

## Self-employment rates

### Key facts

- Since the start of the economic crisis, the number of self-employed followed very different trends across OECD countries. Considering the level in 2007 as benchmark, the number of self-employed increased in Canada, France, Germany and the United Kingdom, while it decreased in Korea, Italy, Spain and the United States.

### Relevance

Self-employment data are a relevant source of information on trends in business ownership. A key advantage of self-employment data is their timeliness; they are derived from surveys conducted quarterly or monthly on representative samples of the population in working age (Labour Force Surveys), and provide accurate data very soon after the collection (often less than a month). The data can also be used to assess trends in different types of self-employment jobs, for example distinguishing the self-employed with and without employees.

### Definitions

*The number of self-employed* is the number of individuals who report their status as “self-employed” in population or labour force surveys.

*Self-employment jobs* are those “jobs where the remuneration is directly dependent upon the profits (or the potential for profits) derived from the goods and services produced (where own consumption is considered to be part of profits). The incumbents make the operational decisions affecting the enterprise, or delegate such decisions while retaining responsibility for the welfare of the enterprise” (15th Conference of Labour Statisticians, January 1993). The definition therefore includes both unincorporated and incorporated businesses and as such differs from the definitions used in the System of National Accounts which classifies self employed owners of incorporated businesses and quasi-corporations as employees.

It should be noted that not all the self-employed are “entrepreneurs”. Self-employment statistics include for example, craft-workers and farmers.

### Comparability

The main comparability issue relates to the classification of the incorporated self-employed. While in official statistics for most OECD countries, the self-employed who incorporate their businesses are counted as self-employed, in some countries they are counted as employees (for example, Japan, New Zealand and Norway). In the United States, official statistics generally publish data including only the unincorporated self-employed, but the data source (Current Population Surveys) also provide information on the self-employed who incorporated their businesses. For improving international comparability, data for the United States in Figure 1.3 refer to both the incorporated and the unincorporated self-employed.

### Sources/Online databases

OECD estimates based on:

- Current Population Survey (United States).
- Eurostat Labour Force Surveys, 2000-12.
- Labour Force Survey (Canada).

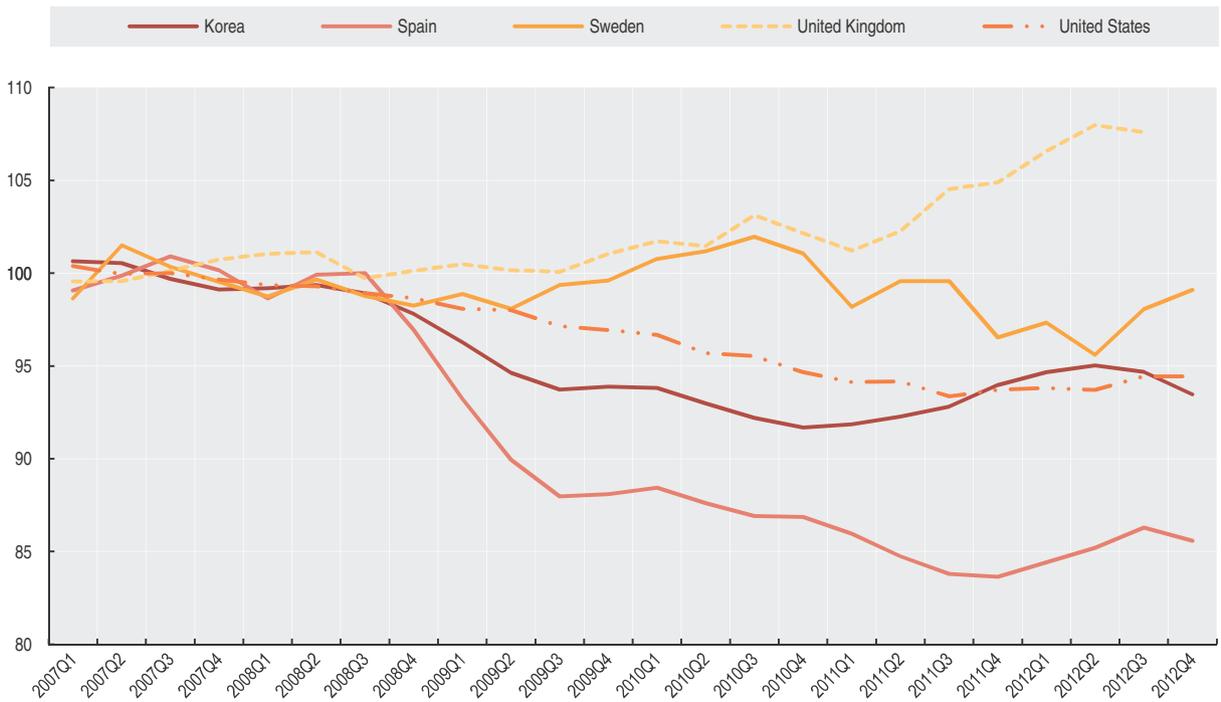
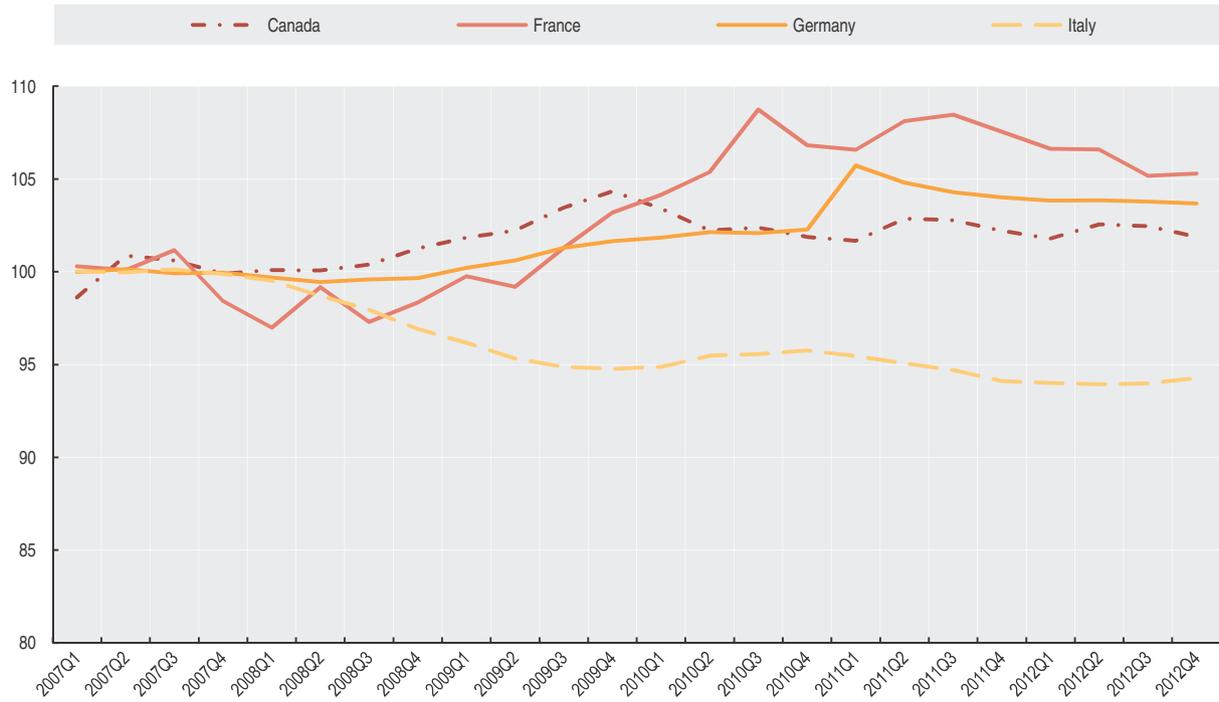
### For further reading

Hipple, S. (2010), “Self-employment in the United States”, *Monthly Labor Review*, September.

OECD (2012), *Closing the Gender Gap. Act Now*, OECD Publishing, Paris, [www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/close-the-gender-gap-now\\_9789264179370-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/close-the-gender-gap-now_9789264179370-en).

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**Figure 1.3. Number of self-employment jobs**  
 Number of jobs, trend-cycle average 2007 = 100



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