

TUC analysis: Women in the labour market

The recession has had a significant impact on the labour market prospects of women and men across the UK.

The recession led to more men losing their jobs than women. The number of men in work has fallen by 312,000 since the start of the downturn (with the working age employment rate falling by 3.3 percentage points, from 79 per cent to 75.7 per cent), while the female employment level has reduced by 66,000 (with the working age rate falling by 1.7 percentage points, from 67 per cent to 65.3 per cent). However, over the last year male employment prospects have shown some recovery (with a 238,000 increase in employment levels and a 0.4 point increase in the rate) while female employment levels have fallen (by 19,000 on the year and a 0.5 point fall in the rate).

Similarly, since the recession started male unemployment levels have increased by 530,000 (while the rate has risen by 3.1 percentage points to 8.6 per cent), while female unemployment has increased by 346,000 (with the rate rising by 2.3 percentage points to 7.1 per cent). But since the start of the recovery women have done far worse than men. On the year male unemployment has shown a small fall of 31,000 (with the rate falling by 0.3 percentage points), while female unemployment has risen by 71,000 (with the rate increasing by 0.5 percentage points). Female unemployment levels (1,028,000) are therefore the highest since 1988, whereas male unemployment (1,464,000) was last at current levels in 1996. In recent months female unemployment levels have reached their highest since the start of the recession (1,039,000 in September 2010), whereas male unemployment levels are now 72,000 lower than their recessionary peak (which was 1,536,000 in July 2009).

Young people have been hit far harder than workers in other age groups as a result of the recession. The most recent labour market data show that the unemployment rate for young men (aged 18-24) is currently 19.9 per cent, compared to 16.1 per cent for young women. Since the recession started rates for both groups have risen by 6.2 percentage points. However, over the last year the unemployment rate for young men has shown a small fall of 0.3 percentage points, compared to an increase of 1.6 points for young women. Unemployment levels for young women are now the highest on record (308,000, with records starting in 1992). While unemployment levels for young men are higher (447,000), they are 19,000 lower than their recessionary peak and previously reached the same level in January 1994.

TUC analysis also shows that the changes faced by young people vary by region. TUC analysis of Labour Force Survey data from July – September 2010 shows that in some areas of the country more than 20 per cent of young women (16-24) are unemployed, compared to far lower percentages in higher age groups. It also demonstrates that in certain regions young women's unemployment has risen more quickly than young men's (although in other regions the reverse is the case). In particular in Merseyside unemployment among young women has risen by 11 per cent since the recession started, in the West Midlands the increase has been 10 per cent and Scotland and Yorkshire have both seen 9 percentage point increases.

Far more women than men work in the public sector, with over 30 per cent of employed women nationally working in public sector jobs. The percentage of women in this position varies by region, with 39 per cent of women employed in the public sector in the North East (compared to 21 per cent of men) and 42 per cent of women employed in the public sector in Northern Ireland (compared to 19 per cent of men).

Since the start of the recession there has been a fall of 34,000 in retail and wholesale work (with a small increase of 9,000 on the year) and a 14,000 fall in administrative and secretarial vacancies (with a small fall of 1,000 on the year). And over the last year several other sectors where there are high proportions of female employees have also seen sharp falls in vacancy levels. For example, the number of vacancies in education has fallen 26,000 on the year (compared to 20,000 since the start of the recession), the number in health and social work has fallen 6,000 since the start of the recession (and 18,000 on the year). With redundancies in the public sector set to increase, and slow growth likely to mean that job creation rates in sectors including retail and administration remain low, women at work are likely to be in for a tough year.

Notes

- Falls since the recession started refer to falls from January 2008 – November 2010 (the most recent ONS labour market data) and annual falls refer to the change between November 2009 and November 2010 (apart from the vacancy data which refers to falls since January 2011 and to annual change between January 2011 and January 2010).

- Where dates are not provided data refers to November 2010 (except for vacancy data which refers to January 2011).

- For a full breakdown of male and female unemployment by region and age, you can access a spreadsheet file at: <http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/recessionwomen.xls>

- Data on occupational segregation is available from ONS's Economic and Labour Market statistics: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/elmr/downloads/elmr6.pdf>.

- Please note that ONS raw data is not seasonally adjusted. Levels and proportions for the regional data are therefore slightly different to those published in ONS's regular labour market releases.