STANDARDISED UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

The OECD area unemployment rate on a standardised basis rose to 7.2 per cent in December 1991 from the 7.0 per cent level prevailing in the preceding four months. Eight of the eleven countries for which monthly unemployment data are available experienced an increase in December -- Sweden and Finland recorded the sharpest rises (of 0.6 and 0.4 percentage point, respectively); in the three remaining countries (Canada, France and Germany), the rate remained unchanged. Quarterly data for New Zealand point to a slight easing in the unemployment rate there.

Taking 1991 as a whole, the OECD average standardised unemployment rate rose by 0.7 percentage point to 6.8 per cent -- the first average annual increase since 1983. The increase in OECD Europe was on balance somewhat less (0.5 percentage point), even though in certain countries (Finland, Ireland and the United Kingdom) it exceeded 2 percentage points. In Germany and Italy, the average rate of unemployment declined. Elsewhere, Australia and New Zealand experienced relatively sharp increases in unemployment, while the rate rose by 1.2 percentage points in the United States and 2.1 percentage points in Canada. The Japanese standardised rate was unchanged at 2.1 per cent for the second year in a row.

Developments in January in the seven countries for which data are available do not suggest a further deterioration of the OECD unemployment situation. In three countries (Canada, United States and Belgium), the unemployment rate remained unchanged, while in two (Australia and Sweden) it fell by 0.3 percentage point, and in the remaining two countries (Ireland and the United Kingdom) it rose by 0.2 percentage point.