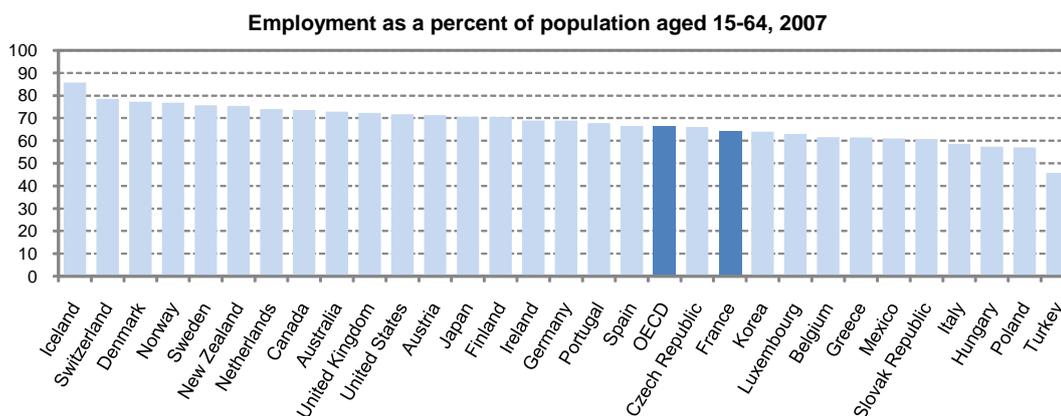


## Employment Outlook 2008 – How does FRANCE compare?

**French labour market performance has improved but the gap vis-à-vis best-performing countries remains significant.** The *OECD Employment Outlook* shows that the French standardised unemployment rate fell by one percentage point in 2007, reaching 8.3% at the end of the year. This remains, however, 1.3 percentage point above the EU-15 average and 2.7 points above the OECD average. However, only 64.4% of people of working age have a job in France, compared with over 70% in the best-performing OECD countries like Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United States and the United Kingdom (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. More than one third of the working-age population does not have a job in France



**Improving the labour market situation of younger and older workers is a key.** Prime-age workers fare relatively well in France, with 82% of people aged 25-54 in employment against 77% in the OECD area as a whole. By contrast, only 38% of people aged 55 to 64 are working, 15.5 percentage points less than the OECD average. And at 20%, the unemployment rate among youth aged 15 to 24 years is 1.5 times higher than in the OECD area. In France, youth face strong barriers to employment at all levels of educational attainment.

**Racial minorities fare worst in the labour market than the rest of the population.** For example, the *Employment Outlook* notes that, in big cities where specific studies have been conducted, it takes people with African-sounding names typically twice as long to get a job interview than individuals with strictly identical resumes but having a French-sounding name.

**The legislative framework for equality is quite comprehensive, but population appears to be ill-informed.** Only half of the population in France claim to know that discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin, when hiring new employees, is unlawful. And only 29% of French citizens know their rights, should they be a victim of discrimination. This lack of public awareness constitutes a strong barrier to the effective enforcement of legal rules. Indeed, laws are not self-enforcing; individuals are the actors mobilizing the law and have to take legal actions. Thus, at the very least, workers should know that they have a legal right to equal treatment. Information and education campaigns, currently conducted by the HALDE (High Authority Combating Discrimination and Promoting Equality), are particularly welcomed.

**Although it is too early to evaluate its impact, the HALDE has strong powers, and can potentially play an important role in fighting discrimination.** Laws can have an impact only if they are effectively enforced, and in this respect, equality bodies have a crucial role to play, the OECD report notes. In particular, such bodies should: have investigative powers so that they can help a plaintiff to gather evidence of discrimination, be empowered to investigate companies even in the absence of an individual

claim and to apply sanctions where there is evidence of discrimination; and, also, help the parties to solve a discrimination dispute through mediation as an alternative to judicial actions. Taking its functions in 2005, the HALDE has all these powers.

**Mental health has slightly worsened in France in the last decade.** Prevalence of self-reported mental illness has increased by almost 2% since 1992. At the same time, the share of workers reporting work-related mental health problems has also risen, although it is close to the EU average. Work-related mental health problems are more often associated with more difficult working conditions such as working long hours and workplace discrimination. Certain working conditions which have an impact on mental health have worsened in France (work intensity and shift work) but others have improved (discrimination at the workplace). That said, mental illness remains more prevalent among unemployed or other inactive persons than among those who have a job.

*OECD Employment Outlook 2008* is available to journalists on the **password protected** web site or on request from the **Media Relations Division**. For further comment on France, journalists are invited to contact Stefano Scarpetta (tel: +33 1 45 24 19 88 or e-mail: stefano.scarpetta@oecd.org) or Anne Saint-Martin (tel: +33 1 45 24 85 90 or e-mail: anne.saint-martin@oecd.org) from the OECD Employment Analysis and Policy Division.