

Rebounding UK PMIs mask troubling employment story

The latest UK PMIs don't add a great deal of new information to our understanding of how the UK economy is rebounding. That said, the employment aspect of the report is yet another sign that the jobless rate is likely to climb over the coming months, posing a major challenge to the economic recovery



Source: iStockphoto

The level of PMIs aren't especially helpful right now...

If you're looking to gauge the strength of the UK recovery, the latest PMIs are probably not the best place to look.

At 56.6, the service-sector index (which accounts for around 80% of UK output) is a bit better than expected, as more importantly, it is back above the all-important 50-level for the first time since the pandemic began.

These latest PMI numbers tell us that on balance, a higher

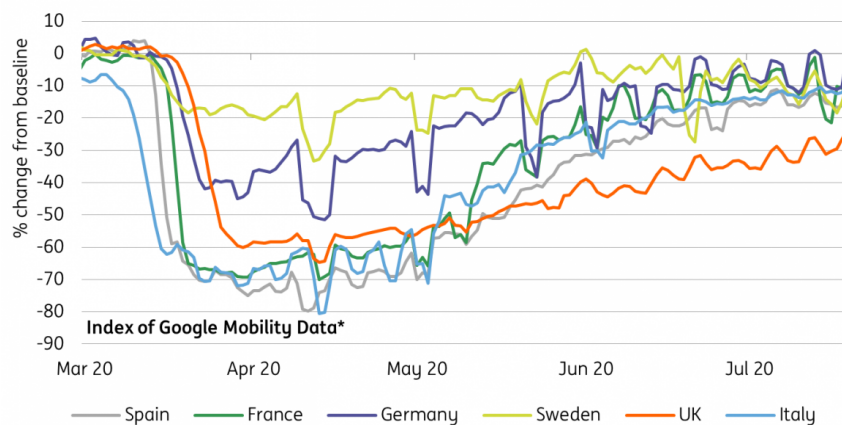
proportion of firms are seeing things getting better - but it doesn't tell us much about the magnitude of that improvement.

But while this is undoubtedly a positive step, it only really tells us that the sector is no longer contracting, something that we already know from various other data sources, including the official GDP data for May.

The general point is that, while PMIs are usually the gold-standard when it comes to nowcasting growth in normal times, they aren't all-that-helpful at economic turning points.

Like other survey-based data, they are calculated by netting out the number of businesses saying conditions are improving against those that say they are worsening. So what these latest PMI numbers tell us is that on balance, a higher proportion of firms are seeing things getting better - but it doesn't tell us much about the magnitude of that improvement.

UK movement is still below 'normal' according to Google



Source: Google Mobility Report, ING

Unemployment set to rise as furlough scheme wound down

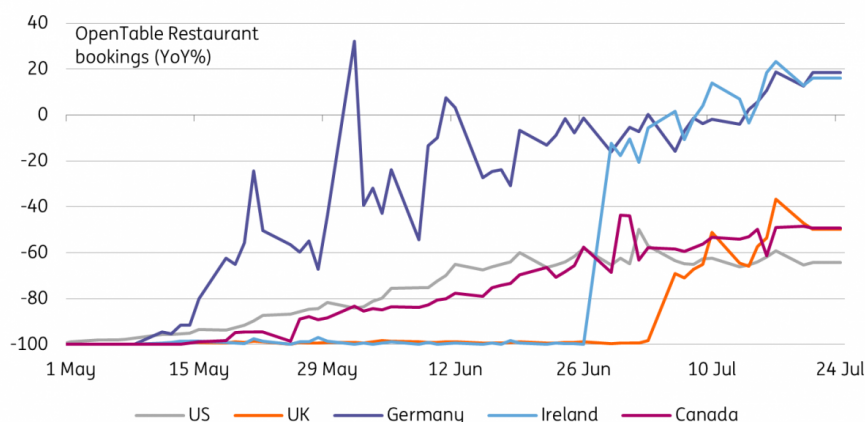
That said, the IHS Market/CIPS accompanying press release provides an important reminder that the recovery is likely to be slow. They noted for instance that one-in-three service providers reported a fall in employment in July, reflecting higher costs and weaker-than-expected demand. This comes as the government prepares to gradually withdraw the support provided by the job retention (furlough) scheme over the next few months.

These signs of weaker demand are largely backed-up by other data sources too. We know by looking at Google Mobility indices, as well as footfall data from Springboard/UK government and OpenTable restaurant reservations, that consumers are still reluctant to spend time (and money) away from home. We suspect some of these measures will improve over coming weeks, but a more sustained recovery will hinge on public confidence in country's ability to control localised outbreaks of Covid-19, through contact tracing and other measures.

A safety-conscious consumer, as well as the increasing financial challenge posed by rising unemployment, suggest that the overall economic recovery is unlikely to a full 'V-shape'. [Despite a](#)

[strong recovery in retail sales during June](#), we don't expect the size of the UK economy to return to pre-virus levels until 2022 or later.

OpenTable reservations still much lower than usual



Source: OpenTable, Bloomberg

Author

James Smith

Developed Markets Economist, UK

james.smith@ing.com

Disclaimer

This publication has been prepared by the Economic and Financial Analysis Division of ING Bank N.V. ("ING") solely for information purposes without regard to any particular user's investment objectives, financial situation, or means. *ING forms part of ING Group (being for this purpose ING Group N.V. and its subsidiary and affiliated companies).* The information in the publication is not an investment recommendation and it is not investment, legal or tax advice or an offer or solicitation to purchase or sell any financial instrument. Reasonable care has been taken to ensure that this publication is not untrue or misleading when published, but ING does not represent that it is accurate or complete. ING does not accept any liability for any direct, indirect or consequential loss arising from any use of this publication. Unless otherwise stated, any views, forecasts, or estimates are solely those of the author(s), as of the date of the publication and are subject to change without notice.

The distribution of this publication may be restricted by law or regulation in different jurisdictions and persons into whose possession this publication comes should inform themselves about, and observe, such restrictions.

Copyright and database rights protection exists in this report and it may not be reproduced, distributed or published by any person for any purpose without the prior express consent of ING. All rights are reserved. ING Bank N.V. is authorised by the Dutch Central Bank and supervised by the European Central Bank (ECB), the Dutch Central Bank (DNB) and the Dutch Authority for the Financial Markets (AFM). ING Bank N.V. is incorporated in the Netherlands (Trade Register no. 33031431 Amsterdam). In the United Kingdom this information is approved and/or communicated by ING Bank N.V., London Branch. ING Bank N.V., London Branch is authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and is subject to regulation by the Financial Conduct Authority and limited regulation by the Prudential Regulation Authority. ING Bank N.V., London branch is registered in England (Registration number BR000341) at 8-10 Moorgate, London EC2 6DA. For US Investors: Any person wishing to discuss this report or effect transactions in any security discussed herein should contact ING Financial Markets LLC, which is a member of the NYSE, FINRA and SIPC and part of ING, and which has accepted responsibility for the distribution of this report in the United States under applicable requirements.

Additional information is available on request. For more information about ING Group, please visit www.ing.com.