East Sussex County Council

Welfare benefits claimants in East Sussex

September 2026

Some headlines for East Sussex:

Universal Credit (UC) continuing to rise - but much of the increase is down to claimants of older ("legacy") benefits being moved onto UC through a process known as migration.

Overall working age claimants also growing but much more slowly - one in four (24%) working age people now on at least one benefit.

Nearly 50,000 working age people are on at least one out-of-work benefit (unemployment, sickness or carers)

Almost 23,000 households with children are claiming UC, but slightly down over the year (May 26). At least 43,100 children live in these families, a higher number than the number measured in the Children in Low Income Families (CILIF) After Housing Costs (AHC) data (just under 30,000).

Over 30,000 working age people claiming Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP). 43% are claiming for Mental Health and behavioural disorders, another 16% have neurological or cognitive conditions, and 41% are claiming for a chronic, musculoskeletal, trauma or sensory condition.

Contents

Summary

Universal Credit (UC): In May 2026 there were 63,200 people in East Sussex claiming Universal Credit (UC), including 15,700 who were working (with or without additional work seeking requirements) and 11,000 who were searching for work. The number of UC claimants has risen by 8.4% (4,900 claimants) since May 2025. In East Sussex in there were 54,100 households on UC in May 2026.

Legacy Benefits: Most claimants of legacy benefits such as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Tax Credits and Housing Benefit have now been migrated to Universal Credit, which partly explains this large increase, which is considerably bigger than the overall increase in welfare benefit claimants (see below).

DWP Benefits: In November 2025 there were 77,500 working age people claiming at least one DWP benefit (including working people on UC or Housing Benefit, but not including those who claim Tax credits only), an increase of 1,300 claimants (up 1.7%) since November 2024. This is 24% of the working age population.

Out-of-work Benefits: 49,600 working age people were claiming a benefit because they were not in work (16% of the working age population), either because they were unemployed or because of sickness/disability or caring responsibilities, in November 2025. This figure was up 3.3% (1,580 more claimants) compared to a year previously.

Unemployed UC/JSA claimants: In July 2026 there were 11,745 people claiming UC or Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) because they were unemployed, 3.7% of working-age people. This was 115 more claimants than in June 2026 (up 1.0%) and up 740 claimants (6.7%) since July 2025.

Disability Benefits (DLA/PIP): In November 2025 there were 30,500 working age people claiming DLA/PIP because of sickness or disability, a further 9,600 who were aged 65 and over, and 9,100 who were aged under 16.

Pension Credit: There were 13,100 people claiming Pension Credit in East Sussex in November 2025, which was 8.8% of all people aged 65 and over.

Note changes in publication dates: DWP have changed the publication schedule for most Benefits Data. Universal Credit (UC) data which used to be published at the same time as the Unemployed (UC/JSA) Claimant Count data on a monthly basis is now released quarterly in February, May, August and November, together with data for UC Households and other data such as data on UC health caseload. Data for other benefits such as Benefit Combinations, Housing Benefits and Disability benefits (DLA and PIP) which used to be published quarterly will henceforth be published annually in September. The data in this report covers the last quarterly release of benefits data from May 2026.

Universal Credit Claimants

Universal Credit: migration to UC from other benefits

Universal Credit (UC) has replaced Tax Credits, and a variety of other means-tested social security benefits, including income-based Jobseekers Allowance (JSA), income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support (IS) and Housing Benefit (HB). These are known as “Legacy benefits”. The process of moving claimants of Legacy benefits to UC is called Migration.

Universal Credit is now fully rolled out to all areas, and it is no longer possible for anyone to make a brand-new claim for tax credits or most other means-tested benefits. The only exception is for a few people who are granted refugee status. People with sufficient National Insurance contributions can still claim contributions-based JSA and ESA if they are unemployed or sick, even if they have other income or savings. Instead, people are expected to claim UC or Pension Credit (if they are aged 66 or over) depending on their circumstances. Tax credits ended on 5 April 2025. Tax Credit claimants have all been invited to claim UC and either been migrated to UC now, do not qualify for UC or chosen not to make a claim. The migration of the last few income-based ESA and working age Housing benefit claimants should have been completed by the end of summer 2026.

In the 2 year period from January 2024 to December 2025, there was an increase of 14,400 Universal Credit claimants in East Sussex, but in the same period, 13,530 people on legacy benefits were migrated to UC, representing 94% of all of these new UC claims (see note 1).

Table 1: People invited to Move to Universal Credit, January 2024 - December 2025, and total change in UC claimants

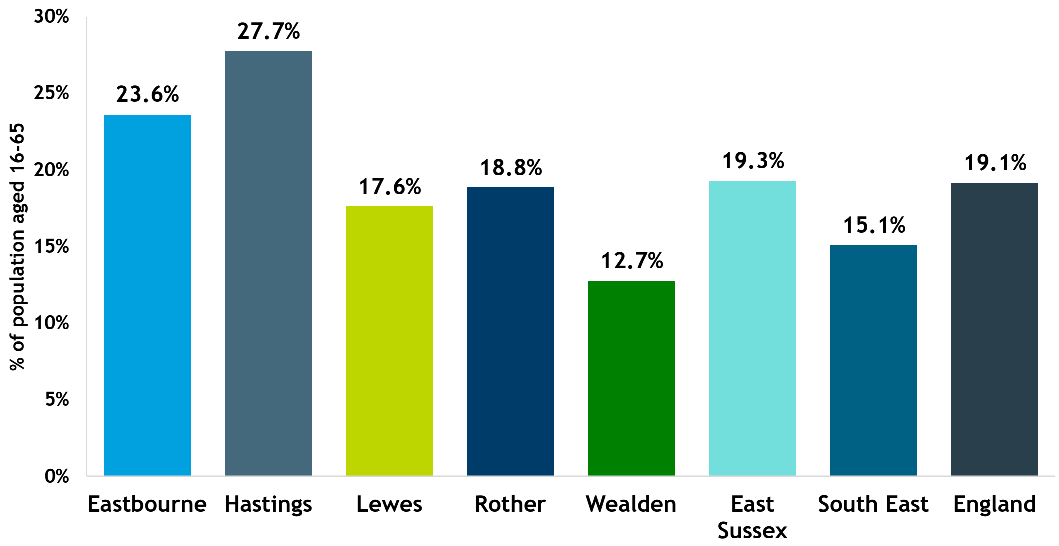
	Claimed UC	Did not claim UC - Legacy benefit closed	Total invited to claim UC	Total change in UC over the period
Tax Credits only	3,994	2,263	6,247	
DWP benefits (incl. combination with Tax Credits)	9,457	364	9,817	
Legacy non-customer	69	0	84	
Total	13,528	2,633	16,161	14,402

Universal Credit Data (see note 1)

In East Sussex in May 2026 there were 63,170 people claiming UC. This is 19.3% of working age people (aged 16-65), just above to the national (England) rate (19.1%), and well above the regional rate of 15.1%. Numbers have increased by 8.4% since May 2025, a rise of 4,900 claimants over the year.

Claimant rates are highest in Hastings (27.7% in May 2026), where more than a quarter of working age people are claiming Universal Credit. Rates are also high in Eastbourne (23.6%) but considerably lower than average in Wealden (12.7%).

Figure 1: Proportion of working age people claiming Universal Credit, May 2026



Universal Credit claimants by conditionality

The number of people who are searching for work rose slightly over the year (May 2025-2026), but the number of claimants in the 'No work requirements' group continues to rise at a steady rate and in May 2026 made up more than half (52%) of all UC claimants, compared to 39.3% in May 2024. Much of the change in the numbers of claimants in different conditionality groups will be due to the effects of people on legacy benefits who have now mostly been migrated onto UC (see above).

A quarter of UC claimants are in one of the Working conditionality groups, with 15% in the Working – no requirements group and a further 10% in the Working – with requirements group. (See below for definitions of conditionality groups and the difference with employment indicator).

Figure 2: Universal Credit claimants by conditionality – May 2019-2026

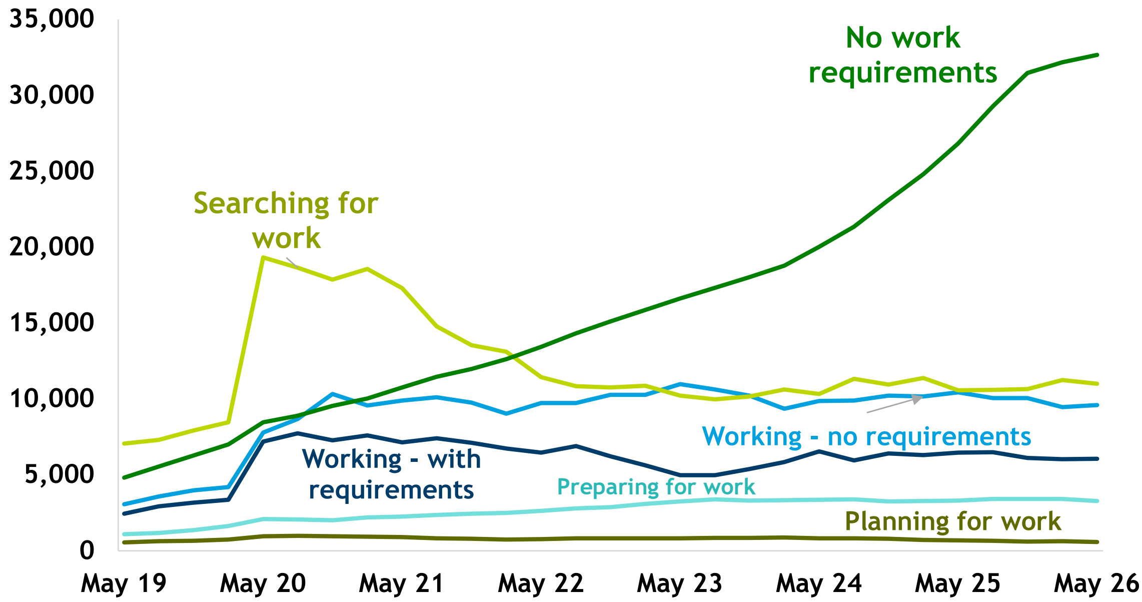


Table 2: Universal Credit claimants by conditionality in East Sussex, May 2026

Conditionality measure	Number of UC claimants	Percentage of all UC claimants
Searching for work	10,990	17.4%
Working - no requirements	9,590	15.2%
Working - with requirements	6,050	9.6%
Preparing or planning for work	3,870	6.1%
No work requirements	32,670	51.7%
All claimants	**63,170**	**100.0%**

Table 3: Definitions of conditionality groups

Conditionality group	Claimant conditions
Working: no requirements	Individual or household earnings over the level at which conditionality applies.
Working: with requirements	In work but could earn more, or not working but has a partner with low earnings.
Searching for work	Not working, or with very low earnings. Claimant is required to take action to secure work—or more/better paid work.
Preparing for work	Expected to start preparing for future even with limited capability for work at the present time or has a child aged 2. (Aged 3-4 prior to April 2017).
Planning for work	Expected to work in the future. e.g. Lone parent/lead carer of child aged 1. (Aged 1-2 prior to April 2017).

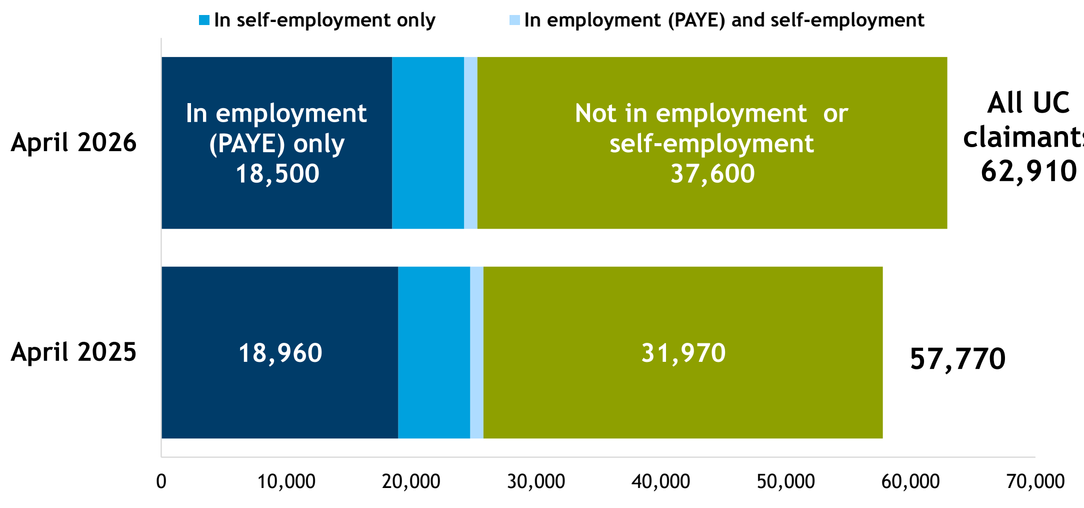
Conditionality group	Claimant conditions
No work requirements	Not expected to work at present. Health or caring responsibility prevents claimant from working or preparing for work.

Employment indicator (see note 2)

In April 2026, 40.2% of UC claimants (25,300 people) in East Sussex were in employment. The proportion is down from 44.7% in April 2025, and the number has declined by 1.9% over the year, compared to an overall increase of 8.9% in UC claimants. Of these 25,300 employed people, 5,740 were self-employed and a further 1,080 had been employed as both employees and self-employed during the assessment period, meaning that nearly 11% of UC claimants were in some form of self-employment, and more than a quarter of working claimants.

This data uses the employment indicator which shows whether someone received any earnings within the whole UC assessment period, as opposed to the conditionality data seen above which indicates the employment status of the individual on the count date. From May 2026, DWP have published data which indicates whether a claimant is an employee, self-employed, or some combination of the two employment statuses

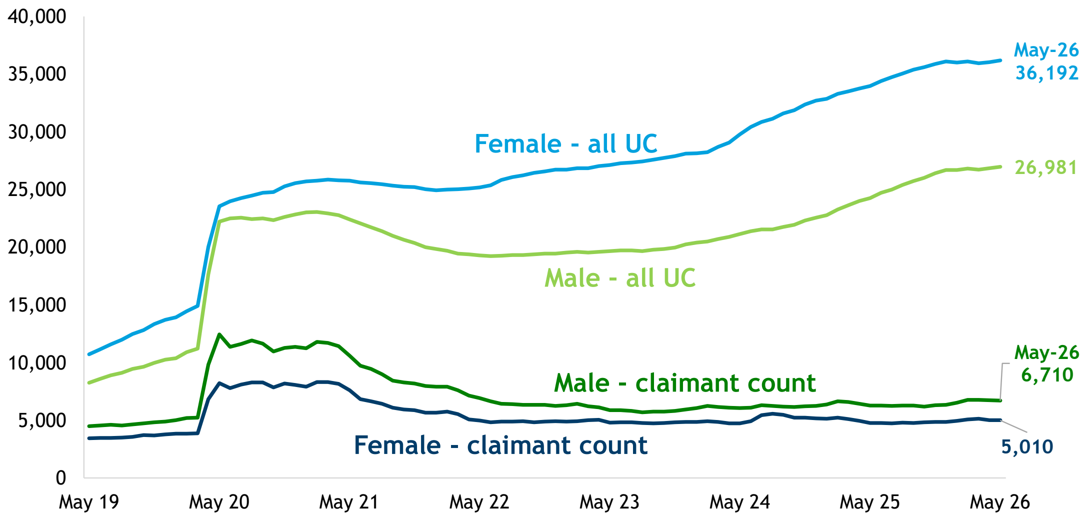
Figure 3: Employment indicator of Universal Credit with employment status detail in East Sussex - April 2025 and 2026



Universal Credit claimants by sex

In May 2026, there were 36,190 UC female UC claimants, 57.3% of all UC claimants. This compares to 42.8% of unemployed UC/JSA claimants who were female (see chart below). The percentage of UC claimants who are female is highest in Wealden (61%) and lowest in Eastbourne (55%) and Hastings (56%). 61% of rural UC claimants are female (5,060 claimants of a total of 8,320). (see note 3 for information about claimant count)

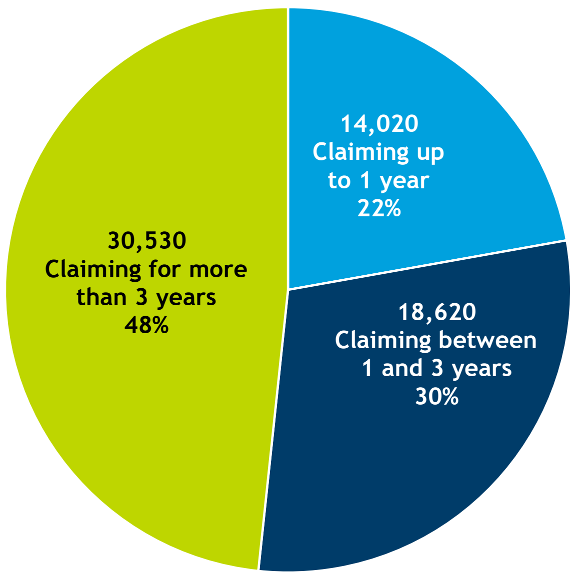
Figure 4: Male and female claimants of Universal Credit and UC/JSA unemployed claimant count, May 2019-2026, East Sussex



Duration of claim

In May 2026, just under half (48.3%, 30,530 people) of all UC claimants had been receiving the benefit for at least 3 years (compared to 45.1% in England as a whole, and more than three quarters of UC claimants (77.8% or 49,150 claimants) have been claiming the benefit for over 1 year, similar to the proportion in England (77.1%).

Figure 5: Universal Credit claimants by duration in May 2026, East Sussex



Households on Universal Credit

In East Sussex in May 2026 there were 54,060 households on UC. 53.2% of these UC claimants are single people with no children. 42.3% are families with children (22,870 households) of whom 71% are single parents. The proportion of claimant households with children has declined from 46.7% to 42.3% since May 2025 as increasing number of single people with sickness or disability have been migrated from Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

Only 17% of UC claimant households are couples (9,120), and three quarters of claiming couple households (6,710 or 74% of claiming couple households) have children. The number of single claimants without children rose by 4,460 claimants (18.3%) in the year to May 2026 and childless couples claiming UC also increased sharply (up 310 or 14.6%). This compares to a rise in the number of single parents of just 0.3% (50 families) over the year and a decline in the number of claimant couples with children (down by 320, -4.5%).

Figure 6: UC households in East Sussex, May 2025 and May 2026, by family type

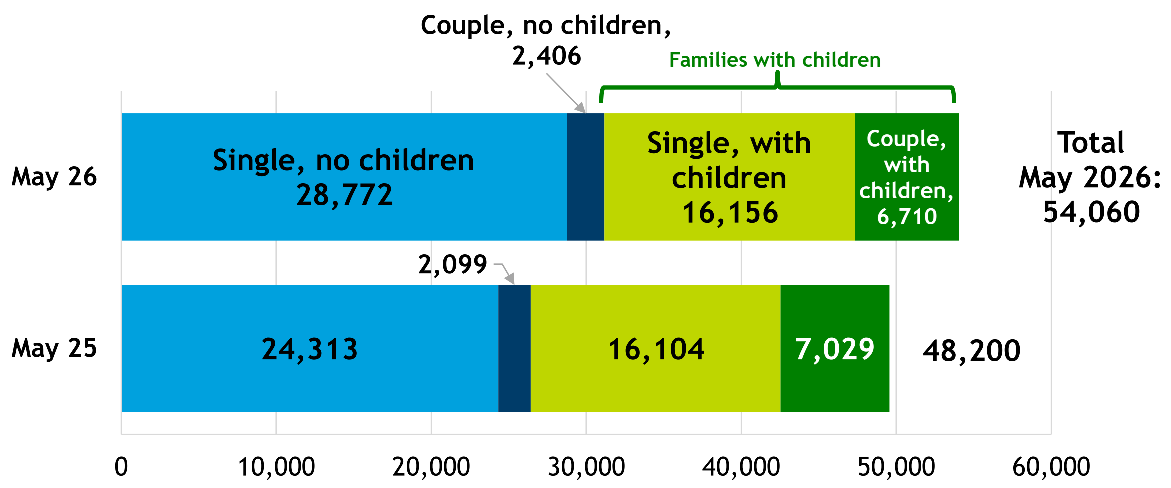


Table 4: Households on Universal Credit by family type, East Sussex, May 2026

Household type	UC households in May 2026	Percentage of all UC households
Single, no children	28,770	53.2%
Couple, no children	2,410	4.5%
Single, with children	16,160	29.9%
Couple, with children	6,710	12.4%
All UC households without children	31,180	57.7%
All UC households with children	22,870	42.3%
All households claiming UC	**54,060**	**100.0%**
All UC claimants	**63,170**	

Benefits paid to families with children

According to the DWP's Children in Low-income families data, in 2024/25, 29,640 children in East Sussex were living in relative low-income families, after housing costs. 75% of these children were in working families, with only 25% (7,300) in out-of-work families (due to unemployment or sickness/disability).

Households with children on Universal Credit

In May 2026, there were 22,870 households with children claiming Universal Credit (UC), 1.2% fewer than in May 2025. The total number of children in families receiving UC (assuming that in families with more than 5 children there are only 5 children) has also fallen slightly faster, from 43,700 in May 2025 to 43,130 in May 2026 (down 1.3%). This means that not all children living in UC families are necessarily classed as living in "Relative low-income families".

Tax credits have now ended and the last remaining families have been migrated to UC. UC has considerably more intensive work-search requirements for working families in low income compared to the Tax Credit regime, so some of those families who have been invited to claim UC have not done so. Around two-thirds (64%) of the 6,250 families who had an open Tax Credit claim and were invited to claim UC actually made a claim.

Disabled Children

Children aged 0-16 years cannot claim Personal Independence Payments (PIP) but still make claims for Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

In November 2025 there were 9,130 children aged 0 to 15 years claiming DLA in East Sussex, 17% more than in November 2024. Of these children, 59% were claiming due to a Neurological or cognitive condition, with the vast majority of these claims for Learning difficulties (56% of all DLA claims by children). This compares to England where 44% were claiming because of Learning Difficulties. 32% in East Sussex were claiming due to a Mental Health or behavioural disorder, compared to 41% nationally in November 2025. The vast majority of child claimants in this group were classified as having a Behavioural disorder, both locally and nationally.

Figure 7: Under 16 DLA claimants in East Sussex by broad condition groups - November 2024 and November 2025

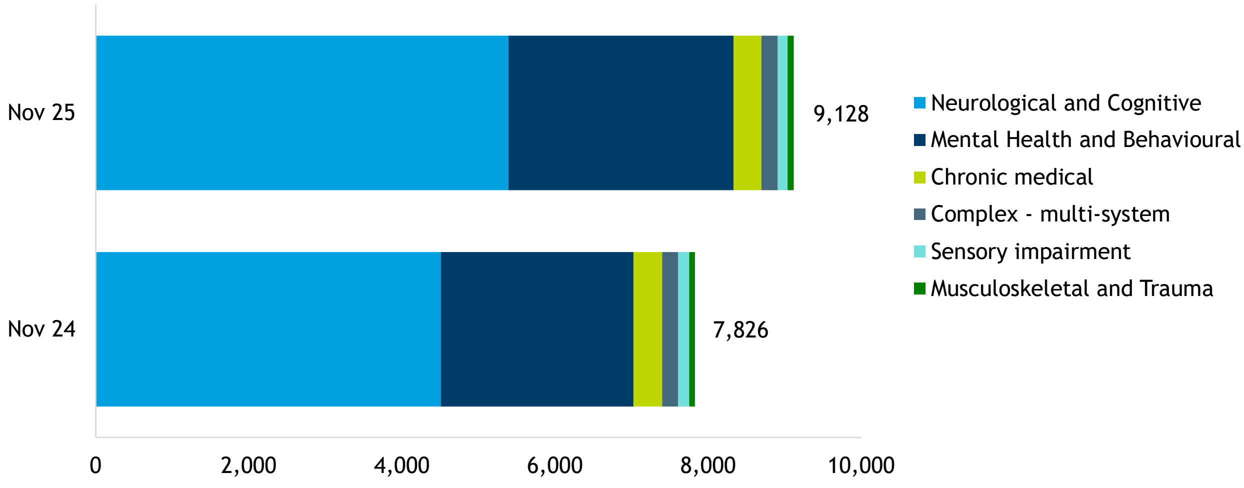
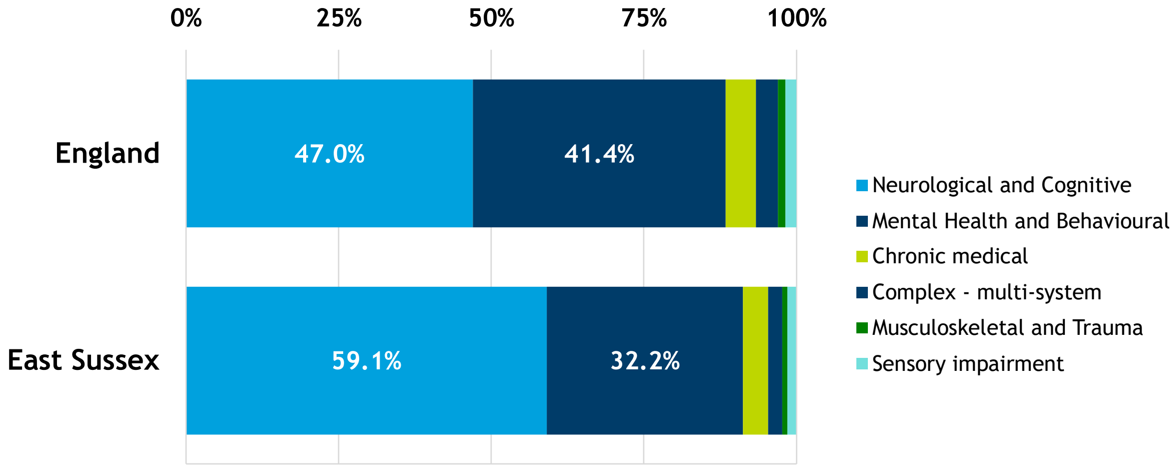


Figure 8: Percentage of under 16 DLA claimants by broad condition groups - East Sussex and England, November 2025



Working age people

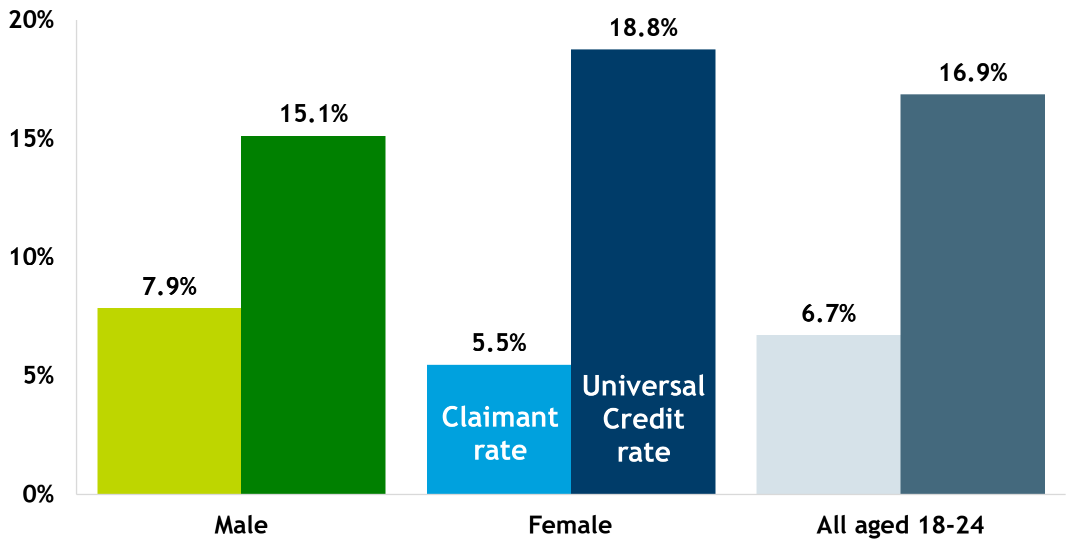
Young people aged 18 to 24

A recent report on young people who are not in the labour market, told us that at the end of 2025, around 957,000 young people aged 16-24 in the UK were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). Data for this age group is not available for the county or district, but the figures were 839,900 (13.3% of this age group) in England and 109,200 (11.5%) in the South East region. We can estimate therefore that around one in eight young adults in East Sussex are likely to be NEET, which would be around 5,900 people aged 16-24.

Data on the number and percentage of 16 and 17 year olds who are NEET can be found on East Sussex in figures in the Data Explorer.

Because most young people aged 16-17 are still in compulsory education, this analysis will focus on those aged 18-24.

Figure 9: Percentage of young adults aged 18-24 who are claiming Universal Credit and UC/JSA because of unemployment in East Sussex in May 2026



In July 2026 there were 2,265 young adults claiming JSA or UC because they were unemployed and actively seeking work, 6.7% of the age group. This compares with 5.8% nationally. Hastings has the highest proportion of young people claiming with 10.0%, but the rate is also high in Eastbourne (7.8%). Young males are more likely to be claiming because they were unemployed, 7.6% in East Sussex, 11.9% in Hastings and 9.3% in Eastbourne, compared to just 6.9% of young men claiming because of unemployment in England as a whole.

In May 2026 there were 5,775 young adults claiming Universal Credit in East Sussex, 17.0% of the population aged 18-24. This is higher than the 13.7% of young adults claiming UC nationally, and a much higher rate than the South East (11.7%). In Hastings 26.5% of young adults are claiming UC. Females are more likely to be claiming UC – 18.8% of young women are claiming in East Sussex (compared to 14.3% nationally), and 29.2% of young women in Hastings.

When looking at the conditionality regime of UC, young people are much more likely to be in the Searching for Work conditionality group than other ages. In May 2026, 39% of young UC claimants aged 18-24 are in this group, compared to 38% who have no work seeking requirements, and 15% who are in work (with- or without-requirements). This compares to 16% of middle-aged claimants of UC aged 25-49, and 14% of those aged 50 and over who are searching for work.

Half of all young male UC claimants (50%) were claiming because they were searching for work in May 2026. This compares to 29% of young women aged 18-24 in this group.

Of the 5,775 young people aged 18-24 claiming UC in May 2026, 52% of claimants are female. 2,000 young people were claiming UC because of a health need, 53% (1,050) of whom were female. However 63% of 2,680 young people in the No Work Requirements/ Planning for work/ Preparing for work group are female (1,680), which implies that around

37% of all young women who are claiming in the No work requirements/planning/preparing conditionality group have caring responsibilities, compared to just 6% of young males.

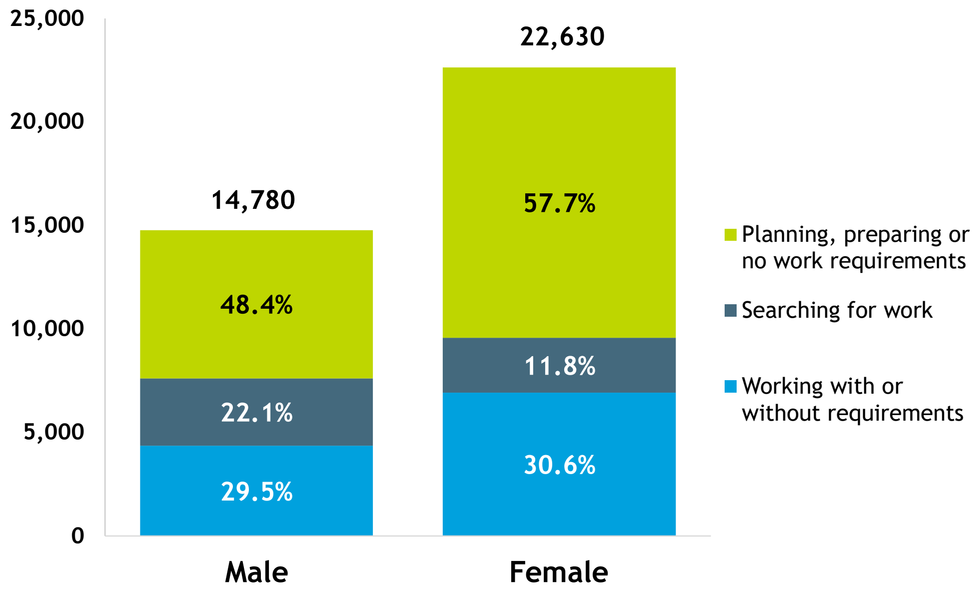
In November 2025, there were a total of 7,350 people aged 18-24 claiming at least one DWP benefit, and 1,740 of these were not on UC.

Claimants aged 25 to 49

In May 2026 there were 37,410 working aged people in the 25-49 age group who were claiming Universal Credit, 4.1% more than a year previously. This compares to an increase of 8.4% among all claimants suggesting claimant numbers among this group are growing more slowly than all claimant numbers.

In East Sussex in May 2026, nearly a quarter of all people in this middle working age group were claiming UC (24.4%), rising to around a third of all middle working aged people in Hastings (32.2%). This compares to 22.5% nationally, although when looking at the rate of this age group claiming UC and JSA because people are searching for work, the rate in the county (4.1%) is slightly lower than in England as a whole (4.3% of people aged 25-49).

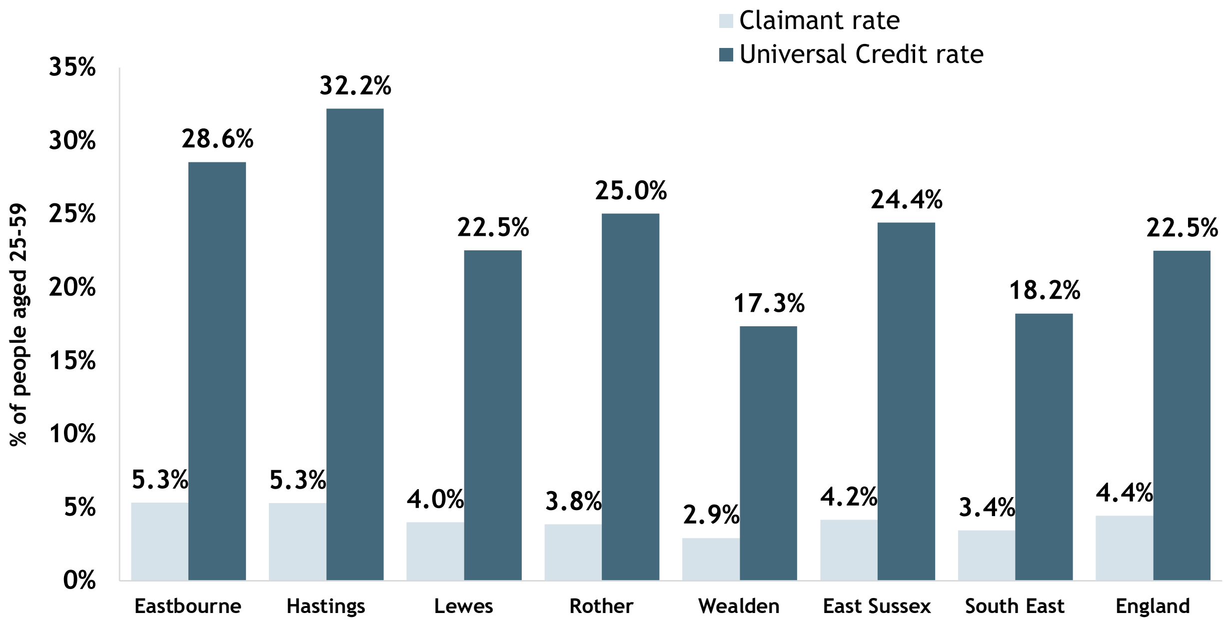
Figure 10: Claimants of UC aged 25-49 by sex and broad conditionality group, East Sussex, May 2026



More than half of UC claimants (54.0%) in this age group in East Sussex (May 2026) are claiming because they are not currently able to work, because of sickness, disability, or caring responsibilities, including those who are planning or preparing for work - 57.7% of female claimants (13,060) and 48.4% of male claimants (7,150 claimants).

30.2% of UC claimants in the county aged 25 to 49 are in work (with- or without additional work-seeking requirements), and the remaining 15.8% are searching for work. But when we look at men and women, while 29.5% of male UC claimants are in work (4,360), 30.6% of middle-aged female claimants are (6,930 claimants), compared to 22.1% of male claimants who are searching for work and 11.7% of female claimants in May 2026.

Figure 11: Claimant rates for Unemployed UC/JSA and all UC claimants among people aged 25-49 – East Sussex, districts and comparators (May 2026)



If we look at all DWP benefits, there were 41,300 people in the 25-49 age group in East Sussex who were in receipt of at least one benefit, 27.1% of this age group, in November 2025. This is higher than the national rate (25.0%). 17.3% of people in this middle working age group were claiming because they were not working, and a further 9.8% were claiming and also in work. More than a third (35.1%) of people in this age group were claiming in Hastings, and 30.9% in Eastbourne. In rural areas of East Sussex, 18.1% of people aged 25-49 were in receipt of at least one DWP benefit.

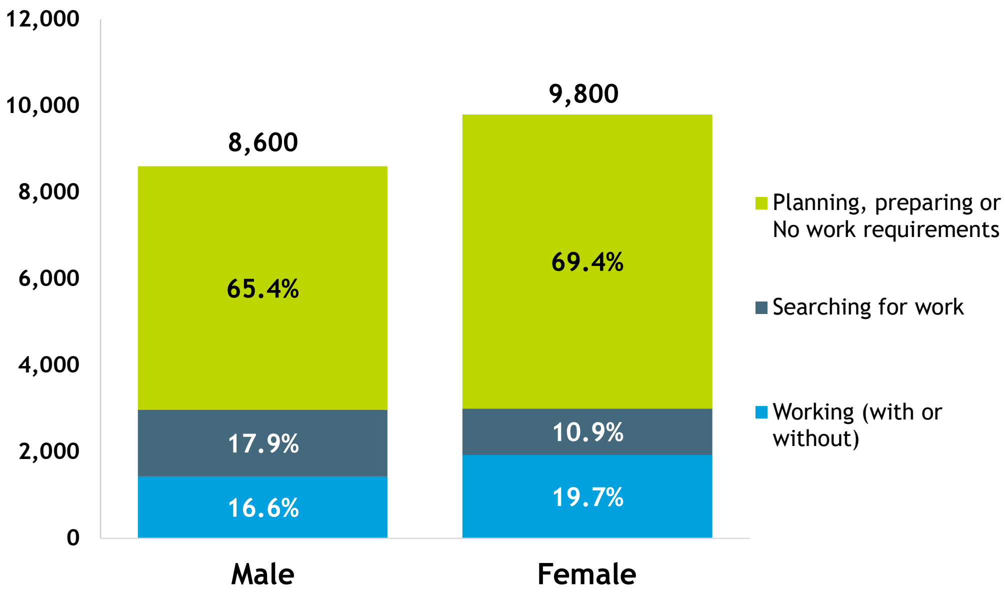
Claimants aged 50 to 65

In May 2026 there were 18,410 older working aged people in the 50+ age group who were claiming Universal Credit, 18% more than a year previously. This compares to an increase of 8.4% among all claimants suggesting claimant numbers among this group are growing faster than other age groups. This is probably due to the migration of claimants from other benefits – there has been a 32.6% increase in the number of UC claimants aged 50+ in the "No work requirements" conditionality group over the year, compared to 17.1% more people aged 25 to 49 and just 4.7% more young people aged 18 to 24 in this conditionality group.

The rate of claiming UC is lower among this age group than younger people – in May 2026 14.3% of people aged 50-65, were claiming compared to 24.4% of people aged 25-49 and 16.9% of people aged 18-24.

Two-thirds of older working age claimants (67.5%) are in the Planning, Preparing or No work requirements groups, compared to just over half (54.0%) of people aged 25-49 and 46.4% of the 18-24 age group in May 2026.

Figure 12: Claimants of UC aged 50-65 by sex and broad conditionality group, East Sussex, May 2026



Looking at sex, in May 2026, 53.3% of older UC claimants were female, compared to 60.5% of claimants aged 25-49, but only 52.2% of younger claimants aged 18-24.

Once again Hastings and Eastbourne have much higher claimant rates for UC among this age group, with 22.7% of the 50-65 age group claiming in Hastings, and 19.4% in Eastbourne in May 2026.

In November 2025, 24,390 people age 50-65 were claiming at least one DWP benefit, 19.0% of the population in this age group. 63% of these people were on an out-of-work benefit.

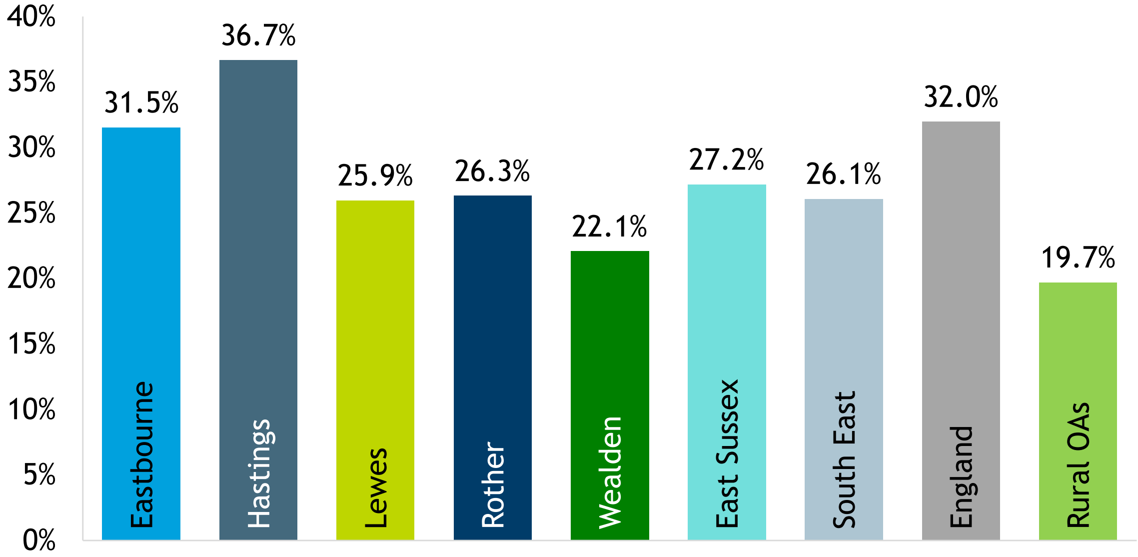
Pension age group

In East Sussex there were 142,710 claimants of Pension Age (PA: 66 years and over) in November 2025. Around three quarters of all Pension age claimants (72% or 102,350 people) are claiming State Pension only, while 40,370 are claiming at least one other benefit, which includes Pension Credit, Disability benefits (Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Attendance Allowance (AA) and Industrial Injuries Disability Benefit (IIDB)), Housing Benefit, and Carers allowance (CA).

In November 2025, 28% of claimants aged 66+ received at least one additional benefit in addition to their State Pension. The highest rates of claiming additional pensioner benefits were found in Hastings (37%) and Eastbourne (32%, equal to the national rate). But even Wealden 22% of pension aged people are claiming an additional benefit on top of their state pension. Even in Rural areas, 20% of pensioners are also claiming additional benefits.

28,640, 20% of PA claimants are on at least one disability related benefit. Note that most of these disability benefits are not means-tested. DLA/PIP claimants have to have made their claim before age 65 in order to receive the benefit after they reach age 66. Disabled older claimants can apply for Attendance Allowance for help with daily activities.

Figure 13: Proportion of pensioners receiving other benefits in addition to any state pension, November 2025



Note that in this chart and throughout this briefing, data for output areas which are located in Output Areas (OAs) classified as "Rural" in the ONS' latest Rural/Urban classification have been aggregated and labelled as Rural areas or "Rural OAs" in the chart above.

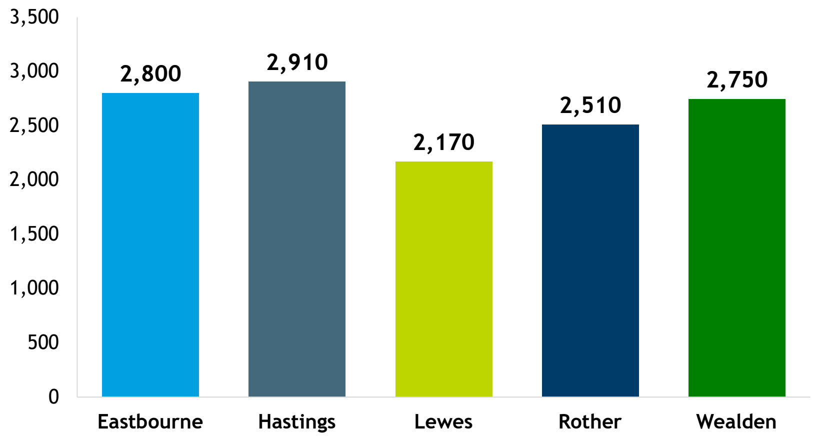
There are 1,140 PA claimants in East Sussex who receive no state pension (but get other benefits including Pension Credit).

Pension Credit

Pension Credit gives claimants extra money to help with living costs if they are over State Pension age and on a low income. Pension Credit can also help with housing costs such as ground rent or service charges and might mean extra help if they are a carer, severely disabled, or responsible for a child or young person. A person can get Pension Credit even if they have other income, a pension, savings or own their own home.

There were 13,130 PC claimants in East Sussex in November 2025, which was 9.1% of all people aged 66 and over. 71% of PC claimants are aged over 75, and two thirds of all PC claimants are women. Hastings has the highest rate of PC claimants – 15.9% of people aged 66+ are claiming pension credit.

Figure 14: Number of claimants of Pension Credit in November 2025



The wards with the highest rates of people claiming Pension Credit are located in Hastings, with 6 out of the top 10 wards for PC claimant rates located there:

Figure 15: 10 wards in East Sussex with the highest claimant rates for Pension Credit in November 2025

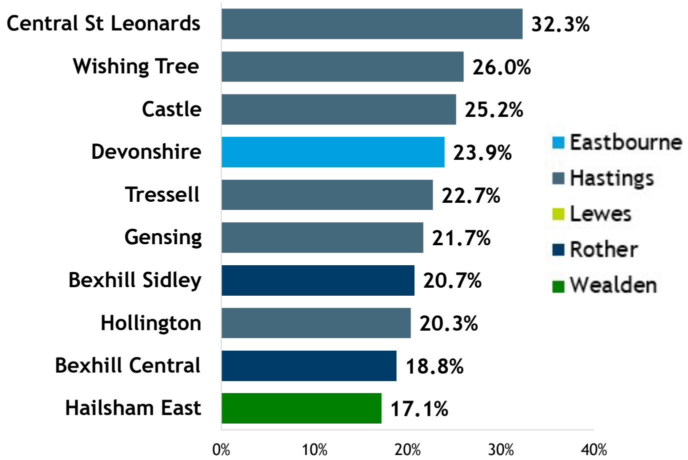
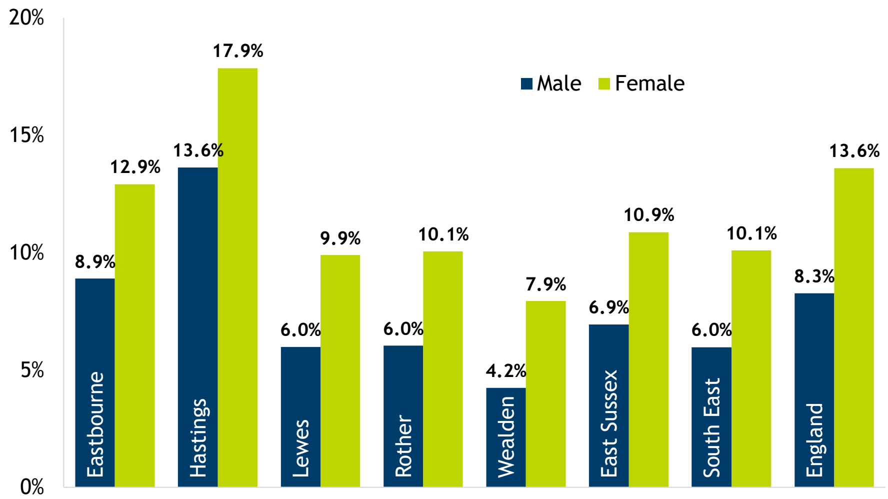


Figure 16: Pension Credit claimant rate by sex, districts and comparators, November 2025



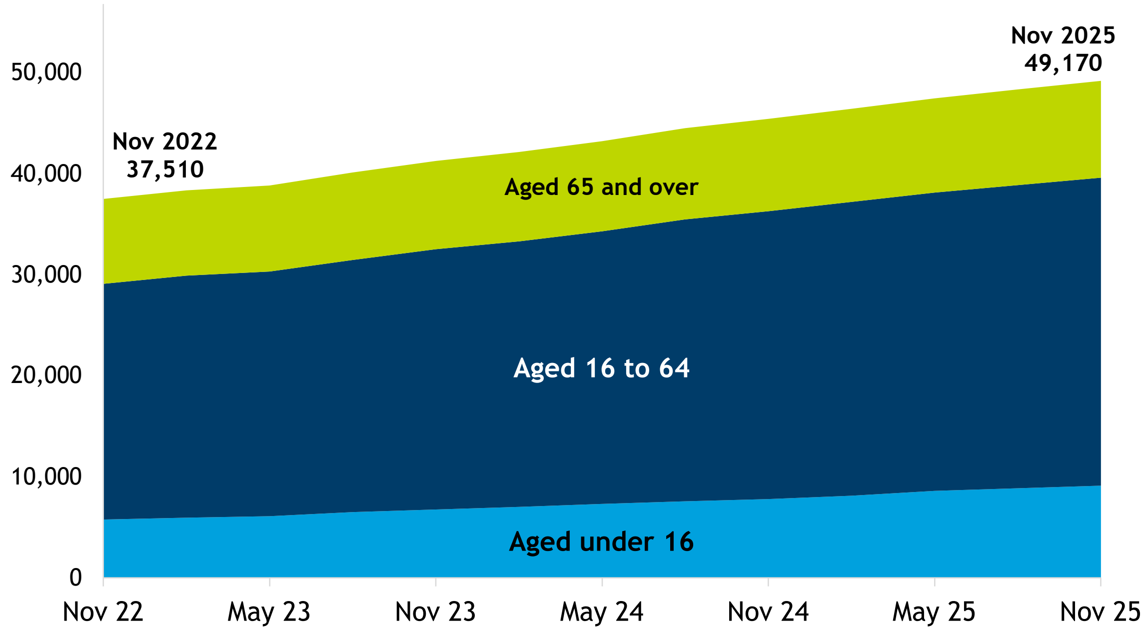
State Pension

In November 2025 there were 141,740 people in the county claiming their State Pension. 70% are paid the pre-2016 type pension, and 30% are paid New State Pension which was introduced in 2016. 26% of people do not receive the full amount of State Pension, but only 1% receive less that 50% of the basic amount. People who receive a lower amount of State Pension can apply for Pension Credit if they do not have sufficient other sources of income.

Disability benefits

DLA and PIP claimants

Figure 17: DLA and PIP claimants in East Sussex by age, November 2022 to November 2025



In November 2025 there were 49,170 claimants of the main non-means-tested disability benefits, Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP), which is slowly replacing DLA for claimants aged 16 and over. There were 30,470 working aged people (aged 16-64) claiming DLA or PIP.

The number of DLA and PIP claimants has continued to rise at a steady rate over the last 3 years and in November 2025 was 8.2% higher than the previous year. But while there was a 7.0% increase among those aged 16-64, the number of claimants who were under 16 rose by 16.6% in the year to November 2025, and those aged 65+ increased by 5.0%.

Rates of claiming DLA and PIP among working age people (aged 16-64) are higher in East Sussex than in England as a whole. In November 2025, 9.5% of working age people (30,470) in the county were claiming DLA/PIP, compared to 8.2% nationally, and in Hastings, 13.0% of working age people receive DLA or PIP.

Table 5: DLA and PIP claimants in November 2025

	Total DLA/PIP claimants	Working age DLA/PIP claimants	% of working age claiming DLA/PIP
Eastbourne	10,410	6,590	10.8%
Hastings	11,140	7,290	13.0%
Lewes	8,600	5,280	9.1%
Rother	8,440	5,100	10.1%
Wealden	10,580	6,210	6.6%
East Sussex	**49,170**	**30,470**	**9.5%**
South East	662,140	406,560	6.8%
England	4,897,350	3,056,800	8.2%

Ages and sex

Claimant rates are now highest among the youngest age group. In November 2025, more than one in ten children aged 0 to 15 (10.2% or 9,130 children) in East Sussex were in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA – children do not claim PIP if they have a disability). This compares to 9.5% of working aged people (aged 16 to 64 – 30,470 people) and 6.3% of older people (aged 65 and over – 9,580 people) who are in receipt of DLA and PIP (combined).

The number of children who are claiming DLA in the county rose by 16.6% over the year to November 2025, compared to a rise of 7.0% among working aged people and an increase of 5.0% among older people. In England as whole, there was a 14.8% rise among children.

Overall DLA/PIP claims are fairly evenly split between the sexes, with 48.4% of all DLA/PIP being male in the county in November 2025. However among children, nearly two-thirds of claims were boys (64.1%), compared to older age groups – 45.7% of working aged people and 41.8% of older claimants were male.

Disabling conditions

People claim DLA and PIP for a variety of conditions. (see notes for details of how conditions have been classified to make them comparable with the two benefit types). Among all age groups, Mental Health and Behavioural disorders make up the largest proportion of claimants (35.2%) in November 2025, with Musculoskeletal and Trauma conditions making up the next largest group (24.8%) and Neurological and Cognitive disorders making up the third largest group (23.9%). However, there are big differences among the age groups.

Among children aged 0-15 years, 59.1% of DLA claimants are claiming for Neurological and Cognitive conditions, the vast majority of whom are classified as having learning difficulties, a further 32.2% are classified as having Mental Health and Behavioural disorders. However when we look at older claimants of both benefits (DLA and PIP) 43.6% of working aged people are claiming because of Mental Health and Behavioural disorders, 24.5% because of Musculoskeletal and Trauma conditions, and just 16.0% because of

Neurological and Cognitive conditions, with a further 13.2% with a Chronic medical condition. The pattern is very different among pension-age claimants, with 48.4% claiming because of Musculoskeletal and Trauma conditions and a further 19.1% claiming for Chronic medical conditions, 15.9% with Neurological and Cognitive conditions and only 11.6% with Mental Health and Behavioural disorders.

Figure 18: DLA/PIP claimants by broad condition and age, November 2025

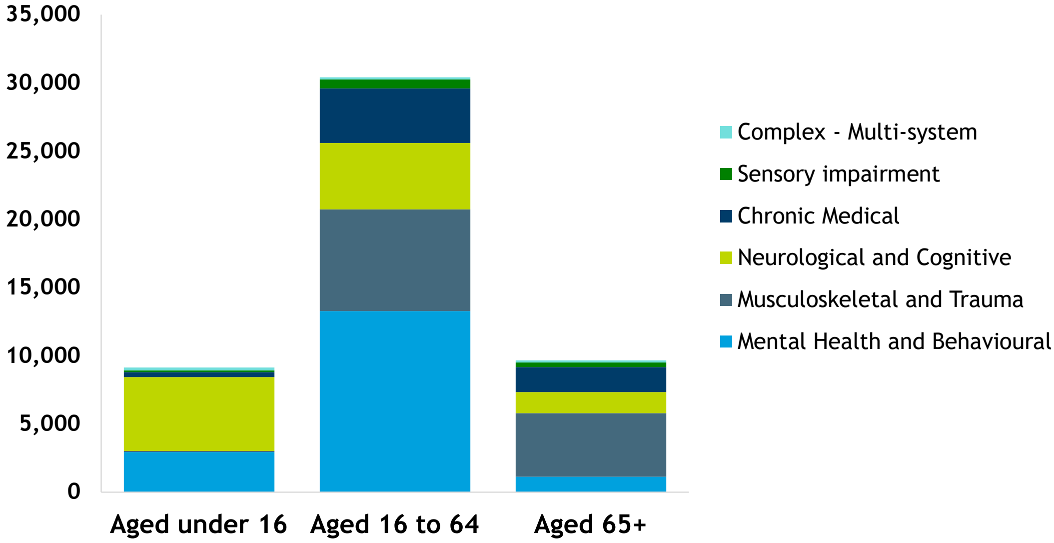
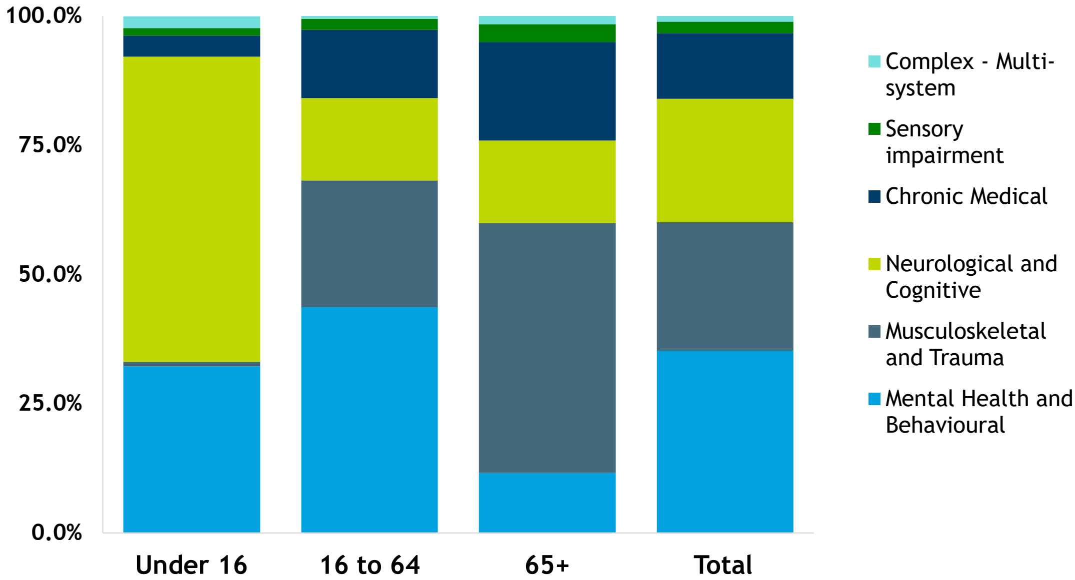


Figure 19: Proportion of DLA/PIP claimants by broad condition and age, November 2025



Other benefits claimed by people with health conditions

Many people with health conditions claim Universal Credit, either in addition to other benefits such as DLA/PIP or on its own because of a health condition. In addition, most people who were too sick to work and were claiming income-based Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) have now been migrated to Universal Credit. Some claimants of

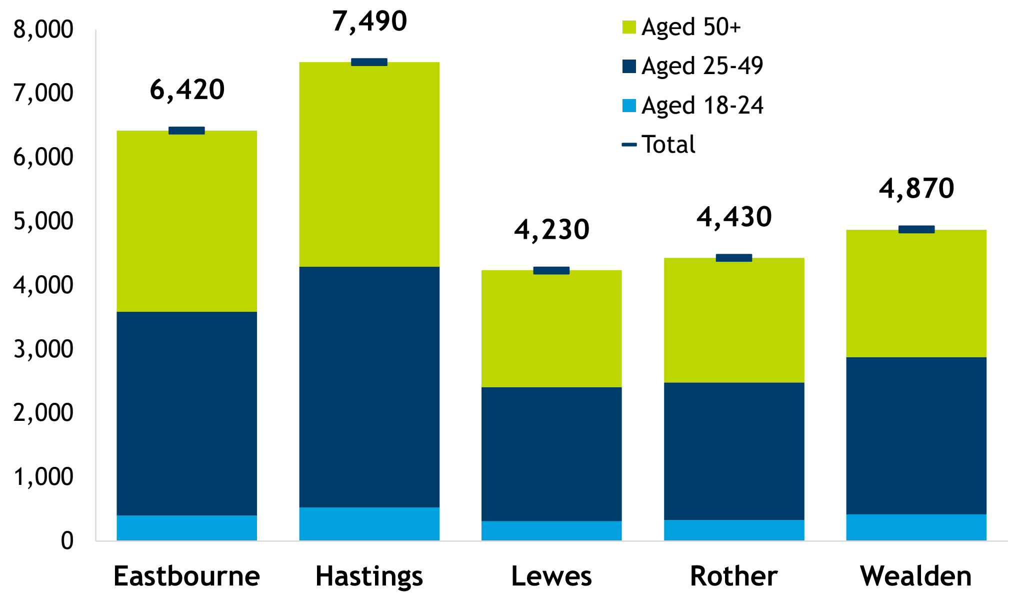
ESA receive contributions-based ESA, which is not subject to migration to UC and continues to be claimed by people who do not qualify for UC because they (or their partner) have other income or savings above the threshold.

UC claimants for health reasons will be measured by the “UC Health caseload” data published by DWP. In November 2025, 26,560 people in East Sussex were included in the UC health caseload, 44% of all UC claimants in November 2025. An additional 6,840 people were still claiming ESA (690 of these people receive NI credits only) in November 2025 (the latest data available) almost all of whom are on contributions-based ESA. This means that a total of 33,400 working aged people in the county were receiving other benefits due to sickness or disability either on their own or in addition to DLA/PIP discussed above.

By March 2026, the UC health caseload in the county had increased to 27,420.

When looking at age groups, in March 2026, while 45% of UC claimants were claiming for health reasons, only 35% of 18-24 year old claimants and 37% of 24-49s were claiming for these reasons while 65% of older UC claimants aged 50 and over were claiming for health reasons.

Figure 20: UC health caseload by age, districts of East Sussex, March 2026



Housing support

Claimants can receive payments to help with rent, either directly through their Universal Credit (UC), or in the form of Housing Benefit (HB).

Housing Benefit

The migration of working age claimants of HB to UC is now more or less complete, but there were still 2,530 working-age households claiming HB in March 2026 in East Sussex, of whom 91% were in social rented housing.

Older people may continue to claim HB to help them with their rent, and there are now 9,720 people aged 65 and over currently in receipt of HB in the county, including 6,090 households who are social tenants (63%) and 3,630 claimants who are private tenants. 37% of those older private tenants receive an amount of benefit that is less than the rent they pay (2,130 people)

Universal Credit housing entitlement

In May 2026 there were 54,060 households on Universal Credit (UC). While 38% of households did not claim any support for their housing (either because they are owner-occupiers or are not paying rent to a landlord), 35% were getting help with a social rent, and 24% were getting help for their private rent payments.

Private rented housing payments are based on the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), and this means that many claimants receive less in housing allowance than they pay in rent. Out of 17,460 households who are private tenants, 9,840 (56%) receive Local Housing Allowance which does not cover the rent they pay, in May 2026.

There were 14,840 households receiving support with their Social housing payments, of whom 1,990 households (13%) received less support than the social rent they pay because of spare room subsidy rules, sometimes known as “bedroom tax”.

This means that there are 11,830 households on UC who have to use some of the benefit they receive which is intended to support their family to pay for their housing.

Benefit cap

In addition to restrictions to rent received by some households, other households are subject to the Benefit Cap. The benefit cap is a limit on the total amount of benefit a household can get. It applies to most working aged households, except for those with a disabled member, and those who are earning at least £881 per month. Outside London, capped households can receive a maximum of 1,835 per calendar month (£22,020 a year) in benefit.

In East Sussex, 950 households were subject to the Benefit Cap in February 2026, 830 of whom were families with children.

Conclusion

Overall, welfare dependency in East Sussex continues to rise, but the evidence suggests this is driven less by unemployment and increasingly by disability, long-term health conditions, caring responsibilities and the migration of claimants from legacy benefits. These trends have important implications for health, social care, housing, financial inclusion and child poverty services across the county.

Further information and notes

This briefing analyses a variety of different benefits data, which is released by DWP for different time periods. UC/JSA claimant count data is published on a monthly basis with data for the previous month, and the most recent data available is for July 2026. Universal Credit (UC) data about people and households is now published quarterly, with data up to the previous quarter. The latest UC data available for this briefing was published in August 2026 with data for May 2026. From September 2026 onwards, all other benefits data will be published annually. The data in this briefing was mostly published in May 2026, some of this was for November 2025 (e.g. Benefit combinations, Employment and Support Allowance(ESA)). Where possible we have tried to ensure that we use the same time period to compare different groups of claimants (for example Sick/disabled claimants of UC and ESA). Please take care to ensure you understand that the data reflects how the situation was at that time period.

Note 1 – Universal Credit

Universal Credit (UC) has replaced six benefits ("legacy benefits"): Income-based Jobseekers Allowance (JSA); income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA); Income Support (IS); Housing Benefit (HB); Working Tax Credit (WTC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC). Universal Credit is for people of working age who are on low incomes whether or not they work. All new income-related benefit claimants of working age now claim UC, and claimants of legacy benefits have now been migrated to UC.

Detailed Universal Credit data ages, sex, duration and small areas is available on ESiF.

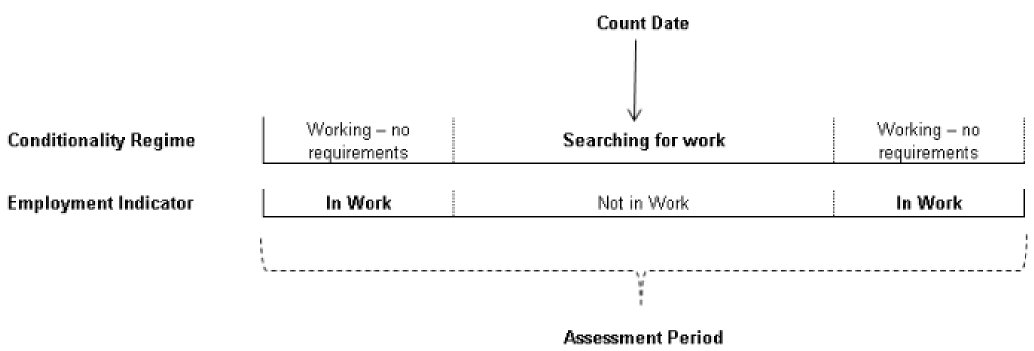
Note 2 – Employment Indicator

The Employment Indicator for Universal Credit shows whether earnings were recorded within an individual's completed UC assessment period closest to the count date. At the time of writing this briefing Employment detail was not yet available for May 2026.

The Conditionality Regime is based on an individual's circumstances on the count date.

It is therefore possible for an individual to be 'In Work' using one measure and 'Not in Work' using the other as shown in the example below. Care should be taken when interpreting any tables created by cross-tabulating these two variables.

This diagram shows how the two measures are related.



Note 3 – UC/JSA Claimant Count

The Claimant Count measures the number of people who have made claims for benefits (either JSA or UC) for reasons of unemployment. Most new claimants for benefit are covered by Universal Credit, but there are some claimants who do not qualify for UC because they have savings of over £16,000 or because they have a partner who has income, but may be entitled to contributions-based JSA which is not means-tested.

All new claimants of means-tested benefits claim UC rather than the legacy benefits (JSA, Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support, Housing Benefits and Tax Credits). People claiming non-means tested benefits such as contributions-based JSA and ESA, are still able to apply for and claim some of these benefits.

To qualify for JSA or UC as a job seeker, claimants must meet certain eligibility criteria which include being available for and actively seeking work, although they may work less than 16 hours per week and still be eligible if their earnings are very low. The count of JSA claimants includes those claiming only National Insurance credits.

The Claimant rate is defined as the number of claimants resident in an area expressed as a percentage of the working age population resident in that area which includes all people aged 16-64. Rates for different age groups use the population of that age group. Population figures are derived from the latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) mid-year population estimates, which are currently available for 2025 for the county and districts, and 2024 for wards.

The Claimant Count is often used as an indicative measure of unemployment as it provides frequently updated information for a range of geographies. Care should be taken not to confuse this with ONS' official labour market statistics which use the International Labour Organisation's definition of the unemployment rate, which includes all those aged 16 plus who are out-of-work, but actively seeking work, including those claiming no benefits, as a percentage of all Economically Active people aged 16 and over.

More detailed claimant count data is available on ESiF.

Note 4 – Benefit combinations

The aim of the DWP's Benefit Combinations dataset is to look at the whole, combined picture for all DWP benefit claimants. Some people who claim benefits receive more than one type (for example DLA, IB and HB) depending on when they claimed and the reason for their claim, so combining individual claimant counts for different benefits may count the same claimant more than once. The Benefit Combinations data has been published by DWP to provide statistics on the number of individuals claiming a DWP benefit in total (i.e., counting each individual claimant only once within the data). The data is available from DWP's StatXplore website, and profiles using some of this data are available on ESiF.

Claimants who are 'out-of-work ' in the Benefit Combinations dataset include all those claimants who are claiming and not in work (or searching for work), which includes all people claiming Universal Credit who are not in work (with or without work-seeking requirements), including those who are searching for work, those who have no work requirements, and those who are planning for or preparing for work. It also includes contributions-based JSA, ESA and IB claimants.

For household level benefits (UC, PC and HB), both the main claimant and partner (if applicable) are included in the statistics as separate individuals. This differs from publication elsewhere of PC and HB statistics where figures show number of claims regardless of whether for a single person or a couple. HMRC administered benefits such as Tax Credits and Child Benefit are not included in the statistics, but households who received Tax Credits have now all been migrated Universal Credit.

Figures in the benefit combinations data are affected by the introduction of Universal Credit (UC). The main changes have been:

- increasing number of individuals claiming UC with corresponding decreasing number of individuals claiming JSA, ESA, IS and HB.
- increasing number of individuals claiming UC who would previously have claimed Working Tax Credit and/or Child Tax Credit and who would not have appeared in these statistics until their UC claim began.

Definitions

A DWP benefit claimant is defined for the purposes of the Benefit Combinations statistics as the individual who is claiming benefit on their own behalf, or in the case of Universal Credit, Pension Credit and Housing Benefit, an individual who is part of a single or couple claim for benefit. An individual is not counted as a benefit claimant if they are a beneficiary of another person's benefit claim but are not claiming any benefit in their own right.

DLA/PIP/AA

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is a non-means tested benefit for disabled people who need assistance with personal care or mobility. From 2013 DWP started to replace DLA for working age people with Personal Independence Payment (PIP), and all new claims by working age people are now made to PIP rather than DLA, while existing DLA claimants are invited to claim PIP. However, people can continue to receive PIP or DLA after reaching state pension age if they continue to satisfy the entitlement conditions.

DLA is still claimed by disabled children under the age of 16, but they are expected to apply for PIP when they reach 16 years.

Attendance Allowance (AA) is a benefit for people at state pension age or over who are so severely disabled that they need a great deal of help with personal care or supervision. Essentially these three benefits each offer help for similar sets of circumstances, although under slightly different qualifying conditions. As such they have been banded together and the benefit combinations statistics simply show PIP/DLA for Working Age individuals, or PIP/DLA/AA for State Pension Age individuals, where the individual could be on any of the benefits shown at the reference date.

In this briefing we have mostly combined data for DLA and PIP, including grouping the main disabling conditions into broad groups in order to examine the kinds of conditions and disabilities people have.

Incapacity Benefits

ESA/IB/SDA/IS(IB) are benefits paid to people who are too sick or disabled to work. Incapacity Benefit (IB), Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) (for those under pension age), and Income Support for those claiming on the basis of incapacity (IS(IB)) closed to new claimants from 2008, with existing claimants migrated to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) on a rolling program since that date. Essentially these four benefits each offer help for similar sets of circumstances, although under slightly different qualifying conditions. As such they have been banded together where at the reference date the individual could be on any of ESA; IB and/or SDA (separately or in combination); and IS where IB and/or SDA is also in payment.

ESA can be contributions-based (see JSA below) or income-based, but income-based benefit has now been replaced by Universal Credit, with managed migration to UC for all ESA claimants planned for completion by end 2026.

Pension Credit (PC)

Pension Credit (PC) gives claimants extra money to help with living costs if they are over State Pension age and on a low income. Pension Credit can also help with housing costs such as ground rent or service charges and might allow a claimant to get extra help if they are a carer, severely disabled, or responsible for a child or young person. A person can get Pension Credit even if they have other income, a pension, savings or own their own home. Some partners of PC maybe under age 65 and are included in the Benefit Combinations data.

Housing Benefit (HB)

HB is a benefit paid to help people pay their rent if they are unemployed, on a low income or claiming benefits. HB for working age people is being replaced by Universal Credit, but may still be claimed by people who are aged 65 and over.

Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)

JSA is a working age benefit for people who are not in full-time employment (work less than 16 hours per week) and are available for, and actively seeking, work. Income-based JSA has been replaced by Universal Credit (UC), but contribution-based JSA can be claimed if someone has paid enough Class 1 National Insurance contributions. A person can get this type of JSA even if their partner works or they have savings over £16,000.

Universal Credit (UC)

Universal Credit is a single monthly payment for working-age people to help with living and housing costs if they are on a low income or out of work. The following benefits have been replaced by Universal Credit: Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support (IS), Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and Housing Benefit (HB). An individual claiming Universal Credit may have to do work-related activity in order to get full entitlement to Universal Credit –

even if they are doing some work. Each eligible adult will fall into one of six conditionality regimes based on their capability and circumstances.

Conditionality groups

UC Searching for work: Not working, or with very low earnings. Claimant is required to take action to secure work - or more / better paid work. The Work Coach supports them to plan their work search and preparation activity.

Planning for work: Expected to work in the future. Lone parent / lead carer of child aged 1 (or aged 1-2 prior to April 2017). Claimant required to attend periodic interviews to plan for their return to work.

Preparing for work: Expected to start preparing for future even with limited capability for work at the present time or a child aged 2 (or aged 3-4 prior to April 2017), the claimant is expected to take reasonable steps to prepare for work including Work Focused Interview.

UC No Work Requirements: Claimants in this group are not expected to work at present. Health or caring responsibility prevents claimant from working or preparing for work.

UC Working with requirements: In work but could earn more, or not working but has a partner with low earnings.

UC Working - no requirements: Individual or household earnings over the level at which conditionality applies. Required to inform DWP of changes of circumstances, particularly if at risk of decreasing earnings or losing job.

Contact details

For further information about unemployment, benefits, claimants and other labour market data please contact the Research and Intelligence team on esif@eastsussex.gov.uk.

The Research and Intelligence Team, Governance Services, provides demographic and socio-economic data, intelligence and insight to support East Sussex County Council and other East Sussex Partners. The Team also manages East Sussex in Figures (ESiF), the Local Information System for East Sussex.

ESiF (www.eastsussexinfigures.org.uk) is a web-based information system that contains detailed, up-to-date and reliable information on a wide range of topics. It is free and easy to use.

You can also use ESiF to view Area profiles for different topics and geographies, including profiles to support funding bids.