Labour Market and Claimant Headline Figures: Released 20th October 2026

Regional Labour Market[1] –

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 August 2026, the West Midlands Region employment rate (aged 16 – 64 years) was 72.5%. Since the three months ending May 2026, the employment rate decreased by 0.9 percentage points (pp), the second highest decrease across all regions. When compared to the same period in the previous year, the employment rate decreased by 0.6pp. The UK employment rate was 75.3%, a 0.2pp increase from the previous quarter and when compared to the previous year. The highest employment rate within the UK for the three months ending August 2026 was in the South West with 79.2% and the lowest in the North East with 70.5%, the West Midlands ranked third lowest.

- For the three months ending August 2026, the West Midlands Region unemployment rate (aged 16 years and over) was 5.7%, which has increased by 0.5pp since the previous quarter, the highest increase across all regions. However, when compared to the previous year, the unemployment rate was 0.5pp lower. The UK unemployment rate was 4.7%, a 0.1pp decrease from the previous quarter and when compared to the previous year. The highest unemployment rate in the UK for the three months ending August 2026 was in London with 6.6% and the lowest in Northern Ireland with 2.1%, the West Midlands ranked second highest.

- For the three months ending August 2026, the West Midlands Region economic inactivity rate (aged 16 – 64 years) was 22.8%, an increase of 0.3pp from the previous quarter and an increase of 1.1pp when compared to the previous year. The UK economic inactivity rate was 20.9%, a decrease of 0.1pp from the previous quarter and a 0.2pp decrease from the previous year. The highest economic inactivity rate in the UK for the three months ending August 2026 was in Northern Ireland with 25.9%, with the lowest in the South West with 17.5%. The West Midlands ranked fifth highest.

- For payrolled employees[2], when comparing September 2026 with the same period last year, the UK overall decreased by 0.2% and regional changes ranged from a 0.9% increase in Northern Ireland (the only area to increase) to a 0.7% decrease in London. The West Midlands decreased by 0.1%.

Annual Population Survey – Labour Market: Year Ending June 2026[3]

- Overall, for the WMCA area, the economic activity rate was 74.8% in the year ending June 2026, a decrease of 0.3 percentage points (pp) since the year ending June 2025. England's economic activity rate was 79.5% and increased by 0.4pp. When compared to the year ending June 2021, the WMCA was 0.5pp lower, while nationally levels had increased by 0.6pp.
- In the year ending June 2026, the WMCA was the lowest Combined Authority for economic activity. West of England Combined Authority was the highest at 83.0% down to the joint second lowest which was the North East Combined Authority and Tees Valley Combined Authority both at 75.7%.

[1] Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS), Labour market in the regions of the UK: October 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 October 2026. For those aged 16-64 years old.

- The WMCA area employment rate was 69.3% in the year ending June 2026, this was a decrease of 0.8pp since the year ending June 2025. While England's employment rate remained unchanged at 75.8%. When compared to the year ending June 2021, the WMCA was 0.5pp lower compared to an increase of 1.0pp England-wide.
- In the year ending June 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 Tees Valley Combined Authority at 71.1%.

- Since the year ending June 2025, the WMCA area unemployment rate has increased by 0.7pp to 7.4% in the year ending June 2026. England's unemployment rate increased by 0.5pp to 4.7% in the year ending June 2026. When compared to the year ending June 2021, the WMCA unemployment rate increased by 0.1pp, while England decreased by 0.5pp.
- In the year ending June 2026, the WMCA was the highest Combined Authority for unemployment. York & North Yorkshire Combined Authority was the lowest at 2.2% up to the second highest which was Tees Valley Combined Authority at 6.2%.

- The WMCA area economic inactivity rate was 25.2% in the year ending March 2026, an increase of 0.3pp since the year ending June 2025. England's economic inactivity rate decreased by 0.4pp to 20.5%. When compared to the year ending June 2021, the WMCA was 0.5pp higher, while England decreased by 0.6pp.
- In the year ending March 2026, the WMCA was the highest Combined Authority for economic inactivity. West of England Combined Authority was the lowest at 17.0% up to the second highest which was the Tees Valley Combined Authority at 24.3%.

Claimant Count[4]

All Claimants Summary

Revised Estimates

- New figures show that there were 141,780 (revised down from 143,985) claimants in the WMCA area in August 2026. Since July 2026, there has been an increase in claimants of 1.0% (+1,385) in the WMCA area – these figures have been revised from an increase of 3.6% (+3,590). For England over this period, there has been an increase of 0.3%, revised from an increase of 2.2%.
- When compared to August 2025, claimants have now decreased by 0.1% (-110) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from an increase of 1.5% (+2,095). For England over this period, there has been a decrease of 0.03%, revised from an increase of 1.8%.
- When compared to August 2021, claimants have decreased by 6.9% (-10,580) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from a decrease of 5.5% (-8,375). For England over this period, there has been a decrease of 20.6%, revised from a decrease of 19.2%.

- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 16-64 years old was 7.4% in August 2026 (revised from 7.5%). For England, the proportion was 4.0% (no change).

- 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%).

[4] Source: ONS/DWP, Claimant Count, October 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 145,055 claimants in the WMCA area in September 2026. Since July 2026, there has been an increase of 2.3% (+3,275) claimants in the WMCA area, England increased by 2.4%. When compared to September 2025 claimants have increased by 2.6% (+3,706) in the WMCA area, matching the national growth rate. When compared to September 2021, claimants have decreased by 1.5% (-2,265) in the WMCA area, with England decreasing by 14.4%.

- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 16-64 years old was 7.5% compared to 4.1% for England in September 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 30,645 (revised down from 31,040) youth claimants in the WMCA area in August 2026. Since July 2026, this has increased by 3.6% (+1,060), revised down from an increase of 4.9% (+1,455). For England over this period, there has been an increase of 3.2%, revised from an increase of 5.0%.
- When compared to August 2025, youth claimants have now increased by 7.8% (+2,220) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from an increase of 9.2% (+2,615). For England over this period, there has been an increase of 7.6%, revised from an increase of 9.4%.
- When compared to August 2021, youth claimants have increased by 7.5% (+2,135) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from an increase of 8.9% (+2,530). For England over this period, there has been a decrease of 8.9%, revised from a decrease of 7.3%.

- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 18-24 years old was 10.0% (revised from 10.2%) in August 2026. For England, the proportion was 6.0% (revised from 6.1%).

- Across the Combined Authorities, the WMCA still had the highest rates, Tees Valley was second highest at 8.4% (unchanged) down to 2.7% for York & North Yorkshire (revised from 2.8%).

Provisional Estimates

- There were 31,525 youth claimants in the WMCA area in September 2026. Since August 2026, there has been an increase of 2.9% (+880) youth claimants in the WMCA area, England-wide youth claimants increased by 3.0%. When compared to September 2025, youth claimants have increased by 10.9% (+3,100) in the WMCA area, with England increasing by 10.3%. When compared to September 2021, youth claimants have increased by 16.8% (+4,525) in the WMCA area, with England increasing by 0.1%.

- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 18-24 years old was 10.3% compared to 6.2% for England in September 2026. Across the Combined Authorities, the WMCA had the highest rates, Tees Valley was the second highest at 8.5% down to 2.8% for York & North Yorkshire.