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Fraser Nelson

Revealed: Britain's welfare hotspots

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(Photo by Jack Taylor/Getty Images)



Every three months, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) updates the full UK welfare picture. It's a big task and there's a six-month lag — but the resulting picture is the biggest scandal in politics. It shows that now, with a worker shortage crisis so acute that immigration has been running at a million a year, 5.4 million are being kept on out-of-work benefits (as categorised by the DWP) This figure includes those on sickness benefit who are excluded from the official unemployment figure.

It's a huge waste of money but, far worse, a waste of human potential. Tens of thousands are, once again, being written off. The progress of the Iain Duncan Smith era was washed away by lockdown and things are back to where they were. And things are expected to get (much) worse: we have the whole story on [this section](#) of the data hub. I've written [here](#) about the integrity of the methodology.

In our great cities, the situation is stark. In Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester one in five people in the working-age population are claiming out-of-work benefits. You can go to these places and see employers crying out for workers: Adzuna shows 11,000 jobs in Glasgow at an [average](#) £35,000 each. Liverpool [has](#) 9,000 jobs averaging £34,000 each. Manchester [offers](#) 22,000 jobs at £39,000 annual average.

But let's juxtapose this against the working-age population of each city that is on out-of-work benefits. 7.6 per cent of Glasgow is on incapacity benefit while 11.3 per cent of the city on the workless component of Universal Credit (what used to be known as Jobseeker's Allowance) — so 19 per cent in all. Almost one in five. It's a similar picture in Manchester and Liverpool, but higher at 23 per cent in Middlesbrough and 25 per cent in Blackpool.

We have now pulled all of the data from the DWP website: it's all in the below searchable table. You can type in the name of any city or council areas.

Out-of-work benefits: claimants in local authorities

In February 2023, as a proportion of 16-64-year old population

Page 1 of 37



Local authority	▼ Total	Incapacity benefits	UC (workless)	Other
Blackpool	25.3%	7.7%	17.1%	0.5%
Hartlepool	23.5%	5.4%	17.7%	0.5%
Blaenau Gwent	23.0%	9.3%	13.2%	0.4%
Middlesbrough	22.7%	6.4%	15.7%	0.5%
Knowsley	21.7%	7.5%	13.7%	0.4%
Inverclyde	21.1%	7.3%	13.5%	0.3%
Merthyr Tydfil	21.1%	8.5%	12.2%	0.4%
North Ayrshire	21.1%	7.1%	13.5%	0.5%
West Dunbartonshire	20.9%	8.0%	12.3%	0.5%
Hastings	20.9%	5.6%	14.9%	0.4%

"Out of work" benefits as defined by the DWP. Data published Aug23 on DWP Stat-Xplore ([methodology here](#)) Updated quarterly, with a six-month lag (!!).

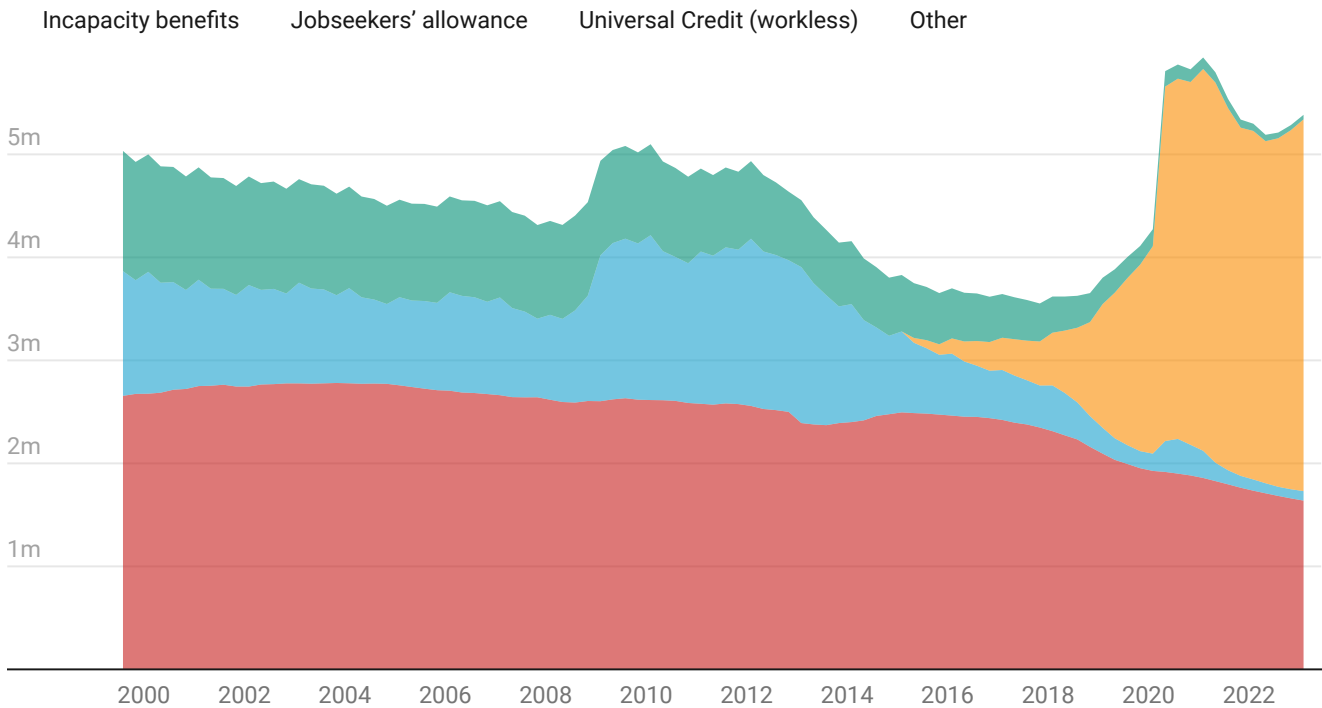
Table: The Spectator (5yJ3E) • Source: DWP / ONS / NRS / Spectator • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

The new problem is sickness benefits claims (especially mental health — to which we have also devoted a **section** of the data hub). Far too many are being written off, now, as unfit for any work. This is not just a waste of taxpayers' money but, worse, a waste of human life and potential. The vacuum in the labour force sucks in immigration which, in turn, puts pressure on public services. To fix welfare would be to remedy the root problem. But to do so is often the toughest task in politics, as you can be accused of being cruel to the most vulnerable. It's often easier, politically, to abandon these people and grow the workforce by immigration rather than try to set up the support and advice that is needed by the 5,000 a day who have been claiming sickness benefit (a figure that has doubled since the lockdowns).

This is not a story about idle Britain: we're still the same country that had record economic participation before the lockdowns. But those lockdowns served to erase previous progress on welfare reform and leave a caseload as bad as anything seen under Labour.

5.4 million on out-of-work benefits

As defined by DWP. View from: 1979 or **2000**



Using DWP methodology. [Click here for full sourcing and details](#). Figures to Feb23. Updated quarterly, with six-month lag (!). Next update: 14 Nov

Chart: The Spectator (5V22T) • Source: [ONS \(BEN01\)/DWP](#). • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

And yes, there will always - in every society - be a certain percentage genuinely too sick too work. But perhaps not 12 per cent of the potential workforce. People who report sick are simply not being given the help and support they need: they're being given the top welfare cheque and then no real follow-up or contact from government.

And where will this de facto pay-and-forget policy lead? The current forecast is that the disability benefits caseload rises by 1,020 a day (!) for the next *four years*, at huge cost (the DWP projections are shown on our [data hub](#)). To actually plan for mass economic exclusion on this scale, to economically decommission an ever-greater share of the working-age population, is no way to run an economy or a society.

In my *Daily Telegraph* [column](#) I write that Mel Stride, the DWP secretary, is about to start an overhaul. In a country where home-working and the worker shortage crisis has changed the labour market, the overhaul that Stride seeks to apply is overdue.

We'll keep following this at *The Spectator* and on our data hub.

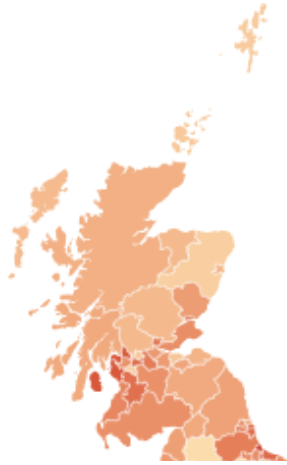
Here's the same data, but in a zoomable map.

The GB welfare map

Proportion of working-age population on out-of-work benefits in Feb 2023

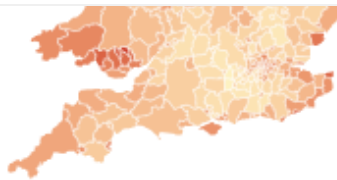
Local authorities Smaller areas in regions:

London, SE, SW, E Mids, W Mids, East, Yorkshire, NE, NW, Wales, Scotland



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Using population estimates for 16- to -64-year-olds from Census 2021 from the ONS (England and Wales) and mid-2021 population estimates from NRS (Scotland)

Map: The Spectator (qcYqF) • Source: DWP (Stat-Xplore benefits combinations tables), ONS Census 2021 population estimates, NRS mid-2021 population estimates, Spectator calculations • Map data: © Crown copyright and database right 2021 • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)



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