

# Women in Northern Ireland 2020

Theme: Labour Market

Frequency: Annual

Geographical Area: Northern Ireland

The following publication considers the different labour market experiences of women and men in Northern Ireland. A consistent feature of the labour market is higher employment and unemployment rates for males and higher inactivity rates for females. These features are explored using estimates from the Labour Force Survey quarterly and household datasets.

## Key Points:

- The employment rate for males in NI has been consistently higher than for females over the past ten years. Although the number of employees in NI was evenly split between males and females in 2019, the number of self-employed males was more than double the number of self-employed females.
- Males were more likely to work full-time than females. Furthermore, approximately 60% of employed women with dependent children worked full-time, compared to 95% of employed males with dependent children.
- The unemployment rate for males in NI has been consistently higher than for females over the past ten years, however, the gap is narrowing between the two. In 2019, 44% of the unemployed were female and 56% were male.
- Over the past 10 years there have been consistently more economically inactive women than men. In 2019, just under a third of working age women were economically inactive, compared to just under a quarter of men.
- The most common reason for inactivity among women was family and home commitments, while the most common reason for men was sickness or disability. The difference in inactivity rates between men and women can be entirely accounted for by the number inactive due to looking after family/home.
- 76% of women with dependent children were economically active, compared with 92% of men with dependent children.
- Economic activity rates were lowest for women with a youngest dependent child of pre-school age.

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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:

- Improved quality of the LFS data by boosting the sample size and improving precision around headline estimates.

## Things users need to know

Estimates in sections 1 and 2 are calculated from the January-December 2019 individual dataset while estimates in section 3 are based on the October-December 2019 quarterly household dataset. The 2019 annual dataset is based on 11,000 individuals while the quarterly dataset is based on 7,000 individuals. As such users should note that the estimates from the quarterly dataset are less precise (have larger confidence intervals around them) than estimates from the individual dataset.

## Context

The Women in Northern Ireland report is an annual publication summarising key labour market statistics for females. Please note all data within this report are not adjusted for seasonality.

A Labour Market Outputs consultation ([Labour Market Statistics User Engagement page](#)), which was open to the public during summer 2019, showed labour market statistics are used for policy monitoring and research, academic and private sector research, service planning and delivery. Responses which related specifically to the Women in NI Report indicated that 63% of respondents found the Women in NI report 'useful' or 'very useful' for their work.

Key users of Northern Ireland labour market statistics include government departments, in particular the Department for the Economy (DfE), 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 include the media, banks, academics, private consultants and the general public, 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:

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

## User Feedback

A request was made in the 2017 edition of Women in NI for feedback from users – specifically to better understand how the statistics are being used and whether there are any improvements that can be made.

A response to the feedback received was published on the [NISRA website](#). Using the feedback, Women in NI has been restructured to cover only Labour Force Survey data. Analysis of activity/inactivity levels has been expanded with particular emphasis on the impact of dependent children on economic activity.

This publication will continue to remain under review. Any further comments or feedback are welcome at [lfs@finance-ni.gov.uk](mailto:lfs@finance-ni.gov.uk)

# 1 Summary

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Despite making up half the working age population (16-64), nearly a third of working age women are not in the labour force, while this is the case for just over a fifth of working age men. This report looks at this trend in greater depth and examines the reasons for female economic inactivity in more detail.

According to the 2019 Labour Force Survey the main reason that women are economically inactive is that they are looking after the family and the home. Conversely, looking after family and the home is the least commonly given reason for male economic inactivity. The difference in inactivity rates between males and females can be entirely attributed to the difference in the number looking after the family/home. In fact, excluding the numbers looking after the family/home from the inactivity totals would bring the female inactivity rate below that of males (19.9% for women and 20.7% for men).

Economic inactivity rates for women in the 25-34 range with dependent children are much higher (20pps) than for those without dependent children, the age group most likely to have infants, toddlers and pre-school aged children. Further, women with dependent children are most likely to be employed between the ages of 35-49 years, within which age band approximately four-fifths of women are in the labour market (working or looking for work), and are much more likely to work part-time hours than their male counterparts.

There is thus something inherently gendered in women's experiences of engagement with the labour market, in terms of uptake of employment, in the level of their engagement with their employment, and in the [types of employment](#). This report seeks to provide data to illustrate the nuanced ways this engagement is impacted by having children (including higher likelihoods of economic inactivity when the children are young and the likelihood of full-time work increasing as their children grow).

# Women in NI 2020

## Employment



**68%**  
employment  
rate of women  
aged 16-64

## Part-time employment



**38%**  
of female  
employees aged  
16-64 worked  
part-time

## Self-employment



**8%**  
of females  
aged 16+ in  
employment were  
self-employed

## Economic Inactivity

**30%**  
of females aged  
16-64 were  
economically  
inactive



## Family/home commitments

**34%**  
of inactive  
women aged  
16-64 were  
inactive due to  
family/home  
commitments



## Dependent children

**76%**  
of females with  
one or more  
dependent  
children were  
economically  
active



*pps<sup>1</sup> = percentage points*

*Labour Force Survey (data subject to future revisions)*

*Data published – 4<sup>th</sup> June 2020*

## 2 Women in the labour force

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a household sample survey carried out by interviewing individuals about their personal circumstances and work. It provides a rich source of information on the labour force using internationally agreed definitions. Estimates are subject to sampling error (see [Further Information](#) and the [Estimating and Reporting Uncertainty](#) paper for details).

### 2.1 Employment

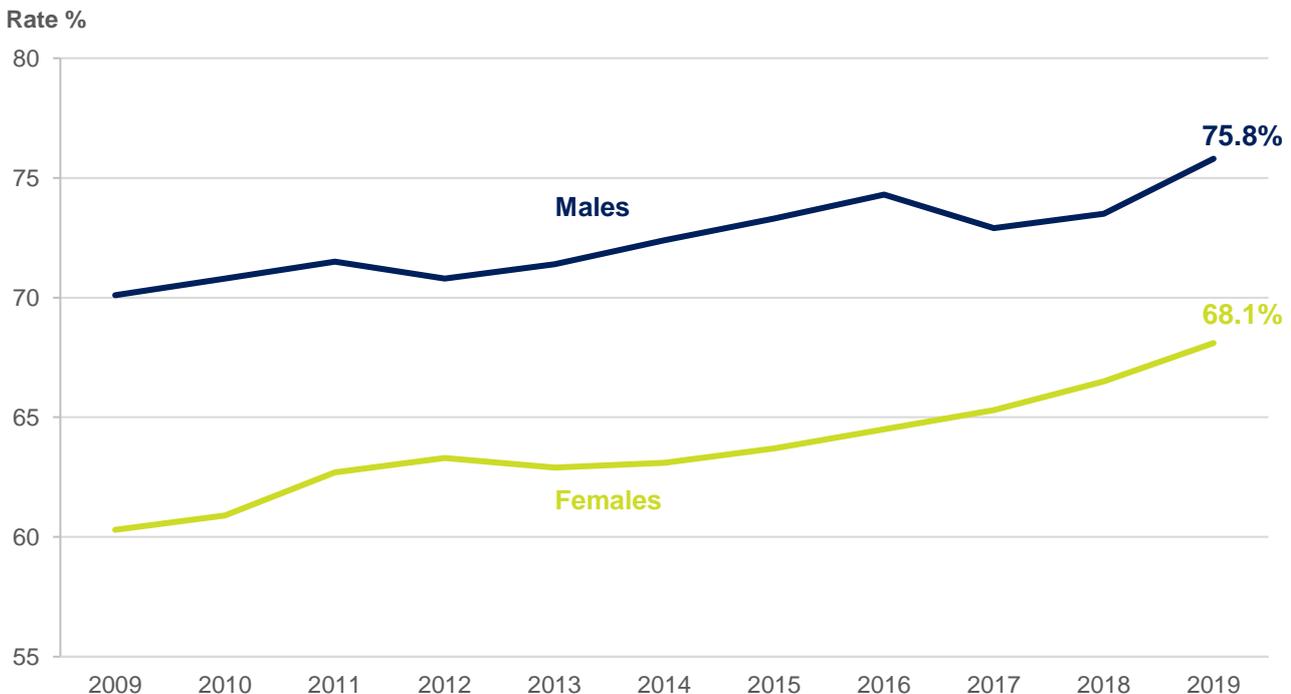
**LFS employed:** people aged 16 or over who did at least one hour of paid work in the reference week (whether as an employee or self-employed); those who had a paid job that they were temporarily away from; those on government-supported training and employee programmes and those doing unpaid family work.

**Employment rate:** calculated by taking the number of employed people aged 16-64 as a proportion of all working age people

#### Key Findings:

- In 2019, the estimated number of women (16+) in employment was 414,000
- Women accounted for around half of those currently in employment
- Women in employment was made up of 376,000 employees (91%), 33,000 self-employed (8%) and a small number on government training and employment schemes or unpaid family workers

Figure 1: Employment rate by gender (16-64), Jan-Dec 2009 to Jan-Dec 2019



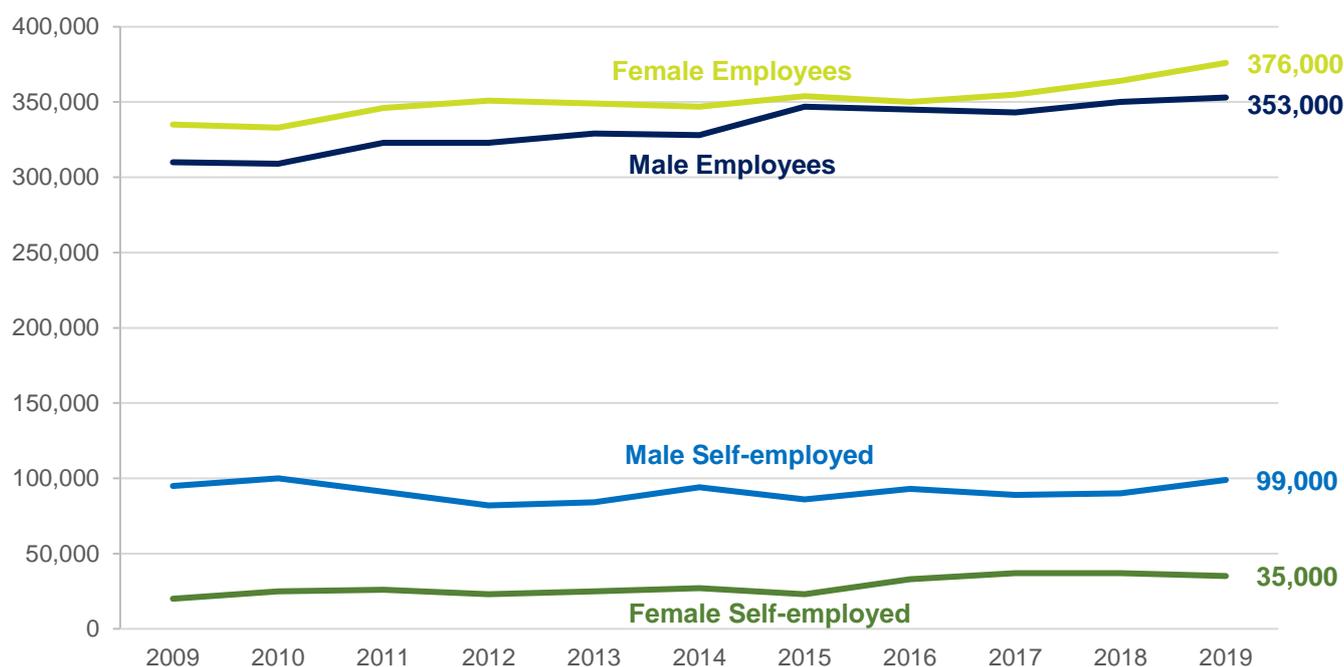
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In the last 10 years both the male and female employment rates have increased to all-time highs. During this time the female employment rate has consistently been lower than the rate for males, although the gap between the male and female rates has narrowed by 2 percentage points over ten years. The increase in the female employment rate is consistent with the change in pension age, as employment rate for women aged 60-64 in employment has increased by 26pps over the last decade.

The employment rate for females aged 16 to 64 in 2019 was 68.1%, which was:

- an increase of 7.8pps over the last 10 years and an increase of 1.5pps over the last year
- lower than the male employment rate (75.8%), which is an increase of 5.7pps since the same point 10 years ago and an increase of 2.3pps over the last year.

**Figure 2: Gender profile of employees and self-employed (16+), Jan-Dec 2009 to Jan-Dec 2019**



\* Those on government schemes, training and employment programmes too small for reliable estimate

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Overall there has been an increase for both males (46,000) and females (58,000) in employment over the last 10 years. The rise in male and female employment was mainly driven by increases in the number of employees.

### Employment by category

In terms of the type of job (employee or self-employment):

- women accounted for 52% of all employees and 26% of the total self-employed in 2019
- there were steady gains in numbers of female and male employees over the past ten years
- the gender profile of employees has been relatively even throughout the past ten years
- the numbers of self-employed males and females have stayed relatively constant over the last ten years
- self-employed females indicated that their main reasons for working this way was due to the nature of the work and for better work conditions, while the main reasons for male self-employment were that it was the nature of their job or chosen career or they started or joined a family business.

## **Employment by working pattern**

- The proportion of female employees (16-64) working full-time is the same as 10 years ago at 62% and the proportion of males working full-time has fallen by 2pps to 89%. Therefore the majority of part-time employees (79%) are women
- approximately three-quarters (73%) of female employees (16+) working part-time stated that the reason was because they 'Didn't want full-time work'.

## **Employment by Industry**

- Nearly half (48%) of employed women were employed within the “public administration, education and health” sector and a further fifth (19%) were employed within the “distribution, hotels and restaurants” sector
- Employment across sectors was more evenly distributed for males, with “public administration, education and health” and “distribution, hotels and restaurants” being the two highest categories with 16% of employed men in each.

## 2.2 Unemployment

**LFS unemployment:** The International Labour Organisation (ILO) define unemployed as 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 (numbers and rates refer to 16+ population)

**Unemployment rate:** total number of those aged 16 and over who are unemployed as a proportion of all economically active people aged 16 and over

### Key Findings:

- The female unemployment rate has been lower than the male unemployment rate for the last ten years
- By 2019 the gap in male and female unemployment rates had almost closed completely

Figure 3: Unemployment rate by gender (16+), Jan-Dec 2009 to Jan-Dec 2019

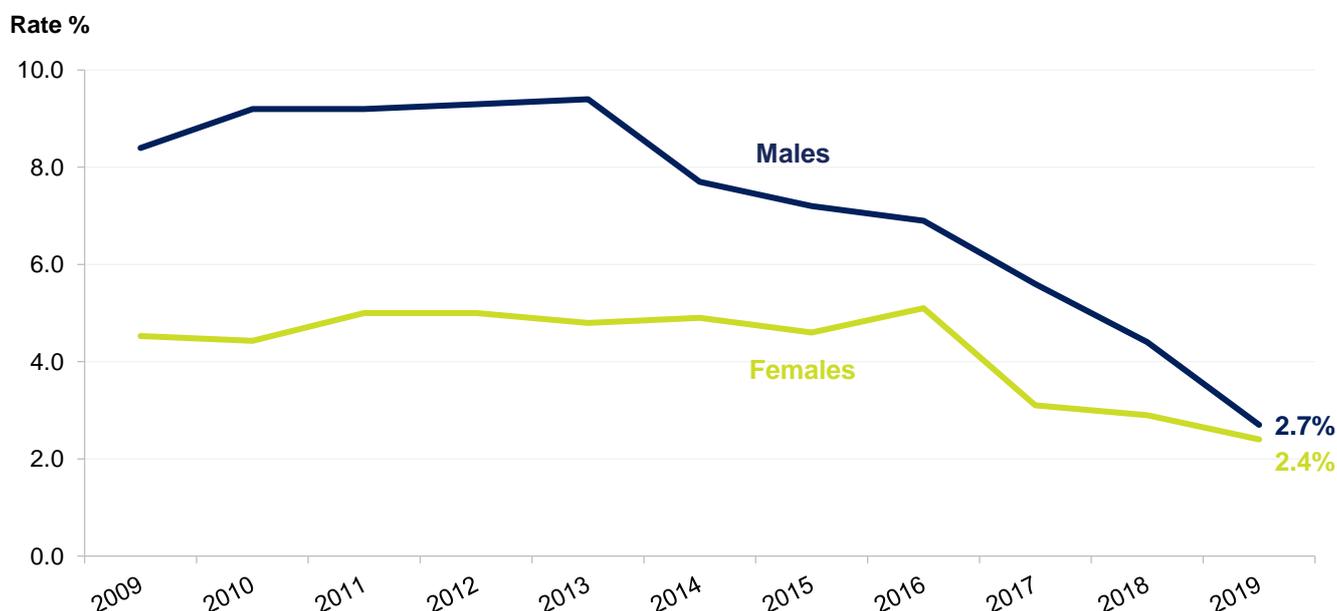


Figure 3 shows that the female unemployment rate has consistently been below the male unemployment rate for the last 10 years. While the two series don't mirror each other exactly, they generally follow the same trend with the gap almost closing in the most recent year (January-December 2019) recording record low rates for both males (2.7%) and females (2.4%).

LFS estimates showed that:

- in 2019, under half of the unemployed aged 16 and over were female (44%) and over half (56%) were male
- in 2019, the unemployment rate for women aged 16+ in NI was 2.4% compared with 2.7% for men
- the number of unemployed males and females in 2019 was significantly lower than levels in 2009. During this period the number of females unemployed reached a peak (21,000) in 2016, and a low in 2019 (10,000)
- similarly in this period, the number of males unemployed reached a peak in 2013 (44,000) and a low in 2019 (13,000).

## 2.3 Economic Inactivity

**Economically inactive:** people who are neither in employment nor unemployed on the ILO measure. This group includes those who are looking after a home, long term sick or disabled, students and retired (numbers refer to 16+ population, rates refer to 16-64 years).

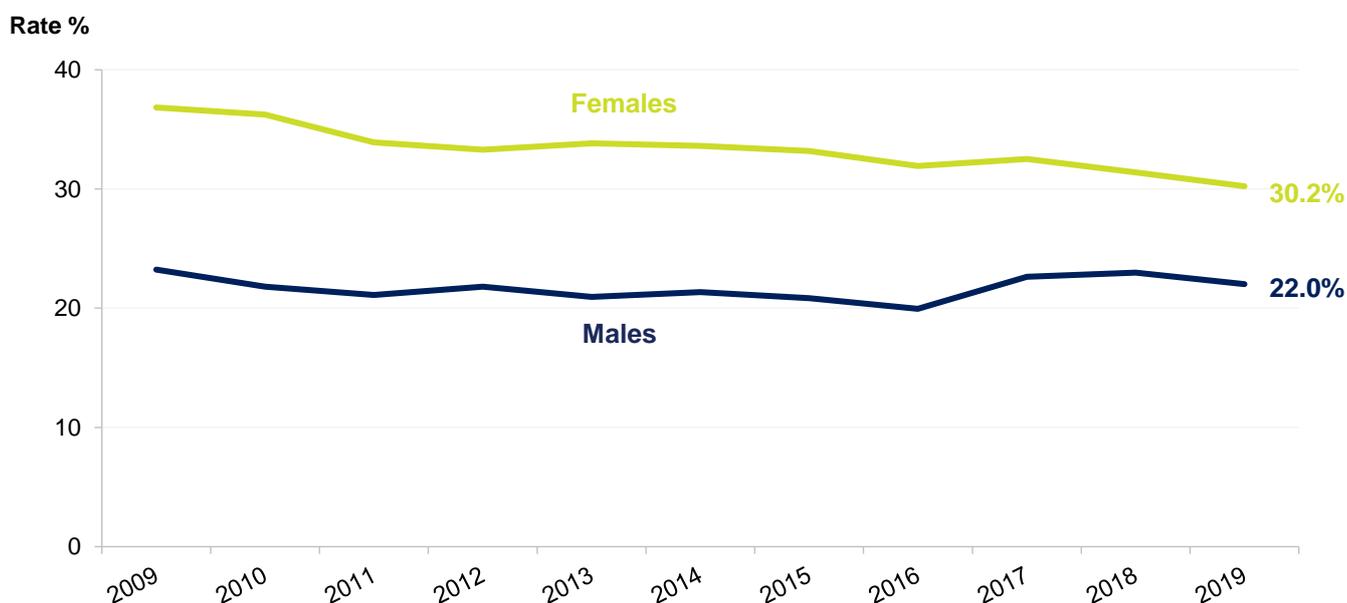
**Economic inactivity rate:** the number of economically inactive people aged 16-64 as a proportion of all working age people

For further information on economic inactivity, see [Economic Inactivity in Northern Ireland 2018](#)

### Key Findings:

- Just under a third of working age women were economically inactive in 2019
- Women have had a consistently higher rate of economic inactivity than men for the last 10 years

Figure 4: Economic inactivity rate by gender (16-64), Jan-Dec 2009 to Jan-Dec 2019



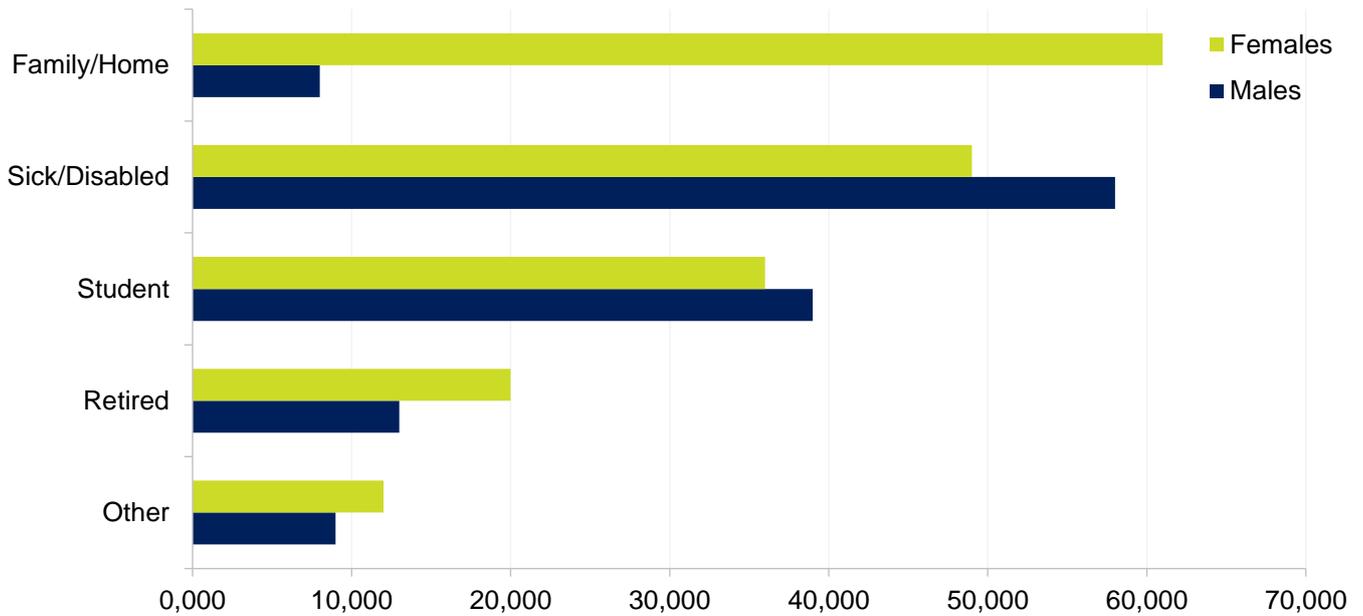
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The economic inactivity rate for women has been consistently higher than men, although it has narrowed over the last decade and reached a record low in 2019. However, at 30.2%, it was still 8 percentage points above the rate for men, and higher than male inactivity rates throughout the 2009 – 2019 period.

LFS estimates show in 2019:

- just under a third (30.2%) of working age women and just under a quarter (22.0%) of working age men were economically inactive
- the 16-64 inactivity rate for women (30.2%) was 1.2pps lower than the previous year and 6.6pps lower than the same point 10 years earlier. The corresponding rate for men (22.0%) was 1.0pps lower than the previous year and 1.2pps lower than 10 years earlier

**Figure 5: Reasons for economic inactivity by gender (16-64), January–December 2019**



“Other” also includes ‘discouraged workers’ (those not in a job who would like work and whose reason for not seeking work in the past four weeks is that they believe there are no jobs available).

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Of the economically inactive (aged 16-64 years):

- more than a third of women who were unavailable for work gave the reason for inactivity as family/home commitments (61,000 or 34%). This was the least likely reason for male inactivity (at only 8,000 or 6%).
- the main reason given by men for inactivity was related to sickness and disability (58,000, 46%). It is the second most common reason for women, comprising 49,000 (27%) of economically inactive women.
- excluding those inactive in order to care for family/home, there are almost equal numbers of inactive women and men. Correspondingly, Table 1 shows the inactivity rate (16-64), excluding those looking after the family or home, is lower for females than for males (19.9% for females compared with 20.7% for males).

**Table 1: Components of economic inactivity rate (16-64) by gender**

	Males	Females
Family/Home	1.3%	10.3%
Sick/Disabled	10.0%	8.2%
Student	6.8%	6.1%
Retired	2.3%	3.4%
Other	1.5%	2.1%
<b>Total Rate</b>	<b>22.0%</b>	<b>30.2%</b>

# 3 Women with Dependent Children

Analysis in this section relates to the household unit. Where men or women are discussed it relates to head of households (as defined below) rather than all adults.

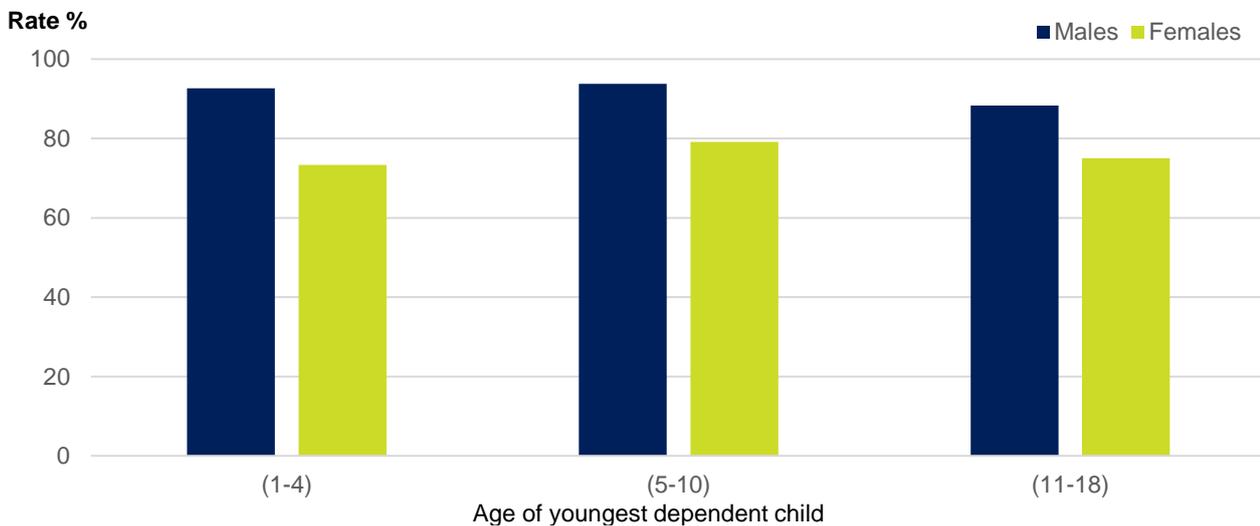
**Dependent children:** Those under 16 years and those aged 16 to 18, never-married and in full-time education.

**Head of household<sup>1</sup>:** This is the head of the family unit or the spouse/cohabitee of the head of the family unit.

## Key Findings:

- 76% of women with dependent children were economically active, compared with 92% of men with dependent children
- The economic activity rate for women with pre-school age children (74%) was substantially lower than for men with pre-school age children (93%)

**Figure 6: Economic activity rates of men and women (16-64) by age of youngest dependent child\*, October-December 2019**



\* **Note:** people with dependent children under the age of 1 have been excluded as those on maternity leave are included in the employment total

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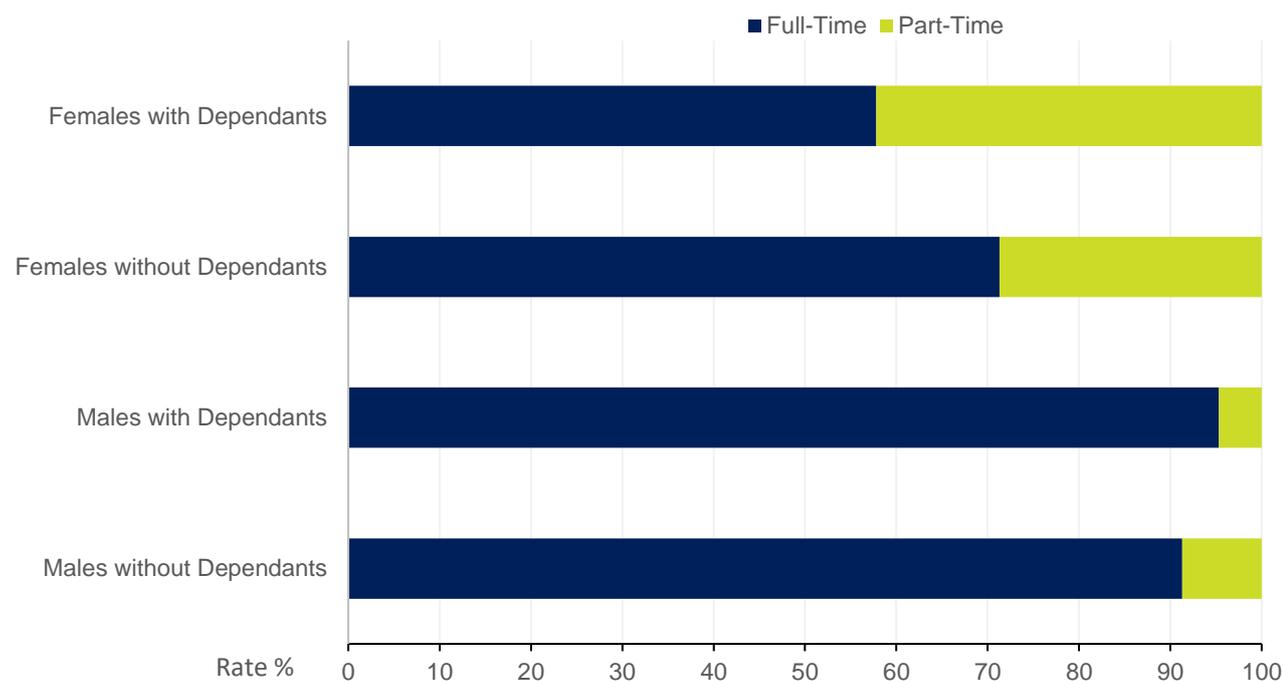
The previous section demonstrated that economic inactivity was higher among women and the most common reason for inactivity was home or family responsibilities. Analysis of household units shows that 74.5% of women (16-64) who were inactive due to family/home commitments had a dependent child.

Figure 6 shows the economic activity rates for males and females disaggregated by age of youngest dependent child. Age groupings of children are aligned with pre-school, primary school and secondary school age. The data indicates that:

- Women consistently have lower economic activity than men regardless of age of youngest dependent child
- The group with the lowest economic activity is women with a youngest child of pre-school age (73.3%). The difference in economic activity rate for men and women with a youngest child of pre-school age is 19.3pps.

<sup>1</sup> For more information on household concepts & definitions visit <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/labour-market/labour-market-statistics/volume-8---2008.pdf>

**Figure 7: Working patterns of men and women (16-64) with and without dependent children, October-December 2019**



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This graph shows the working patterns (full-time or part-time) of men and women with and without dependent children.

- Women were much more likely than men to be working part-time schedules, regardless of whether they have dependent children.
- Over two-thirds of employed women without dependent children were working full time (71.3%), while over half of employed women with dependent children were working full time (57.8%).
- The average age of females without dependent children was higher than that of females with dependent children, particularly those working part-time (51 compared with 39). The one third of females without dependent children working part-time may therefore, in part, be women who began a part-time schedule with young children and did not resume full-time work once those children were grown
- The age of youngest child was related to work pattern. 53.2% of women whose youngest child was of pre-school age worked full-time. This increased to 60.5% of women whose youngest child was of secondary school age.
- As illustrated in Table 2 below, there was very little difference in the rates or the average ages of men with and without dependent children working full-time and part-time. Men with dependent children were the most likely to be working full-time (95.3%) and, on average, were the youngest males.

**Table 2: Working patterns of women with dependent children by age of their youngest child**

	Full-Time Work	Part-Time Work
1-4	53.2%	46.8%
5-10	55.7%	44.3%
11-18	60.5%	39.5%

\* **Note:** those women with dependent children under the age of 1 have been excluded to exclude maternity leave from the analysis

# Further information

## 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.

## LFS economic activity

Economic activity is defined as those aged 16 and over who are either in employment or unemployed.

## Sampling variability

The Labour Force Survey is a sample survey. It provides estimates of population values. If we drew many samples each would give a different result. The ranges shown for the LFS data in the table below represent 95% confidence intervals. We would expect that in 95% of samples the range would contain the true value.

**Table 3: Sampling variability of labour market estimates**

January-December 2019	LFS estimate	Lower limit	Upper limit
Unemployment 16+	23,000	19,000	27,000
Employment 16-64	839,000	827,000	852,000
Economically inactive 16-64	306,000	293,000	318,000
Unemployment rate 16+	2.6%	2.1%	3.0%
Employment rate 16-64	71.9%	70.8%	73.0%
Economic inactivity rate 16-64	26.2%	25.1%	27.2%

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

### LFS Datasets

This report relies on two separate LFS datasets—the individual and the household datasets. Data within Sections 1 and 2 are gathered from the individual annual January-December 2019 dataset. Data within Section 3 is from the October-December 2019 quarterly households dataset. These datasets were selected to represent the most recent publishable time period at the time of the writing of this report.

### 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 and for annual LFS datasets is 6,000. As such, data below 6,000 for the first two sections and 8,000 for the third section are suppressed.

### For Further Information contact:

Elizabeth Super  
Economic & Labour Market Statistics Branch  
Floor 1  
Colby House  
Stranmillis Court  
BT9 5RR

Tel: (028) 90255176

Email: [LFS@finance-ni.gov.uk](mailto:LFS@finance-ni.gov.uk)

Web: [Labour Force Survey](#)

Twitter: [@NISRA](#)