

Article

# Women in the labour market: 2013

Examination of women in the UK labour market, looking at women with and without children. Includes employment rates, occupations, skill level of jobs, and pay in comparison with men. Over the past 40 years there has been rising employment for women and falling employment for men, but men have consistently higher employment rates age 22 and above



Contact:  
Jamie Jenkins  
labour.market@ons.gsi.gov.uk

Release date:  
25 September 2013

Next release:  
To be announced

## Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Women in the labour market](#)
3. [Background notes](#)

# 1. Main points

The main points are:

- Rising employment for women and falling employment for men over 40 years
- Men have consistently higher employment rates than women above the age of 22
- Employment rates for women lowest in Northern Ireland and London
- Birmingham has the lowest employment rate among the smaller areas
- Men with children more likely to work than those without – opposite picture for women
- The employment rate gap between mothers in a couple and lone mothers smaller for those with older children
- Men tend to work in the professional occupations associated with higher levels of pay than women
- Women dominate employment within caring and leisure occupations
- The number of women working within managerial roles slightly higher than the EU average
- Female graduates more likely to work in a slightly lower skilled occupation group than men
- Men make up the majority of workers in the top 10% of earners for all employees but the gap is lower for those under 30

## 2. Women in the labour market

### Rising employment for women and falling employment for men over 40 years

Over the past 40 years there has been a rise in the percentage of women aged 16 to 64 in employment and a fall in the percentage of men. In April to June 2013 around 67% of women aged 16 to 64 were in work, an increase from 53% in 1971. For men the percentage fell to 76% in 2013 from 92% in 1971.

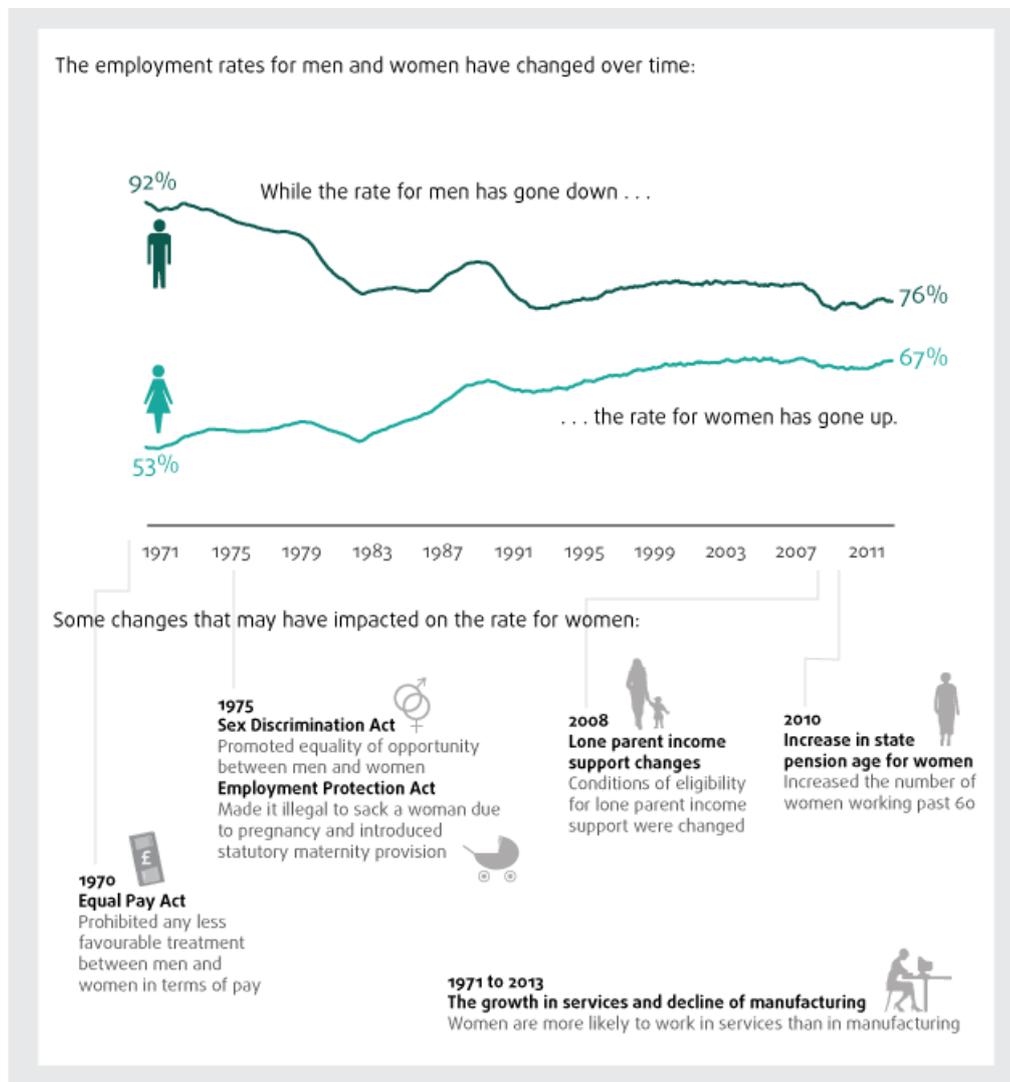
In April to June 2013, looking at the not seasonally adjusted series, around 13.4 million women aged 16 to 64 were in work (42% part-time) and 15.3 million men (12% part-time). For those who worked full-time there were differences in the average hours worked per week. For example, full-time men worked on average 44 hours per week whilst full-time women worked 40 hours per week. While there have been increases in the number of women in work, the percentage of them doing a part-time role has fluctuated between 42-45% over the past 30 years.

Most of the shift in more women and fewer men working happened between 1971 and 1991. Several factors may account for this. One possible factor is the rise of the service sector and decline of the manufacturing sector beginning in the 1960s. Traditionally a higher proportion of women than men have worked in services, with a higher proportion of men working in manufacturing. The growing demand to employ people within the service sector and falling demand within the manufacturing sector may have resulted in more women and fewer men working. Over the period the fall in men working has seen an increase in the number who are inactive. This could be for many reasons, for example between 1971 and 1991 when most of the fall in men in work occurred, many could have taken earlier retirement, left work for health reasons or started sharing childcare responsibilities. Since 1993 there have been increases in young men who are inactive due to study.

Since the 1970s there have been several pieces of new legislation that may have impacted on the employment rate for women:

- 1970 Equal Pay Act – this prohibited any less favourable treatment between men and women in terms of pay
- 1975 Sex Discrimination Act – promoted equality and opportunity between men and women
- 1975 Employment Protection Act – made it illegal to sack a woman due to pregnancy and introduced statutory maternity provision
- 2008 Lone parent income support changes – conditions of eligibility for lone parent income support were changed
- 2010 increase in State Pension Age for women - women now retiring later than previously

## Employment rates for men and women aged 16-64, 1971 to 2013, UK



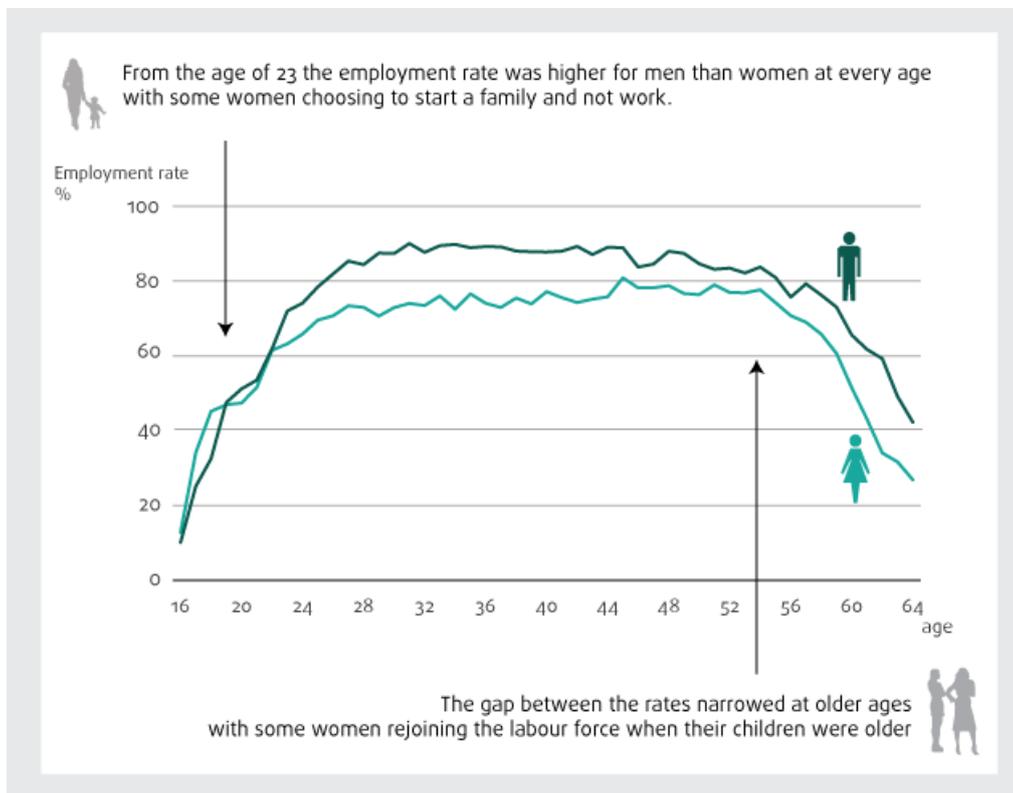
Since 1991 increases in the percentage of women in work continued but at a slower rate than before. More recently, during the 2008/09 recession the employment rates for men fell more than for women and have since levelled off in the last four years with men's employment rates remaining between 75% and 77% and women's at 65% to 67%.

The rise in women in employment is partly due to an increase in the percentage of mothers in work. In 1996 (when comparable records began), 67% of married or cohabiting mothers with dependent children were in work and by 2013 this had increased to 72%. There has also been an increase in the lone mother's employment rate from 43% to 60% over the same period. As more women have entered employment there has been a fall in those inactive, which are those who are either not looking for work or not available to work, for example looking after the family. The percentage of women who were inactive gradually fell over the past 40 years to a low of 28% of women aged 16 to 64 in 2013.

## Men have consistently higher employment rates than women above the age of 22

In 2013, up until the age of 22 the percentage of men and women in work was similar, above this age men consistently had a higher employment rate than women with some women choosing to start a family and not work. The gap between the two rates narrowed at older ages with some women rejoining the labour force when their children are older. At some of the oldest age groups the gap widens as women approach and pass their state pension age and retire while men have to wait until 65 for the state pension age.

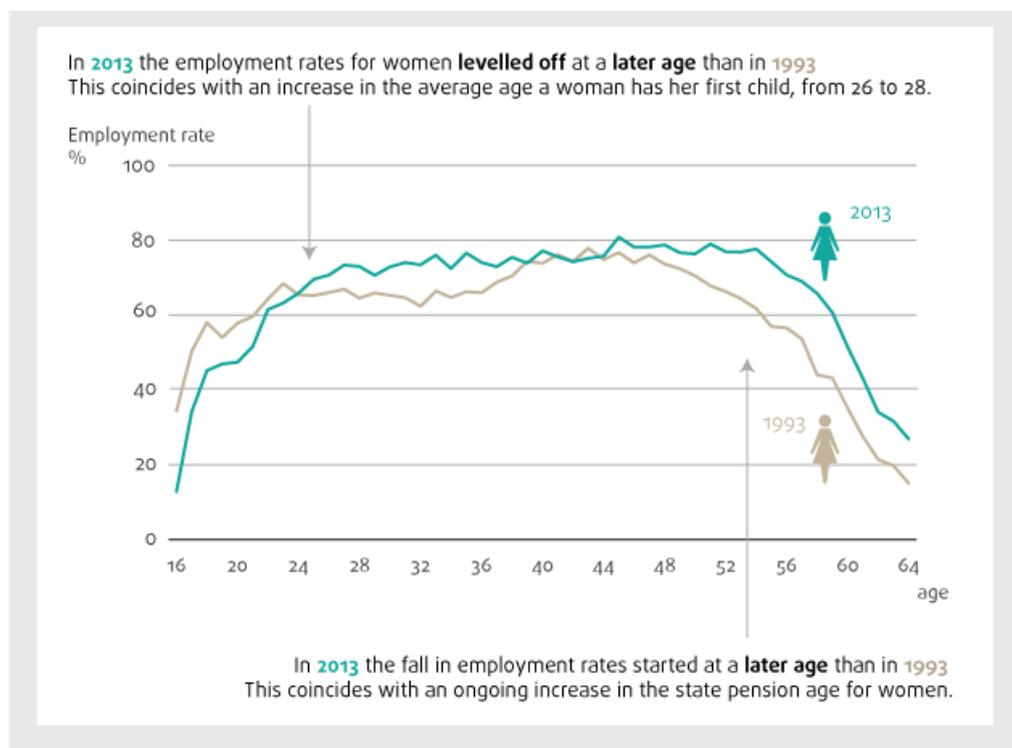
### Employment rates for men and women by individual year of age, April to June 2013, UK



Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

Focusing on women only, employment rates for young women aged 16 to 23 were higher two decades ago in 1993 compared with the same period in 2013, mainly due to greater numbers remaining in full-time education. In 1993 the employment rate for women levelled off during their 20s and early 30s, coinciding with the average age for a woman to give birth to her first child at 26 years. In 2013 the levelling off took place slightly later, coinciding with an increase in the average age for a woman to give birth to her first child, which is 28 according to the latest figures. For most ages above 25 the employment rate for women was higher in 2013 than two decades ago, coinciding with a fall in the percentage of women remaining out of the labour force to look after the family and an increase in the percentage of mothers in employment. The difference in women's employment rates widens for older women aged 50 and above. The increase in the percentage of older women in work in 2013 compared with 1993 may be partially attributable to the rising state pension age. For those in their mid-50s, the 1993 cohort would be women who were born in the 1940s and would have started looking for work in the 1960s and the 2013 cohort would be women born in the 1960s who started looking for work in the 1980s. It may be the latter group are more likely to be in employment as a woman being in work was more fashionable for the latter cohort.

## Employment rates for women by individual year of age, April to June 1993 and April to June 2013, UK

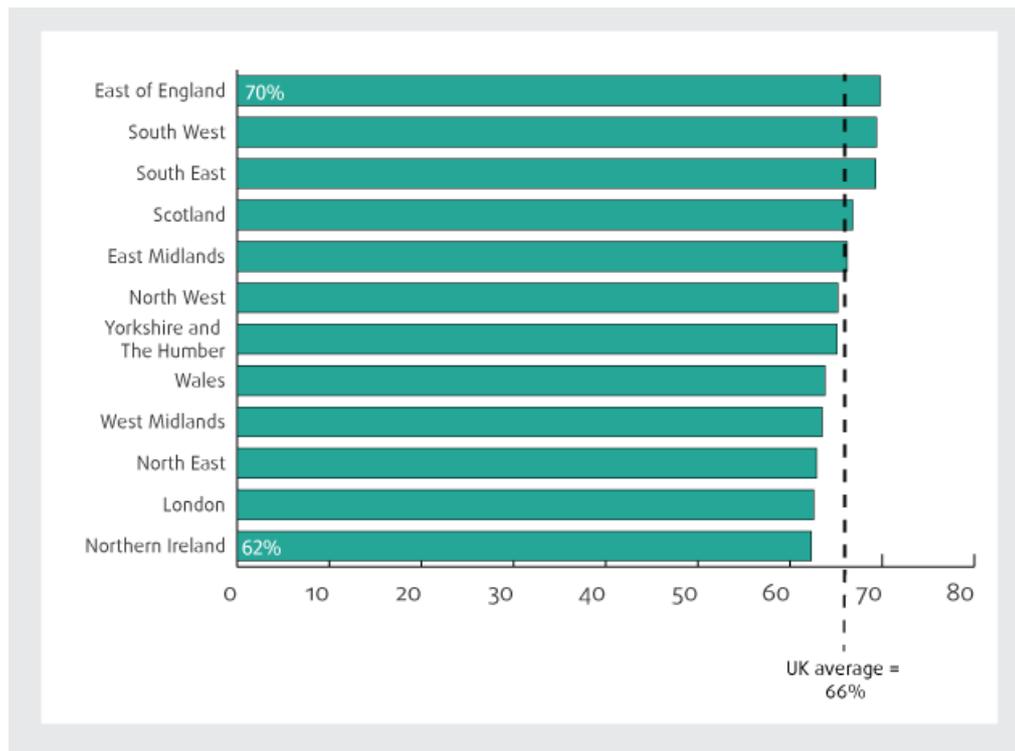


Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

## Employment rates for women lowest in Northern Ireland and London

Looking across the countries of the UK and regions of England the employment rate for women was highest in the East of England between July 2012 and June 2013 at 69.8% followed by the South West at 69.4% and the South East at 69.3%. The lowest employment rate was in Northern Ireland at 62.3%, followed by London at 62.6% and the North East at 62.9%. The rankings are similar to the overall employment rate that includes men with the exception of London, which is lower down the ranking for women compared with men. This may be linked to the diverse ethnic population within the area with some women who are not in work due to looking after the family.

## Employment rates for women aged 16 to 64 by area of the UK, July 2012 to June 2013



Source: Annual Population Survey (APS) - Office for National Statistics

### Birmingham has the lowest employment rate among the smaller areas

Looking into a little more detail geographically, Birmingham had the lowest employment rate for women across the UK where just over half (50.2%) of women aged 16 to 64 were in work. The next lowest employment rates were in Nottingham (53.5%), Coventry (55.2%) and Leicester (55.2%). Some of these areas have low employment rates because of the universities within them and when considering only women aged 25 to 64, Nottingham and Coventry were no longer towards the bottom but Birmingham still had the lowest employment rate. One of the reasons for this is that Birmingham has a higher than average proportion of its women that do not work because they are at home looking after their family. This may be linked to the diverse ethnic population within the area.

## Employment rates for women aged 16 to 64 by local area of Great Britain, July 2012 to June 2013



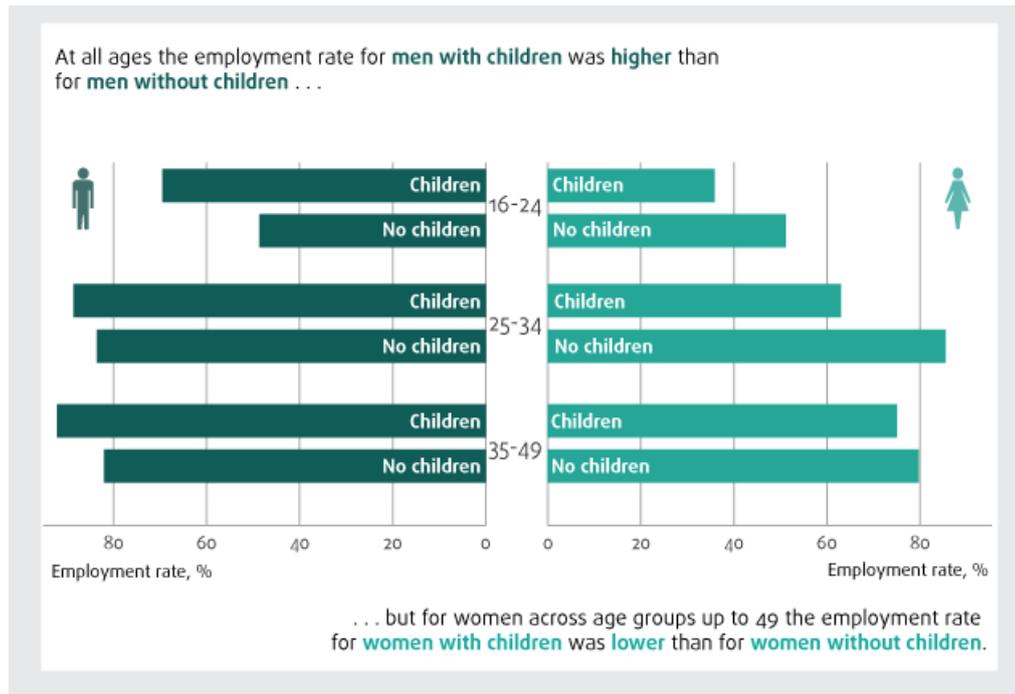
Source: Annual Population Survey (APS) - Office for National Statistics

### Men with children more likely to work than those without – opposite picture for women

Focusing on women up to the age of 49, for those with children their employment rates were lower than those without children. For men the opposite occurred as men with children were more likely to work than those without.

For younger males, aged 16-24, a higher percentage of those without children were in full time education compared with those with children. Meanwhile for middle to older aged men, aged 35 and upwards, a higher percentage of men without dependent children were not in work due to long term sickness or disability.

## Employment rates for men and women living with and without dependent children by age group, April to June 2013, UK



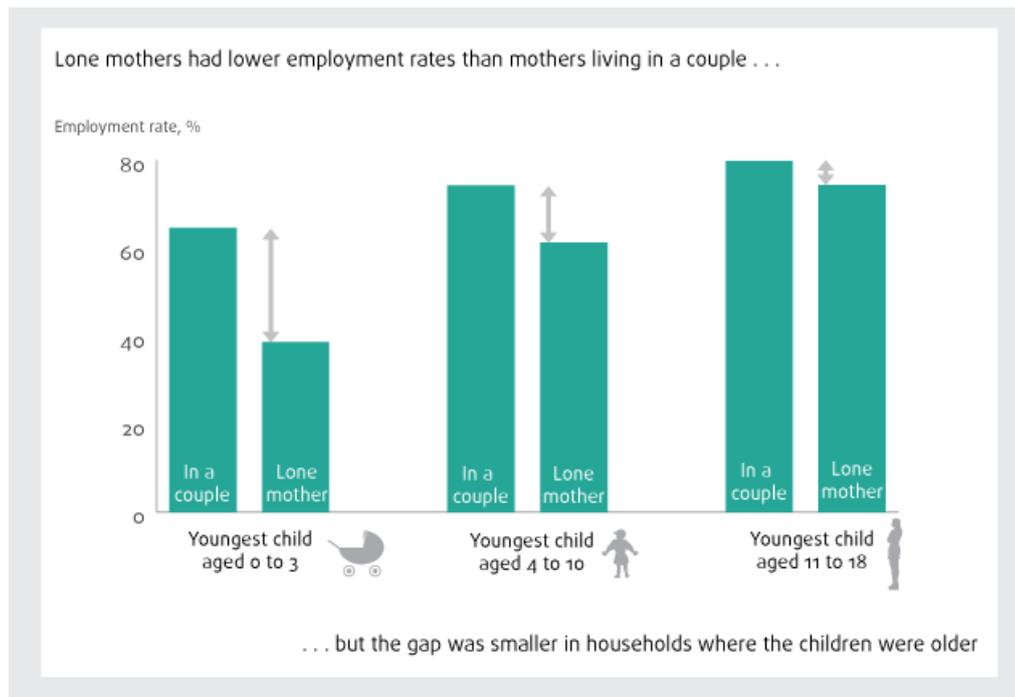
Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

The employment rate gap of mothers with and without dependent children narrowed at older ages, reflecting that the children in the family would be older, making it easier for women to return to work.

### The employment rate gap between mothers in a couple and lone mothers smaller for those with older children

The age of the child and the relationship status of the mother are important factors in if they are in work or not. For lone mothers whose youngest child was aged up to three, just 39% were in work, compared with 65% of couples with children in the youngest age group; this was a gap of 26 percentage points. For mothers whose youngest child was at primary school age, between four and ten, employment rates were higher at 74% for those in a couple and 61% for those who were a lone parent, a much narrower gap of 13 percentage points. The narrowing of the gap may reflect that lone mothers have fewer opportunities to go to work when their youngest child is not in school as couples can share childcare with their partner. When the youngest child is of school age, lone parents have greater opportunity to enter a job. The employment rate gap between mothers in couples and on their own narrowed further where the age of the youngest dependent child was between eleven and eighteen, with employment rates of 80% for mothers in a couple and 74% for lone mothers. In recent years, comparing back 2013 with 2008 there has been an increase in the employment rates for lone parents with children aged four and over, while the corresponding rates for couples have remained similar. This has meant the gap between the rates for couples and lone parents has narrowed.

## Employment rates for mothers in a couple and lone mothers, April to June 2013, UK

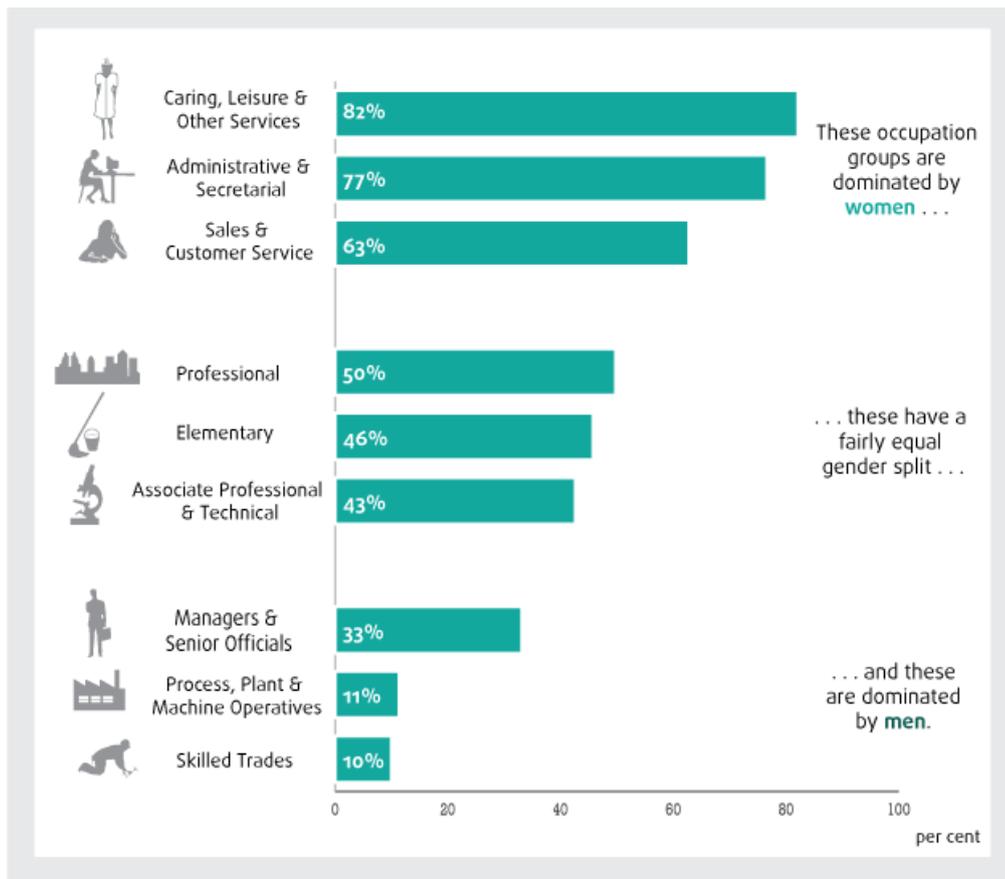


Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

## Men tend to work in professional occupations associated with higher levels of pay

Concentrating on a wider age range of 16 and over, in April-June 2013, 15.9 million men were in employment compared with 14.0 million women. The most common occupation category for both was professional with 19% of men and 21% of women in employment working in professional occupations. Within this professional occupation category workers were spread over a wide variety of jobs but with differences for men and women. For example, the most common occupation for women was nursing while the most common for men was programmers and software development professionals. Men tended to work in professional occupations associated with higher levels of pay. For example programmers and software development professionals earned £20.02 per hour (excluding overtime) while nurses earned on average £16.61 according to the 2012 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings.

## The percentage of workers in each occupation group that are women, April to June 2013, UK



Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

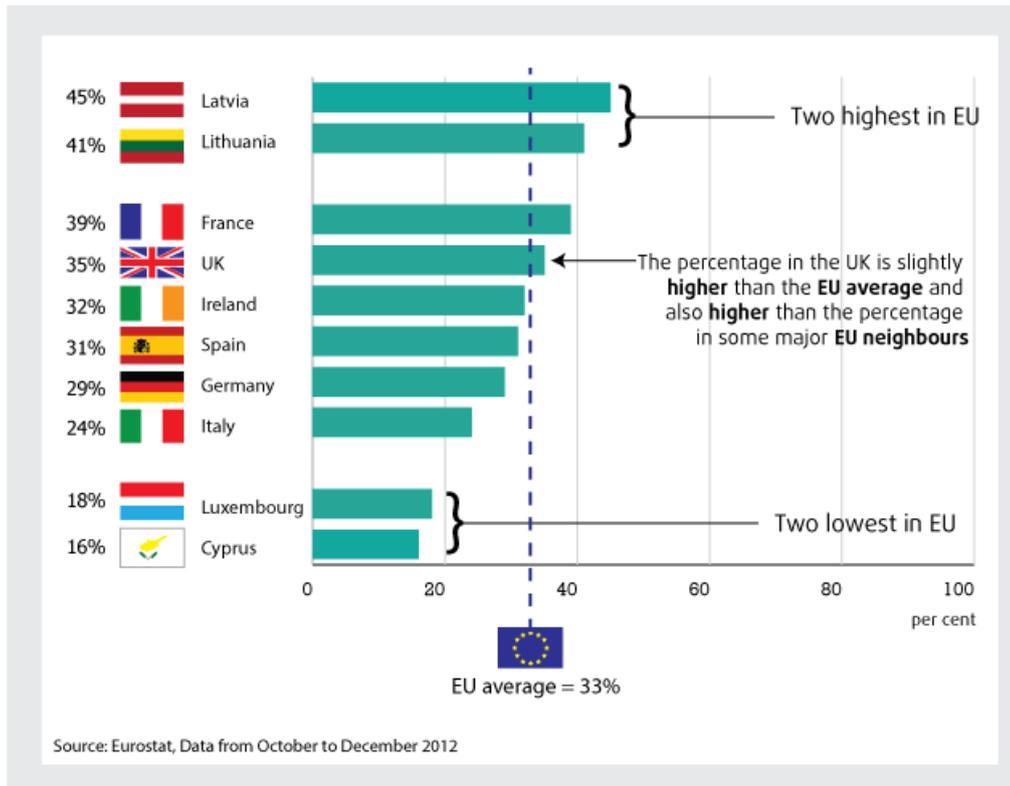
### Women dominate employment within caring and leisure occupations

Looking within each of the occupational groups women dominate employment within occupations within caring and leisure, accounting for 82% of those within these occupation types. The next most common occupations that women dominated were admin and secretarial roles and sales/customer service occupations. At the other end of the scale, women were in the minority within skilled trade occupations, accounting for just 10%, followed by roles within manufacturing such as process, plant and machine operatives.

### The number of women working within managerial roles slightly higher than the EU average

Focusing on occupations within the highest paid category of managers, directors and senior officials, within this latter category around a third (33%) was female in April to June 2013. Looking across the European Union and using information from Eurostat and the International Standard Classification of Occupations for the final quarter of 2012, around 34.8% of women were working as managers, slightly higher than the European Union average of 33.5%. The percentage of managers that were women was slightly lower than the UK figure in the larger economies of Spain (31%), Germany (29%), and Italy (24%) but it was greater in France (39%). Across the European Union as a whole, women were most prominent within the managerial occupation group in Latvia (45%) and Lithuania (41%). The country where women were least prominent as managers was Cyprus (16%).

## The percentage of women working in senior management roles, October to December 2012, selected countries from the European Union



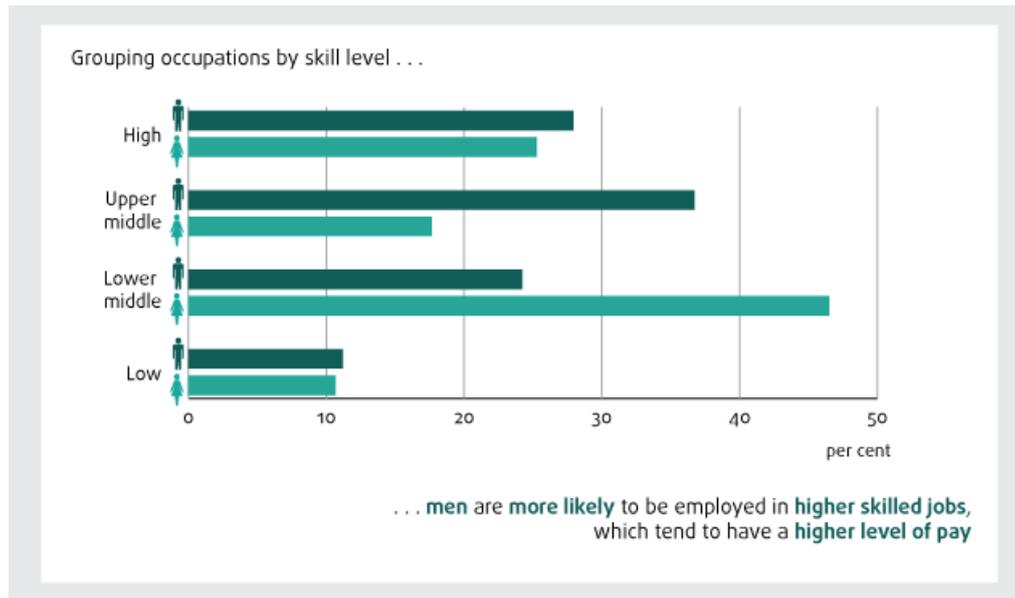
Source: Eurostat

## Men are more likely to be employed in higher skilled jobs than women

When grouping the above occupations into job skill level a slightly lower percentage of women worked in the highest skilled jobs, which consist of some managers and senior officials along with professional occupations. There was a similar percentage of men and women working in the lowest skill category, consisting of the elementary occupations. Within these low skill roles there were differences in the types of jobs between men and women. Men performed roles such as elementary storage occupations which include tasks such as loading and unloading cargo from ships or furniture from warehouses and women working in roles such as cleaners and domestics.

The main differences between men and women were in the two middle skilled groups of upper middle (associate professional and technical occupations and skilled trade occupations) and lower middle (admin/secretarial occupations, caring/leisure occupations and sales/customer service occupations). In 2013, 37% of men were employed in the upper middle skilled roles compared with 18% of women and conversely 46% of women were employed in lower middle skilled roles compared with 24% of men.

## The percentage of working men and women that are in each skill level group, April to June 2013, UK



Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

### Female graduates more likely to work in a slightly lower skilled occupation group than men

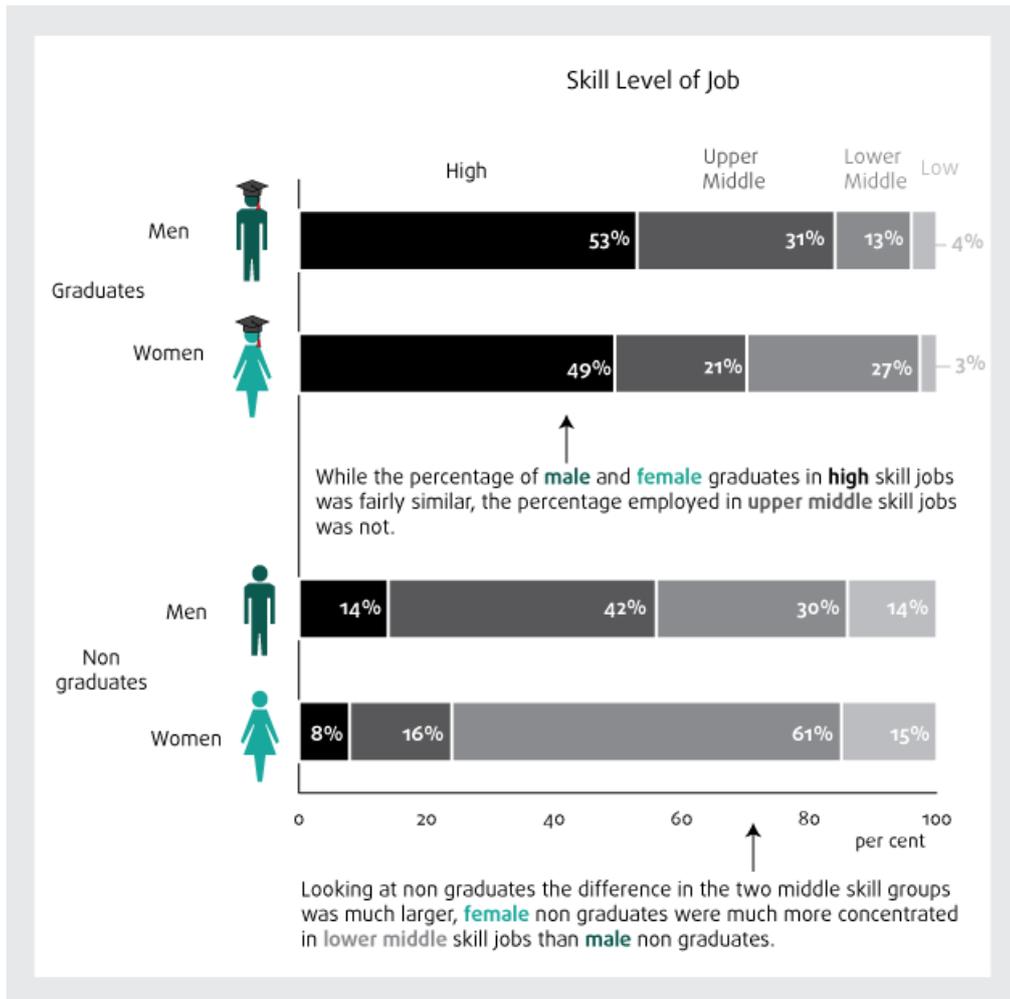
In 2013, 44% of women in work were graduates who had achieved a qualification that was above an A-level standard, for example having a degree or higher education qualification. This was slightly higher than the 38% of men qualified to a similar level. There is often a link between the qualifications required to do a job and the skill level of a job, with higher skilled jobs requiring a higher level of qualification.

Focusing on graduates, aged 22 and above, and looking at the skill level of their jobs, a slightly higher percentage of men (53%) were in high skill jobs than women (49%). At the other end of the skill scale, there were very few graduates in low skill jobs, just 4% of men and 3% of women. While 31% of men were employed in the second highest skill category of upper middle, 21% of women were employed in this category. As for everyone as a whole, including non-graduates, the main differences between men and women graduates were in the two middle job skill level groups of upper middle and lower middle.

Consequently a higher percentage of female graduates (27%) compared with males (13%) worked in lower middle skill jobs with teaching assistants, care workers and home carers and administrative roles forming the top three jobs for women working in this skill level. More women than men were employed in lower middle skilled jobs despite employed female graduates tending to achieve just as strong degree results, with every three in five of those females (62%) with a degree or equivalent attaining a first or upper second class compared with 56% of men.

For non-graduates the difference in the two middle skill groups for men and women was much larger, with around 42% of male non-graduates employed in the upper middle group compared with 16% of women. Meanwhile 30% of men and the majority of female non-graduates, 61%, were employed in lower middle skilled jobs such as sales and retail assistants and care workers/home carers. There were a similar percentage of men and women in the lowest skill group but more non-graduate men (14%) were employed in the highest skill group than women (8%).

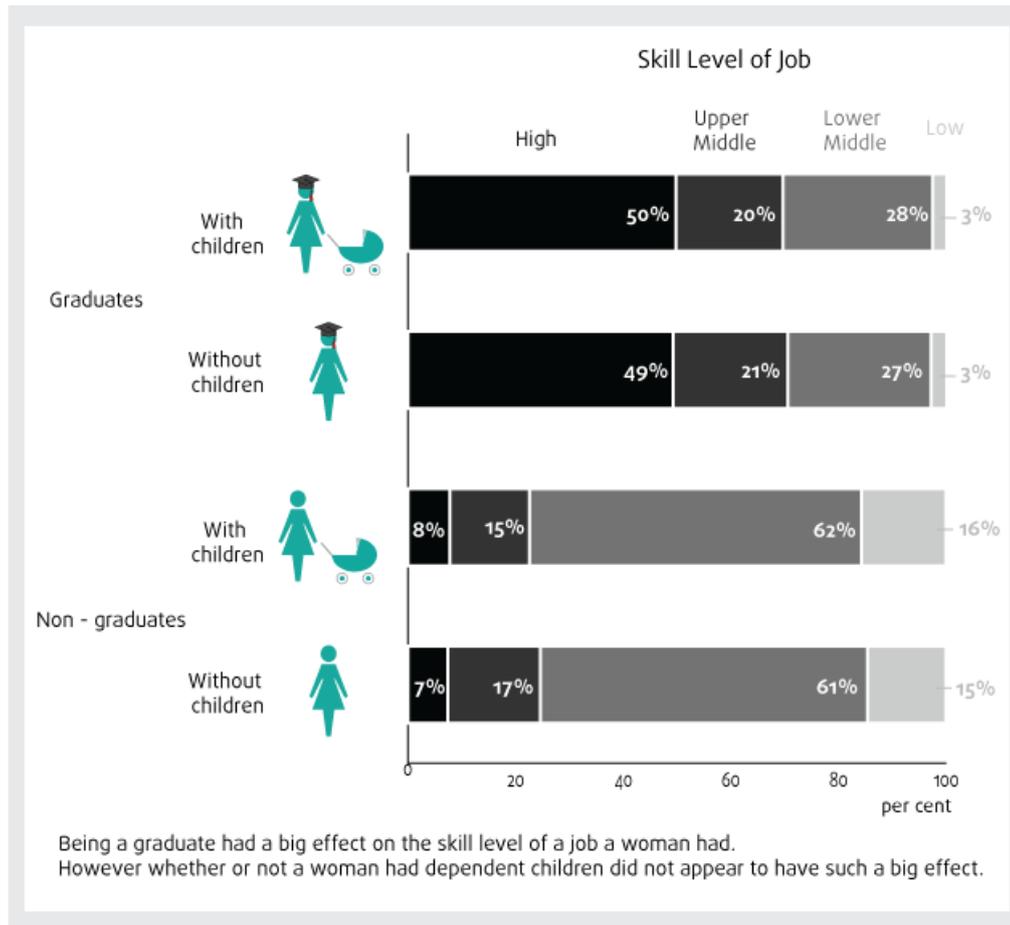
**The percentage of male and female graduates and non graduates working in each skill level group, April to June 2013, UK**



**Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics**

Comparing women in work with dependent children with those without, the percentage working across the different skill groups was similar for both graduates and non-graduates.

## The percentage of women working in each skill level group by whether a graduate and whether living with dependent children, April to June 2013, UK



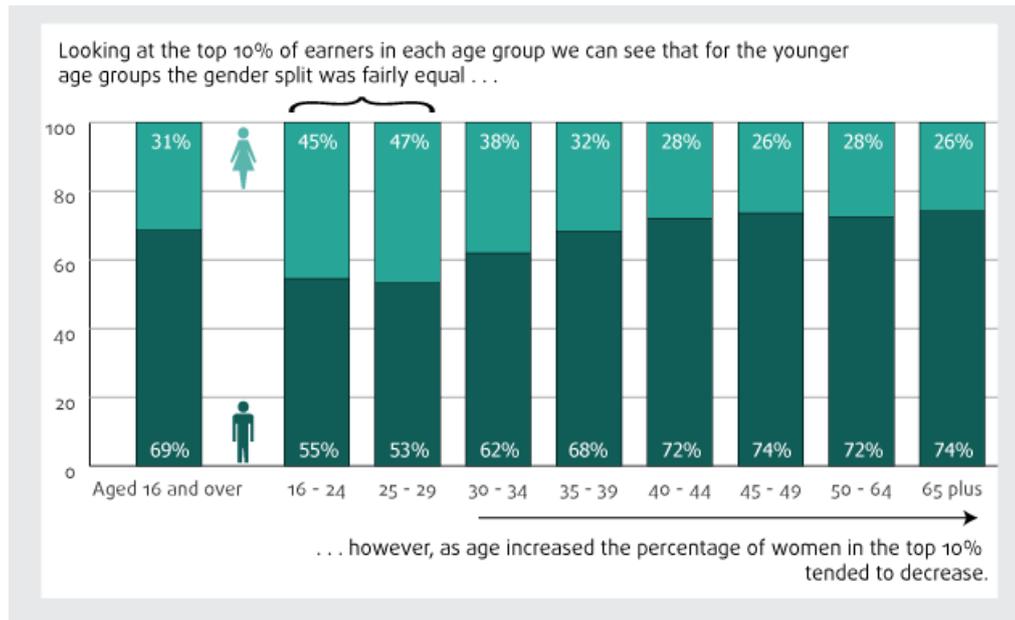
Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

## Men make up the majority of workers in the top 10% of earners but the gap is lower for those under 30

Individuals' pay levels are dependent upon a number of factors, such as their experience, age, qualifications and most importantly their type of job. There are often differences in these between men and women. For example, men tend to work in higher skilled jobs than women and the professional occupations associated with a higher level of pay.

Focusing on the top 10% of earners for all employees across a number of age bands, to identify what percentage of women were among the highest paid, the majority of those in the top 10% were male for each age group. However, given this, for the younger age groups of 16-24 and 25-29 the top 10% of earners were more evenly split. As men and women increased in age, the percentage of the top 10% that were female tended to decrease. The greatest fall in the percentage of the top 10% of earners that were women was between the 25-29 and 30-34 age groups, coinciding with women having children in their late twenties. Therefore, the percentage of women in the highest paid reduces after the average age that women tend to give birth to their first child. This may be due to several factors such as women choosing to focus more on family life than their careers. Alternatively, or in addition, some employers may not offer women the same career opportunities as men. However, the Labour Force Survey which collects information on employment does not ask questions about these possible reasons.

## The percentage of men and women in the top 10% of earners by age band, April 2012, UK, All employees



Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) - Office for National Statistics

### Notes for women in the labour market

1. For all the data included in this report please click this link:

[All data used in the "Women in the Labour Market 2013" report \(196.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)

## 3. Background notes

### 1. Datasets

The charts and all related figures from the Annual Population Survey (APS) and the Labour Force Survey from charts 1-3 use person datasets. The charts and all related figures from the remaining Labour Force Survey charts use the household datasets as most of the analysis has comparisons with and without children.

### 2. Seasonal adjustment

Most of the data in this report is not seasonally adjusted so may differ slightly to the headline figures published monthly. The exception is the first paragraph and chart that uses the headline seasonally adjusted figures from 1971 onwards.

### 3. Concepts and definitions

- The employment rate is the number in employment aged 16 to 64 as a percentage of all those aged 16-64
- The employment rate for each age is the number in employment as a percentage of all that age.
- The full-time/part-time split is not available for some workers, these have been excluded from the total.

- Hours worked refers to the average total usual hours worked in main job, including overtime. This is unavailable for some workers.
  - The mean age of mother at childbirth is standardised. This measure eliminates the impact of any changes in the distribution of the population by age and therefore enables trends over time to be analysed.
  - Standardised mean ages for 2011 have been calculated using mid-year population estimates based on the 2011 Census.
  - Dependent children are children aged under 16 and those aged 16 to 18 who have never married and are in full-time education.
  - Mother/father includes biological mothers/fathers, step-mothers/fathers and adoptive mothers/fathers with dependent children that live in the same household as them. Foster mothers/fathers, women /men with non-dependent children and those whose children live in a separate household are not included.
  - Women on maternity leave and on a career break are defined as in employment.
  - Rankings for local areas are based on Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics Level 3 areas (NUTS3).
  - Occupation group is based on the Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) 2010 major groups. The occupation group is not available for some workers, these have been excluded from the total.
  - The skill level groups are created by grouping jobs together based on their occupation according to the Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) 2010 lower level groups.
  - A graduate is defined as an individual who has completed the first stage of tertiary education. Those who have achieved a qualification that is above an A-level or equivalent.
  - Hourly pay includes employees aged 16 and over on adult rates whose pay for the pay period was not affected by absence and excludes overtime.
  - The 90th percentile is the point at which, if workers were ordered by increasing pay, 10% of workers will earn at or above this.
4. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting [www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html](http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html) or from the Media Relations Office email: [media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk)

These National Statistics are produced to high professional standards and released according to the arrangements approved by the UK Statistics Authority.