

What “economically inactive” means under UKSPF

- **Core definition:** People **not in work and not actively seeking work**. This mirrors the standard ONS/ILO definition that UKSPF adopts for its People & Skills indicators.
- **No minimum duration:** There is **no required length of time** someone must be out of work to be counted as economically inactive. **People count if they are 16+**.
- **Benefits status:** Economically inactive people **may or may not** be on benefits. Where they are, UKSPF guidance flags “legacy” benefits like **ESA, Incapacity Benefit and Income Support**, and Universal Credit groups such as the **Preparation Requirement** or **Work Focused Interview Requirement** as within scope.
- **How this fits into UKSPF paperwork:** These definitions sit behind UKSPF output indicators such as “Number of economically inactive people engaging with keyworker support services” and “Number of people receiving support to gain employment.”

Boundary with “unemployed” and “employed”

- **Unemployed** means out of work **and** actively looking for work in the past 4 weeks and available to start in the next 2 weeks, or already have a job starting in the next 2 weeks. Those people are **not** classed as economically inactive.
- **Employed** includes anyone doing one hour or more of paid work per week or temporarily away from a job. They are not economically inactive.

All groups who can be counted as economically inactive

UKSPF relies on the standard ONS breakdown of inactivity “by reason.” Anyone in these groups, if not working and not actively seeking work, is counted as **economically inactive** ([SOURCE](#)):

1. **Students in full-time education** who are not working and not job-seeking.
2. **People looking after family and home**, including unpaid carers whose responsibilities keep them out of the labour market.
3. **Long-term sick or disabled** whose health prevents job-seeking.
4. **Temporarily sick or injured** and therefore not available to start work.
5. **Retired people**, including early retirees below State Pension Age if they are not seeking work.
6. **Discouraged workers** who would like a job but have stopped looking because they believe no jobs are available for them.
7. **Other reasons** that keep someone out of both work and job-search, for example long-term travel, religious orders, or personal circumstances. ONS classifies these as “other” inactivity. ([SOURCE](#))

ONS’ high-level definition is: people not in employment who **have not been seeking work in the last 4 weeks and/or are not available to start work in the next 2 weeks**. UKSPF uses this standard in its indicators and monitoring ([SOURCE](#)).

This is defined by people who:

1. Waiting for the result of a job application or a training assessment

- Someone who has had final interviews and is waiting for the outcome, and has paused all other applications.
- A candidate undergoing vetting or security clearance after applying, not applying elsewhere while they wait.
- A person being assessed by a training provider or “training agent” for programme entry, not job-seeking during the assessment period. ([SOURCE](#))

2. Not yet started looking

- A recent graduate who plans to begin searching next month after a short break.
- Someone who has just relocated and is giving themselves a few weeks to settle before starting a job search.
- A school or college leaver who intends to look for work later in the year but is not looking now.

3. Do not need employment

- A person living off savings or investment income who is not looking for work.
- An individual financially supported by a partner or family who states they do not need a job and is not seeking work.
- Someone taking a self-funded break after redundancy and not looking for work at present.

4. Any other reason

- Long-term travel or a gap year where the person is not searching for jobs and is not available to start.
- Full-time unpaid volunteering with a charity while not job-seeking.
- Membership of a religious order or extended retreat where the person is neither seeking nor available for work.
- Waiting for a visa or right-to-work decision, not job-seeking until status is resolved.
- Moving house or managing significant personal administration, not looking for work until this is complete.
- Taking time out after bereavement or a major life event, without active job search.

NOTE: If someone says their main reason is student, looking after family or home, temporary sickness, long-term sickness, retired or discouraged, they should be counted in those specific ONS categories rather than “other.” The LFS questionnaire explicitly lists these separate options.

The “other” grouping in the headline INAC01 tables ([SOURCE](#)) is a practical roll-up used by ONS for publication, and they do not routinely publish a further split of that sub-group.

Who Is Economically Inactive?

1. Students, Leavers, and Education-Adjacent	
Full-time FE/HE student not seeking work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What makes them inactive: enrolled full-time, not job-seeking, not available in the next two weeks. • Likely partners: Further Education colleges, universities, Students' Unions, student wellbeing teams, ESOL providers.
PhD write-up or masters dissertation period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inactive because research deadlines and funding rules mean no job search or availability. • Partners: Postgraduate schools, university graduate schools, research councils, library services.
Recent school or college leaver "taking a breather"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not yet started looking after exams, intends to start later. • Partners: Careers service, youth providers, The Prince's Trust, local FE colleges, youth clubs.
Waiting to start college or apprenticeship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer accepted, start date beyond two weeks, not job-seeking. • Partners: Apprenticeship hubs, training providers, FE admissions, youth services.
Gap-year or long-term travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not job-seeking, not available to start. • Partners: Youth travel networks, international exchange groups, alumni associations.
2. Caring and Family	
New parent on maternity, adoption or shared parental leave, not job-seeking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inactive because focused on infant care and not seeking work. • Partners: Health visitors, midwives, Sure Start, Women's Centres, Employers For Childcare.
Single parent without affordable childcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not searching due to childcare constraints. • Partners: Family support hubs, childcare voucher advisors, local childcare alliances, Citizens Advice.
Kinship carer or guardian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary carer for a child who is not their own, not seeking work. • Partners: Kinship care charities, social services, family support charities.
Parent of a child with SEND/ASN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination of care and education prevents job search. • Partners: SENDIASS services, autism and ADHD charities, parent forums, schools.

Adult carer for partner or relative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care needs limit availability and job search. • Partners: Carers organisations, GP practices, community nursing teams, respite services.
Sandwich carer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caring for children and an older relative, no bandwidth to job-seek. • Partners: Carers centres, Age sector charities, family support hubs.
2. Health, Disability and Recovery	
Long-term physical health condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronic illness limits job search or availability. • Partners: GP federations, condition-specific charities, community rehab.
Long COVID	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-viral fatigue and fluctuating symptoms, not able to commit to employment. • Partners: Long COVID clinics, respiratory charities, occupational therapy teams.
Chronic pain and musculoskeletal conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pain flares prevent reliable availability. • Partners: Pain clinics, physio services, Versus Arthritis-type organisations.
Neurodivergent adult with executive function barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not currently job-seeking due to support needs or overwhelm. • Partners: Autism and ADHD charities, employability providers with specialist coaches, condition-aware therapists.
Severe mental health episode or recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression, anxiety, PTSD or psychosis impacting readiness to search. • Partners: Community mental health teams, third-sector mental health orgs, talking therapy services.
Cancer treatment or recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active treatment or fatigue prevents job search. • Partners: Oncology units, Macmillan-type services, clinical nurse specialists
Post-operative or injury recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary incapacity, not available in the reference period. • Partners: Hospital discharge teams, community physio, falls clinics.
Substance use recovery, stabilisation phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on treatment and stability rather than job search. • Partners: Addiction services, recovery communities, social prescribing.

<p>Functional Neurological Disorder and similar fluctuating conditions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unpredictable symptoms, not currently job-seeking. • Partners: Neurology clinics, condition-specific charities, occupational therapy.
<p>3. Older Workers and Retirement</p>	
<p>Early retiree below State Pension age</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Left the labour market, not seeking work. • Partners: Financial wellbeing providers, pre-retirement programmes, community groups.
<p>Recently redundant older worker who opted out</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose retirement after redundancy, not job-seeking. • Partners: Outplacement services, unions, local enterprise agencies.
<p>Grandparent carer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary daytime childcare for grandchildren, not seeking work. • Partners: Family hubs, Carers orgs, community centres.
<p>4. Discouraged, Disconnected, or Low-Confidence</p>	
<p>Discouraged worker</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stopped looking after repeated rejections, believes no jobs exist for them. • Partners: Confidence-building programmes, peer mentoring networks, community learning.
<p>Rural, transport-isolated resident</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No viable transport, stopped job search. • Partners: Rural support charities, community transport schemes, digital inclusion projects.
<p>Digitally excluded adult</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of devices or skills blocks job search. • Partners: Libraries, digital skills charities, community IT projects.
<p>Low literacy or ESOL beginner</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delays search while building language or literacy. • Partners: ESOL providers, adult literacy services, community language hubs.
<p>5. Immigration and Status</p>	
<p>Awaiting visa or right-to-work decision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing not to job-see until status is clarified. • Partners: Migrant support organisations, legal advice centres, ESOL colleges.
<p>Resettled refugee or displaced person focused on integration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritising housing, ESOL and health before employment. • Partners: Refugee councils, integration teams, community sponsors.

Spouse on dependent visa settling in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pausing job search during resettlement. ● Partners: Migrant family support groups, community centres, faith groups.
6. Housing, Safety and Crisis	
Domestic abuse survivor in refuge or move-on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prioritising safety, legal processes and rehousing over job search. ● Partners: Women's Aid-type services, police IDVAs, housing providers.
Homeless or in temporary accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No stable base, not seeking work. ● Partners: Homelessness charities, housing associations, local housing authority.
Recently bereaved or major life event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Temporary pause in search while managing grief or administration. ● Partners: Bereavement services, faith leaders, community navigators.
Moving home or primary carer ill-health crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Short-term disruption, not available to start. ● Partners: Social prescribers, community advice services.
7. Justice, Armed Forces and Families	
Recently released from prison, stabilising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focused on ID, housing and health, not yet job-seeking. ● Partners: Probation services, resettlement charities, ID and housing support teams.
On community sentence with intensive hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commitments prevent job search or availability. ● Partners: Probation, community payback coordinators, restorative justice teams.
Medically discharged veteran, in clinical rehab	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Treatment and rehab take priority. ● Partners: Armed forces charities, NHS veteran services, DWP Armed Forces champions.
Armed forces spouse or partner after relocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Paused search due to move and childcare disruption. ● Partners: Military family federations, garrison community centres, childcare networks.
8. Faith, Volunteering and Personal Finance	
Member of a religious order or long retreat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Not engaged in labour market or job search. ● Partners: Faith organisations, diocesan networks, interfaith councils.
Full-time unpaid volunteer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Volunteering as main activity, not seeking paid work.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners: Volunteer centres, large national charities, community anchors.
Financially secure adult who does not need work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Living off savings, investments or partner income, not seeking work. Partners: Financial wellbeing groups, community networks, alumni associations.
9. "Other" Timing and Admin	
Waiting for result of a job application or security vetting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paused further search while awaiting an outcome. Partners: Employability providers, careers services, sector bodies with clear timelines.
Not yet started looking after a move or life change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has a plan to start later, not seeking now. Partners: Community connectors, GP link workers, local advice centres.
Inactive but would like a job later	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> States they want work but cannot search now due to constraints. Partners: Health and wellbeing services, motivational coaching, community learning.
Inactive and does not want a job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content without employment at present, not available. Partners: Community engagement teams, social prescribing, volunteering pathways if desired.