

Centre for Policy Research on
Men and Boys

Missing Men

Quarterly Report Series

2025: Male Employment

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Foreword by Nick Isles

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Centre for Policy Research on Men and Boys

The Centre for Policy Research on Men and Boys (CPRMB) is a research organisation and think tank dedicated to understanding and addressing issues that uniquely affect men and boys in the UK. Its vision is a world where men and boys of all backgrounds thrive in their families and communities, one where the sexes can rise together by supporting each other.

It will do this by supporting the development of new research, thinking and insight into policy affecting men and boys. This is by focusing on critical areas where they face unique challenges, promoting policy change, and fostering public awareness and understanding. These are in seven core areas: Economy, Employment and Skills; Education; Health; Fatherhood and Family; Criminal Justice; Male Identity; and Portrayal of Men in Media and Culture.

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Foreword

Work matters. It matters for men and it matters for women. It is a major way (perhaps the major way) we act upon the world. It provides us with a sense of purpose, the ability to provide for ourselves and provide for our families. It creates meaning, rhythm to our lives and, for some, a lasting legacy. For many, self-employment is the route to work. For most others employment is the way they earn a living. Yet right now in mid-2025 too many men and too many women are not working, or not working enough, or not working in good jobs. This creates economic, social and cultural pressures on individuals and the communities they live in. Pressures that can lead to very poor outcomes for health, enjoyment, freedoms and families.

For men work has always been important. The role of the male breadwinner is a recurring and persistent stereotype – drawn from that brief period of full employment for men after the second world war and the Victorian approach to family and home that preceded both world wars. It is also very evident today. Take research such as a recent You Gov poll for the Young Men Research Initiative¹ that showed that nearly 50% of young men still see ‘providing for your family’ as a major part of their role as men. This cannot be achieved without work and work that pays well.

As this second Missing Men report describes, the Government’s target of an employment rate of 80% is a long way off. To achieve it will, in our estimate, require a male employment rate of 83% and a female employment rate of 77%. Yet we are seeing worrying trends in economic inactivity rising for 16-24 year old young men who are Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEETS).

With unemployment and inactivity rates in this group together being above 13%, though down by 0.7% since the same time last year, this is and needs to be a high policy priority. Increases on the same measure (economic inactivity) for those aged 50-64 are also too high – up by 100,000 since the pandemic. If we could get the employment level of the three worst performing UK regions to the level of the best performing regions such as the South West and South East (that have employment rates near to 80%) we could add 153,000 more men aged 50-64 to the workforce. This would go some way to achieving the additional 975,000 men in work that CPRMB has calculated will be required to hit the 80% employment rate.

Having said that, the picture is not entirely gloomy. Sickness rates among men have fallen a full percentage point in the last two decades. It is also the case that the number of men working long hours has fallen by 50% since 2000, albeit more self-employed men work longer hours than employees.

Our recommendations for policymakers are simple: understand the gender dimensions to strategies and policies. Men and boys might need specific forms of intervention around getting back to work, staying healthy while at work and being trained for different roles than men might have done in the past.

The final word should perhaps go to Theodore Roosevelt who said,
“Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.”

Nick Isles

Director, Centre for Policy Research on Men and Boys

Executive Summary

Following the successful launch of the Missing Men: Men and Boys' Scorecard (2024/25)² in May 2025, for the last three quarters of each subsequent year, the CPRMB will produce a quarterly snapshot update on one of its key focus areas.

For this quarter, employment is the focus in alignment with the government's Get Britain Working Strategy³ and its core pillars such as the Industrial Strategy, Local Growth Plans and the Youth Guarantee. The government is also due to publish a Men's Health Strategy later this year, which will play a part in addressing working-age men, who are too ill to work.

This report focuses on five data sets - two at both ends of the age spectrum, two with respect to working-age employment sickness and the last on working hours. The focus is on how many and what types of men are 'missing' from the workplace – and analysing (using the business scorecard approach from the first report) the trends. Some of these men are unemployed, others economically inactive.

The current unemployment rate⁴ for men is 4.8% (aged 16 and over, Q2, 2025, UK), the highest rate since Q2 2021, and higher than in the immediate pre-pandemic period (Q1 2020) where it was 4.3%. Currently 886,000 men are unemployed.

Findings

- (1) **NEETS:** Whilst there has been a year-on-year fall in the proportion of 16-24 year old young men who are Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET), the overall proportion is higher than in the decades before the pandemic. It is welcome news that the unemployment rate for NEETS has not increased, remaining steady at 5.9% since the same quarter of 2024 and down considerably from its recent peak in 2010.

However, the story is not the same for the proportion of NEETS who are now economically inactive (7.2%). Ten years ago it was 4.4% and 20 years ago 4.5%. In numbers there are currently 224,000 unemployed young men, all missing from the workforce. There are also an estimated 146,000 young men who are economically inactive due to temporary or long-term illness - many of whom are also potentially 'missing' from the workforce.

- (2) **Working-age men aged 50+:** Current rates of unemployment (3.5%) and economic inactivity (22%) are lower than the first half of this century. However, the rates are higher than the immediate pre-pandemic period (2.9% and 21.2% in 2019). There are 178,000 unemployed men in this age group. Using regional figures, if the employment rates in the three lowest performing regions were at the same level as the three highest, there would be 79,000 more 50+ men in the North West in work, 41,000 in Wales and 33,000 in the North East. All currently 'missing' from their local workforce.

- (3) **Men who are long-term sick and want to work:** Whilst the proportion of men in this category now (1.7%) is lower than the first half of this century, the rates are higher than the immediate pre-pandemic period (1.3%). There are currently 371,000 working age men who are long-term sick and want to work. All missing from the workforce.
- (4) **Sickness Rates:** Sickness rates for working age men have consistently fallen with 1.6% of male employed working hours lost to sickness (2.6% in 2000). The rate is the same now as before the pandemic and 4 days are lost per male worker per year. However, there has been an increase in the rate and number of days lost due to men being off work due to mental health. This is an estimated 1 million extra working days.
- (5) **Long working hours (45+):** The number of men working over 45 hours per week has nearly halved this century (from 36.2% in 2000 to 18.8% in 2025). A higher proportion of self-employed men (25.4%) work longer hours than male employees (17.6%). However, 3.3 million men and 1.4 million women still work long hours.

Analysis

- (1) Broadly, the employment picture for men had been improving throughout the century, up until the pandemic (March 2020 – end of 2021) since when it has worsened. This is illustrated by a combination of growth in unemployment and in economic inactivity.
- (2) There is a real opportunity to grow the male workforce. These include ‘sub-categories’ of men, especially NEETS, those aged over 50 and those who want to work yet are long-term sick. Growth is needed to meet the government’s target of an 80% employment rate which the CPRMB has previously estimated⁵ requires an extra 975,000 men in employment.

Policy Recommendations

- (1) The Government’s *Get Britain Working* plan has clear policy delivery pillars which are underway including the Youth Guarantee and *Keep Britain Working Review* to support employers in tackling health based economic inactivity. All pillars should understand and address any specific barriers that are affecting the economic activity, participation and productivity of men. The same should be included in the implementation of the UK Modern Industrial Strategy.
- (2) The forthcoming Department for Education’s schools’ white paper should apply a gender-sensitive lens so it can focus on boys’ relative under-attainment (such an approach was outlined in All-Party Parliamentary Group report⁶ in 2023); creating a careers service and campaigns that actively promotes non-traditional ‘male’ careers such as in teaching, health and social care; and better prepares young men and boys for further vocational education. These campaigns and promotions could all be branded under the overall banner of “This Boy Cares” as a general message, and made specific to individual job paths as described above. There should be specific recruitment campaigns targeting men of all ages to go into these careers too.
- (3) The forthcoming Men’s Health Strategy should have a clear targeted mission to reduce male economic inactivity due to ill-health; improve the take up of the men’s health check (there are already pilots being run with employers); and increase the volumes of men working in the health and social care sector.

Key

For the scorecard, a simple key has been created. This will be used over time so will illustrate a continuing picture.

Red	Worsening or Negative Data from previous period
Amber	No Improvement
Green	Improving or Positive Data from previous period

Data Example

Data	Annual Change	Pre-Pandemic Change	Decade Change
Measure	The change between the latest data and previous years' data.	The change between the latest data and equivalent data point in 2019 or Q4 2019/20 – the period closest to start of the pandemic	The change between the latest data and equivalent data points a decade ago

The data presented is based on the latest quarterly or annual data published by 31 August 2025

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Scorecard

Scorecard

Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

The CPRMB's inaugural Missing Men report highlighted the fact that by the end of 2024, the percentage of young men (aged 16-24) who were Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) had worsened since the start of the pandemic. This is not just the overall figure but also in terms of those unemployed and economically inactive. Economically inactive is a very broad Office for National Statistics (ONS) category that includes "students, people looking after family and home, long-term sick and disabled, temporarily sick and disabled"⁷.

Below is the most current data⁸ for 2025 (Q2, April-June) for each comparable quarter. Given the Government has launched its Youth Guarantee to drive the number of NEETS down, the impact of this policy will be trackable over time in relation to male NEETS.

Table 1 (Scorecard): Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETS)

	Measure	Data	Annual Change	Pre-Pandemic Change	Decade Change
NEETS					
1.1 (UK)	NEET: Percentage of age male population (16-24 males, UK)	2025 (Q2): 13.1% 2024 (Q2): 13.8% 2019 (Q2): 11.8% 2015 (Q2): 11.4% 2010 (Q2): 13.2% 2005 (Q2): 11.5%			
1.2 (UK)	NEET: Unemployed percentage of age male population (16-24 males, UK)	2025 (Q2): 5.9% 2024 (Q2): 5.9% 2019 (Q2): 6.0% 2015 (Q2): 7.0% 2010 (Q2): 9.1% 2005 (Q2): 7.0%			
1.3 (UK)	NEET: Economically inactive percentage of age male population (16-24 males, UK)	2025 (Q2): 7.2% 2024 (Q2): 7.9% 2019 (Q2): 5.8% 2015 (Q2): 4.4% 2010 (Q2): 4.1% 2005 (Q2): 4.5%			

The figures show an annual fall in the percentage of NEETS overall and in the two major categories. Overall, in 2025 (Q2, April-June), there were 224,000 unemployed males (140,000 women) and 273,000 economically inactive males (310,00 women).

There are two important points.

Firstly, the overall percentage of NEETS is higher than in the pre-pandemic period (2019) and also more than 10 and 20 years ago.

Secondly, this is driven by the switch in rates from unemployed male NEETS (which has fallen) to economically inactive male NEETS. Figure 1 below shows the switch over time which started in 2018, then was 'interrupted' by the employment challenges in the pandemic, but has resumed since the pandemic ended.

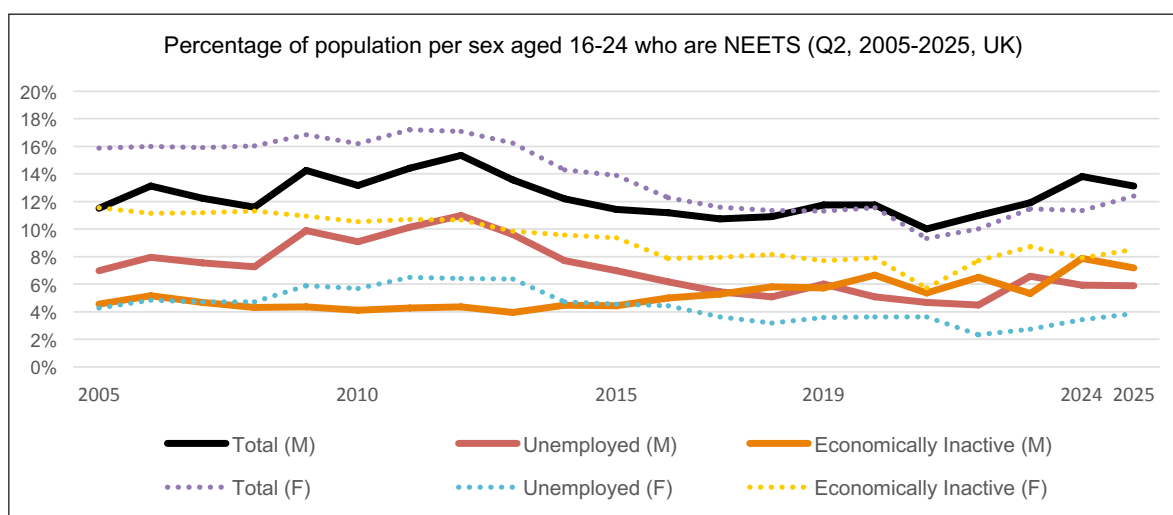
The percentage of economically inactive male NEETS is the highest ever since the ONS published the data (2002) when the figure was 4.1% and from 20 years ago (2005) when it was 4.5%.

In terms of numbers, with the population change caveat, the numbers are significant. In 2002, there were 135,000 economically inactive male NEETS; in 2005, there were 157,000; and in 2015, there were 164,000. In 2025, this has increased to 273,000.

In comparison, the numbers who were unemployed has not materially changed (236,000 in 2002; 242,000 in 2005; 258,000 in 2015; and 224,000 in 2025).

Figure 1 below shows the trend for both male and females. As well as the switch explained above on male NEET unemployment and inactivity, it also shows that the overall male NEET rate became larger than the overall female NEET rate in 2019.

Figure 1: Percentage of population per sex aged 16-24 who are NEETS (Q2, 2005-2025, UK)



Male NEET Inactivity: Long-term or Temporarily Sick

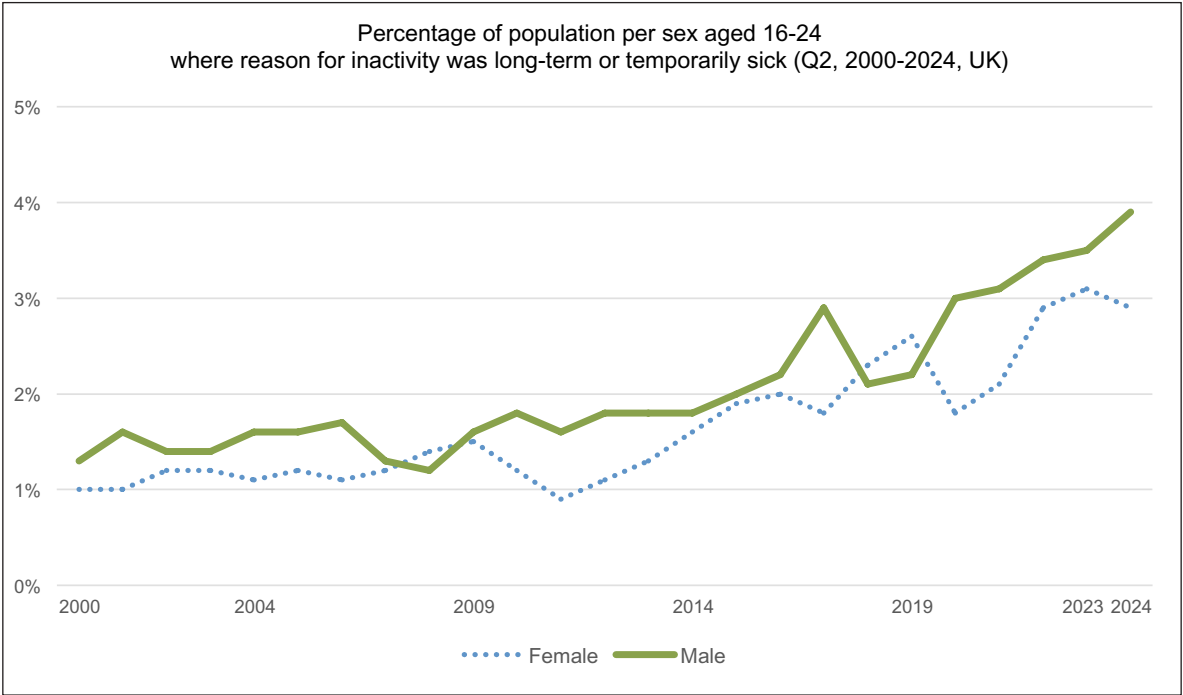
As stated previously, the economically inactive category is broad. However, the Department for Education⁹ has produced annual breakdowns for some NEET categories – this includes those who are temporarily or long-term sick.

Table 2 (Scorecard): Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETS): Reason for Inactivity (Sickness)

	Measure	Data	Annual Change	Pre-Pandemic Change	Decade Change
NEETS: Sickness					
2.1 (UK)	NEET: Temporarily or long-term sick, percentage of age male population (16-24 males, UK)	2024 (Q4): 3.9% 2023 (Q4): 3.5% 2019 (Q4): 2.2% 2014 (Q4): 1.8% 2009 (Q4): 1.6% 2004 (Q4): 1.6% 2000 (Q4): 1.3%			
These figures go back to 2000 and they show the percentage of male NEETS whose reason for inactivity was long-term or temporary sickness has trebled since the turn of the century. And is still increasing.					

The trend in Figure 2 below shows that there has been a large percentage increase in female figures too.

Figure 2: Percentage of population per sex aged 16-24 where reason for inactivity was long-term or temporarily sick (Q4 2000-2024, UK)



With the caveat of population change, the estimated numbers of 16–24 year old men who were inactive due to being long-term or temporarily sick in 2014 were 55,000 and in 2019, there were 67,000. In 2024, it had increased to 146,000.

Men and Employment: Aged 50-64

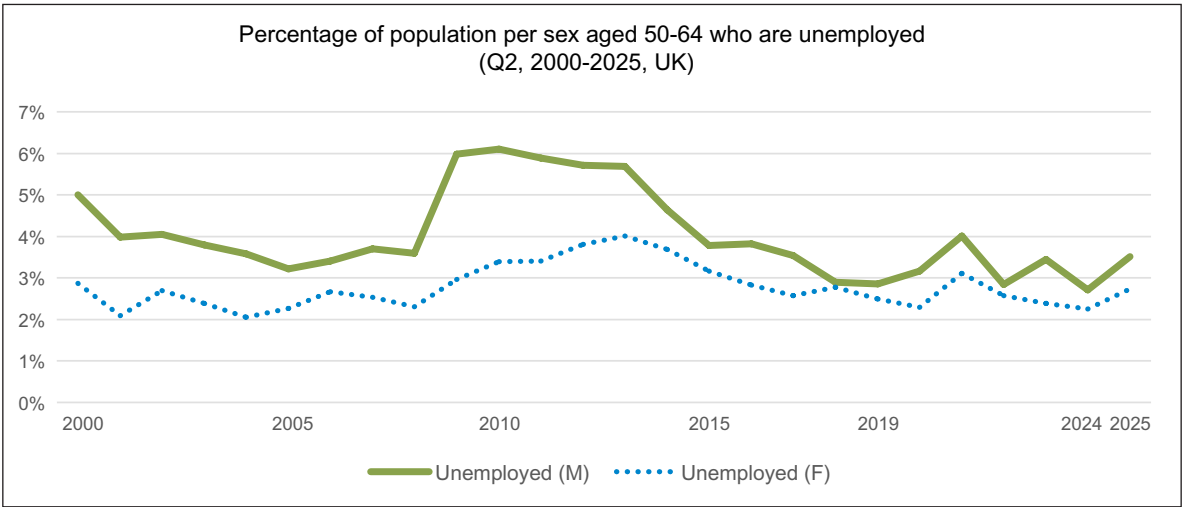
Often the focus on debates on employment age ranges has focused primarily on the overall rate or the NEET 16-24 age group. However, the men aged 50-64 who are unemployed and economically inactive¹⁰ are also 'missing men' from the workforce. This will also have an adverse impact on the employment rate, economic productivity and growth rates – as well as for their own and their families lives. Therefore, in policy terms, it is vital that this age-group has considerably more policy focus, including around skills transfer, re-skilling and also tackling their inability to work due to ill health.

Table 3 (Scorecard): Unemployment and Inactivity

	Measure	Data	Annual Change	Pre-Pandemic Change	Decade Change
Unemployment and Inactivity					
3.1 (UK)	Unemployment: Percentage of age male population (50-64 males, UK)	2025 (Q2): 3.5% 2024 (Q2): 2.7% 2019 (Q2): 2.9% 2015 (Q2): 3.8% 2010 (Q2): 6.1% 2005 (Q2): 3.2% 2000 (Q2): 5.0%			
3.2 (UK)	Economically inactive: Percentage of age male population (50-64 males, UK)	2025 (Q2): 22.0% 2024 (Q2): 23.2% 2019 (Q2): 21.2% 2015 (Q2): 22.0% 2010 (Q2): 24.1% 2005 (Q2): 25.4% 2000 (Q2): 27.4%			
The table above shows that older male unemployment is starting to rise again and is 0.6 percentage points higher than the pre-pandemic period. It is creeping back up to the levels of ten years ago. There has been a 0.8 percent point increase since last year. The economic inactivity rate is increasing too. In terms of actual volumes which do not take into account population growth; 178,000 men in this age group are unemployed and 1.4 million are economically inactive. Before the pandemic (2019), the figures were 141,000 and 1.3 million.					

Figure 3 below looks at the longer-term trend on unemployment for both men and women. It shows how the economic recession of 2008 and 2009 impacted male unemployment in this age group – nearly doubling between 2005 and 2010. By historical standards over this century, the unemployment rate in this age group has been falling, however is now increasing again towards the rates seen in the first ten years of this century.

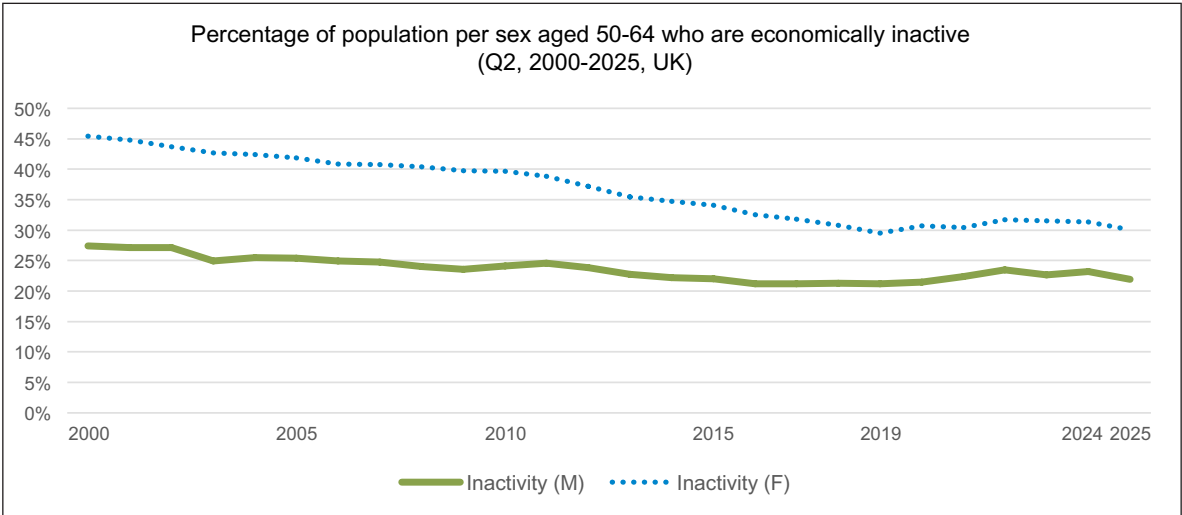
Figure 3: Percentage of population aged 50-64 per sex who are unemployed (Q2, 2000-2025, UK)



In terms of historical trends on economic inactivity, Figure 4 below shows that the female rate has fallen from 45% in 2000 to 30% in 2025. A one third fall. However, the male rate has fallen more slowly from 27% in 2000 to 22% on 2025, an 18% fall.

More research needs to be conducted on this whole age group, especially on the reasons for these trends. It may well be cultural as well as economic for women, in that many are choosing to come back into the workforce perhaps once their children are older.

Figure 4: Percentage of population per sex aged 50-64 who are economically inactive (Q2, 2000-2025, UK)

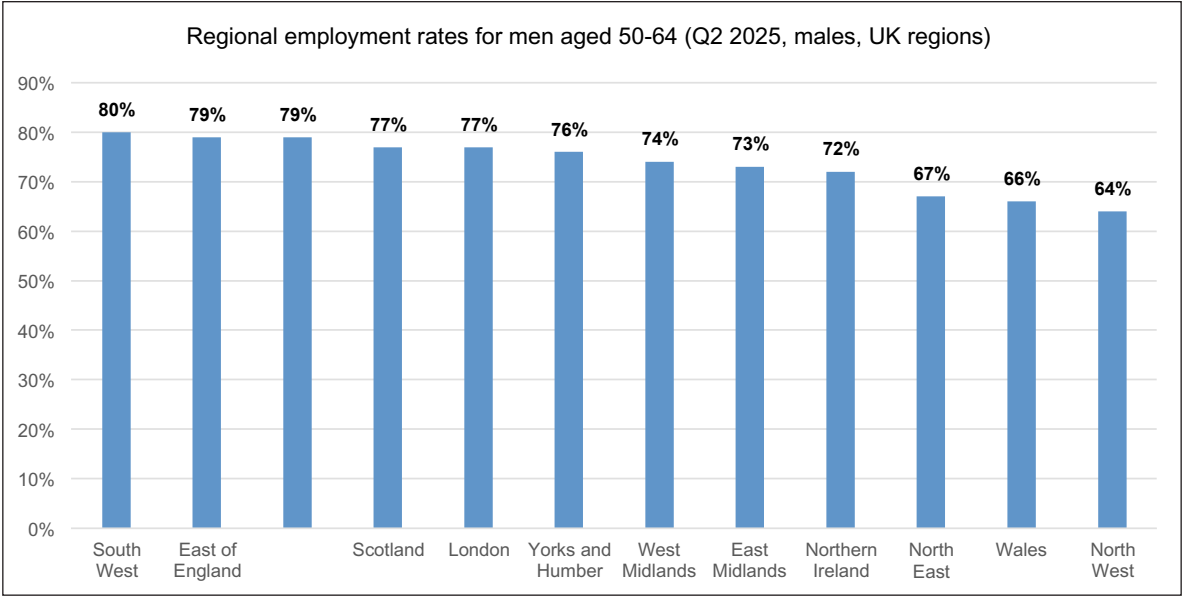


The data in *Figure 5* below¹¹ looks at the male employment rates across the UK's twelve regions. There is a 10-percentage point difference between the top three and the bottom three.

Taking the average of 79.6% employment rate in the three highest regions and then applying that to the lowest three regions, if the male employment rate for this age group in the North West was at 79.6%, then there would be 79,000 more men in work. In Wales, it would be 41,000 and in the North East, 33,000.

The key to looking at this data for men in this age-group is that there is not just an issue because they are male, it is also where they live (place) which will be allied to occupation and also employment opportunities. At local authority level, there will be further differences including within regions. It means not just overall gender-sensitive back-to-work programmes for this age-group, it means regionally/local-centred programmes too.

Figure 5: Regional employment rates for men aged 50-64 (Q2 2025, males, UK regions – not seasonally adjusted)



Men and Employment: Long-Term Sick

ONS Labour Force Survey figures¹² include an important dataset that covers those who are long-term sick and want to work. Another group of ‘missing men’ from the workforce.

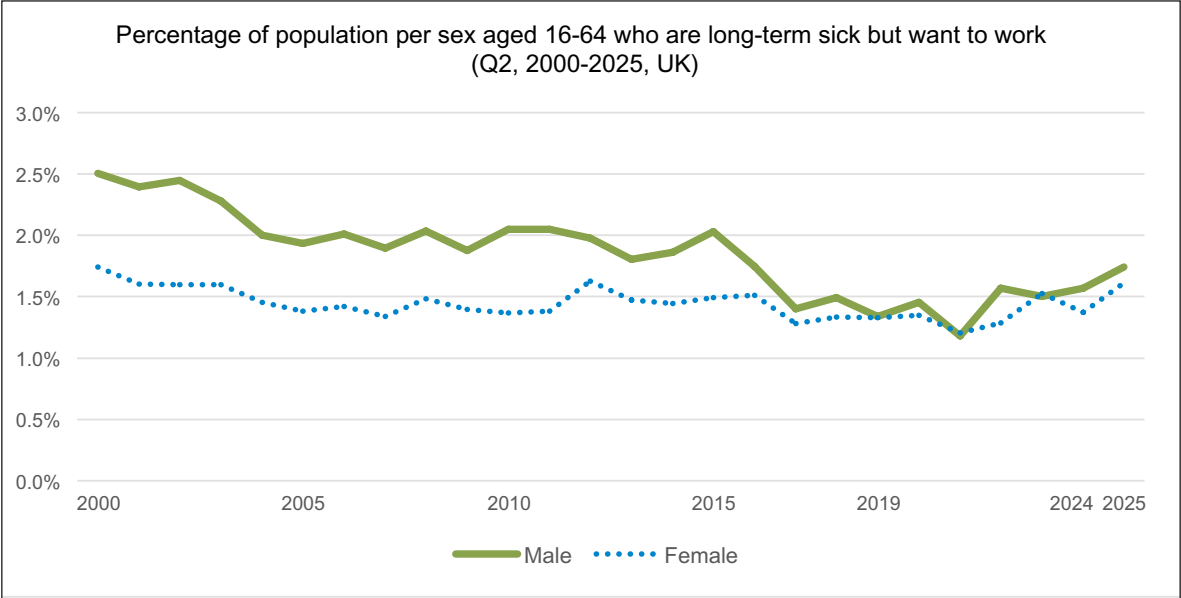
Table 4 (Scorecard): Long-term sick and wanting to work

	Measure	Data	Annual Change	Pre-Pandemic Change	Decade Change
Long-Term Sick and Wanting to Work					
4.1 (UK)	Long Term Sick and Want to Work: Percentage of working-age male population (16-64 males, UK)	2025 (Q2): 1.7% 2024 (Q2): 1.6% 2019 (Q2): 1.3% 2015 (Q2): 2.0% 2010 (Q2): 2.0% 2005 (Q2): 1.9% 2000 (Q2): 2.5%			
The trend here shows that the percentage of the whole work-age male population who are long-term sick and want to work had been falling since the turn of the century but since 2019, has started to increase with a 30% increase (0.4 percentage points) since the start of the pandemic. Using the actual numbers, with the caveat of population change, it shows an increase from 274,000 (2019, Q2) to 371,000 (2025, Q2). These figures equate to 29% of men who are too sick to work. They are another group of ‘missing men’ from the workforce. 894,000 men though are long-term sick and do not wish to work. There are two different, albeit related, policy challenges here but it does mean there are a large cohort of men who are closer to the labour market than others in this category.					

Based on the whole 16-64 working age population for both sexes¹³, *Figure 6* below shows that similarly the percentage of women who are long-term sick and want to work has also been increasing.

Whilst the male rate remains lower than in 2005 (1.9%), the female rate now (1.6%) is higher than in 2005 (1.4%). Overall, there are 354,000 working-age women who are too sick to work yet wish to.

Figure 6: Percentage of population aged 16-64 per sex who are long-term sick but want to work (Q2, 2000-2025, UK)



Men and Employment: Sickness Rates

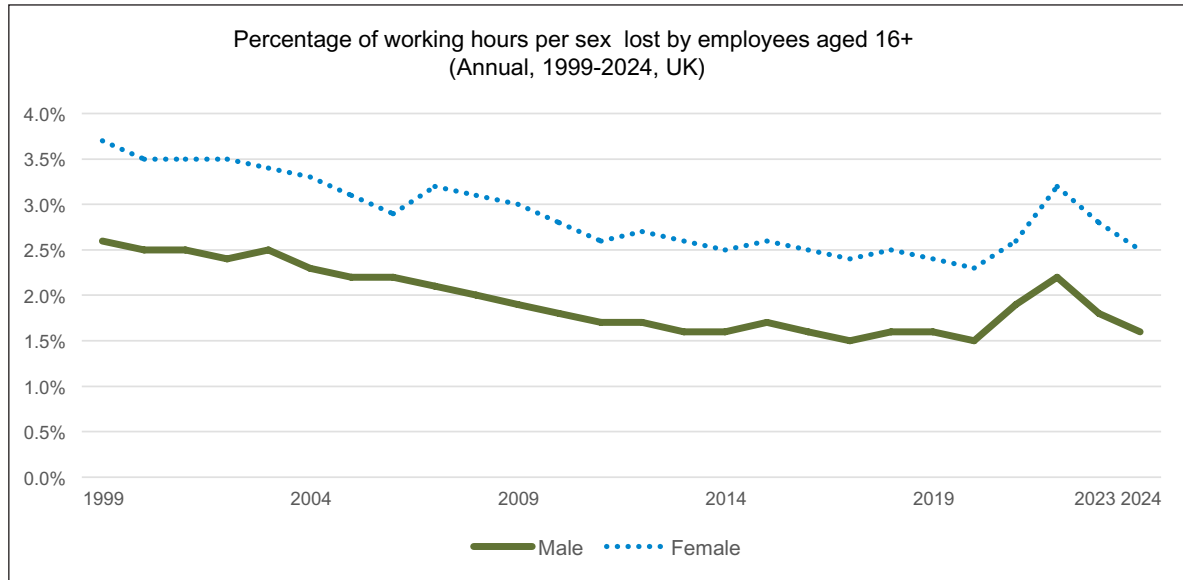
Overall sickness rates are obviously an indicator of health and importantly productivity too. The ONS, through its Labour Force Survey publishes annual figures¹⁴ based on the definition of statistics “the percentage of working hours lost because of sickness or injury.”

Table 5 (Scorecard): Sickness Rates

	Measure	Data	Annual Change	Pre-Pandemic Change	Decade Change
Sickness Rates					
5.1 (UK)	Sickness absence rate (16+ in employment, males, UK)	2024: 1.6% 2023: 1.8% 2019: 1.6% 2014: 1.6% 2009: 1.9% 2004: 2.3% 1999: 2.6%			
The data shows that the overall male rate has fallen back down to the 2019 pre-pandemic period. Historically, the 30-year figures show that men are taking less time off than they did in 1999. This is positive news.					

The figure below shows the same pattern for males and females, with the 2024 rate for the latter being 2.5%.

Figure 7: Percentage of working hours lost per sex by employees aged 16+ (Annual, 1999-2024, UK)



The ONS data also shows that in 2024, the average number of days lost per year for men was 4, whilst in 2015 it was 4.1 and 2005 was 5.7. Older data shows it was 7.2 days in 1995.

The total number of days lost by men to sickness in 2024 was 68.3 million (80.5 million by women). In 2019, the figure for men was 67.2 million (71.8 million by women). In 1999, the numbers of days lost were 100.7 million and 84.5 million respectively – so there has been a large fall in the last 25 years, aligned to the fall in percentage rate and days lost.

Mental Health

The ONS figures also provide data on the main reasons that employees give for sickness. Given mental health is far more prominent an issue now than ever before, the ONS data shows that a growing percentage of men and women are giving this as a reason for their sickness. In fact, 2024 saw large increases. In 2024, mental health made up 7.7% of the reasons male employees gave for sickness. For women, it is 11.5%. This is higher than in 2009 (5.7% and 7.8% respectively).

However, this data can be susceptible to increases and falls in other categories such as musculoskeletal (the second highest category behind minor illnesses) so on its own does not indicate whether more hours are lost or not to this.

Figure 8 below is an extrapolation based on applying the percentage of employees stating they are sick due to mental health by the overall number of days lost by male and female employees (in millions). Table 5a shows that 1 million more days were lost to mental health in 2024 than in 2014 for males and 2.7 million more for women.

Figure 8: Number of days lost by employees per sex aged 16+ due to mental health (Annual 1999-2024, UK)

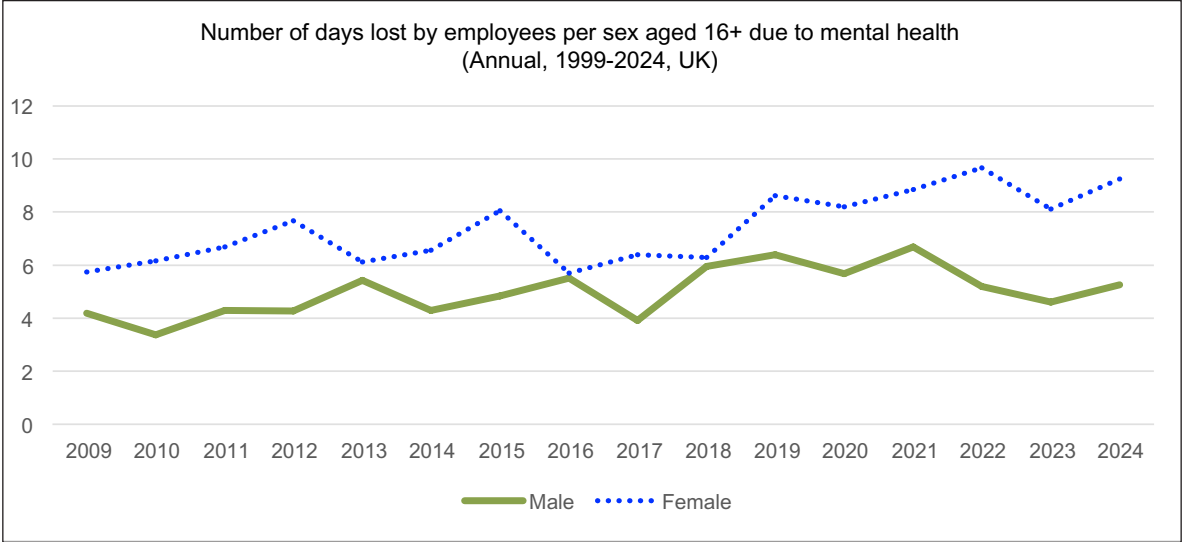


Figure 8 is also caveated by population change. However, by taking the average number of overall days lost per sex per employee (4 for men and 5.7 for women) by the overall number of days lost to mental health, show there has been an increase in the rate: from 0.27 per male employee in 2009 to 0.31 in 2024. This is shown in Table 5a.

Table 5a: Number of days lost by employees aged 16+ due to mental health (Annual 1999-2024, UK)

Year	Male (million days)	Female (million days)	Male (days per year)	Female (days per year)
2024	5.3	9.3	0.31	0.56
2023	4.6	8.1	0.27	0.51
2019	6.4	8.6	0.37	0.54
2014	4.3	6.6	0.26	0.45
2009	4.2	5.7	0.27	0.42

Men and Employment: Long Working Hours

The number of people working longer hours has an impact on their own physical and mental health, and also in ‘time’ spent on other activities including time with their families and in the ‘house’.

Table 6 (Scorecard): Hours Worked

	Measure	Data	Annual Change	Pre-Pandemic Change	Decade Change
Weekly Hours Worked: 45 Hours or More					
6.1 (UK)	Hours Worked: Percentage of those in employment working 45 hours or more per week (16-64, males UK)	2025 (Q2): 18.8% 2024 (Q2): 19.9% 2019 (Q2): 25.5% 2015 (Q2): 27.9% 2010 (Q2): 27.5% 2005 (Q2) 30.8% 2000 (Q2): 36.2%			
Current ONS figures¹⁵ show that a smaller percentage of men (all in employment) since 2000 are working more than 45 hours per week. A nearly 50% fall over the first quarter of the century. In terms of actual hours, there are still 3.31 million men working over 45 hours every week (1.36 million women). In terms of employment type, currently 17.6% of men who are employees work over 45 hours per week, whilst 25.4% of self-employed men do. This is a trend that has persisted over the 25-year period. There are lower rates for female employees, as 7.9% of employees work over 45 hours per week as do 11.4% of those who are self-employed. Overall, 8.2% of employed women work over 45 hours per week.					

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