Member States and takes into account only the active labour force. In contrast, the registered unemployment data monitored by national offices (GUS in Poland, labour offices in Slovakia) include a wider group of people, including those who may not be actively looking for work according to ILO criteria.

Comparative interpretation

From a comparative perspective, it is clear that the Polish labor market showed lower unemployment than the Slovak labor market using the harmonized Eurostat methods. In 2025, Poland had unemployment between 2.6% - 3.2% according to different monthly data, while Slovakia was around 5% - 5.5% in the same period. This difference is significant and may point to differences in the economic structure, labor mobility, migration trends or labor market efficiency in the two countries.

Table 2 Comparison of unemployment Poland – Slovak Republic, years, 2024, 2025

Period	Poland – registered (GUS) %	Poland – harmonised (Eurostat) %	Slovakia – harmonised (Eurostat) %	Slovakia – registered %
December 2024	5,1	3,0	5,0	5,4
January 2025	5,4	2,6	5,0	5,3
March 2025	5,3	2,7	5,1	5,2
June 2025	5,1	2,8	5,2	5,1
July 2025	5,4	2,9	5,5	5,3

Source: own elaboration

Table 2 shows that Poland has a lower harmonised unemployment rate (2.6–3.0%) than Slovakia (5.0–5.5%) over the same period. The difference is roughly half, indicating a relatively better position of the Polish labour market according to the international Eurostat methodology.

Registered data show a smaller difference between Poland (5.1–5.4%) and Slovakia (5.1–5.4%), reflecting that national methodologies for registering the unemployed are roughly comparable, but cover a wider group of people than the harmonised methodology.

The trend is stable, with slight monthly fluctuations, with Poland showing consistently lower harmonised unemployment, while Slovakia has slightly higher values. This difference may be a consequence of demographic factors, economic structure, labour mobility and labour market efficiency.

In terms of regional disparities, both countries show higher unemployment in less developed regions, but the overall trend shows a relatively stable and low unemployment rate, which indicates a strong absorption potential of the workforce in both countries.

The higher unemployment rate in Slovakia according to harmonized data may be influenced by various factors, such as slower employment growth in some sectors, demographic differences or regional disparities. On the other hand, the relatively low unemployment rate in Poland according to Eurostat data may reflect a stronger absorption capacity of the labor market, or other economic dynamics that support employment. These differences would deserve special attention in the analysis of labor market policies and economic policies of both countries.

Conclusion of the comparison

The higher unemployment rate in Slovakia according to harmonized data may be influenced by various factors, such as slower employment growth in some sectors, demographic differences or regional disparities. On the other hand, the relatively low unemployment rate in Poland according to Eurostat data may reflect a stronger absorption capacity of the labor market, or other economic dynamics that support employment. These differences would deserve special attention in the analysis of labor market policies and economic policies of both countries.

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