

Statistical bulletin

Labour market overview, UK: May 2023

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



Contact:
Debra Leaker
labour.market@ons.gov.uk
+44 1633 455400

Release date:
16 May 2023

Next release:
13 June 2023

Table of contents

1. [Other pages in this release](#)
2. [Main points](#)
3. [Latest indicators at a glance](#)
4. [Labour market data](#)
5. [Glossary](#)
6. [Measuring the data](#)
7. [Strengths and limitations](#)
8. [Related links](#)
9. [Cite this statistical bulletin](#)

1 . Other pages in this release

- [Average weekly earnings in Great Britain](#)
- [Earnings and employment from Pay As You Earn Real Time Information, UK](#)
- [Employment in the UK](#)
- [Labour market in the regions of the UK](#)
- [Vacancies and jobs in the UK](#)

2 . Main points

The UK employment rate was estimated at 75.9% in January to March 2023, 0.2 percentage points higher than October to December 2022. The increase in employment over the latest three-month period was driven by part-time employees and self-employed workers.

The more timely estimate of payrolled employees for April 2023 shows a monthly decrease, down 136,000 on the revised March 2023 figures, to 29.8 million. This is the first fall in total payrolled employees since February 2021, though this should be treated as a provisional estimate and is likely to be revised when more data are received next month.

The unemployment rate for January to March 2023 increased by 0.1 percentage points on the quarter to 3.9%. The increase in unemployment was largely driven by people unemployed for over 12 months.

The economic inactivity rate decreased by 0.4 percentage points on the quarter, to 21.0% in January to March 2023. The decrease in economic inactivity during the latest three-month period was largely driven by people aged 16 to 24 years. Looking at economic inactivity by reason, the quarterly decrease was largely driven by those inactive because they are students or inactive for other reasons. Meanwhile, those inactive because of long-term sickness increased to a record high.

Flows estimates show that, between October to December 2022 and January to March 2023, there has been a record high net flow out of economic inactivity. This was driven by people moving from economic inactivity to employment.

In February to April 2023, the estimated number of vacancies fell by 55,000 on the quarter to 1,083,000. Vacancies fell on the quarter for the 10th consecutive period and reflect uncertainty across industries, as survey respondents continue to cite economic pressures as a factor in holding back on recruitment.

Growth in average total pay (including bonuses) was 5.8% and growth in regular pay (excluding bonuses) was 6.7% among employees in January to March 2023. Average regular pay growth for the private sector was 7.0% and for the public sector was 5.6% in January to March 2023. A larger growth for the public sector was last seen in August to October 2003 (5.7%).

In real terms (adjusted for inflation), growth in total and regular pay fell on the year in January to March 2023, by 3.0% for total pay and by 2.0% for regular pay.

There were 556,000 working days lost because of labour disputes in March 2023, up from 332,000 in February 2023.

3 . Latest indicators at a glance

4 . Labour market data

[Summary of labour market statistics](#)

Dataset A01 | Released 16 May 2023

Labour market statistics summary data table, including earnings, employment, unemployment, redundancies and vacancies, Great Britain and UK, published monthly.

[Earnings and employment from Pay As You Earn Real Time Information, seasonally adjusted](#)

Dataset | Released 16 May 2023

Earnings and employment statistics from Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI) (Experimental Statistics), seasonally adjusted.

[Labour Force Survey single-month estimates](#)

Dataset X01 | Released 16 May 2023

Labour Force Survey (LFS) single-month estimates of employment, unemployment, and economic inactivity. Not designated as National Statistics.

[A guide to labour market data](#)

Methodology | Updated 25 August 2022

Summary of labour market datasets, providing estimates of employment, unemployment, average weekly earnings and the number of vacancies. Tables are listed alphabetically and by topic.

View all related data on our [related data page](#).

Alternatively, [Nomis](#) provides free access to the most detailed and up-to-date UK labour market statistics.

5 . Glossary

Average weekly earnings

Average weekly earnings, detailed in our [Guide to labour market statistics methodology](#), measure money paid by employers to employees in Great Britain before tax and other deductions from pay. The estimates are not just a measure of pay rises, because they also reflect, for example, changes in the overall structure of the workforce.

More high-paid jobs in the economy would have an upward effect on the earnings growth rate.

Economic inactivity

People not in the labour force (also known as economically inactive in our [Guide to labour market statistics methodology](#)) are not in employment but do not meet the internationally accepted definition of unemployment. This is because they have not been seeking work within the last four weeks 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. See our [Guide to labour market statistics methodology](#) for a more detailed explanation.

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 (people in work and those seeking and available to work) who are unemployed. See our [Guide to labour market statistics methodology](#) for more information.

Vacancies

[Vacancies](#) are defined as positions for which employers are actively seeking recruits from outside their business or organisation. The estimates are based on the Vacancy Survey. This is a survey of businesses designed to provide estimates of the stock of vacancies across the economy, excluding agriculture, forestry, and fishing (a small sector for which the collection of estimates would not be practical). For more information, see our [Guide to labour market statistics methodology](#).

Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI)

These data come from HM Revenue and Customs' (HMRC's) Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI) system. They cover the whole population, rather than a sample of people or companies, and they will allow for more detailed estimates of the population. The release is classed as experimental statistics (see our [Guide to experimental statistics methodology](#)), as the methodologies used to produce the statistics are still in their development phase. As a result, the series are subject to revisions.

A more detailed glossary is available in our [Guide to labour market statistics methodology](#).

6 . Measuring the data

Our [Comparison of labour market data sources methodology](#) compares data sources and discusses some of the main differences.

Coronavirus

For more information on how labour market data sources are affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, see our [Coronavirus and the effects on UK labour market statistics article](#).

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

The population totals used for the latest Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates use projected growth rates from Real Time Information (RTI) data for EU, and non-EU populations based on 2021 patterns. The total population used for the LFS, therefore, does not take into account any changes in migration, birth rates, death rates, and so on since June 2021. As such, levels estimates may be under- or over-estimating the true values and should be used with caution. Estimates of rates will, however, be robust.

Economic statistics governance after Brexit

Following the UK's exit from the EU, new governance arrangements are being put in place that will support the adoption and implementation of high-quality standards for UK economic statistics. These governance arrangements will promote international comparability and add to the credibility and independence of the UK's statistical system.

At the centre of this new governance framework will be the new National Statistician's Committee for Advice on Standards for Economic Statistics (NSCASE). NSCASE will support the UK by ensuring its processes for influencing and adopting international statistical standards are world leading. The advice NSCASE provides to the National Statistician will span the full range of domains in economic statistics, including the national accounts, fiscal statistics, prices, trade and the balance of payments, and labour market statistics.

Further information about NSCASE is available on the [UK Statistics Authority website](#).

Making our published spreadsheets accessible

Following the Government Statistical Service (GSS) guidance on [Releasing statistics in spreadsheets](#), we will be amending our published tables over the coming months to improve usability, accessibility and machine readability of our published statistics. To help users change to the new formats, we will be publishing sample versions of a selection of our tables and, where practical, initially publish the tables in both the new and current formats. If you have any questions or comments, please email us at labour.market@ons.gov.uk.

Consultation on release practices

The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) has finalised its [Consultation on release practices](#). The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has welcomed the findings in a [Statement on the ONS's response to the OSR's proposals](#), noting that the release time exemptions, which were granted during the coronavirus pandemic, are now incorporated into the revised Code of Practice. As such, the monthly labour market bulletin will continue to be published at 7am.

Occupational data in Office for National Statistics (ONS) surveys

Following the article regarding [The impact of miscoding occupational data published in September](#), we intend to revise LFS estimates based on this coding alongside the July 2023 labour market release. We will also be updating Annual Population Survey estimates published on [Nomis](#) at this time. An article giving more detail on the revision methodology and its impact is expected to be released alongside the data.

Labour market transformation

We have published a [Labour market transformation article](#) and a [Transforming the LFS blog post](#) providing an update on the transformation of labour market statistics.

We welcome your feedback on this latest update and our plans. Please email us at labour.market.transformation@ons.gov.uk to tell us what you think.

7 . Strengths and limitations

The estimates presented in this bulletin contain uncertainty. For more information, see our [Uncertainty and how we measure it methodology](#).

Further information is available in our [Guide to labour market statistics methodology](#).

Information on revisions is available in our [Labour market statistics revisions policy](#).

Information on the strengths and limitations of this bulletin is available in [our previous bulletin, Labour market overview, UK: April 2021](#).