Office for National Statistics

Statistical bulletin

Labour market in the regions of the UK: December 2020

Regional, local authority and Parliamentary constituency breakdowns of changes in UK employment, unemployment, economic inactivity and other related statistics.

Notice

15 December 2020

The effect of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on our capacity means we have reviewed the existing labour market releases and have suspended some publications.

This will protect the delivery and quality of our remaining labour market outputs and ensure we can respond to new demands as a direct result of coronavirus. More details about the impact on labour market outputs can be found in our statement.

Table of contents

1 . Main points

- For the three months ending October 2020, the highest employment rate estimate in the UK was in the South East (78.6%) and the lowest was in Northern Ireland (70.6%).

- For the three months ending October 2020, the highest unemployment rate estimate in the UK was in the North East (6.6%) and the lowest was in both the South East and Northern Ireland (3.9%).

- For the three months ending October 2020, the highest economic inactivity rate estimate in the UK was in Northern Ireland (26.4%) and the lowest was in the South East (18.0%).

- Between June and September 2020, workforce jobs decreased in all regions of the UK, except for Wales, which increased by 11,000; the largest decrease was in London at 98,000.

- In September 2020, the region with the highest estimated proportion of workforce jobs in the services sector was London at 92.0%, while the East Midlands had the highest proportion of jobs in the production sector at 12.5%.

- The highest average estimated actual weekly hours worked, for the 12 months ending June 2020, was in London at 31.7 hours and the lowest was in the North East at 28.4 hours; for full-time workers, it was highest in London at 35.9 hours, and for part-time workers it was highest in Northern Ireland at 15.5 hours.

The data in this bulletin come from the Labour Force Survey, a survey of households. It is not practical to survey every household each quarter, so these statistics are estimates based on a large sample.

2 . Coronavirus and measuring regional labour market

Coronavirus and Labour Force Survey estimates

Because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, all face-to-face interviewing for the Labour Force Survey (LFS) was suspended and replaced with telephone interviewing. This change in method for initial contact has changed the non-response bias of the survey, affecting interviews from March 2020 onwards. An article on Coronavirus and its impact on the Labour Force Survey gives more detail on this change.

LFS estimates presented for periods from January to March 2020 onwards were re-weighted to account for this bias on 13 October 2020. Annual Population Survey (APS) estimates presented that include affected periods are now also reweighted to account for this.

LFS estimates presented in this bulletin are based on interviews that took place throughout the period from the start of August to the end of October 2020. All the interviews relate to the period after the implementation of coronavirus social distancing measures, the use of local restrictions and government measures aimed at protecting businesses and jobs.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) definition of employment includes those who worked in a job for at least one hour and those temporarily absent from a job. Workers furloughed under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), or who are self-employed but temporarily not in work, have a reasonable expectation of returning to their jobs after a temporary period of absence. Therefore, they are classified as employed under the ILO definition.

LFS responses are weighted to official population projections. The survey is not used to estimate changes in the size of the population. Even if the population does not move in line with expectations, LFS estimates will still continue to sum to the original population projections used to weight the survey.

3 . Regional labour market summary

Table 1 shows the latest estimates for employment, unemployment and economic inactivity for August to October 2020 and a comparison with the previous quarter (May to July 2020). Comparing non-overlapping periods (August to October 2020 with May to July 2020) provides a more robust short-term comparison.

Table 1: Summary of latest headline estimates for regions of the UK, seasonally adjusted, August to October 2020

	Employment rate[1] (%) aged 16 to 64 years	Change on May to July 2020	Unemployment rate[2] (%) aged 16 years and over	Change on May to July 2020	Inactivity rate[3] (%) aged 16 to 64 years	Change on May to July 2020
UK	75.2	-0.5	4.9	0.7	20.8	0.0
Great Britain	75.4	-0.6	5.0	0.7	20.6	0.0
England	75.6	-0.7	5.1	0.8	20.3	0.1
North East	71.2	-2.1	6.6	1.1	23.5	1.0
North West	73.9	-1.4	4.7	1.0	22.3	0.6
Yorkshire and The Humber	73.8	-0.3	5.2	1.1	22.2	-0.5
East Midlands	75.0	-1.0	5.3	0.7	20.6	0.4
West Midlands	75.0	0.6	5.4	0.8	20.6	-1.3
East	77.2	-0.4	4.7	0.7	18.9	-0.2
London	75.2	-1.4	6.3	1.2	19.8	0.6
South East	78.6	-0.5	3.9	0.3	18.0	0.3
South West	76.8	-0.2	4.4	0.4	19.5	-0.1
Wales	72.4	-1.4	4.6	1.4	24.0	0.4
Scotland	74.8	1.4	4.2	-0.6	21.8	-0.9
Northern Ireland	70.6	0.2	3.9	0.9	26.4	-0.9

Source: Office for National Statistics - Labour Force Survey

Notes

1. Calculation of headline employment rate: number of employed people aged from 16 to 64 years divided by the population aged from 16 to 64 years. Population is the sum of employed plus unemployed plus inactive.

2. Calculation of headline unemployment rate: number of unemployed people aged 16 years and over divided by the sum of employed people aged 16 years and over plus unemployed people aged 16 years and over.

3. Calculation of headline economic inactivity rate: number of economically inactive people aged from 16 to 64 years divided by the population aged from 16 to 64 years. Population is the sum of employed plus unemployed plus inactive.

4. The estimates in this table come from a survey and are therefore subject to sampling variability. More information on the quality of these estimates is available in Table 2 of this release and the accompanying Dataset S02.
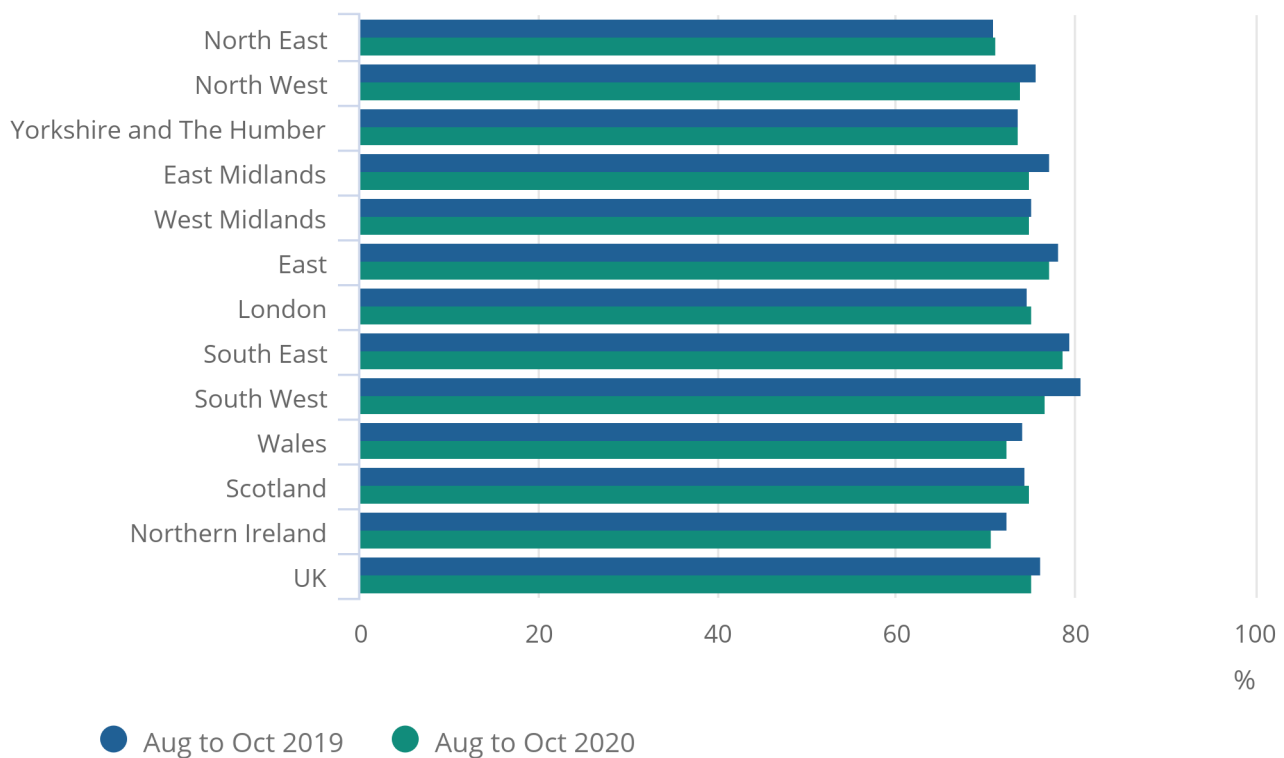
4 . Employment

Figure 1: Employment rate estimates have fallen over the year for most regions in the UK

Employment rate estimates for people aged 16 to 64 years, by UK region, seasonally adjusted, between August to October 2019 and August to October 2020

Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Employment measures the number of people aged 16 years and over in paid work and those who had a job that they were temporarily away from. The employment rate is the proportion of people aged between 16 and 64 years who are in employment.

The employment rate estimate for people aged between 16 and 64 years for the UK was 75.2% for the period August to October 2020 (Figure 1). This is a decrease of 0.5 percentage points compared with the previous quarter (May to July 2020).

For the period August to October 2020:

- the UK region with the highest employment rate estimate was the South East at 78.6%

- the UK region with the lowest employment rate estimate was Northern Ireland at 70.6%

- the largest increase in the employment rate estimate, compared with the previous quarter (May to July 2020), was in Scotland at 1.4 percentage points; the increase is partly caused by the record high increase in the employment level, of 57,000

- the largest decrease in the employment rate estimate, compared with the previous quarter (May to July 2020), was in the North East at 2.1 percentage points

- compared with the same period last year, London saw the largest increase in the estimated employment rate, at 0.4 percentage points

- compared with the same period last year, the South West saw the largest decrease in the estimated employment rate, at 4.0 percentage points
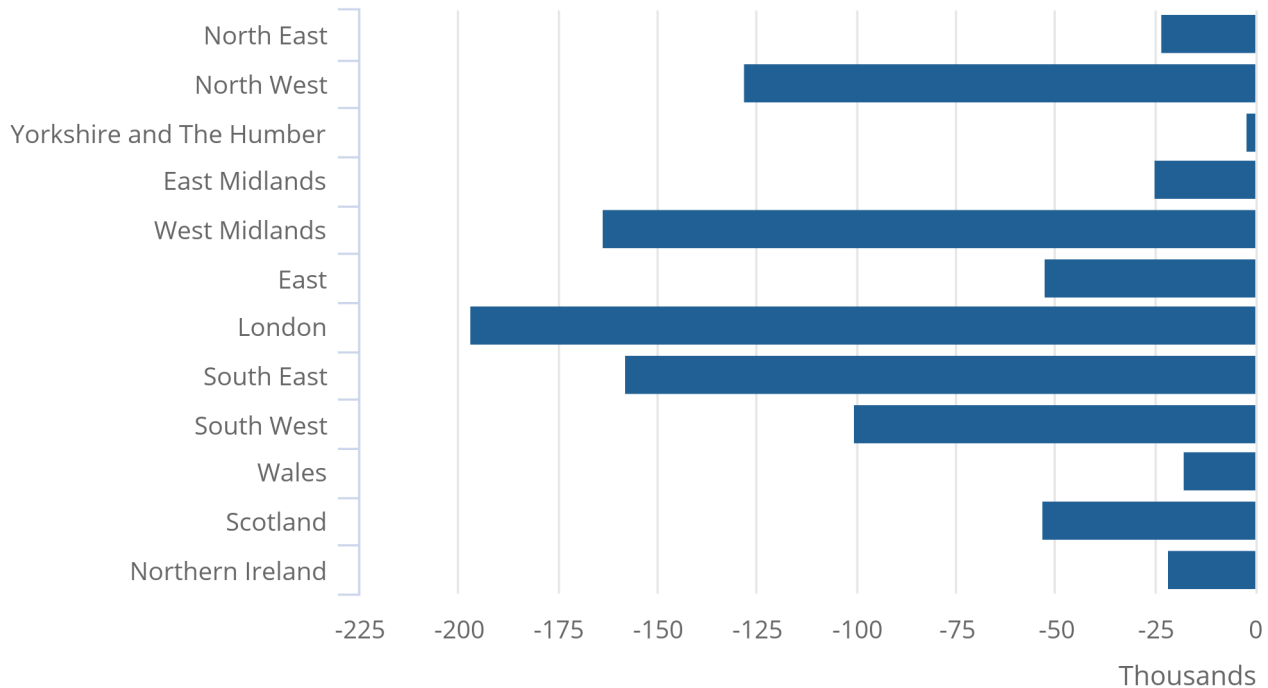
5 . Workforce jobs

On 13 October 2020, data from our Labour Force Survey (LFS) was reweighted. The workforce jobs (WFJ) estimates include some data from the LFS. WFJ estimates have been revised to incorporate this reweighting as well as other revisions. More information can be found in the revisions article.

Figure 2: All regions of the UK saw a decrease in workforce jobs compared with last year

Annual change in estimated workforce jobs, by UK region, seasonally adjusted, between September 2019 and September 2020

Source: Office for National Statistics – Workforce jobs

Workforce jobs measures the number of filled jobs in the economy. The estimates are mainly sourced from employer surveys such as the Short-Term Employment Surveys (STES) and the Quarterly Public Sector Employment Survey (QPSES). Workforce jobs is a different concept from employment, which is sourced from the LFS, as employment is an estimate of people and some people have more than one job.

A comparison between estimates of employment and jobs article is available.

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the LFS and WFJ series may have additional differences because a person's perception of their attachment to a job may differ from the business's perception of that job. It is also important to note that the LFS is based on interviews throughout the coverage period, whereas the WFJ series relate to a specific date. This difference can be significant in a labour market that is experiencing rapid changes.
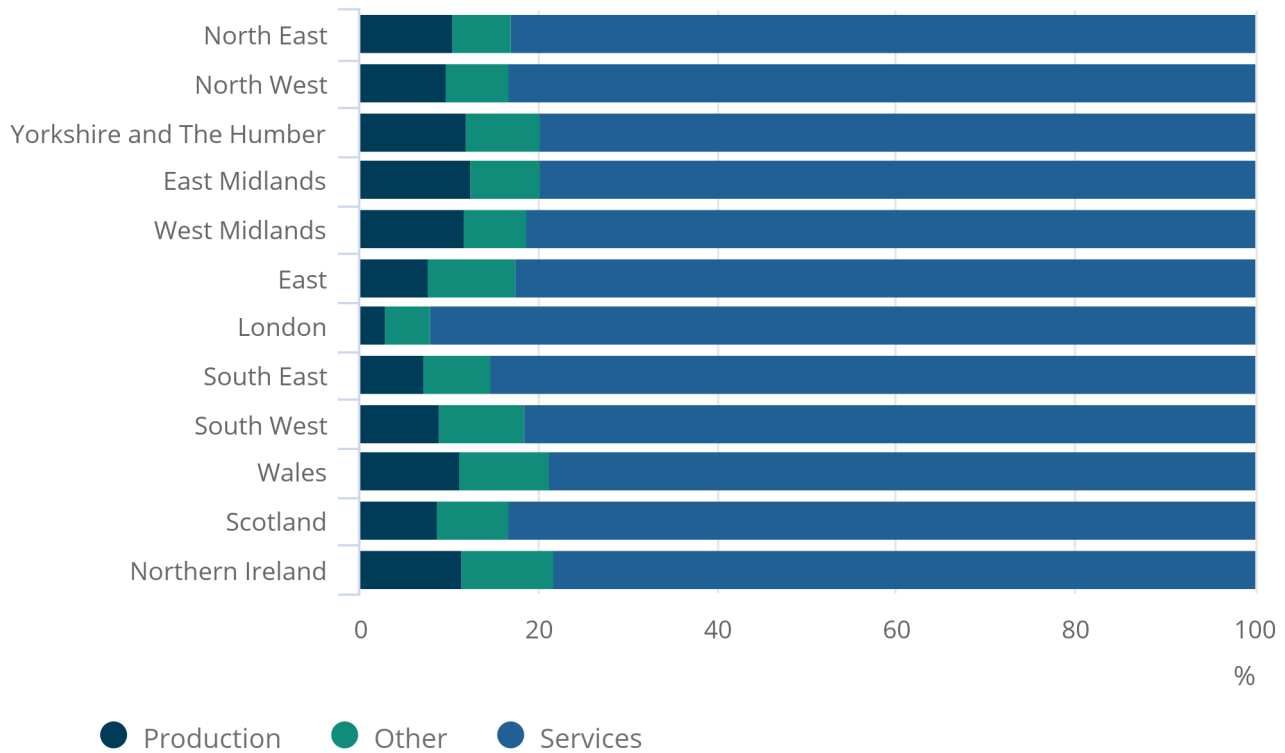
For September 2020:

- there were an estimated 34.69 million workforce jobs in the UK; this is 942,000 fewer than a year ago (September 2019) and 475,000 fewer than the previous quarter (June 2020)

- workforce jobs decreased in all regions of the UK between September 2019 and September 2020; the largest estimated decrease of 197,000 was in London (Figure 2)

- the smallest estimated decrease in workforce jobs between September 2019 and September 2020 was seen in Yorkshire and The Humber at 2,000

- compared with the previous quarter (June 2020), workforce jobs decreased in all regions of the UK, except for Wales, which increased by 11,000; the largest decrease was in London at 98,000

- the East Midlands had the highest proportion of jobs in the production sector at 12.5% (Figure 3), while London had the lowest proportion at 3.0%

- for the services sector, London had the highest proportion at 92.0%, while Northern Ireland had the lowest proportion at 78.3%

- the services sector currently accounts for 83.7% of the total workforce jobs in the UK

Figure 3: Jobs in London were more dominated by the services sector than in other regions

Proportion of workforce jobs by broad industry group, by UK region, September 2020

Source: Office for National Statistics – Workforce jobs
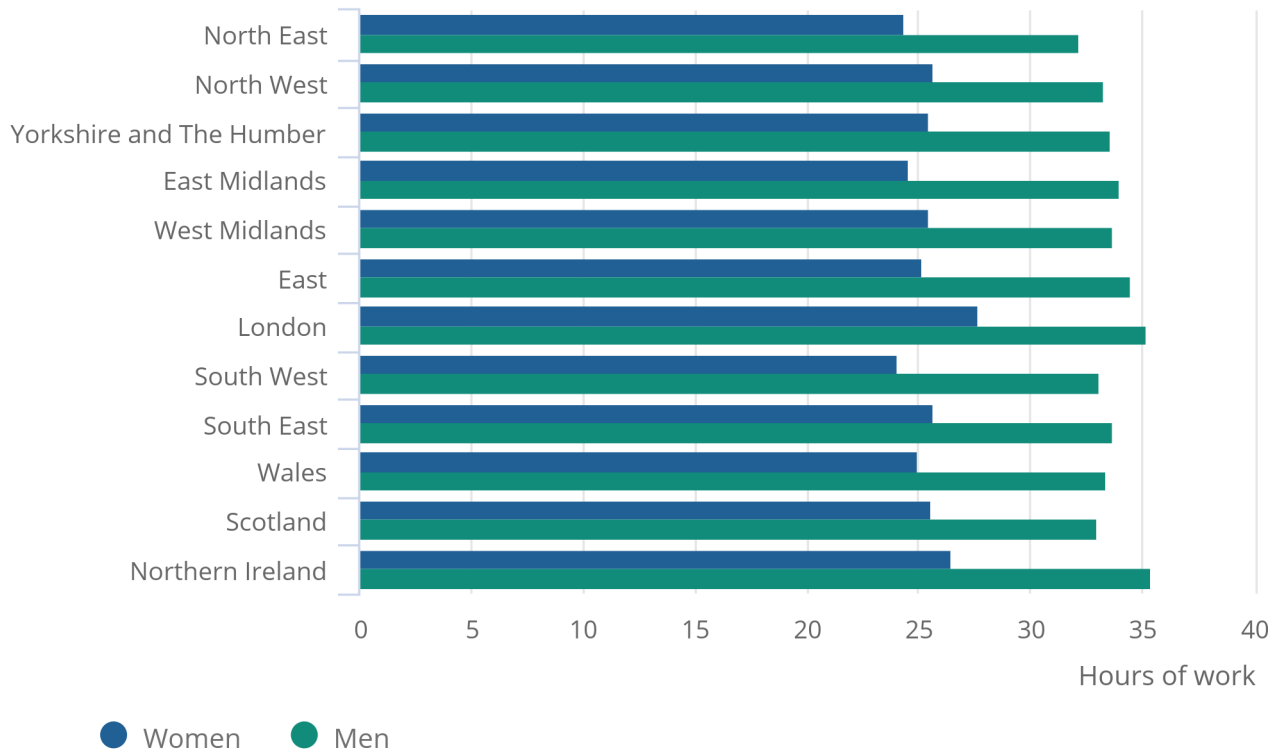
6 . Actual hours worked

On 13 October 2020, the latest estimates from the Annual Population Survey (APS) was reweighted for the period July 2019 to June 2020. Unlike the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the APS weighting methodology did not include adjustments for tenure. This month, the APS estimates have been re-weighted to account for this bias.

Figure 4: Men in Northern Ireland work more hours than in any other region

Average (mean) estimated actual weekly hours of work, by UK region and by sex, July 2019 to June 2020

Figure 4: Men in Northern Ireland work more hours than in any other region

Average (mean) estimated actual weekly hours of work, by UK region and by sex, July 2019 to June 2020

● Women ● Men

Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Statistics for usual hours worked measure how many hours people usually work per week. Compared with actual hours worked, they are not affected by absences and so can provide a better measure of normal working patterns. For example, a person who usually works 37 hours a week but who was on holiday for a week would be recorded as working zero actual hours for that week, while usual hours would be recorded as 37 hours.

For the period July 2019 to June 2020:

- the UK region with the highest estimated average actual weekly hours worked (for all workers) was London at 31.7 hours

- the UK region with the lowest estimated average actual weekly hours worked (for all workers) was the North East at 28.4 hours

- all regions of the UK saw a decrease in the average hours worked, compared with the same period of the previous year (July 2018 to June 2019); the largest of which was in the North East with a decrease of 3.0 hours per week

- the smallest decreases in the average hours worked, compared with the same period of the previous year (July 2018 to June 2019), were in London and the South East, both with a decrease of 2.0 hours per week

- the region with the highest average actual weekly hours worked in full-time jobs was London at 35.9 hours

- the regions with the lowest average actual weekly hours worked in full-time jobs were the North East and East of England, both at 33.0 hours

- for part-time jobs, the region with the highest average hours worked was Northern Ireland at 15.5 hours and the regions with the lowest were the South East and South West, both at 14.2 hours

- for men, the region with the highest average hours worked was Northern Ireland at 35.4 hours and for women it was London at 27.6 hours

- the largest difference in average hours worked between men and women was in the East Midlands where men worked on average 9.5 more hours per week than women (Figure 4)

Total weekly hours

All regions of the UK saw a decrease in the total weekly hours worked compared with the same period of the previous year (July 2018 to June 2019), with the largest decrease seen in the South East, of 8.5 million hours to 138.0 million hours a week. Northern Ireland saw the smallest decrease in total hours, of 1.7 million hours to 26.0 million hours a week.

The region with the largest difference in total weekly hours worked between men and women was London, where men worked a total of 28.0 million more hours a week than women. The region with the smallest difference was Northern Ireland, where men worked only 5.0 million more hours a week than women.

7 . Unemployment

Figure 5: The unemployment rate has increased for all UK regions compared with the same period last year

Unemployment rate estimates for people aged 16 years and over who are economically active, by UK region, seasonally adjusted, between August to October 2019 and August to October 2020

Figure 5: The unemployment rate has increased for all UK regions compared with the same period last year

Unemployment rate estimates for people aged 16 years and over who are economically active, by UK region, seasonally adjusted, between August to October 2019 and August to October 2020

● Aug to Oct 2019   ● Aug to Oct 2020

Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Unemployment measures people without a job who have been actively seeking work within the last four weeks and are available to start work within the next two weeks. The unemployment rate is not the proportion of the total population who are unemployed. It is the proportion of the economically active population (those in work plus those seeking and available to work) who are unemployed.

Regional estimates for the unemployment rate are volatile, which needs to be allowed for when considering the pattern of change over time. The unemployment rate estimate for people aged 16 years and over for the UK was 4.9% for the period August to October 2020 (Figure 5); this is an increase of 0.7 percentage points compared with the previous quarter (May to July 2020).

For the period August to October 2020:

- the UK region with the highest unemployment rate estimate was the North East at 6.6%

- the UK regions with the lowest estimated unemployment rate were the South East and Northern Ireland, both at 3.9%

- the largest increase in the unemployment rate estimate compared with the previous quarter (May to July 2020) was seen in Wales at 1.4 percentage points

- the only decrease in the unemployment rate estimate compared with the previous quarter (May to July 2020) was in Scotland at 0.6 percentage points

- compared with the same period last year, London saw the largest increase in the estimated unemployment rate at 1.8 percentage points

- there were no decreases in the unemployment rate compared with the same period last year; the North East saw the smallest increase in the estimated unemployment rate at 0.5 percentage points

8 . Economic inactivity

Figure 6: Northern Ireland had the highest economic inactivity rate in the UK

Economic inactivity rate estimates for people aged 16 to 64 years, by UK region, seasonally adjusted, between August to October 2019 and August to October 2020

Figure 6: Northern Ireland had the highest economic inactivity rate in the UK

Economic inactivity rate estimates for people aged 16 to 64 years, by UK region, seasonally adjusted, between August to October 2019 and August to October 2020

Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Economic inactivity measures people without a job but who are not classed as unemployed because they have not been actively seeking work within the last four weeks and/or they are unable to start work within the next two weeks. Our headline measure of economic inactivity is for those aged between 16 and 64 years.

The estimated economic inactivity rate for people aged between 16 and 64 years for the UK was 20.8% for the period August to October 2020 (Figure 6); this is largely unchanged compared with the previous quarter (May to July 2020).

For the period August to October 2020:

- the UK region with the highest estimated economic inactivity rate was Northern Ireland at 26.4%

- the UK region with the lowest estimated economic inactivity rate was the South East at 18.0%

- the largest increase in the economic inactivity rate estimate compared with the previous quarter (May to July 2020) was in the North East at 1.0 percentage point

- the largest decrease in the economic inactivity rate estimate compared with the previous quarter (May to July 2020) was in the West Midlands at 1.3 percentage points; the region saw a record low economic inactivity rate of 20.6%

- compared with the same period last year, the South West saw the largest increase in the estimated economic inactivity rate at 2.5 percentage points

- compared with the same period last year, London saw the largest decrease in the estimated economic inactivity rate at 1.9 percentage points

9 . Local labour market indicators

On 13 October 2020, the latest estimates from the Annual Population Survey (APS) was reweighted for the period July 2019 to June 2020. Unlike the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the APS weighting methodology did not include adjustments for tenure. This month, the APS estimates have been re-weighted to account for this bias.

Indicators from the Annual Population Survey

For the period July 2019 to June 2020:

- the local authorities with the highest employment rate estimates in the UK were Wellingborough at 89.6%, South Oxfordshire at 88.5% and Torridge at 87.9%

- East Lindsey was the local authority with the lowest rate at 61.6%, followed by Tendring at 63.2% and Middlesbrough at 64.2%

- the local authorities with the highest unemployment rate estimates in the UK were Birmingham at 8.2%, followed by Hartlepool at 7.4%, and South Tyneside and Middlesbrough, both at 7.1%

- the local authorities with the lowest rates were the Orkney Islands at 1.7%, Eden in Cumbria at 1.8%, followed by the Shetland Islands and Ribble Valley, both at 1.9%

Jobs densities (first published 21 January 2020)

The jobs density of an area is the number of jobs per head, of resident population, aged 16 to 64 years. A high jobs density would represent an employment centre, where people commute to for work. A low jobs density would represent an area with fewer jobs, where people would commute from for work.

In 2018:

- the highest jobs density estimate in Great Britain was the City of London at 110.11 and the lowest was Lewisham at 0.40

- Westminster (4.28) and Camden (2.17), both in London, were the next highest jobs densities

- the highest jobs density estimate outside London was Watford at 1.80

- after Lewisham, the lowest jobs densities were East Renfrewshire at 0.45, followed by East Dunbartonshire, Redbridge and Waltham Forest, all at 0.47

10 . Regional labour market data

Headline Labour Force Survey indicators for all regions
Dataset HI00 | Released 15 December 2020
Headline labour market indicators from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) for all of the UK regions. These cover economic activity, employment, unemployment and economic inactivity. Datasets HI01 to HI12 provide all regional level indicators for each region of the UK.

Claimant Count by unitary and local authority (experimental)
Dataset CC01 | Released 15 December 2020
Claimant Count for people resident in local and unitary authorities, counties, and regions of the UK.

Regional labour market summary
Dataset S01 | Released 15 December 2020
Labour market indicators for countries and regions of the UK, covering employment, unemployment, Claimant Count and workforce jobs.

Local indicators for counties and local and unitary authorities
Dataset LI01 | Released 15 December 2020
Labour market indicators for local and unitary authorities, counties, and regions in Great Britain for a 12-month period.

All regional labour market datasets used in this bulletin are available on the Related data page.

11 . Glossary

Actual and usual hours worked

Statistics for usual hours worked measure how many hours people usually work per week. Compared with actual hours worked, they are not affected by absences and so can provide a better measure of normal working patterns. For example, a person who usually works 37 hours a week but who was on holiday for a week would be recorded as working zero actual hours for that week, while usual hours would be recorded as 37 hours.

Economic inactivity

People not in the labour force (also known as economically inactive) are not in employment but do not meet the internationally accepted definition of unemployment because they have not been seeking work within the last four weeks and/or they are unable to start work in the next two weeks. The economic inactivity rate is the proportion of people aged between 16 and 64 years who are not in the labour force.

Employment

Employment measures the number of people in paid work or who had a job that they were temporarily away from (for example, because they were on holiday or off sick). This differs from the number of jobs because some people have more than one job. The employment rate is the proportion of people aged between 16 and 64 years who are in employment. A more detailed explanation is available in our guide to labour market statistics.

Local labour market indicators

Local labour market indicators cover employment, unemployment, economic inactivity and jobs density for sub-regional geographic areas such as local and unitary authorities, counties and regions in the UK for the most recent 12-month period available of the Annual Population Survey (APS). The jobs density of an area is the number of jobs per head, of resident population, aged 16 to 64 years.

Unemployment

Unemployment measures people without a job who have been actively seeking work within the last four weeks and are available to start work within the next two weeks. The unemployment rate is not the proportion of the total population who are unemployed. It is the proportion of the economically active population (those in work plus those seeking and available to work) who are unemployed.

A more detailed glossary is available.

12 . Measuring the data

This bulletin shows the latest main labour market statistics for the regions and countries of the UK, along with statistics for local authorities, travel-to-work areas and Parliamentary constituencies.

Data for Northern Ireland, although included in this bulletin, are available in full separately, in the Northern Ireland Labour Market Report on the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) website. Regional and local area statistics are available from Nomis.

Latest updates

From the March 2020 release, this bulletin has been presented in a new format, which, following a review from our publishing team, has been designed in line with the Office for National Statistics' (ONS's) new style guide and provides a more user-friendly experience. The title of the release has also changed to 'Labour market in the regions of the UK'. All previous release titles have remained unchanged, but all previous releases are still linked to the new release. All data contained within the release have not changed, so all data and commentary within the bulletin are still directly comparable.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

We continually review all publications and data published as part of the labour market release; this has led to the postponement of some publications and datasets to ensure that we can continue to publish our main labour market data. This will also protect the delivery and quality of our remaining outputs as well as ensuring we can respond to new demands as a direct result of the coronavirus pandemic.

For more information on [how labour market data sources are affected by the coronavirus pandemic](), see the article published on 6 May 2020, which details some of the challenges that we have faced in producing estimates at this time.

An article published on 11 December 2020 [compares our labour market data sources and discusses some of the main differences]().

Our latest data and analysis on the impact of the coronavirus on the UK economy and population are available on our dedicated [coronavirus web page.]() This is the hub for all special coronavirus-related publications, drawing on all available data. In response to the developing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we are working to ensure that we continue to publish economic statistics. For more information, please see [COVID-19 and the production of statistics]()

Impact on production of workforce job estimates

Because of social distancing measures leading to the temporary closure of businesses across the UK, there have been some difficulties in collecting data using the Short-Term Employment Survey (STES). Survey response rates were lower than is typical. To protect the quality of our output, we have used alternative sources where possible to inform data. We have used Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) section-level indications from the Business Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) Survey (BICS) as well as survey contributor-level comments provided to us over the telephone or electronically, as a guide on whether businesses are operational and likely, or not, to be actively recruiting and to confirm employment figures.

End of EU exit transition period

After the transition period ends on 31 December 2020, the UK statistical system will continue to collect and produce our wide range of economic and social statistics. We are committed to continued alignment with international statistical standards, enabling comparability both over time and internationally and we will work with users of statistics to make sure they have the data they need to support the decisions they have to make.

As the shape of the UK's future statistical relationship with the EU becomes clearer over the coming period, the ONS is making preparations to assume responsibilities that as part of our membership of the EU, and during the transition period, were delegated to the statistical office of the EU, Eurostat. This includes responsibilities relating to international comparability of economic statistics, deciding what international statistical guidance to apply in the UK context and to provide further scrutiny of our statistics and sector classification decisions.

In applying international statistical standards and best practice to UK economic statistics, we will draw on the technical advice of experts in the UK and internationally, and our work will be underpinned by the UK's well-established and robust framework for independent official statistics, set out in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007. Further information on our proposals will be made available in early 2021.

We will continue to produce our labour market statistics in line with the UK Statistics Authority's [Code of Practice for Statistics]() and in accordance with International Labour Organization (ILO) definitions and agreed international statistical guidance.

Data sources

This bulletin includes labour market estimates at a regional level from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) on total employment, unemployment and economic inactivity. More detailed regional estimates for employment by age, full-time and part-time working, economic activity and economic inactivity by age, and reasons for economic inactivity are provided using the Annual Population Survey (APS). Any estimates for geographic areas below regional level are provided using the APS. In tables where the APS estimates are provided for detailed geographic areas, regional and national estimates are also provided from the APS for comparability.

The LFS is a household survey using international definitions of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity. It compiles a wide range of related topics such as occupation, training, hours of work and personal characteristics of household members aged 16 years and over. Estimates are produced every month for a rolling three-monthly period, based on interviews that took place throughout the three months; for example, February to April data in a release will be followed by data for March to May in the next release.

The APS, which began in 2004, is compiled from interviews for the LFS, along with additional regional samples. The APS comprises the main variables from the LFS, with a much larger sample size. Consequently, the APS supports more detailed breakdowns than can be reliably produced from the LFS. Estimates are produced every quarter for a rolling annual period; for example, January to December data will be followed by data for April to March when they are next updated.

A [comparison between estimates of employment and jobs](#) is available.

Comparisons with earlier data

The most robust estimates of short-term movements in estimates derived from the LFS are obtained by comparing the estimates for August to October 2020 with the estimates for May to July 2020, which were first released on 15 September 2020. This provides a more robust estimate than comparing with the estimates for July to September 2020. This is because the August and September 2020 data are included within both estimates, so observed differences are only between July and October 2020. The LFS is representative of the UK population over a three-month period, not for single-month periods.

Quality and methodology

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the Quality and Methodology Information (QMI) reports for various labour market topics:

- [LFS QMI](#)

- [LFS performance and quality monitoring reports](#)

- [APS QMI](#)

- [Vacancy Survey QMI](#)

- [Workforce Jobs QMI](#)

- [Average weekly earnings QMI](#)

- [Labour Disputes Inquiry QMI](#)

Further information about the LFS is available from the [LFS user – guidance](#).

[A guide to labour market statistics](#), which includes a [glossary](#), is also available for further information.

13 . Strengths and limitations

Uncertainty in these data

The estimates presented in this bulletin contain uncertainty. There are many sources of uncertainty, but the main sources in the information presented include each of the following.

Because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) and the suspension of face-to-face interviewing on 17 March 2020, we had to make operational changes to the Labour Force Survey (LFS), particularly in the way that we contact households for initial interview, which moved to a "by telephone" approach. These changes resulted in a response where certain characteristics have not been as well represented as previously. This is evidenced in a change in the balance of type of household that we are reaching. In particular, the proportion of households where people own their homes in the sample has increased and rented accommodation households has decreased.

To mitigate the impact of this non-response bias, in October 2020, we introduced housing tenure into the LFS weighting methodology for periods from January to March 2020 onwards. While not providing a perfect solution, this redressed some of the issues that had previously been noted in the survey results. More information can be found in Coronavirus and its impact on the Labour Force Survey and in this blog.

The change in weighting methodology resulted in revisions to all LFS estimates published on 13 October 2020 for the periods January to March 2020 through to May to July 2020 and consequently had an impact on recent movements for a number of the published series. More information about the impact of the change in weighting on main LFS indicators published in October 2020 can be found in Dataset X08.

Strengths

We have developed a framework for labour market statistics to describe the concepts within the labour market and their relationship to each other. The framework is based on labour supply and demand. This approach has wide international acceptance, including by the International Labour Organization (ILO). The labour market statistics are used by a range of users, including central and local government, the media, trade unions and businesses. They are used for the analysis, evaluation, monitoring and planning of the labour market and economy. They are also used for social analysis and help inform a range of government policies towards population groups of concern (such as women, young people, older people and jobless households).

Accuracy and reliability

Most of the figures in this statistical bulletin come from surveys of households or businesses. Surveys gather information from a sample rather than from the whole population. The sample is designed carefully to allow for this and to be as accurate as possible given practical limitations such as time and cost constraints, but results from sample surveys are always estimates, not precise figures. This means that they are subject to a margin of error, which can have an impact on how changes in the numbers should be interpreted, especially in the short-term.

Changes in the numbers reported in this statistical bulletin (and especially the rates) between three-month periods are usually not greater than the margin of error. In practice, this means that small, short-term movements in reported rates (for example, within plus or minus 0.3 percentage points) should be treated as indicative and considered alongside medium- and long-term patterns in the series and corresponding movements in administrative sources, where available, to give a fuller picture.

Seasonal adjustment

All estimates discussed in this statistical bulletin are seasonally adjusted, except where otherwise stated. Like many economic indicators, the labour market is affected by factors that tend to occur at around the same time every year; for example, school leavers entering the labour market in July and whether Easter falls in March or April. To compare movements other than annual changes in labour market statistics, the data are seasonally adjusted to remove the effects of seasonal factors and the arrangement of the calendar.

Revisions

One indication of the reliability of the main indicators in this bulletin can be obtained by monitoring the size of revisions. These summary measures are available in Dataset S02 Regional labour market: Sampling variability and revisions summary and show the size of revisions over the last five years.

The revised data may be subject to sampling or other sources of error. Our standard presentation is to show five years' worth of revisions (that is, 60 observations for a monthly series and 20 for a quarterly series).

Sampling variability

Table 2: Labour Force Survey sampling variability
Sampling variability (95% confidence intervals) of regional Labour Force Survey estimates, August to October 2020

	Employment level, aged 16 and over (thousands)	Unemployment level, aged 16 and over (thousands)	Economic activity level, aged 16 and over (thousands)	Economic inactivity level, aged 16 to 64 (thousands)	Employment rate, aged 16 to 64 (%)	Unemployment rate, aged 16 and over (%)
North East	±40	±20	±36	±46	±2.5	±1.5
North West	±68	±30	±63	±79	±1.5	±0.8
Yorkshire & The Humber	±56	±28	±53	±65	±1.7	±1.0
East Midlands	±45	±22	±43	±59	±1.7	±1.0
West Midlands	±61	±28	±58	±70	±1.7	±0.9
East	±57	±26	±53	±65	±1.5	±0.8
London	±90	±53	±84	±92	±1.4	±1.0
South East	±65	±28	±62	±74	±1.2	±0.6
South West	±59	±23	±59	±72	±1.7	±0.8
Wales	±45	±18	±43	±53	±2.3	±1.2
Scotland	±59	±24	±57	±71	±1.7	±0.9

Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Notes

1. The sampling variability estimates are for 95% confidence intervals and are calculated on data that are not seasonally adjusted.

2. These data are part of data Table A11: Labour Force Survey sampling variability, which is part of the Labour market overview, UK release and Dataset S02 of this release.

14 . Related links

Labour market overview, UK: December 2020
Bulletin | Released 15 December 2020
Estimates of employment, unemployment, economic inactivity and other employment-related statistics for the UK.

Earnings and employment from Pay As You Earn Real Time Information, UK: December 2020
Bulletin | Released 15 December 2020
Experimental monthly estimates of payrolled employees and their pay from HM Revenue and Customs' (HMRC's) Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI) data. This is a joint release between HMRC and the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Vacancies and jobs in the UK: December 2020
Bulletin | Released 15 December 2020
Quarterly estimates of the number of people employed in the public and private sectors in the UK. The public sector comprises central government, local government and public corporations.

Working and workless households in the UK: July to September 2020
Bulletin | Released 25 November 2020
Commentary on quarterly estimates of the economic status of UK households and the people living in them.

Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), UK: November 2020
Bulletin | Released 19 November 2020
Quarterly bulletin examining estimates of men and women aged between 16 and 24 years in the UK who are not studying or in employment.