

**Senate Economics Legislation Committee**  
**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**  
**Treasury Portfolio**  
Budget Estimates 2014  
3 June to 5 June 2014

**Department/ Agency:** ABS

**Question:** BET 1

**Topic:** International Unemployment

**Reference:** Hansard pg. 95, 3 June 2014

**Senator:** Bishop

**Question:**

**Senator MARK BISHOP:** You can take this on notice. Could you provide us with whether official unemployment numbers in other countries are subject to such significant revisions, if you are aware of it, from our major trading partners? I do not expect you to have that knowledge off the top of your head.

**Mr Harper:** We could certainly provide some information on notice. We are not talking about revisions here. We are talking about volatility in month-to-month movements. We, for the most part, do not revise the original labour force estimates. But seasonally adjusted estimates and trend estimates get revised as additional information becomes more available. But we can provide information about that on notice. One feature of the Australian Labour Force Survey is that it is quite a large survey. It has, by international standards, a very high response rate. So our survey stacks up pretty well when we compare it to what we see in comparable countries overseas

**Answer:**

1. All of our major trade partners<sup>1</sup>, through the use of sample surveys and in the majority of cases, rolling or rotating samples, experience error and normal variation in their official employment statistics. This is unanimously expressed through the use of standard error, which is used to create the 95% confidence interval, the range into which the real value is 95% certain to fall. This is attached to estimates and used as a measure of volatility.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has always been highly transparent about any and all potential sources of error in our estimates. We believe that our Labour Force Survey estimates are of high quality, are internationally respected, are consistently reliable, and are fit for purpose.

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<sup>1</sup> Japan, Korea (Republic of), New Zealand, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Data for China was unavailable.

**Further detail**

To address this question on notice, we have sought to provide a broad overview of the labour force collections of our major trading partners. These include, in alphabetical order, China, Japan, Korea (Republic of), New Zealand, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The below tables provide basic information about the title of each survey, the agency responsible for collection, the objectives and the official uses of each survey; followed by the frequency, size, scope, sampling and collection methodology; and finally the basic information about the estimation process, including benchmarking to the larger population, measures and extent of error, and the methods by which revision of estimates can take place.

Information has been provided where publically accessible. Select information for some collections is not available publically and therefore is not included.

## Australia

		<i>Country:</i>	Australia
<b>Survey</b>	<i>Statistical agency responsible:</i>		Australian Bureau of Statistics
	<i>Title:</i>		Monthly Population Survey (This comprises the Labour Force Survey, plus the labour supplementary surveys which are run in conjunction with the Labour Force Survey usually on an annual basis.)
	<i>Objectives:</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The LFS is designed to provide timely information on the labour market activity of the usually resident civilian population aged 15 years and over.</li> <li>• The supplementary surveys provide additional information about particular sub-groups of the population or issues of interest.</li> </ul>
	<i>Produces official estimates for:</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- employment: yes</li> <li>- unemployment: yes</li> <li>- earnings: no</li> <li>- hours of work: yes</li> </ul>
<b>Methodology</b>	<i>Basic details</i>	<i>Frequency:</i>	Monthly
		<i>Size:</i>	29,000 dwellings (0.33% of population)
		<i>Collection:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Computer-assisted personal interview for first month</li> <li>• Computer-assisted telephone interview for the rest</li> <li>• On-line self-completion option available</li> <li>• Interviewed every month for 8 months</li> <li>• Participation compulsory</li> </ul>
		<i>Scope:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civilian population</li> <li>• 15 years and over</li> <li>• usually resident in Australia</li> <li>• excluding foreign diplomatic and military personnel (and their families)</li> </ul>
	<i>Sample design:</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sampling frame based on an area-based list of dwellings, partially base on Population Census</li> <li>• Updated every 5 years</li> <li>• Rolling sample, interviewed up to 8 times in 8 months</li> <li>• Sample fully refreshed every 8 months (1/8 per month)</li> <li>• Approximately 82% remain in sample for two consecutive surveys</li> </ul>
	<i>Accuracy and quality</i>	<i>Benchmarking:</i>	Benchmarked to ERP by Age, Sex and State/Territory of residence.
		<i>Measures of error:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard Error provided for sampling error <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This is used to construct 95% confidence intervals</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Relative Standard Error<sup>2</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Total unemployment rate: 2 %</li> <li>- Total employment: 0.3 %</li> <li>- Total unemployment: 2.5 %</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<i>Revision of estimates:</i>		Original estimates are generally not revised. Seasonally adjusted and Trend estimates are revised slightly every month through the time series adjustment process. All estimates are rebased when the ERP is revised after each census.	

<sup>2</sup> These RSEs are as last provided to the ILO. They may not be up to date and are for illustrative purposes only.

## China

		<i>Country:</i>	China
<i>Survey</i>	<i>Statistical agency responsible:</i>		National Bureau of Statistics of China
	<i>Title:</i>		Annual Sample Survey on Labour Force
	<i>Objectives:</i>		N/A
	<i>Produces official estimates for:</i>		N/A
<i>Methodology</i>	<i>Basic details</i>	<i>Frequency:</i>	Yearly
		<i>Size:</i>	N/A
		<i>Collection:</i>	N/A
		<i>Scope:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entire population</li> <li>• 16 years and over</li> </ul>
	<i>Sample design:</i>		N/A
	<i>Accuracy and quality</i>	<i>Benchmarking:</i>	N/A
		<i>Measures of error:</i>	N/A
		<i>Revision of estimates:</i>	N/A

## Japan

		<i>Country:</i>	Japan
<i>Survey</i>	<i>Statistical agency responsible:</i>		Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications
	<i>Title:</i>		Labour Force Survey
	<i>Objectives:</i>		To elucidate the current state of employment and unemployment in the country every month.
	<i>Produces official estimates for:</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- employment: yes</li> <li>- unemployment: yes</li> <li>- earnings: yes</li> <li>- hours of work: yes</li> </ul>
<i>Methodology</i>	<i>Basic details</i>	<i>Frequency:</i>	Monthly
		<i>Size:</i>	40,000 dwellings (0.1% of population)
		<i>Collection:</i>	Personal interviews at households.
		<i>Scope:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entire population</li> <li>• 15 years and over</li> <li>• usually resident in Japan</li> <li>• excluding foreign diplomatic and military personnel (and their families)</li> </ul>
	<i>Sample design:</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sampling frame based on Population Census</li> <li>• Updated every 5 years</li> <li>• Rolling sample, interviewed 4 times in 16 months (Enumeration districts, included for 4 months, out for 8 months, in for 4 months. For the 4 month periods, half the ED is surveyed in first 2 months, and the other half in the second 2 months)</li> <li>• Sample fully refreshed every 15 months</li> <li>• Approximately 50% remaining in sample for two consecutive surveys</li> </ul>
	<i>Accuracy and quality</i>	<i>Benchmarking:</i>	Benchmarked to population estimates by Age, Sex and area of residence
		<i>Measures of error:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard Error provided for sampling error <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This is used to construct 95% confidence intervals</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Relative Standard Error<sup>3</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Total employment: 0.1 %</li> <li>- Total unemployment: 0.8 %</li> <li>- Total economically active population: 0.1 %</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<i>Revision of estimates:</i>		Most data are seasonally adjusted.	

<sup>3</sup> These RSEs are as last provided to the ILO. They may not be up to date and are for illustrative purposes only.

## Korea, Republic of (South)

		<i>Country:</i>	Korea, Republic of (South)	
<i>Survey</i>	<i>Statistical agency responsible:</i>		Bureau of Social Statistics, Employment Statistics Division	
	<i>Title:</i>		Economically Active Population Survey	
	<i>Objectives:</i>		The primary purpose is to collect up-to-date information on the economic status of the population and on changes in the structure of the labour force.	
	<i>Produces official estimates for:</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- employment: yes</li> <li>- unemployment: yes</li> <li>- earnings: no</li> <li>- hours of work: yes</li> </ul>	
<i>Methodology</i>	<i>Basic details</i>	<i>Frequency:</i>	Monthly	
		<i>Size:</i>	32,000 households (0.2% of the population)	
		<i>Collection:</i>	Personal interviews at households using a paper form.	
		<i>Scope:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entire population</li> <li>• 15 years and over</li> <li>• Excluding armed forces</li> </ul>	
	<i>Sample design:</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sampling frame based off population census</li> <li>• Rolling sample, interviewed up to 36 times</li> <li>• Sample fully refreshed every 36 months</li> <li>• Approximately 97% remaining in sample for two consecutive surveys</li> </ul>	
	<i>Accuracy and quality</i>	<i>Benchmarking:</i>		
		<i>Measures of error:</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard Error provided for sampling error <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This is used to construct 95% confidence intervals</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Relative Standard Error<sup>4</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Total unemployment rate: 3.2 %</li> <li>- Total employment: 0.4 %</li> <li>- Total unemployment: 3.2 %</li> <li>- Total economically active population: 0.4 %</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<i>Revision of estimates:</i>		Most data are seasonally adjusted.		

<sup>4</sup> These RSEs are as last provided to the ILO. They may not be up to date and are for illustrative purposes only.

## New Zealand

		<i>Country:</i>	New Zealand
<i>Survey</i>	<i>Statistical agency responsible:</i>		Statistics New Zealand
	<i>Title:</i>		Household Labour Force Survey
	<i>Objectives:</i>		To produce each quarter a comprehensive range of statistics relating to the employed, the unemployed and those not in the labour force who comprise New Zealand's working age population.
	<i>Produces official estimates for:</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- employment: yes</li> <li>- unemployment: yes</li> <li>- earnings: no</li> <li>- hours of work: yes</li> </ul>
<i>Methodology</i>	<i>Basic details</i>	<i>Frequency:</i>	Quarterly (March, June, September and December)
		<i>Size:</i>	15,000 households (1% of the total population)
		<i>Collection:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Computer-assisted personal interview and computer-assisted telephone interview</li> <li>• Interviews conducted every 3 months for a total of 8 interviews</li> <li>• Participation compulsory</li> </ul>
		<i>Scope:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually resident population present at interview</li> <li>• 15 years and over</li> </ul>
	<i>Sample design:</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sample frame based off the population census</li> <li>• Updated every 5 years</li> <li>• Rolling sample, interviewed up to 8 times</li> <li>• Sample fully refreshed every 24 months</li> <li>• Approximately 87.5% remaining in sample for two consecutive surveys</li> </ul>
	<i>Accuracy and quality</i>	<i>Benchmarking:</i>	Estimates are benchmarked to Census counts by age, sex and whether a Māori person.
		<i>Measures of error:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard Error provided for sampling error <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This is used to construct 95% confidence intervals</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Relative Standard Error<sup>5</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Total unemployment rate: 6.7 %</li> <li>- Total employment: 1 %</li> <li>- Total unemployment: 6 %</li> <li>- Total economically active population: 0.9 %</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
		<i>Revision of estimates:</i>	Most data are seasonally adjusted.

<sup>5</sup> These RSEs are as last provided to the ILO. They may not be up to date and are for illustrative purposes only.

## Singapore

		<i>Country:</i>	Singapore	
<i>Survey</i>	<i>Statistical agency responsible:</i>		Ministry of Manpower	
	<i>Title:</i>		Labour Force Survey	
	<i>Objectives:</i>		To collect data on economic activities of the population, including detailed information on employment and unemployment, characteristics of the labour force and economically inactive persons.	
	<i>Produces official estimates for:</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- employment: no<sup>6</sup></li> <li>- unemployment: yes</li> <li>- earnings: no</li> <li>- hours of work: no</li> </ul>	
<i>Methodology</i>	<i>Basic details</i>	<i>Frequency:</i>	Yearly (June)	
		<i>Size:</i>	33,000 dwellings (3% of population)	
		<i>Collection:</i>	Computer-assisted telephone interview	
		<i>Scope:</i>	Usual residents of Singapore either present or temporarily absent excluding persons living in some special dwellings such as institutions, worksites or dormitories.	
	<i>Sample design:</i>		Based off the National Database of Dwellings in Singapore.	
	<i>Accuracy and quality</i>	<i>Benchmarking:</i>		
		<i>Measures of error:</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard Error provided for sampling error <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This is used to construct 95% confidence intervals</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Relative Standard Error<sup>7</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Total unemployment rate: 2.2 %</li> <li>- Total employment: 0.3 %</li> <li>- Total unemployment: 2.1 %</li> <li>- Total economically active population: 0.3 %</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<i>Revision of estimates:</i>		Unemployment estimates are seasonally adjusted		

<sup>6</sup> Data on employment in Singapore is chiefly obtained through administrative records rather than surveys. See Labour Market, First Quarter 2014, p.A21 for further detail.

<sup>7</sup> These RSEs are as last provided to the ILO. They may not be up to date and are for illustrative purposes only.



## United Kingdom

		<i>Country:</i>	United Kingdom
<i>Survey</i>	<i>Statistical agency responsible:</i>		Social Surveys Division of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in Great Britain and the Central Survey Unit in Northern Ireland.
	<i>Title:</i>		Labour Force Survey
	<i>Objectives:</i>		The main purpose of the quarterly LFS is to provide information needed to develop, manage, evaluate and report on labour market policies. Its main strengths are that it provides a self-contained, integrated source of information about the Labour market activity (or inactivity) of the whole (household) population, based on a large sample size, and that it uses the internationally standard definitions of employment and unemployment recommended by the International Labour Organization (ILO).
	<i>Produces official estimates for:</i>		N/A
<i>Methodology</i>	<i>Basic details</i>	<i>Frequency:</i>	Continuous, weekly.
		<i>Size:</i>	53,000 households (0.1% of the population)
		<i>Collection:</i>	Face-to-face personal interview (paper and pencil) for the first interview, telephone interview paper and pencil) for the following
		<i>Scope:</i>	Entire population, excluding persons living in institutions.
	<i>Sample design:</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based off an Address Register</li> <li>• Sample fully refreshed every 15 months</li> </ul>
	<i>Accuracy and quality</i>	<i>Benchmarking:</i>	Estimates benchmarked to the <i>Business Register and Employment Survey</i>
		<i>Measures of error:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard Error provided for sampling error               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This is used to construct 95% confidence intervals</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
		<i>Revision of estimates:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most data are seasonally adjusted.</li> <li>• More extensive annual adjustments may take place where there is a review of the seasonal adjustment process</li> </ul>

## United States

		<i>Country:</i>	United States	
<i>Survey</i>	<i>Statistical agency responsible:</i>		U.S. Census Bureau	
	<i>Title:</i>		Current Population Survey (CPS)	
	<i>Objectives:</i>		Collect timely labour force information.	
	<i>Produces official estimates for:</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- employment: yes</li> <li>- unemployment: yes</li> <li>- earnings: yes</li> <li>- hours of work: yes</li> </ul>	
<i>Methodology</i>	<i>Basic details</i>	<i>Frequency:</i>	Monthly	
		<i>Size:</i>	60,000 dwellings (0.055% of the population)	
		<i>Collection:</i>	Computer assisted personal interview	
		<i>Scope:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole population</li> <li>• 16 years and over</li> <li>• Excluding armed forces, persons in institutions and homeless people</li> </ul>	
	<i>Sample design:</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Master address file based on Decennial Census</li> <li>• Continually updated</li> <li>• Sample fully refreshed every 16 months</li> <li>• Approximately 75% remaining in sample for two consecutive surveys</li> </ul>	
	<i>Accuracy and quality</i>	<i>Benchmarking:</i>		
		<i>Measures of error:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard Error provided for sampling error               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This is used to construct 95% confidence intervals</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Relative Standard Error<sup>8</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Total unemployment rate: 0.2 %</li> <li>- Total employment: 0.1%<sup>9</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
		<i>Revision of estimates:</i>		Data are seasonally adjusted

<sup>8</sup> This RSE is as last provided to the ILO. It may not be up to date and is for illustrative purposes only.

<sup>9</sup> Sourced from ABS Annual report rather than information provided to the ILO.

## Glossary and abbreviations

- Benchmark
  - Benchmarks are a method of ensuring that the data from sample surveys (which have higher margins of error than a census) are weighted to reflect the overall population. This can be based on various sources, such as Census counts or Estimated Resident Population, and can use various benchmarks, such as certain age groups, sex, certain sub-populations, location of residence, or (often) a combination of the above. Estimates from labour force surveys are weighted so as to align to totals of these benchmarks and provide accurate estimates for these groups.
- ERP – Estimated Resident Population
  - This is the best available estimate of the population. This is based on Census information, but incorporates other sources of data (such as migration, births or deaths) to estimate the population at a point in time. This is then often used to project and back-cast population estimates between these fixed points.
- ILO – International Labour Organisation
- N/A – Not available
  - This is used where information is either not applicable to the survey, or (more commonly) where it is not available in the public domain.
- RSE – Relative Standard Error
  - The Relative Standard Error is obtained by expressing the Standard Error (SE) as a percentage of the estimate.
  - As per SE, two times the RSE percent either side of the estimate will give the 95% confidence interval.
    - For example, an estimate of 100 with an RSE of 2%, we could be 95% confident that the true value was within +/- 4%, or between 96 and 104.
- Sample design
  - The structured process by which a sample of the population is selected for enumeration.
- SE – Standard Error
  - This is a measure of sampling variability. That is, the survey estimates may differ from those that would have been produced had all persons been included in the survey.
  - There are about two chances in three (66% confidence interval) that a sample estimate will differ by less than one standard error from the figure that would have been obtained if all dwellings had been included in the survey, and about nineteen chances in twenty (95% confidence interval) that the difference will be less than two standard errors.
    - For example, for an estimate of 100 with an SE of 5, we could be 95% confident that the true value was within +/- 10, or between 90 and 110.
- 95% confidence interval – See SE and RSE.

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