

Labour Market and Claimant Headline Figures: Released 19th May 2026

Regional Labour Market¹ –

Please note: Estimates from January to March 2025 include the full effect of recent improvements in Labour Force Survey (LFS) data collection and sampling methods introduced from January 2024; however, estimates may be subject to the effect of further ongoing improvements. An increased amount of volatility will remain in the estimates from mid-year 2023 and throughout 2024, so ONS would advise caution when interpreting change involving those periods. ONS recommend using the LFS estimates as part of our suite of labour market indicators, alongside Workforce Jobs, Claimant Count and Pay As You Earn Real Time Information (PAYE RTI) estimates. LFS estimates are weighted to 2022 mid-year population estimates for periods from January to March 2019; headline UK seasonally adjusted series before this have been modelled, but other series have a discontinuity at this point.

- For the three months ending March 2026, the West Midlands Region employment rate (aged 16 – 64 years) was 73.8%. Since the three months ending December 2025, the employment rate increased by 0.7 percentage points (pp) – the second highest increase of all regions (behind the North East). When compared to the same period in the previous year, the employment rate increased by 1.0pp (second highest increase). The UK employment rate was 75.0%, a 0.1pp increase when compared to the previous quarter and unchanged when compared to the previous year. The highest employment rate within the UK for the three months ending March 2026 was in the South East with 78.5% and the lowest in the North East with 72.0%, the West Midlands ranked sixth lowest.
- For the three months ending March 2026, the West Midlands Region unemployment rate (aged 16 years and over) was 5.4%, which has decreased by 0.7pp since the previous quarter and was 0.9pp higher when compared to the previous year. The UK unemployment rate was 5.0%, a 0.2pp decrease from the previous quarter and a 0.5pp increase when compared to the previous year. The highest unemployment rate in the UK for the three months ending March 2026 was in London with 7.3% and the lowest in Northern Ireland with 2.1%, the West Midlands ranked fifth highest.
- For the three months ending March 2026, the West Midlands Region economic inactivity rate (aged 16 – 64 years) was 21.9%, an increase of 0.1pp from the previous quarter, but a decrease of 1.8pp when compared to the previous year. The UK economic inactivity rate was 20.9%, an increase of 0.1pp from the previous quarter and a 0.4pp decrease from the previous year. The highest economic inactivity rate in the UK for the three months ending March 2026 was Northern Ireland with 26.3% with the lowest in the South West with 18.3%, the West Midlands ranked sixth lowest.
- For payrolled employees², when comparing April 2026 with the same period last year, the UK overall decreased by 0.7% and regional changes ranged from a 1.0% increase in Northern Ireland (the only area to increase) to a 1.3% decrease in London. The West Midlands decreased by 0.7%.

¹ Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS), Labour market in the regions of the UK: May 2026 (official statistics in development)

² Payrolled employee figures should be treated as provisional estimates and are likely to be revised when more data is received next month.

Claimant Count³

All Claimants Summary

Revised Estimates

- New figures show that there were 141,845 (revised down from 144,120 claimants) in the WMCA area in March 2026. Since February 2026, there has been an increase of 0.6% (+870) claimants in the WMCA area – these figures have been revised from an increase of 2.2% (+3,145). For England over this period, there has been an increase of 0.4%, revised from an increase of 2.1%.
- When compared to March 2025, claimants have now decreased by 4.1% (-5,990) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from a decrease of 2.5% (-3,715). For England over this period, there has been a decrease of 2.9%, revised from a decrease of 1.2%.
- When compared to March 2021, claimants have decreased by 19.3% (-33,925) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from a decrease of 18.0% (-31,650). For England over this period, there has been a decrease of 35.3%, revised from a decrease of 34.1%.
- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 16-64 years old was 7.4% in March 2026 (revised from 7.5%). For England, the proportion was 4.0% (revised from 4.1%).
- Across the Combined Authorities, the WMCA still had the highest rates, West Yorkshire was second highest at 5.0% (unchanged) down to 2.1% for York & North Yorkshire (unchanged).

Provisional Estimates

- There were 143,080 claimants in the WMCA area in April 2026. Since March 2026, there has been an increase of 0.9% (+1,235) claimants in the WMCA area, England also increased by 0.9%. When compared to April 2025 claimants have decreased by 2.1% (-3,040) in the WMCA area, with England decreasing by 0.1%. When compared to April 2021, claimants have decreased by 17.4% (-30,165) in the WMCA area, with England decreasing by 33.6%.
- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 16-64 years old was 7.4% compared to 4.1% for England in April 2026. Across the Combined Authorities, the WMCA had the highest rates, West Yorkshire was second highest at 5.0% down to 2.0% for York & North Yorkshire.

Youth Claimant (Aged 18-24) Summary

Revised Estimates

- New figures show that there were 29,480 (revised down from 29,850) youth claimants in the WMCA area in March 2026. Since February 2026, this has now increased by 0.9% (+275) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from an increase of 2.2% (+645). For England over this period, there has been an increase of 1.2%, revised from an increase of 2.7%.
- When compared to March 2025, youth claimants have now increased by 7.7% (+2,120) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from an increase of 9.1% (+2,490). For England over this period, there has been an increase of 7.5%, revised from an increase of 9.1%.

³ Source: ONS/DWP, Claimant Count, May 2026. This experimental series counts the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance plus those who claim Universal Credit and are required to seek work and be available for work and replaces the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance as the headline indicator of the number of people claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed. Please note, when new data is released, the previous month is also revised.

- When compared to March 2021, youth claimants have decreased by 15.5% (-5,425) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from a decrease of 14.5% (-5,055). For England over this period, there has been a decrease of 33.3%, revised from a decrease of 32.4%.
- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 18-24 years old was 9.6% (revised from 9.7%) in March 2026. For England, the proportion was 5.9% (revised from 6.0%).
- Across the Combined Authorities, the WMCA still had the highest rates, Tees Valley was second highest at 7.8% (revised from 7.9%) down to 2.9% for York & North Yorkshire (unchanged).

Provisional Estimates

- There were 29,730 youth claimants in the WMCA area in April 2026. Since March 2026, there has been an increase of 0.8% (+250) youth claimants in the WMCA area, England-wide youth claimants increased by 0.7%. When compared to April 2025, youth claimants have increased by 8.7% (+2,390) in the WMCA area, with England increasing by 9.3%. When compared to April 2021, youth claimants have decreased by 13.5% (-4,650) in the WMCA area, with England decreasing by 31.2%.
- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 18-24 years old was 9.7% compared to 5.9% for England in April 2026. Across the Combined Authorities, the WMCA had the highest rates, Tees Valley was the second highest at 7.9% down to 2.8% for York & North Yorkshire.