

Labour Market and Claimant Headline Figures: Released 15th September 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 July 2026, the West Midlands Region employment rate (aged 16 – 64 years) was 72.6%. Since the three months ending April 2026, the employment rate decreased by 0.8 percentage points (pp), the highest decrease across all regions. When compared to the same period in the previous year, the employment rate decreased by 0.9pp. The UK employment rate was 75.1%, unchanged from the previous quarter and a decrease of 0.1pp when compared to the previous year. The highest employment rate within the UK for the three months ending July 2026 was in the South East and South West both with 78.2% and the lowest in the North East with 71.3%, the West Midlands ranked third lowest.
- For the three months ending July 2026, the West Midlands Region unemployment rate (aged 16 years and over) was 5.6%, which has increased by 0.3pp since the previous quarter but was 0.4pp lower when compared to the previous year. The UK unemployment rate was 4.9%, unchanged 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 July 2026 was in London with 6.8% and the lowest in Northern Ireland with 2.4%, the West Midlands ranked second highest.
- For the three months ending July 2026, the West Midlands Region economic inactivity rate (aged 16 – 64 years) was 23.0%, an increase of 0.6pp from the previous quarter (the largest increase of any region) and an increase of 1.3pp when compared to the previous year. The UK economic inactivity rate was 20.9%, a decrease of 0.1pp from the previous quarter and the previous year. The highest economic inactivity rate in the UK for the three months ending July 2026 was in Northern Ireland with 26.0%, with the lowest in the South East with 18.2%. The West Midlands ranked fourth highest.
- For payrolled employees², when comparing August 2026 with the same period last year, the UK overall decreased by 0.5% and regional changes ranged from a 0.8% increase in Northern Ireland (the only area to increase) to a -1.0% decrease in London. The West Midlands decreased by 0.3%.
- The estimated number of workforce jobs in the UK was over 36.7 million in June 2026, up by 60,498 (+0.2%) from the previous year. Workforce jobs increased in 8 out of 12 regions of the UK between June 2025 and June 2026. The South West had the largest decrease in percentage terms and by total jobs, with a decrease of 1.5% (-46,448 jobs). The West Midlands had 3.0 million workforce jobs in June 2026, an annual increase of 0.1% (+2,516 jobs). Of the eight areas to increase, Northern Ireland had the highest percentage increase by 1.5%, closely followed by Wales with an increase of 1.4%. The West Midlands had the smallest increase of the eight regions where workforce jobs were higher in June 2026 compared to the previous year.

¹ Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS), Labour market in the regions of the UK: September 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.

Claimant Count³

All Claimants Summary

Revised Estimates

- New figures show that there were 140,395 (revised down from 142,850) claimants in the WMCA area in July 2026. Since June 2026, there has been a decrease in claimants of 0.5% (-640) in the WMCA area – these figures have been revised from an increase of 1.3% (+1,815). For England over this period, there has been a decrease of 0.8%, revised from an increase of 1.1%.
- When compared to July 2025, claimants have now decreased by 1.3% (-1,885) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from an increase of 0.4% (+570). For England over this period, there has been a decrease of 0.8%, revised from an increase of 1.1%.
- When compared to July 2021, claimants have decreased by 10.3% (-16,095) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from a decrease of 8.7% (-13,640). For England over this period, there has been a decrease of 24.0%, revised from a decrease of 22.6%.
- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 16-64 years old was 7.3% in July 2026 (revised from 7.4%). For England, the proportion was 3.9% (revised from 4.0%).
- 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 1.9% for York & North Yorkshire (revised from 2.0%).

Provisional Estimates

- There were 143,985 claimants in the WMCA area in August 2026. Since July 2026, there has been an increase of 2.6% (+3,590) claimants in the WMCA area, England increased by 2.2%. When compared to August 2025 claimants have increased by 1.5% (+2,095) in the WMCA area, with England increasing by 1.8%. When compared to August 2021, claimants have decreased by 5.5% (-8,375) in the WMCA area, with England decreasing by 19.2%.
- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 16-64 years old was 7.5% compared to 4.0% for England in August 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 29,585 (revised down from 30,060) youth claimants in the WMCA area in July 2026. Since June 2026, this has increased by 1.1% (+320), revised down from an increase of 2.7% (+795). For England over this period, there has been an increase of 0.6%, revised from an increase of 2.3%.
- When compared to July 2025, youth claimants have now increased by 7.4% (+2,045) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from an increase of 9.2% (+2,520). For England over this period, there has been an increase of 7.5%, revised from an increase of 9.4%.

³ Source: ONS/DWP, Claimant Count, September 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 July 2021, youth claimants have decreased by 0.2% (-60) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from an increase of 1.4% (+415). For England over this period, there has been a decrease of 16.6%, revised from a decrease of 15.1%.
- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 18-24 years old was 9.6% (revised from 9.8%) in July 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 8.0%) down to 2.6% for York & North Yorkshire (revised from 2.7%).

Provisional Estimates

- There were 31,040 youth claimants in the WMCA area in August 2026. Since July 2026, there has been an increase of 4.9% (+1,455) youth claimants in the WMCA area, England-wide youth claimants increased by 5.0%. When compared to August 2025, youth claimants have increased by 9.2% (+2,615) in the WMCA area, with England increasing by 9.4%. When compared to August 2021, youth claimants have increased by 8.9% (+2,530) in the WMCA area, with England decreasing by 7.3%.
- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 18-24 years old was 10.1% compared to 6.0% for England in August 2026. Across the Combined Authorities, the WMCA had the highest rates, Tees Valley was the second highest at 8.4% down to 2.8% for York & North Yorkshire.