

July 2019

Northern Ireland Labour Market Report

Theme: Labour Market

Frequency: Monthly

Geographical Area: Northern Ireland

Key Points

- The latest Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates for the period March-May 2019 indicate that, over the quarter, economic inactivity rate decreased while the unemployment rate and employment rate increased.
- The LFS indicated that the NI unemployment rate (16+) increased over the quarter (0.1pps) and decreased over the year (0.3pps) to 3.1% in March-May 2019. Although the recent changes were not statistically significant, the unemployment rate was significantly below rates in late-2017. The NI unemployment rate was below the joint record low UK rate (3.8%), the Republic of Ireland rate (4.6%) and the EU rate (6.4%).
- The proportion of people aged 16 to 64 in work (the employment rate) increased over the quarter (0.5pps) and the year (1.7pps) to a record high of 71.7%. Although the recent changes were not statistically significant, the employment rate was significantly above rates in mid-2018. The latest employment rate recorded for the whole of the UK (76.0%) was the second highest rate on record.
- The NI economic inactivity rate (the proportion of people aged from 16 to 64 who were not working and not seeking or available to work) decreased by 0.6pps over the quarter and by 1.5pps over the year to 25.9%, one of the lowest on record. Although the recent changes were not statistically significant, the inactivity rate was significantly below rates in late-2017. The latest economic inactivity rate recorded for the whole of the UK was 20.9%.
- The number of confirmed redundancies (1,812) in the most recent 12 months was lower than the previous 12 months (2,848).
- There were 101 confirmed redundancies notified to the Department in June 2019, a decrease from the revised total of 582 notified in May 2019.

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NATIONAL STATISTICS STATUS

National Statistics status means that our statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

These statistics were designated as National Statistics in August 2010 following a full [assessment](#) against the [Code of Practice](#).

Since the assessment by the UK Statistics Authority, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have made the following improvements:

- Redesigned the Labour Market Report, providing more context to results by setting recent changes within context of longer term trends;
- Removed pre-release access to enhance trustworthiness, and brought forward the publication date as a result;
- Improved timeliness of [calendar quarter data](#) (ranging from 1 week to 3 months) by incorporating quarterly tables in the main Labour Market Report Publication
- Improved quality of the LFS data by boosting the sample size and improving precision around headline estimates

1 Summary of Labour Market Statistics

Updated July 2019

Change over quarter

Seasonally adjusted LFS estimates for Northern Ireland for the period March-May 2019 showed that, over the quarter:

- the unemployment rate increased by 0.1pps to 3.1% Not statistically significant
- the employment rate increased by 0.5pps to 71.7% Not statistically significant
- the economic inactivity rate decreased by 0.6pps to 25.9% Not statistically significant

During June 2019 there were:

- 101 confirmed redundancies notified to the Department, lower than the previous month's revised total of 582.

Table 1: Labour Market Summary	Time Period	Estimate (sampling variability of estimate)	Change over quarter (Sampling variability of change)	Change over year (Sampling variability of change)
Unemployment ¹	Mar-May 2019	28,000 (+/-6,000)	1,000 (+/-5,000)	-2,000 (+/-9,000)
Employment ²	Mar-May 2019	871,000 (+/-19,000)	11,000 (+/-16,000)	21,000 (+/-28,000)
Economically inactive ²	Mar-May 2019	570,000 (+/-19,000)	-11,000 (+/-16,000)	-13,000 (+/-27,000)
Unemployment rate ¹	Mar-May 2019	3.1% (+/-0.7)	0.1pps (+/-0.6)	-0.3pps (+/-1.0)
Employment rate ²	Mar-May 2019	71.7% (+/-1.6)	0.5pps (+/-1.2)	1.7pps (+/-2.3)
Economic inactivity rate ²	Mar-May 2019	25.9% (+/-1.5)	-0.6pps (+/-1.2)	-1.5pps (+/-2.2)
Redundancies ³	June 2019	101		

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LFS data are seasonally adjusted.

¹ People aged 16 and over. Unemployment rate = total unemployed as a proportion of the economically active.

² Levels for all persons aged 16 and over, rates for working age (16-64).

³ Confirmed redundancies in the calendar month, not seasonally adjusted.

NI Labour Market Structure: Change over year

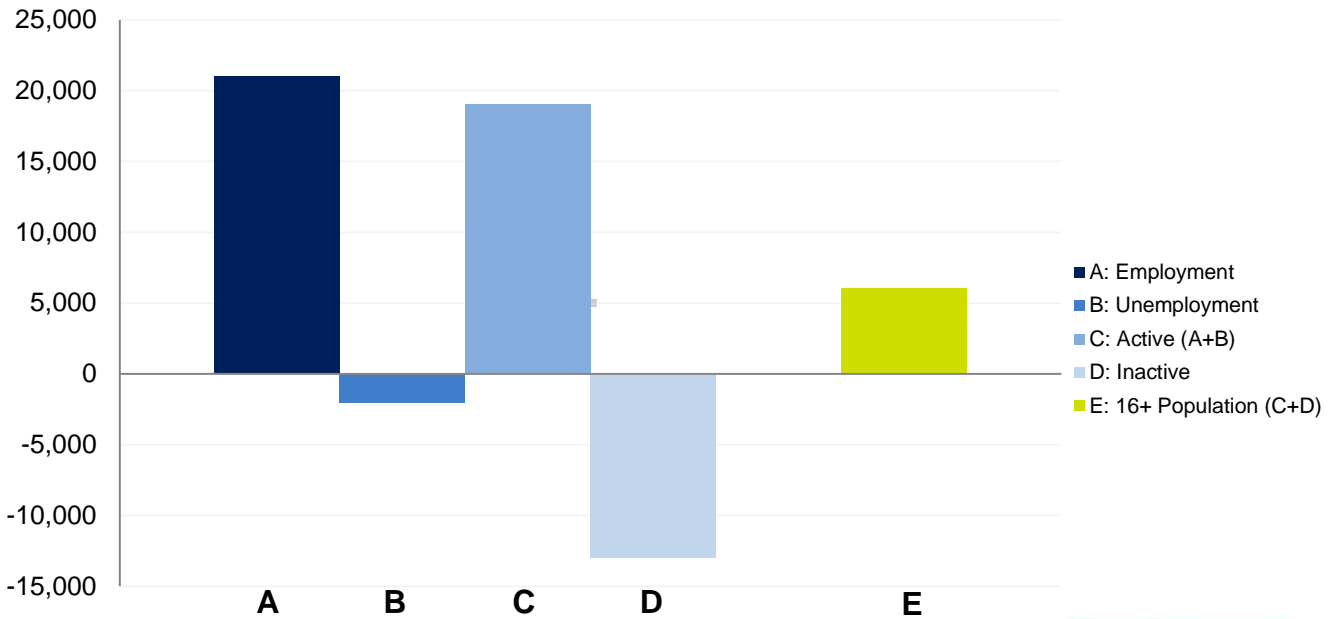
Seasonally adjusted LFS estimates for Northern Ireland for the period March-May 2019 showed that over the year:

- the unemployment rate decreased by 0.3pps (to 3.1%) Not statistically significant
- the employment rate increased by 1.7pps (to 71.7%) Not statistically significant
- the economic inactivity rate decreased by 1.5pps (to 25.9%) Not statistically significant

Over the latest twelve month period there were:

- 1,812 confirmed redundancies which was a decrease of 36% from the previous year (2,848).

Figure 1: NI labour market structure: change over year



Note: figures rounded so may not sum

[Download in excel](#)

UK summary

Seasonally adjusted LFS estimates for the UK for the period March-May 2019 showed:

- the joint lowest unemployment rate (3.8%) on record decreased by 0.1pps over the quarter and 0.4pps over the year
- the employment rate (76.0%) decreased over the quarter by 0.1pps and increased by 0.4pps over the year.
- the economic inactivity rate (20.9%) increased over the quarter by 0.2pps and decreased over the year by 0.1pps.

Commentary

Despite a marginal quarterly increase the NI unemployment rate (3.1%) remains below the UK rate and one of the lowest on record. The trend of low unemployment has been evident since late 2017.

The employment rate increased over the quarter and year to a record high of 71.7%, while economic inactivity decreased over the quarter and the year to one of the lowest on record. At 25.9% it is significantly below rates seen in late 2017. Decreases in economic inactivity since late 2017 indicate that changes in labour market status have not been limited to those working or looking for work, but also for those who were previously outside the labour force.

The continued improvements in the NI labour market are consistent with the UK experience, where employment is second highest on record, inactivity is one of the lowest on record and unemployment is joint lowest on record. It is worth noting, however, when compared to the other UK regions, NI has the second lowest employment rate and highest inactivity rate.

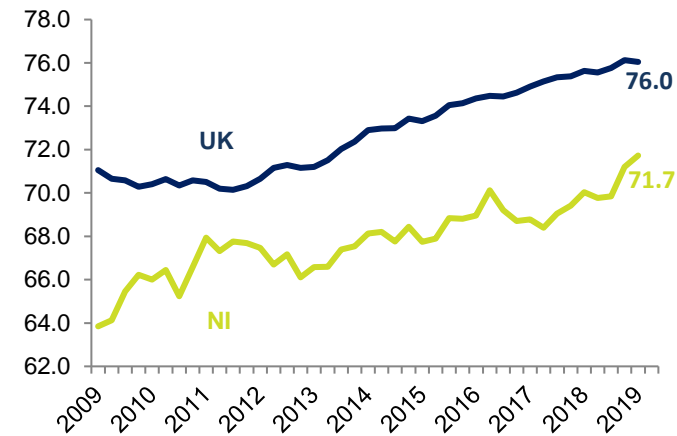
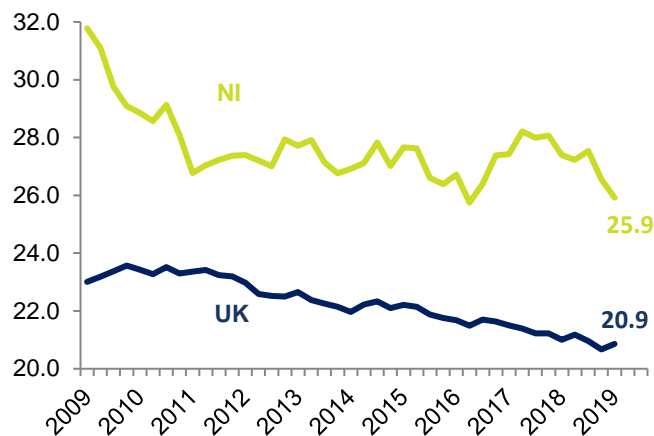
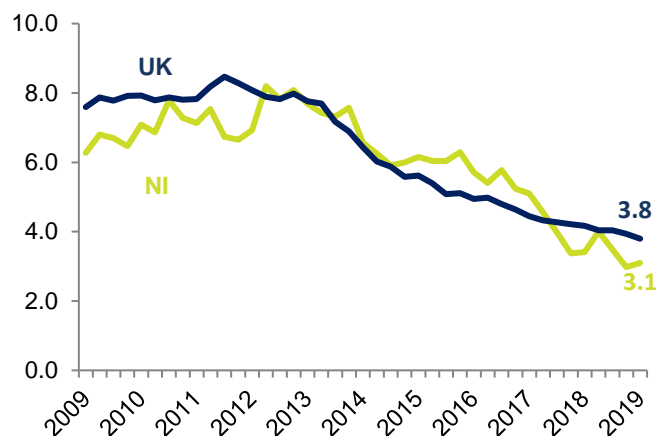
Further information is available on the NISRA - Economic and Labour Market Statistics website: [LMR Headline Tables](#).

March-May 2019

Unemployment – 3.1%

Economic Inactivity – 25.9%

Employment – 71.7%



Quarterly Change

NI +0.1pps¹



UK -0.1pps



NI -0.6pps



UK +0.2pps



NI +0.5pps



UK -0.1pps



Annual Change

NI -0.3pps



UK -0.4pps



NI -1.5pps



UK -0.1pps



NI +1.7pps



UK +0.4pps



pps¹ = percentage points

Labour Force Survey, seasonally adjusted and subject to future revisions.

Date published – 16th July 2019

Things users need to know

July's Labour Market Report is an abridged version consisting of Section 1 with the full suite of labour market tables available online as usual. August's report will return to the full version, similar to previous monthly reports.

The [Labour Market Statistics Consultation](#) is now open and closes 16 August 2019. The consultation covers Labour Force Survey Outputs including the LMR, as well as publications and outputs related to the Quarterly Employment Survey, Business Register and Employment Survey, redundancies and Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings.

Estimates derived from the **Labour Force Survey** (including estimates of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity) are calculated using 2016 based population projections and the 2017 mid-year population estimates. In February 2019, estimates from June - August 2011 to September – November 2018 were revised as a result of the reweighting process (using the latest population estimates) and from a review of the seasonal adjustment process.

Additionally, estimates from November-January 2018 include a boost to the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey sample. More information on the impact of the reweighting and increased sample size is available in a [separate paper](#).

The experimental Claimant Count data are no longer included in the Labour Market Report. The data tables are published on the [NISRA](#) website and [NOMIS](#).

Context

The Labour Market Report (LMR) is a monthly overview of Northern Ireland key labour market statistics. It includes figures from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the Quarterly Employment Survey, the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, redundancies counts and vacancies data. More information about the data sources can be found in Section 2.

Where available, comparative UK data (produced by the ONS) have been included. The latest labour market statistics are available on the [ONS website](#).

Key users of Northern Ireland labour market statistics include government departments, in particular the Department for the Economy (DfE), which uses the statistics to design and monitor the impact of economic and labour market policy. Other Government departments such as the Executive Office, the Department of Finance (DoF) and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), as well as bodies such as Invest NI and Belfast City Council, regularly require specific ad hoc labour market analysis in order to monitor policies for example, equality and employment. In addition, significant 'non-governmental' users of labour market statistics (including the media, banks, academics, private consultants and the general public) use the data primarily for reporting or researching the performance of the economy in general. Labour market statistics attract widespread media coverage, with a number of broadcasters publishing articles on the labour market on a monthly basis, generally on the day of publication of the Labour Market Report.

Labour market statistics feature in the [DfE Economic Commentary](#), which provides an overview of the state of the Northern Ireland economy, setting it in context with the UK and Republic of Ireland. The most up-to-date official statistics on the economy and labour market are available on the [Economic Overview section](#) of the NISRA website.

Further information on using labour market statistics can be found on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) website:

- [Interpreting Labour Market statistics](#)
- [Guide to Labour Market Statistics](#)
- [Glossary](#)

LFS unemployment

The definition of unemployment used in the Labour Force Survey (LFS) is in accordance with that of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The ILO unemployed includes those without a job who were able to start work in the two weeks following their LFS interview and had either looked for work in the four weeks prior to interview or were waiting to start a job they had already obtained.

The definition of unemployment rate is the percentage of economically active people who are unemployed.

Please note that it is possible for the number of unemployed to increase and the unemployment rate to fall during the same period, as the latter measure is a ratio e.g. if the number of economically active has increased at a faster rate than the number unemployed, the unemployment rate will fall.

LFS employment

The definition of ILO employed applies to anyone (aged 16 or over) who has carried out at least one hour's paid work in the week prior to interview, or has a job they are temporarily away from (e.g. on holiday). Also included are people who do unpaid work in a family business and people on Government-supported employment training schemes.

The definition of employment rate is the percentage of all working age (16-64) people who are employed.

The ILO measures are particularly useful for examining short term and long term trends over time and key LFS time series data are available both seasonally adjusted and unadjusted.

LFS economic inactivity

Economic inactivity is defined as those individuals who are neither in employment nor unemployed as determined by the ILO measure. This economic status includes all those who are looking after a home, are long term sick or disabled, are students or are retired.

Reporting Change and Sampling variability

Reported change is calculated using unrounded data and is presented to 1 decimal place. When a change is less than 0.05pps, it is rounded to 0.0pps and the data is reported as unchanged.

The LFS is a sample survey and, as such, estimates obtained from it are subject to sampling variability. If we drew many samples, each would give a different result. Table 2 shows the sampling variability of the estimates, and quarterly and annual changes using 95% confidence intervals. We would expect that in 95% of samples the range would contain the true value. The final column contains the sampling variability that can be used when assessing change between two independent samples. Due to the LFS five wave structure, this means it can be used to assess changes over six quarters or more. The confidence intervals have been calculated using data that are not seasonally adjusted, with the relevant sampling errors produced then applied to the seasonally adjusted data.

If the 'quarterly or annual change' of an estimate is larger than the 'sampling variability of the change', the change is statistically significant. If none of the reported changes over the year or the quarter were statistically significant, then the recorded changes did not exceed the variability expected from a sample survey of this size.

Table 2: Sampling variability of labour market estimates

March-May 2019	Estimate	Sampling variability of estimate	Change over quarter	Sampling variability of quarterly change	Change over year	Sampling variability of annual change	Sampling variability of change
Unemployment ¹	28,000	+/-6,000	1,000	+/-5,000	-2,000	+/-9,000	+/-10,000
Employment ²	871,000	+/-19,000	11,000	+/-16,000	21,000	+/-28,000	+/-31,000
Economically inactive ²	570,000	+/-19,000	-11,000	+/-16,000	-13,000	+/-27,000	+/-30,000
Unemployment rate ¹	3.1%	+/-0.7pps	0.1pps	+/-0.6pps	-0.3pps	+/-1.0pps	+/-1.1pps
Employment rate ²	71.7%	+/-1.6pps	0.5pps	+/-1.2pps	1.7pps	+/-2.3pps	+/-2.5pps
Economic inactivity rate ²	25.9%	+/-1.5pps	-0.6pps	+/-1.2pps	-1.5pps	+/-2.2pps	+/-2.4pps

¹ People aged 16 and over. Unemployment rate = total unemployed as a proportion of the economically active.

² Levels for all persons aged 16 and over, rates for working age (16-64).

[Download in excel](#)

Please see link for further LFS notes and definitions: [LFS Background Information](#)

Response Rates – Updated quarterly (last updated 14/05/19)

The total eligible sample for the January-March 2019 LFS consisted of 3,655 addresses (1,124 chosen at random from the Valuation & Lands Agency list of domestic properties and 2,531 carried forward from the previous quarter). A random start, fixed interval sampling technique of the addresses, which are ordered by Council Area and Ward, is used. This ensures a proportional representation across the Council Areas in Northern Ireland.

Only private household addresses were eligible, since the LFS is a survey of the private household population. Every selected address is interviewed on five successive occasions, such that in any one quarter, a fifth of the sample will be receiving their first interview, one fifth their second and so on, with one fifth receiving their fifth and final interview. This results in an 80% sample overlap between quarters.

Table 3: Response rates, January-March 2019

Fully and partially responding	2,555
Eligible sample	3,655
Response rate (%)	69.9%

*Of the addresses sampled, a small number contained more than one household and some contained households which moved during the quarter. Residents in NHS hospital accommodation (formerly called nurses' homes) and students living in halls of residence or boarding schools are included to improve the coverage of young people.

LFS Comparisons

Estimates of employment, unemployment, and economic inactivity are derived from the LFS. The most robust estimates of short-term movements in these estimates are obtained by comparing the estimates over separate three month periods. For example, estimates relating to March-May 2019 should be compared with the estimates for December-February 2019. This provides a more robust estimate than comparing with the estimates for February-April 2019, as the March and April data are included within both estimates. Effectively, observed differences are those between the individual months of February 2019 and May 2019. The LFS is sampled such that it is representative of the NI population over a three month period, not for single month periods.

Seasonal adjustment

All estimates discussed in this Statistical Bulletin are seasonally adjusted unless 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 over months or quarters, the data are seasonally adjusted to remove the effects of seasonal factors and the arrangement of the calendar.

Thresholds

Thresholds are used to determine whether LFS data are suitably robust for publication. The threshold used for the quarterly LFS datasets is 8,000. As such, data below 8,000 are suppressed.

LFS revisions

LFS microdata are routinely revised to incorporate the latest population estimates. The latest revisions were published in February 2019 and affect LFS data from the period June-August 2011 onwards. In addition, data from November-January 2018 onwards also reflects a boost to the LFS sample that has been rolled out from January 2018 beginning with wave 1 and will be fully implemented through all 5 waves by April-June 2019. A review of seasonal adjustment methodology has also taken place and affects seasonally adjusted data from June-August 2011 onwards. The majority of revisions to the unemployment rate fell within +/-0.1 percentage points and the largest revision was -0.3pps; the working age employment rate mostly fell within +/- 0.1 percentage points and the largest revision was 1.0pps. More information on the revision policy concerning labour market statistics can be found through the following link: [Labour market statistics revisions policy](#)

Experimental Claimant Count (Jobseekers Allowance claimants plus some out-of-work Universal Credit claimants)

In March 2018, the NI JSA-only claimant count was replaced by an experimental measure based on JSA claimants plus out-of-work UC claimants who were claiming principally for the reason of being unemployed.

The new claimant count is categorised as experimental as the statistics are in the testing phase and not yet fully developed. The ONS have produced a useful '[Guide to Experimental Statistics](#)' and an FAQ document explaining the difference between the two measures is available on the [NISRA website](#).

The experimental Claimant Count data are **no longer** included in the Labour Market Report. The data tables are published on the [NISRA](#) website and counts are available from [NOMIS](#).

Redundancy Legal Requirements

Under the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (amended 8 October 2006), companies are only legally required to notify the Department of impending redundancies of 20 or more employees. Companies who propose less than 20 redundancies are not included in the statistics, so there is likely to be an undercount.

Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)

Please note, changes in NI earnings over the year and relative to the UK can be influenced by a range of factors including the timing of pay settlements, the extent of overtime and differences in the composition of the workforce. As ASHE is a sample survey, results are also subject to an associated level of sampling variability. Further information is available at: [Northern Ireland Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#)

Quarterly Employment Survey (QES)

All QES data contained in the LMR are adjusted for seasonality. The seasonally adjusted series started in 2005. Public sector and private sector series are seasonally adjusted separately to the industry breakdowns. As such, the two series may differ at the NI level.

Revisions

QES estimates are revised quarterly to reflect the latest information provided to the Department by employers. The December 2018 seasonally adjusted estimate first published in March 2019 has subsequently been revised up 0.1%. For further details of QES revisions please see the following link:

[QES Revisions](#)

Pre Release Access

The UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) announced the removal of early access by Ministers and officials to all ONS official statistics from 1 July 2017. For further information please see [correspondence](#) between John Pullinger the National Statistician on this issue and the [reply](#) from Sir David Norgrove, the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority.

As a number of ONS publications affected by this decision include Northern Ireland (NI) level statistics, NISRA also removed early release access for NI officials to the equivalent NISRA publications and associated economic output statistics. This is based on analysis of the proxy nature of NI data for UK trends. The Labour Market Report published on 12th July 2017 was the first release under these new arrangements.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency wishes to thank the participating households for their co-operation in agreeing to take part in the survey and for facilitating the collection of the relevant data.

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