

- EMPLOYMENT RATE -

The employment rate is one of five provisional spotlight indicators that have been selected to monitor national progress against the Equality Measurement Framework (EMF). The others are [earnings](#), [horizontal occupational segregation](#)¹, discrimination in employment and provision of unpaid care and free time.

The Government aspiration is for an employment rate that is the proportion of the working age population in work, of a 'world class' rate of 80%. It is set at this rate because this is the level needed to maintain the productive capacity of the economy in the context of an [ageing population](#). In the event, the UK rate never exceeded 75% and given the recent deterioration in economic conditions - [the UK rate has declined every quarter since early 2008](#) – the 80% aspiration must remain a long-term one. Some population groups and some locations did, however, achieve this rate: most notably in the UK people aged between 25 to 49 years, and in the South West, South Gloucestershire, North Somerset, Gloucestershire, Swindon, Somerset and Wiltshire.

To provide some context to the examination of employment rates by population group – which by necessity uses an annual average (the latest being September 2007 to October 2008) and therefore is relatively insensitive to the effects of the recession – the regional employment rate peaked at 79.4% in November 2007 to January 2008. Thereafter, the slowdown turned to recession, and the regional employment rate began its steady descent to the current rate of 78% (January to March 2009). Over the last 12 months the recession has disproportionately depressed the employment rates of men (down 1.6 percentage points) as opposed to women (also down but by 0.5 percentage points) in the region.

An ONS study² of the [impact of the recession on the labour market](#) also finds that “so far [the recession] impacted more on men in employment than women” and that “young people have experienced the largest decrease in employment rates, compared with other age groups” although it is noted that this downward trend in employment rates for young people had been occurring for “several years before the recession”. A recent [review of evidence on the impact of economic downturn on disadvantaged groups](#) also found that the adverse consequences of recessions – including lower employment – tend to be greater for men than for women, and that “older workers, especially men, can experience a loss of employment due to a recession”³.

The overall employment rate in the South West during September 2007 to October 2008 was 79% (Figure 1). The rate was considerably lower than average for those with a disability (52%) and people aged 16 to 24 (65%) and ethnic minority groups (70%) and slightly below average for

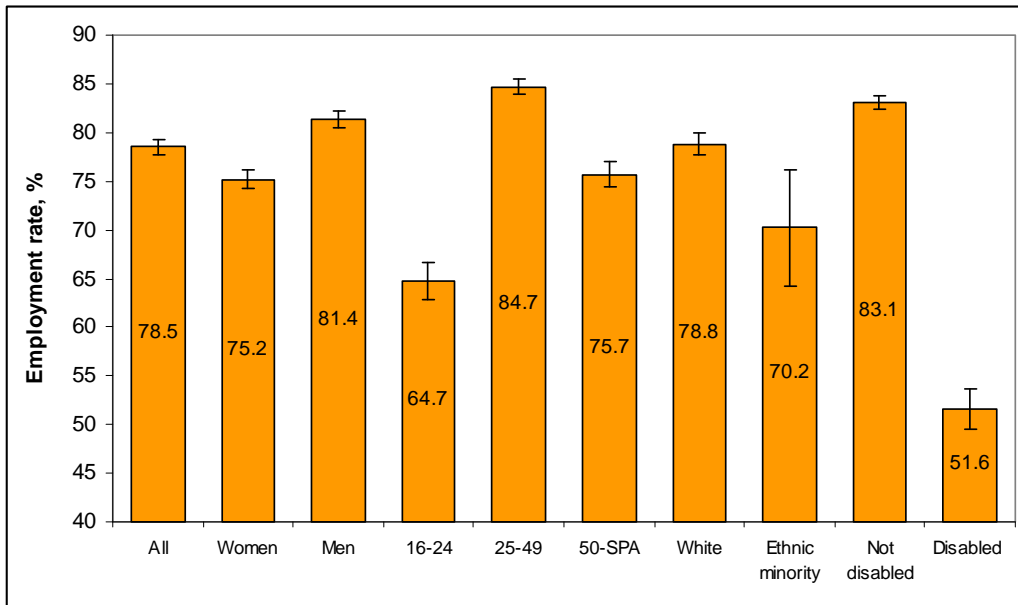
¹ Horizontal occupational segregation occurs when one group – traditionally men and women – do different types of work.

² Office for National Statistics (2009) The impact of the recession on the labour market. http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_labour/Impact-of-recession-on-LM.pdf

³ Stafford, B. and Duffy, D. (2009) Review of evidence on the impact of economic downturn on disadvantaged groups. Department for Work and Pensions. Working Paper No. 68. <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/WP68.pdf>

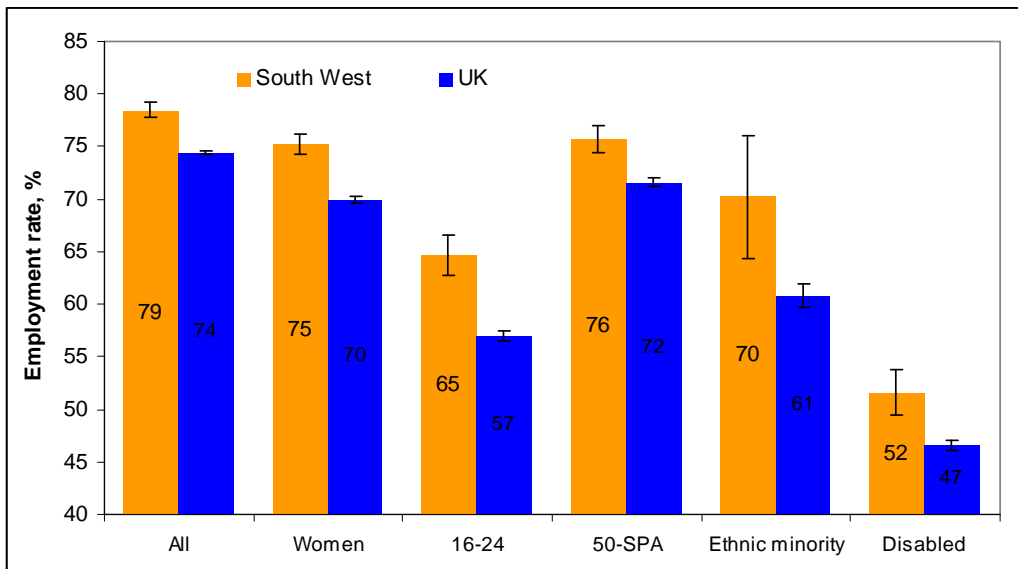
women (75%) and people aged 50 to state pension age (76%). Employment rate for all groups are higher in the South West than the UK average (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Working age employment rate by selected population groups, September 2007 to October 2008, South West



Source: Annual Population Survey

Figure 2: Employment rate by selected disadvantaged group, September 2007 to October 2008, South West and United Kingdom



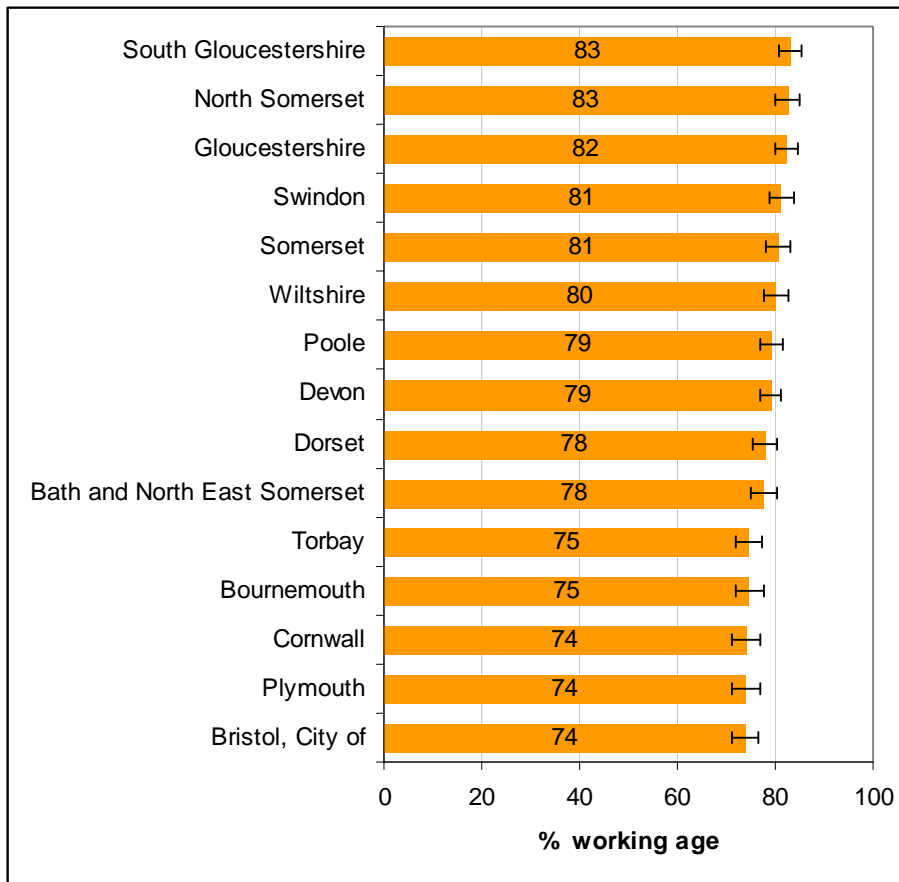
Source: Annual Population Survey

The overall employment rate in the South West did not change significantly between 2004/5 and 2007/8 and the only changes that were statistically robust for disadvantaged groups were a rise in

the employment probabilities for people aged 50 to state pension age both in the South West (from 73% to 76%) and the UK, and an increase in the employment rate of disabled people nationally.

The employment rate in the South West varies from 83% in South Gloucestershire to 43% in Bristol (Table A and Figure 3). Statistically only South Gloucestershire, North Somerset and Gloucestershire have employment rates that are higher than the regional average and only City of Bristol, Plymouth, Cornwall, Bournemouth and Torbay have rates that are lower than the regional average.

Figure 3: Working age employment rate by higher tier local authority area, September 2007 to October 2008, South West



Source: Annual Population Survey