

Labour Market and Claimant Headline Figures: Released 21st July 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 onwards. Some volatility remains particularly for estimates for mid-2023 and throughout 2024, and for granular breakdowns, where sample sizes are smaller. The 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.

- For the three months ending May 2026, the West Midlands Region employment rate (aged 16 – 64 years) was 73.4%. Since the three months ending February 2026, the employment rate increased by 0.2 percentage points (pp). When compared to the same period in the previous year, the employment rate was unchanged. The UK employment rate was 75.1%, a 0.1pp increase when compared to the previous quarter but decrease of 0.1pp when compared to the previous year. The highest employment rate within the UK for the three months ending May 2026 was in the South East with 78.2% and the lowest in the North East with 71.5%, the West Midlands ranked fifth lowest.
- For the three months ending May 2026, the West Midlands Region unemployment rate (aged 16 years and over) was 5.2%, which has decreased by 0.5pp since the previous quarter (joint highest decrease with London) and 0.3pp lower when compared to the previous year. The UK unemployment rate was 4.9%, a 0.1pp decrease from the previous quarter and a 0.2pp increase when compared to the previous year. The highest unemployment rate in the UK for the three months ending May 2026 was in London with 6.5% and the lowest in Northern Ireland with 1.8%, the West Midlands ranked joint fourth highest (with the East Midlands).
- For the three months ending May 2026, the West Midlands Region economic inactivity rate (aged 16 – 64 years) was 22.6%, an increase of 0.4pp from the previous quarter and an increase of 0.3pp when compared to the previous year. The UK economic inactivity rate was 20.9%, a decrease of 0.1pp from the previous quarter and also a 0.1pp decrease from the previous year. The highest economic inactivity rate in the UK for the three months ending May 2026 was Northern Ireland with 26.5% with the lowest in the South East with 18.5%, the West Midlands ranked fourth highest.
- For payrolled employees², when comparing June 2026 with the same period last year, the UK overall decreased by 0.2% and regional changes ranged from a 1.4% increase in Northern Ireland (the only area to increase) to a 0.8% decrease in London. The West Midlands decreased by 0.1%.

Annual Population Survey – Labour Market: year ending March 2026³

- Overall, for the WMCA area, the economic activity rate was 74.9% in the year ending March 2026, an increase of 0.2 percentage points (pp) since the year ending March 2025. England's economic activity rate was 79.5% and increased by 0.7pp. When compared to the year ending March 2021, the WMCA was 0.8pp lower, while nationally it had increased by 0.3pp.
- In the year ending March 2026, the WMCA was joint lowest Combined Authority (with Hull & East Yorkshire) for economic activity. West of England Combined Authority was the highest at 82.7% down to the third lowest which was the North East Combined Authority at 75.3%.

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

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

³ ONS, Annual Population Survey (APS), released July 2026. For those aged 16-64 years old.

- The WMCA area employment rate was 69.1% in the year ending March 2026, this was a decrease of 0.9pp since the year ending March 2025. While England's employment rate increased by 0.1pp to 75.8%. When compared to the year ending March 2021, the WMCA was 1.4pp lower compared to an increase of 0.6pp England-wide.
- In the year ending March 2026, the WMCA was the lowest Combined Authority for employment rate. West of England Combined Authority was the highest at 79.9% down to the second lowest which was Hull & East Yorkshire Combined Authority at 70.5%.
- Since the year ending March 2025, the WMCA area unemployment rate has increased by 1.4pp to 7.7% in the year ending March 2026. England's unemployment rate increased by 0.7pp to 4.7% in the year ending March 2026. When compared to the year ending March 2021, the WMCA rate increased by 0.8pp, while England decreased by 0.4pp.
- In the year ending March 2026, the WMCA was the highest Combined Authority for unemployment. York & North Yorkshire Combined Authority was the lowest at 2.0% up to the second highest which was Tees Valley Combined Authority at 6.1%.
- The WMCA area economic inactivity rate was 25.1% in the year ending March 2026, a decrease of 0.2pp since the year ending March 2025. England's economic inactivity rate decreased by 0.7pp to 20.5%. When compared to the year ending March 2021, the WMCA was 0.8pp higher, while England decreased by 0.3pp.
- In the year ending March 2026, the WMCA was joint highest Combined Authority (with Hull & East Yorkshire) for economic inactivity. West of England Combined Authority was the lowest at 17.3% up to the third highest which was the Tees Valley Combined Authority at 24.7%.

Claimant Count⁴

All Claimants Summary

Revised Estimates

- New figures show that there were 141,195 (revised down from 143,600 claimants) in the WMCA area in May 2026. Since April 2026, there has been an increase of 0.4% (+510) claimants in the WMCA area – these figures have been revised from an increase of 2.1% (+2,915). For England over this period, there has been an increase of 0.1%, revised from an increase of 2.0%.
- When compared to May 2025, claimants have now decreased by 2.5% (-3,555) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from a decrease of 0.8% (-1,150). For England over this period, there has been a decrease of 1.0%, revised from an increase of 0.8%.
- When compared to May 2021, claimants have decreased by 15.1% (-25,165) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from a decrease of 13.7% (-22,760). For England over this period, there has been a decrease of 30.3%, revised from a decrease of 29.0%.
- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 16-64 years old was 7.3% in May 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 4.9% (revised from 5.0%) down to 2.0% for York & North Yorkshire (unchanged).

⁴ Source: ONS/DWP, Claimant Count, July 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.

Provisional Estimates

- There were 143,115 claimants in the WMCA area in June 2026. Since May 2026, there has been an increase of 1.4% (+1,920) claimants in the WMCA area, England increased by 1.2%. When compared to June 2025 claimants have decreased by 1.4% (-2,055) in the WMCA area, with England decreasing by 0.2%. When compared to June 2021, claimants have decreased by 10.4% (16,615) in the WMCA area, with England decreasing by 24.1%.
- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 16-64 years old was 7.4% compared to 4.0% for England in June 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 29,265 (revised down from 29,695) youth claimants in the WMCA area in May 2026. Since April 2026, this has now decreased by 0.2% (-60) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from an increase of 1.3% (+370). For England over this period, there has been a decrease of 1.2%, revised from an increase of 0.4%.
- When compared to May 2025, youth claimants have now increased by 8.2% (+2,220) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from an increase of 9.8% (+2,650). For England over this period, there has been an increase of 7.9%, revised from an increase of 9.7%.
- When compared to May 2021, youth claimants have decreased by 10.4% (-3,410) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from a decrease of 9.1% (-2,980). For England over this period, there has been a decrease of 27.7%, revised from a decrease of 26.5%.
- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 18-24 years old was 9.5% (revised from 9.6%) in May 2026. For England, the proportion was 5.7% (revised from 5.8%).
- 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 2.7% for York & North Yorkshire (unchanged).

Provisional Estimates

- There were 29,685 youth claimants in the WMCA area in June 2026. Since May 2026, there has been an increase of 1.4% (+420) youth claimants in the WMCA area, England-wide youth claimants increased by 0.7%. When compared to June 2025, youth claimants have increased by 8.9% (+2,420) in the WMCA area, with England increasing by 9.2%. When compared to June 2021, youth claimants have decreased by 4.2% (-1,290) in the WMCA area, with England decreasing by 20.6%.
- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 18-24 years old was 9.6% compared to 5.8% for England in June 2026. Across the Combined Authorities, the WMCA had the highest rates, Tees Valley was the second highest at 7.8% down to 2.6% for York & North Yorkshire.