

Article

# Employment in local authorities, England and Wales: Census 2021

Adults living in England and Wales who are in and out of work. Covering employment, unemployment and inactivity. Census 2021 data.



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Release date:  
13 March 2023

Next release:  
To be announced

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# 1 . Main points

- On Census Day, 21 March 2021, 57.2% of usual residents aged 16 years and over were in employment.
- The local authority with the lowest percentage of employment was East Lindsey (45.8%) while Wandsworth had the highest percentage (69.6%).
- Around 3 in 100 (3.4%) usual residents aged 16 years and over in England and Wales were unemployed, and by local authority this ranged from 6.3% in Newham (London) to 0.9% in the Isles of Scilly, and 1.7% in South Lakeland.
- Coastal local authorities including East Lindsey (51.3%), North Norfolk (51.1%) and Tendring (50.3%) had some of the highest proportions of usual residents aged 16 years and over who were economically inactive, whereas some local authorities in London, including Wandsworth (26.4%), Lambeth (26.7%), and the City of London (29.1%) had the lowest percentages; nationally, 39.4% were economically inactive.
- In all local authorities in England and Wales, a greater proportion of men aged 16 years and above were in employment (61.4%) than women (53.2%).
- In England and Wales, 7 in 10 (70.0%) disabled people aged 16 years and over were economically inactive and by local authority this ranged from 77.5% in Tendring, to 56.8% in the City of London; among non-disabled people 31.7% were economically inactive.

## 2 . Several local authorities in London had high proportions of people in employment, including Wandsworth, Lambeth and Southwark

On Census Day, 21 March 2021, there were 27.8 million people (57.2%) aged 16 years and over in employment in England and Wales.

Census 2021 was conducted during the coronavirus pandemic, a period of unparalleled and rapid change, and it is possible that this impacted the way some people responded to the labour market questions on the census. Estimates from the census will also differ to those collected on the [Labour Force Survey](#), because of a range of conceptual differences between the two sources. Please see [Section 10: Data sources and quality](#) for further information about interpreting census labour market data. The local authorities refer to the place of residence rather than the place of work.

Looking at local authorities in England, the percentage in employment ranged from 45.8% in East Lindsey in the East Midlands to 69.6% in the London Borough of Wandsworth. There is a cluster of local authorities around Central London with the highest proportion in employment, including Wandsworth, Lambeth (68.0%) and Southwark (65.2%). Professional occupations, including jobs such as teaching professionals, medical practitioners and engineering professionals, was the largest broad occupation group category, making up 20.2% of people employed in England and Wales. London was the region with the greatest proportion of people working in that occupation group (25.8% of people in employment).

The proportion of the population employed will probably be affected by the age of the population, with younger people more likely to be in employment. London was found to have the youngest population of any region in England and Wales with an average (median) age of 35 years, with Wandsworth having an average (median) age of 33 years. This compares with an average (median) age of 52 years in East Lindsey. Read more information about population structures in our [Population and household estimates, England and Wales: Census 2021 bulletin](#).

Outside London, most local authorities with the highest proportions of people in employment are situated in the South of England and locations inland. Bracknell Forest in the South East (66.4%) had the highest proportion of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment outside London. There are two clusters of local authorities with the highest proportions of employment outside of London. One of these clusters is in Berkshire, including Bracknell Forest, with the second cluster being authorities just north of London, including South Cambridgeshire (63.1%), Central Bedfordshire (63.8%) and Milton Keynes (63.8%).

The east coast of England had some of the lowest proportions of people in employment. These authorities include East Lindsey (45.8%), North Norfolk (46.7%) and Great Yarmouth (49.7%). Parts of the far South West, such as Cornwall and parts of West Devon, also had lower proportions of people in employment, though greater proportions than the local authorities with eastern coastlines. In these areas, the median age tended to be higher, and consequentially a greater proportion of usual residents were retired.

The local authority with the highest percentage of people in employment in Wales was Flintshire (57.9%) while the lowest percentage was Ceredigion (49.1%). Rural areas of Wales had the some of the lowest percentages of people in employment in Wales. Examples include Ceredigion (49.1%), Pembrokeshire (51.5%), Isle of Anglesey (51.1%) and Conwy (50.6%). North eastern parts of Wales such as Flintshire and Wrexham (56.0%) had the highest proportion of people in employment, along with areas in the south east of Wales, such as Vale of Glamorgan (55.8%) and Newport (57.1%).

### Figure 1: 57.2% of usual residents aged 16 years and over in England and Wales were in employment

Percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over who were economically active and in employment in local authorities, 2011 and 2021

Download the data

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### 3 . Most people in employment in England and Wales were employees on Census Day 2021

The census collects information on whether people are employees or self-employed. All usual residents aged 16 years and over who were in employment were able to specify if in their main job they were an employee (worked for an employer) or if they were self-employed or freelance (such as owning and operating their own business). For further information, see the Glossary. On Census Day 2021 in England and Wales, there were 23.1 million people who were employees (47.6% of usual residents aged 16 years and over) and 4.7 million self-employed people (9.6%).

As a proportion of those in employment, five in six (83.2%, 23.1 million) were employees and one in six were self-employed.

The proportion of people in employment that were employees ranged from 90.0% in Barrow-in-Furness to 67.5% in the Isles of Scilly. In Barrow-in-Furness, the Sellafield nuclear plant is a dominant employer and therefore a large proportion of the workforce could be employed as employees there. The majority of the areas in the top 10 for self-employment are rural and or coastal with the exception of Kensington and Chelsea.

#### Figure 2: The proportion of people employed as employees varied widely across England and Wales

Percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over who were economically active, in employment, and employees or self-employed, 2021, top and bottom local authorities

##### Notes:

1. The proportion of people in employment working as employees in Barnet is also 74.6%, the same as Eden and Wealden.

##### Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

#### There were 3.4% of people aged 16 years and over in unemployment in England and Wales

On Census Day 2021, there were 1.7 million usual residents who were unemployed (3.4% of usual residents aged 16 years and over). This included people who were looking for work and could start within two weeks, or were waiting to start a job that had been offered and accepted. This is different to the unemployment rate, as the unemployment rate is the proportion of those economically active who were unemployed. For more information see our [Employment in the UK bulletins](#).

The percentage of people unemployed in England and Wales ranged from 6.3% in Newham in London to 0.9% and 1.7% in the Isles of Scilly and South Lakeland, respectively. There were notable concentrations of unemployment in several London Boroughs and other major cities such as Birmingham (5.9%), Manchester (5.7%) and Newcastle upon Tyne (4.8%).

In Wales, Cardiff had the greatest proportion of people unemployed (4.1%) along with Swansea (3.4%) and local authorities in the South Wales valleys such as Blaenau Gwent (3.4%).

#### Figure 3: Unemployment across local authorities in England and Wales ranged from 0.9% to 6.3%

Percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over who were unemployed, 2011 and 2021, local authorities in England and Wales

**Download the data**

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## **4 . Two in five people were economically inactive in England and Wales on Census Day 2021**

There were 19.1 million economically inactive adults (39.4%) in England and Wales on Census Day 2021. Coastal local authorities (such as East Lindsey, North Norfolk and Tendring) had some of the highest proportions of people who were economically inactive (Figure 4). On the other hand, some local authorities in London had the lowest proportions. Economic activity is more prevalent in London, probably because more young people live there.

### **Figure 4: Economic inactivity varied largely across local authorities in England and Wales**

**Percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over who were economically inactive, 2021, local authorities in England and Wales**

**Notes:**

1. The proportion of economically inactive usual residents aged 16 years and over for Neath Port Talbot was also 46.7%, the same as Torbay and Wyre.

**Download the data**

[.xlsx](#)

### **Among people aged 16 to 64 years, being a student was the most common reason for being economically inactive**

In England and Wales, of all economically inactive usual residents aged 16 years and over, the main reason for economic inactivity was being retired (55.0% or 10.5 million people).

Looking at those aged 16 to 64 years however, the main reasons for inactivity were:

- being a student (29.4%)
- looking after the home or family (23.6%)
- long-term sick or disabled (19.1%)

Being a student includes those in schools, further education, colleges and universities. Areas that are home to large universities and colleges had the highest proportions of working-age people who were economically inactive because of being a student. In Cambridge, 7 in 10 (70%) working-age people who were economically inactive were students, compared with one in eight (12.5%) in the Isles of Scilly and one in seven (14.8%) in East Lindsey (East Midlands).

The estimates of the number of full-time students in our [National Statistics Socio-economic Classification \(NS-SEC\) dataset](#) may differ from the number of economically inactive students. This is because the estimates apply regardless of a person's labour market status. In England, Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester were the top three local authorities in terms of the number of full-time students, while in Wales they were Cardiff, Swansea and Rhondda Cynon Taf. Each of these areas have large universities. The category "economically inactive student" also includes people who are not full-time students who state that studying is their reason for being inactive.

The proportion of economically inactive people aged 16 to 64 years looking after home or family ranged from 35.0% in Slough to 1 in 10 (10.4%) in Exeter.

In England, Blackpool had the highest proportion of economically inactive working-age people that were long-term sick or disabled (33.1%). Oxford had the lowest proportion (7.2%), perhaps partly because of its large student population.

In Wales, the proportion of economically inactive working-age people that were long-term sick or disabled ranged from 36.1% in Blaenau Gwent to 16.9% in Ceredigion.

### **Figure 5: The proportion of working-age usual residents who were economically inactive and long-term sick or disabled ranged from 7.2% to 36.1%**

**Percentage of usual residents aged 16 to 64 years who were economically inactive and long-term sick or disabled, 2021, local authorities in England and Wales**

**Download the data**

[.xlsx](#)

## 5 . A greater proportion of men were employed than women in all local authorities in England and Wales

At a national level, the proportion of usually resident women aged 16 years and over in employment was 53.2%, and 61.4% for men.

The proportion of women in employment by local authority in England and Wales ranged from 66.5% in Wandsworth to 41.7% in East Lindsey. For men, the proportion was also highest in Wandsworth (73.2%) and lowest in East Lindsey (50.1%).

In all local authorities, a greater proportion of men were in employment than women, however the difference in the percentage points varied by local authority. Newham and Redbridge in London had the largest differences between men and women. Newham had 66.4% of men in employment and 52.0% of women, representing a 14.4 percentage point difference. Redbridge had 65.5% of men in employment and 51.8% of women, a 13.7 percentage point difference.

Outside central London, Luton had the largest difference between men and women in employment (64% and 50.4%, 13.6 percentage points). In Wales, Powys was the local authority with the largest difference between men and women (59.3% and 50.6%, 8.7 percentage points).

Blackpool had the smallest difference between men and women in employment in England (53.0% and 49.1%, 3.9 percentage points) while Swansea had the smallest difference in Wales (53.5% and 48.4%, 5.1 percentage points). Both local authorities have two of the lowest proportions of people in employment in England and Wales.

### Figure 6: More men were employed than women in all local authorities in England and Wales

The percentage point difference between men and women aged 16 years and over who were in employment, unemployment or economic inactivity, 2021, local authorities in England and Wales

Download the data

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In England and Wales, the proportion of usual residents aged 16 years and over in unemployment was 3.9% for men and 3.0% for women.

Newham was the local authority with the greatest proportion of unemployed women (5.8%) and the second-highest proportion of unemployed men (6.7%). Birmingham had the highest unemployment for men (7.0%).

The highest proportions of unemployed women were in London, while the highest proportions of unemployed men were in local authorities within the Midlands and in London.

In England and Wales, the proportions of women and men who were economically inactive were 43.8% and 34.7%, respectively.

Lambeth was the local authority with the lowest proportion of economically inactive women (29.6%) compared with 55.7% in East Lindsey (East Midlands). Outside of London, in Bracknell Forest, one in three (34.4%) women were economically inactive. East Lindsey also had the highest proportion of economically inactive men (46.7%), whereas Wandsworth (22.5%) had the lowest proportion.

Of economically inactive people, men were more likely to state being retired as their reason for inactivity than women (57.6% and 53.1%, respectively). Though the Isles of Scilly was where the greatest proportion of economically inactive men (84.1%) were retired, Craven, in Yorkshire and The Humber, had the second-largest proportion (77.5%). One in five (20.7%) economically inactive men were retired in Tower Hamlets, the smallest proportion of all the local authorities. Economically inactive women were also least likely to be retired in Tower Hamlets (16.0%) and were most likely to be retired in South Lakeland, in the North West (74.2%).

## 6 . Disability - Outside of London, Bracknell Forest had the highest proportion of disabled adults in employment

In line with the [Equality Act 2010](#), people who assessed their day-to-day activities as limited by long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses were considered disabled in Census 2021. Disability and employment are both affected by the population age structure. Further information about disability and health in populations can be found in our [Health, disability, and unpaid care: Census 2021 in England and Wales releases](#), and our [Disability by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales: Census 2021 article](#).

In England and Wales, 27.3% of disabled people aged 16 years and above were in employment compared with 64.7% of non-disabled people. The proportion of disabled people in employment ranged from 38.9% in the City of London to 20.2% in Tendring, East of England. Outside of London, Bracknell Forest and Basingstoke and Dean had the highest rates of disabled people in employment (35.6% and 35.4%, respectively).

While the City of London had the highest proportion of disabled people in employment, it had the second-smallest number of disabled people in employment (350). Excluding the Isles of Scilly and the City of London, Rutland had the smallest number of disabled people in employment (1,730, 28.1% of disabled people). As previously mentioned, London has a younger population, so cases of disability is likely to be lower in this younger demographic.

Birmingham had the largest population of disabled people in employment (41,460), but also one of the lower proportions of disabled people in employment (22.8%).

### Figure 7: Across England and Wales, the proportion of disabled people in employment varied from 2 in 5 (38.9%) to 1 in 5 (20.2%)

Percentage of disabled adults aged 16 years and over who were economically active and employed, 2021, local authorities in England and Wales

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

## 7 . Disabled people were more likely to be economically inactive than active

In England and Wales, 7 in 10 (70.0%) disabled usual residents aged 16 years and over were economically inactive and 2.7% were unemployed. Among non-disabled people, 31.7% were economically inactive and 3.6% were unemployed.

The proportion of disabled usual residents who were economically inactive ranged from 77.5% in Tendring to 56.8% in the City of London. East Lindsey had the second-highest proportion of disabled economically inactive people (77.1%), followed by Blaenau Gwent and Neath Port Talbot (76.9% in both areas).

Neath Port Talbot and Blaenau Gwent in Wales had the joint-third highest proportion of economically inactive disabled usual residents (76.9%) in England and Wales, and the highest in Wales. Denbighshire (75.8%) and Merthyr Tydfil (75.8%) were also among the highest in England and Wales. Cardiff was the lowest in Wales, at 68.9%.

The proportion of disabled usual residents in unemployment ranged from 4.8% in Lewisham (London) to 1.5% in Staffordshire Moorlands (West Midlands). In Wales, Cardiff had the highest (3.4%) and Carmarthenshire had the lowest (1.7%) proportions



## 8 . Economic activity status data

### [Employment in regions of England and the country of Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 13 March 2023

Adults living in the regions of England and the country of Wales who are in and out of work. Covering employment, unemployment and inactivity. Census 2021 data.

### [Employment in local authorities, England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 13 March 2023

Adults living in the local authorities of England and Wales who are in and out of work. Covering employment, unemployment and inactivity. Census 2021 data.

### [Employment in upper-tier local authorities, England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 13 March 2023

Adults living in upper-tier local authorities in England and Wales who are in and out of work. Covering employment, unemployment and inactivity. Census 2021 data.

### [Employment in England](#)

Dataset | Released 13 March 2023

Adults living in England who are in and out of work. Covering employment, unemployment and inactivity. Census 2021 data.

### [Employment in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 13 March 2023

Adults living in England and Wales who are in and out of work. Covering employment, unemployment and inactivity. Census 2021 data.

## 9 . Glossary

### Employment

The number of people aged 16 years and over who did paid work as an employee or were self-employed on Census Day 2021. It also includes those who had a job that they were temporarily away from.

### Type of employment

People in employment are split into employment types.

Employees are those doing paid work for an individual or organisation.

Self-employed people are those who own and operate their own business. This can include people who work freelance, which means someone who is self-employed and works, or worked, for different companies on particular pieces of work.

Self-employed people who are not freelance can have employees who work for them.

### Unemployment

People without a job, but who were actively looking for work between 22 February and 21 March 2021 and could start within two weeks. They also include people who had found a job and were waiting to start it in the two weeks after Census Day, 21 March 2021.

### Economically active

People aged 16 years and over who were an active participant in the labour market between 15 and 21 March 2021. This is defined as being:

- in employment as an employee or self-employed
- unemployed, looking for work and could start within two weeks
- unemployed, waiting to start a job that had been offered and accepted

## Economically inactive

People aged 16 years and over who did not have a job between 15 and 21 March 2021, and had not looked for work between 22 February and 21 March 2021, or could not start work within two weeks.

## Reasons for inactivity

Economically inactive people could state that, between 15 and 21 March 2021, they were:

- retired
- studying
- looking after home or family
- long-term sick or disabled
- other

## Usual resident

A usual resident is anyone who, on Census Day, 21 March 2021, was in the UK and had stayed or intended to stay in the UK for a period of 12 months or more. Or it is anyone who had a permanent UK address and was outside the UK, and intended to be outside the UK, for less than 12 months.

## Disability

People who assess that their day-to-day activities are limited by long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses are considered disabled. This definition of a disabled person meets the [harmonised standard for measuring disability](#) and is in line with the Equality Act 2010. Census 2021 was undertaken during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which may have influenced how people perceived their conditions or illnesses.

## 10 . Data sources and quality

The census provides the most detailed picture of the entire population, with the same questions asked to everybody across England and Wales. Census results can be more reliable than survey results based on a sample of the population, because the whole population is included. The UK Statistics Authority has assigned National Statistics status to Census 2021 outputs, providing assurance that these statistics are of the highest quality and value to users.

Census 2021 achieved a very high response rate of 97%. We ensure that the census results reflect the whole population by using statistical methods to estimate the number and characteristics of people who were not recorded on a census response. This means that the census statistics are estimates rather than simple counts of responses, so they have some statistical uncertainty associated with them. We take numerous steps to minimise possible sources of error.

Census 2021 was conducted during the coronavirus pandemic, a period of unparalleled and rapid change, and it is possible that this impacted the way some people responded to the labour market questions on the census. Specifically, analysis suggests that there was a tendency for some people who were furloughed to report that they were out of work rather than in employment when completing the census.

Compared with estimates from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the census shows fewer people in employment and more people in unemployment or economic inactivity. Some of the discrepancy will be explained by the issue of recording the labour market status of some furloughed individuals in the census. There are also a range of conceptual differences, between Census 2021 and the LFS, which make comparisons between the two sources difficult.

Users should be aware of these issues when analysing Census 2021 labour market figures. However, overall, most census respondents responded to the labour market questions in the way we expected, and the census continues to be a valuable tool for understanding the labour market conditions in small geographical areas and for population sub-groups. Please see [Comparing Census 2021 and Labour Force Survey estimates of the labour market, England and Wales: 13 March 2023](#) for further information about interpreting census labour market data.

The labour market figures reported in this article will probably be affected by the age composition of populations. For example, local areas with younger populations will have higher proportions in employment compared with local areas with older populations. This is because in areas with older populations, more people are retired, and therefore a smaller proportion are in employment. Estimates for disabled people could also be closely related to the age of the population. It is not customary to adjust figures on the labour market to account for differences in the age structure of populations, so we have not age-standardised the figures in this article to keep them comparable with other published estimates.

We apply statistical disclosure control to protect the confidentiality of census respondents. Differences in the methods used for statistical disclosure control may result in minor differences in data totals between census products. As we round all figures individually, table totals may not sum exactly.

Quality considerations, along with the strengths and limitations of Census 2021, are more generally provided in our [Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) for Census 2021](#) methodology. There are also specific quality considerations found in our [Labour market quality information for Census 2021 methodology](#). Further information on our quality assurance processes is provided in our [Maximising the quality of Census 2021 population estimates methodology](#).

## 11 . Related links

### [Economic activity status, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 8 December 2022

People in and out of work covering employment, unemployment, hours worked and employment history, Census 2021 data.

### [Industry and occupation, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 8 December 2022

Industries that people are employed in, types of work people do as their main job and social grades, Census 2021 data.

### [Comparing Census 2021 and Labour Force Survey estimates of the labour market, England and Wales](#)

Article | Released 8 December 2022

Comparing the percentages of adults in employment and other labour market data between Census 2021 and the Labour Force Survey, and reasons why they differ.

### [Labour market overview, UK: February 2023](#)

Bulletin | Released 14 February 2023

Estimates of employment, unemployment, economic inactivity and other employment-related statistics for the UK.

### [How industries have changed at a local level between censuses](#)

Web page | Released 8 December 2022

The industries we work in have changed markedly in the ten years to the 2021 Census. We take a look at emerging digital and creative jobs and what is happening to traditional sectors.

### [Welsh government labour market overview](#)

Releases | Revised 16 July 2023

Monthly data on employment, unemployment and economic inactivity.

### [Labour market status of disabled people](#)

Dataset | Released 14 February 2023

Labour market status (employment, unemployment and inactivity) of disabled people. This table is updated four times a year in February, May, August and November. These estimates are sourced from the Labour Force Survey, a survey of households.

### [Labour demand volumes by profession and local authority, UK: January 2017 to December 2022](#)

Article | Released 13 February 2023

Experimental analysis of labour demand changes, split by profession and local authority (and other geographies), according to Textkernel data.

## 12 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 13 March 2023, ONS website, article, [Employment in local authorities, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)