

Social Mobility Commission

Breaking Free

Prevalence, dynamics, and barriers among long-term benefit recipients

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About the Commission

The Social Mobility Commission is an independent advisory non-departmental public body established under the Life Chances Act 2010 as modified by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. It has a duty to assess progress in improving social mobility in the UK and to promote social mobility in England. The Commission board comprises:

Chair

Alun Francis OBE, Chief Executive of Blackpool and The Fylde College.

Deputy Chair

Resham Kotecha, Global Head of Policy at the Open Data Institute.

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Foreword



Alun Francis OBE,
Chair

This is the final publication of my tenure as Chair of the Social Mobility Commission and it reinforces the narrative and analysis which we have established during the last five years. Social mobility is not uniformly worsening, but there are bottlenecks of opportunity at the top and the bottom. Our research has repeatedly pointed to this “stickiness”, and our argument is that the remedy requires a dual policy focus. At the top, we must foster a more dynamic, innovative economy that generates more opportunity and broader avenues for upward mobility. At the bottom, we must address the obstacles which hold people back. Among those obstacles, the welfare system stands out,and this report shows why. While it performs an essential role as a safety net, it is much less successful in helping people to relaunch their lives. It is a trap rather than a trampoline, and it is wasting a significant amount of human potential.

Our focus is on social mobility, and this report examines two vital questions: who receives means-tested benefits long term, and what factors are associated with people becoming stuck on them? This group has not received much attention in the wider social mobility spaces, nor are they the focus of current debates about welfare reform. Our evidence suggests that they should be. Roughly half of the people in receipt of means-tested benefits are still on them the following year, and the longer they are on them, the lower the probability that they will leave.

The research is original and uses data from the Understanding Society longitudinal survey, over the period from 2009-10 up to 2023-24.

The research tells a challenging story for policymakers. The share of people receiving means-tested benefits in 2023-2024 has fallen 11 percentage points since just after the financial crisis (2009-2010), but the numbers affected are still large. In 2023-2024, one in five people (21%) were receiving means-tested benefits. A similar proportion (19%) were receiving means-tested benefits in three of the previous four years. Importantly, a significant minority (37.7%) were in paid employment[1].

The issue is that once people begin claiming means tested benefits, the likelihood of them coming off them is low. Currently, the annual exit and sustained exit rates have fallen to around 10%. The vast majority of long-term means-tested benefit recipients remain trapped in the benefit system. Of those who do manage to move off benefits, exit routes are remarkably fragile, with many cycling back into benefit reliance within a short period. There is a strong pattern of "duration dependence", where time spent on benefits actively erodes future exit rates.

Our research also shows that the risk of long-term welfare dependency is not equally shared. In 2023-4, 72% of single-parent families were dependent long term on means tested benefits, 58% of those with no formal qualifications (compared to only 11% of degree holders) and 42% of individuals with a longstanding limiting illness or disability (compared to just 12% for those without). Place also matters. For example, in November 2025, 39% of working-age people in Blackpool were in receipt of 'out of work' benefits, compared with 23.1% across England.

We know from our previous research that these groups all have lower levels of social mobility.[2] And for people facing compounding disadvantages, such as women in poor health, with low qualifications, and living in a deprived area, the predicted probability of long-term benefit receipt is 92%.

It is important therefore, as NEET reduction and labour market inactivity are acquiring substantial policy attention, that the wider limitations of the welfare system are not ignored. The question of long term benefit dependency is probably improving compared to the post-financial crisis period. In 2009-10 the numbers were higher (32%), but the reduction is from extremely high to very high.

[1] Department for Work & Pensions (2006) 'Universal Credit quarterly statistics, 29 April 2013 to 14 May 2025'
[2] Social Mobility Commission (2023) 'State of the Nation 2023: People and Places'

In terms of remedies, it is evident that policymakers must give far greater attention to fixing this aspect of the welfare system, alongside work currently taking place to reduce NEETs and address labour market inactivity. And in doing so, it must acknowledge and address three extremely difficult problems.

First, is the relationship between long-term benefit dependency and families. The very high percentage of lone parents in this situation presents a problem for those lone parents and for their families. The lone parent misses out on the positive advantages which come with skills acquisition and work. And as our previous research shows, outcomes for children in those families are frequently weak.[3] The answer will not be found by increasing benefits in isolation from a wider redesign of the whole system. The evidence shows that while cash transfers and welfare payments may help to alleviate poverty to some extent, they do little to help improve overall outcomes.[4] It is imperative, therefore, that support for lone parents should focus on reducing dependency, integrating welfare support with skills development, childcare and family support, with the ultimate aim of a thriving and independent family.

Second, is the issue of place. Within each UK nation, individuals living in the most deprived quintile had the largest share of people in long-term receipt of means-tested benefits. Local area deprivation is a clear part of the risk profile for long term benefit dependency, but increasingly, place is a risk factor for a range of other negative outcomes, from low educational achievement, through to employment and health. Very often, there is a concentration of disadvantage in the same places, often seaside towns and post industrial towns.[5] The question is what role the welfare system plays in contributing to this, rather than remedying it.

Third is the issue of adult skills, which is the least well-resourced aspect of the skills system, but critical to removing the bottleneck of opportunity described in this report. Lifelong learning has received limited policy priority in recent years, likely because the far-reaching impact of low skills and qualifications on individuals, families, and communities is not always fully recognised. It is also a drag on economic growth, and a major risk factor in terms of benefit dependency. If adult skills continue to be ignored, far too many people will be locked out of future growth, and the welfare system will never become the "trampoline" it should be.

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[3] Social Mobility Commission (2026) 'The Role of Families in the Educational Outcomes of Children and Young People'
[4] K. Noble and others (2025), The effect of a monthly unconditional cash transfer on children's development at four years of age: A randomized controlled trial in the U.S.
[5] Social Mobility Commission (2025) 'State of the Nation 2025: The evolving story of social mobility in the UK'

Executive summary

Introduction

The UK social security system plays an essential role in providing financial support for working-age adults who face additional costs due to ill health and disability, dependent children and caring responsibilities. Means-tested benefits protect non-working households without income from destitution and top up income in households with low earnings. While for many this support may only be required for short periods of time, for others, longer-term support may be necessary. Provision of social security benefits is costly. The Department for Work and Pensions forecasts that benefit expenditure on working-age adults and children in Great Britain will be £156 billion in 2026/27.[6]

Despite clear public and political interest in the provision of an adequate and effective social security safety net, there is surprisingly little known about those who are the recipients of long-term benefit. This includes limited evidence on prevalence, time trends, of who is most likely to be a long-term recipient and what barriers might prevent long-term claimants from achieving financial independence. If there are barriers, these can constrain efforts to improve social mobility, which has wider implications for the economy and society.

Long-term receipt of means-tested benefits can raise concerns as it reveals a degree of low-income or poverty persistence. Perhaps one of the reasons why so little is known about long-term recipients is that until fairly recently a range of means-tested benefits supported different claimant groups or provided support for distinct needs. The introduction of Universal Credit (UC) in 2013 which gradually replaced 6 legacy means-tested benefits to become the main means-tested benefit for working-age people has provided a sharper focus.[7] Because UC spans out-of-work and in-work means-tested support, with over one-third of UC claimants being in work, it has become clearer that a strategy is required to help people move off benefits and achieve financial independence.[8] With the blurring of the boundary between out-of-work support and in-work support, such a strategy is likely to need to go beyond traditional forms of activation aimed at helping people find and secure work.

[6] Department for Work & Pensions, '[Benefit expenditure and caseload tables 2026]'. Published on GOV.UK.
[7] The 6 benefits that Universal Credit replaced: Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit.
[8] Department for Work & Pensions, '[Universal Credit quarterly statistics, 29 April 2013 to 14 May 2026]'. Published on GOV.UK.

To address these evidence gaps, the Social Mobility Commission (SMC) commissioned the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) to conduct quantitative longitudinal analysis using Understanding Society (from 2009 to 2024), alongside a literature review (published on the CASE website).[9] The core questions which guide the quantitative research in this study are:

1. Prevalence and profile: what is the prevalence and what are the core demographic and socio-economic factors that define long-term benefit recipients?
2. Dynamics and persistence: what are the flows of people into and out of long-term benefit receipt? What socio-demographic characteristics are associated with people becoming stuck on long-term benefit receipt?

For the purposes of this research, a *Long-term* benefit recipient is defined as a working-age adult receiving means-tested benefits for 12 months or longer. This reflects the role of means-tested benefits as a safety net for households experiencing unemployment, low earnings or high housing costs. It also distinguishes recipients from those receiving non-means-tested benefits. The latter are designed to compensate for additional costs mainly associated with disability or caring responsibilities and are not directly tied to labour market status, earnings or income. In the UK, entitlement to means-tested benefits is assessed by household need and other sources of income which can meet that need. Because need and income are assessed jointly at the household level, an individual's benefit status reflects the circumstances of their family unit.

This study analyses 15 years of longitudinal survey data from Understanding Society spanning the years 2009/10 to 2023/24.[10] While administrative benefit records allow precise measurement of continuous claim dates for individual benefit types, Understanding Society was selected because it enables exploration of wider benefit receipt alongside demographics and household circumstances. This includes individual qualification levels, self-reported physical and mental health, occupational classification from the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC), local area deprivation from the Index of Multiple Deprivation, and household composition. Sampling

[9] Abigail McKnight and Margaret Kayitale, 'Review of the existing evidence on long-term benefit receipt, barriers to progress and effective strategies to reduce long-term benefit receipt' CASE report 176, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics and Political Science.

[10] Understanding Society is the UK Household Longitudinal Study, the largest survey of its kind in the UK. It follows an original sample of more than 30,000 households over many years to track social, economic and health changes.

weights (cross-sectional and longitudinal) are applied throughout to provide, as far as possible, nationally representative estimates corrected for sample changes over time.

Chapter 1: Who receives long-term means-tested benefits?

Chapter 1 presents new evidence on trends in means-tested benefit receipt and long-term receipt among working-age adults. Descriptive statistics show the breakdown of trends by different demographic characteristics and household circumstances, while estimates from statistical models identify the independent effects of different risk factors on receipt and long-term receipt. Crucially, these models demonstrate how risk factors compound, creating high probabilities of benefit reliance and long-term receipt for specific groups.

Key findings

- **Long-term means-tested benefit receipt has fallen since the period following the 2007-08 financial crisis**. Although most working-age adults are not claiming means-tested benefits, receipt and long-term receipt remains quite common, affecting around 1 in 5 working-age adults in 2023 to 2024.

- **Long-term receipt recently increased following the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis**.

- **Different measures of long-term receipt reveal a considerable amount of 'churn'**, highlighting how periods away from means-tested benefits can be closely followed by a need to return.

- **Long-term receipt is not evenly distributed across the working-age population with some groups facing much higher risks than others**. Higher than average rates are found for women, some ethnic minority groups, disabled people, lone parents, people with low or no qualifications, those living in deprived areas, people who are unemployed or economically inactive and workers in low-skilled occupations.

- **Despite the overall downward trend in long-term receipt, prevalence did not decline for all groups**. Time trends are flat or increasing among people aged 55 years and over, those with no qualifications, individuals reporting poor general health, and disabled people. This means that an

increasing share of claimants has these characteristics.

- **Results from statistical models of the probability of being a means-tested benefit recipient or a long-term recipient, provide estimates of statistically significant independent effects of risk factors**. These models highlight independent effects of sex, age, qualifications, ethnicity, disability, general health, household type, local area deprivation and employment status.

- **These risk factors do not occur in isolation. This research shows how risks accumulate across different characteristics**, based on statistical model results. It gives examples of compounding risks by using model estimates to predict benefit receipt for hypothetical individuals. For example:

  A 45 to 54-year-old unemployed, disabled White woman with GCSEs, who lives with her partner and dependent children in one of England's most deprived areas, has a 92% predicted probability of long-term receipt of means-tested benefits.

  In contrast, a 35 to 44-year-old degree-educated, disabled White woman, who is employed in a lower managerial/lower professional occupation, lives with her partner with no dependent children in a deprived area of England has an estimated 3% predicted probability of long-term receipt of means-tested benefits.

  In between these examples are a whole range of risks associated with different characteristics and their combinations. For example, a Black African man aged 35 to 44 years, with A level or equivalent qualifications, who is not disabled, employed in a low-skilled occupation group, lives with a partner and dependent children in one of the most deprived areas of England has an estimated 30% probability of being a long-term means-tested benefit recipient.

Chapter 2: Evidence on the dynamics of means-tested benefit receipt

This chapter uses the longitudinal data in Understanding Society to look at the dynamics of means-tested benefit receipt. Two key aspects are explored:

1. The probability of becoming a long-term benefit recipient
2. Whether longer-term benefit claimants are less likely to stop

claiming than shorter-term claimants.

The second aspect helps to address the question on whether there is any evidence of recipients getting 'stuck' on benefits. It is not possible to identify causal effects, which means we cannot determine whether lower exit probabilities among long-term claimants (if found) are caused by the design of the benefit system or due to the duration of claims directly reducing exit probabilities. However, it is possible to estimate whether longer term benefit recipients have lower exit probabilities, identify what factors increase or decrease the probability of moving off benefits and the characteristics of individuals with higher or lower probabilities of remaining on benefits for long periods of time.

Key findings

- **A high proportion of means-tested benefit recipients go on to become long-term recipients each year**. Around half of claimants in one year are estimated to also be in receipt of means-tested benefits in the following year.

- **Some claimants face higher risks of becoming long-term benefit recipients.** Women, 25 to 34 year olds, people who are disabled, people with no or low levels of qualifications, single parents, unemployed or economically inactive, people working in lower-skilled occupations and those living in the most deprived areas have higher risks of becoming long-term benefit recipients.

- **Exit and sustained exit rates from long-term means-tested benefit receipt have fallen over time.** In the most recent year for which Understanding Society data is available (2023-24) rates are around 10%, highlighting a degree of persistence. Falling exit rates are shaped by improvements in the economy following the financial crisis and may also reflect the greater continuity in means-tested support available through UC.

- Changes in the profile of benefit recipients, as highlighted in Chapter 1, can mean that **longer-term recipients increasingly comprise a group of claimants facing higher barriers to increasing household income.** Older people, those with no qualifications, and those reporting poor health or a disability are less likely to exit long-term receipt.

- **Individuals who have been claiming means-tested benefits across a greater number of years have lower predicted probabilities of leaving**

means-tested support. The predicted probability of exiting is 7-8 percentage points lower for longer-term recipients after controlling for a range of characteristics. The predicted probability of achieving a sustained exit is 5-7 percentage points lower for longer-term recipients, again highlighting a degree of persistence.

- **Evidence shows 'churn': short breaks from means-tested benefits often followed by a quick return.** This suggests there are "fragile rungs on the ladder to financial independence".

- Marginal effects from model estimates are used to compute predicted probabilities for exiting long-term means-tested benefit receipt for stylised hypothetical individuals.[11] These highlight how **exit and sustained exit probabilities vary between individuals**. For example:

  A 45-54 year old disabled White woman who lives in one of the most deprived areas of England, who is a single parent working in a lower professional occupation. Prior to the current year she had been in receipt of means-tested benefits for at least 3 years at the time survey interviews took place. Her estimated probability of exiting means-tested benefits in the current year is 5%. If she hadn't been in receipt of means-tested benefits for longer than 2 years (at the time the interviews took place), her predicted probability of exiting would be 12%.

- Other examples highlight how predicted probabilities of exiting long-term means-tested benefit receipt vary between different individual and household characteristics and how longer periods on benefit receipt reduce the predicted probability of leaving while holding other characteristics constant. These results suggest a degree of persistence in means-tested benefit receipt, or 'stickiness', with lower probabilities of leaving benefits for people who have been claiming for longer.

Chapter 3: Conclusions and recommendations

The government must set out a clear and modern vision for the purpose of working-age social security, one that firmly positions social security as both a robust safety net against hardship and an effective trampoline for achieving self-sufficiency. At present, our analysis reveals that while the current system functions as a safety net, for some, it is failing on the 'trampoline' promise:

[11] A stylised hypothetical individual is an imaginary, simplified profile constructed from statistical model outputs to show how risks combine across characteristics.

working-age adults who enter the welfare system face a high likelihood of becoming dependent.

By blurring the boundary between ‘work and welfare’, UC has introduced a secondary structural challenge: the "in-work benefit trap." High withdrawal rates (taper rates) combined with the reduction of local authority support (such as Council Tax Support) mean that as claimants increase their hours or secure small pay rises, a substantial proportion of every additional pound earned is clawed back. Consequently, many claimants fall into long-term benefit receipt without the support, flexibility or financial incentives needed to progress beyond low-paid, part-time or insecure work. The Department for Work and Pensions introduced in-work conditionality to mandate work-search activities for low earners. This means that even people who are already working but earning below a certain threshold are required to carry out job-search or work-related activities to keep their UC. But compliance checks alone cannot overcome these structural disincentives.

To improve social mobility prospects for long-term benefit recipients, policy must remain ambitious: the welfare state should strive to enable health-limited claimants to access suitable, supportive employment wherever possible, while ensuring working parents and low-paid workers are supported to progress beyond low-pay traps. To strengthen the benefit system’s role in supporting upward social mobility, the SMC sets out 5 core recommendations for government:

1. Improve the supply of quality local employment through place-based growth
2. Foster relational coaching as employment support
3. Align family-centred benefit support and childcare to reward work intensity
4. Strengthen vocational adult training opportunities for means-tested benefit recipients
5. Address health inequalities and structural barriers to disability employment

Glossary

Benefit unit – defined according to the administration of social security benefits. Typically comprises a single adult or couple with or without dependent children. A household can contain more than one benefit unit.

Conditionality – ongoing receipt of social security benefits is often dependent on various conditions being met by the claimant. The most common are attending regular appointments with Jobcentre and Careers Service staff and meeting the terms of a claimant commitment, which can include undertaking tasks to find a job or increase earnings. Where conditions are not met, sanctions can be applied leading to reductions in payments over set periods of time.

Household work intensity – is a measure of the amount of paid work undertaken by working-age adult household members against potential working time. For example, a household with 2 working-age adults where one is working full-time and the other is not working is said to have a household work intensity of 50%.

Legacy benefits – refer to the 6 working-age means-tested benefits which Universal Credit (UC) replaced. The 6 legacy benefits are: Income Support, Housing Benefit, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit.

Means-tested benefits – social security benefits paid according to an assessment of income, and sometimes financial assets, within a benefit unit against needs, based on the number of adults and dependent children.

Universal Credit – the main means-tested benefit for working-age adults.

Work-first activation programmes – employment programmes for unemployed people which prioritise finding work above other interventions such as education or training.

Work allowance – a UC claimant can earn up to a set threshold before UC is reduced if they or their partner is responsible for a dependent child or children or have a limited capability to work due to a health condition or disability. This is called the work allowance. Above this threshold, for every £1 earned from working, UC payment is reduced by 55p. This is called the taper rate.

Acronyms

ALMPs – Active Labour Market Programmes

CASE – Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion

DWP – Department for Work and Pensions

ESA – Employment and Support Allowance

FE – Further Education

IMD – Index of Multiple Deprivation

JSA – Jobseeker's Allowance

JRF - Joseph Rowntree Foundation

NEET - Not in employment, education or training

NS-SEC – National Statistics Socio-economic Classification

ONS – Office for National Statistics

PIP – Personal Independence Payment

SMC – Social Mobility Commission

UC – Universal Credit

Introduction

Background and objectives

The UK social security system has evolved over time. Post-World War 2, the 1942 Beveridge report and 1948 National Assistance Act, saw the initiation of a comprehensive, non-means-tested system of social security designed to act as a financial safety net.[12] The system was intended to act as a 'trampoline' supporting people in times of need, before returning to self-sufficiency. Today there is a much more extensive social security system with support for families with dependent children, people with disabilities, carers and means-tested benefits for low-income households. However, think tanks such as the Institute for Fiscal Studies argue that the current system creates financial 'cliff edges' and taper rates that discourage progression and entrench low income.[13] Despite this, little is actually known about the real scale of working-age people who are long-term recipients of social security.

The total number of state benefit recipients provides context for the scale of social security use. In 2025, approximately 24 million people in the UK claimed some combination of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) benefits. Of these, approximately 10 million were of working age.[14] DWP forecasts that benefit expenditure on working-age adults and children in Great Britain will be £156 billion in 2026/27.[15]

Universal Credit (UC) is the primary means-tested working age benefit and is a payment for people both in and out of work. UC was rolled out from 2018, replacing 6 'legacy' means-tested benefits through a process completed in 2026. The number of UC claimants was about 8.3 million in December 2025.[16] This benefit can be provided to support people in work, if their earnings are low enough to qualify and they live in a low-income household.[17] Incapacity

[12] UK Parliament, 'The benefits of Britain', Published on PARLIAMENT.UK.
[13] Institute for Fiscal Studies, 'Universal credit review: challenges and options for reform', 2026. Published on IFS.ORG.UK.
[14] Department for Work & Pensions, 'DWP benefit statistics: February 2026', Published on GOV.UK.
[15] Department for Work & Pensions, 'Benefit expenditure and caseload tables 2026'. Published on GOV.UK.
[16] Department for Work & Pensions, 'DWP benefit statistics: February 2026', Published on GOV.UK.
[17] More accurately, DWP assesses benefit eligibility based on benefit units which typically comprise one adult or a couple and any dependent children living together. The majority of households contain one benefit unit but some contain more than one such as multi-generation households.

and disability benefits support eligible people with health conditions and disabilities. There has been a significant increase in spending on working age, health-related benefits post pandemic (between 2019-20 and 2023-24) from £36 to £48 billion.[18] This increase is further reflected in 2024, by a sharp increase in the number of flows onto UC and into the no work requirement category for those with a health condition.[19] [20] [21]

While the scale of overall social security use is significant, robust evidence relating to long-term benefit recipients is lacking. Little is understood about the prevalence and characteristics of people in receipt of benefits over long periods of time. Without information on the scale and heterogeneity of this group, the need for targeted policies for improving social mobility of long-term benefit recipients is both unknown and difficult to produce.

Improving understanding of the role of individual and systemic factors in long-term benefit receipt will help to inform targeted policies to improve social mobility in the UK, reduce social security spending and increase economic growth. Combined with this, the policy context surrounding the social security system offers an opportunity for the research to contribute meaningfully to wider discussions on the topic. These include the Get Britain Working White Paper, and the Pathways to Work Green Paper, making this a pertinent time to build understanding of those most dependent on the welfare system.[22] [23]

To address these evidence gaps, the Social Mobility Commission (SMC) commissioned the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) to conduct quantitative longitudinal analysis using Understanding Society (2009 to 2024), as well as a separate literature review.[24]

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[18] Institute for Fiscal Studies, 'Health-related benefit claims post-pandemic: UK trends and global context', 2024. Published on IFS.ORG.UK.
[19] Between December 2023 and December 2025, the number of people on UC increased by 2.0 million. However, migration to UC from legacy benefits made up 1.6 million or 78.3% of this increase. Department for Work & Pensions, 'DWP Universal Credit quarterly statistics, 29 April 2013 to 14 May 2026'. Published on GOV.UK.
[20] Department for Work & Pensions, '3b. Flows between Universal Credit conditionality regimes', 2026. Published on GOV.UK.
[21] The increase is likely to reflect the migration of Employment and Support Allowance claimants onto UC in 2024. Department for Work & Pensions, 'Completing the move to Universal Credit: completing the move for households previously on Employment and Support Allowance.'
[22] Department for Work & Pensions, HM Treasury and Department for Education 'Get Britain working white paper', 2024. Published on GOV.UK.
[23] Department for Work & Pensions, 'Pathways to work: reforming benefits and support to get Britain working green paper', 2025. Published on GOV.UK.
[24] Abigail McKnight and Margaret Kayitale, 'Review of the existing evidence on long-term benefit receipt, barriers to progress and effective strategies to reduce long-term benefit

The core research questions that guide this study are:

- Prevalence and characteristics: What is the prevalence and what are the core demographic and socio-economic factors that define long-term benefit recipients?
- Dynamics and persistence: What are the flows of people into and out of long-term benefit receipt? What socio-demographic characteristics are associated with people becoming 'stuck' on long-term benefit receipt?

Methodology

This study uses 15 years of longitudinal survey data from Understanding Society spanning 2009/10 to 2023/24. While administrative benefit records allow precise measurement of continuous claim dates, Understanding Society was selected because it enables exploration of benefit receipt alongside wider demographics such as individual qualification levels, self-reported physical and mental health, occupational classification (NS-SEC), local area deprivation (IMD), and household composition. Sampling weights (cross-sectional and longitudinal) are applied throughout to provide, as far as possible, nationally representative estimates and to correct for sample changes over time.

Defining a working age long-term benefit recipient

'Long-term benefit recipient' is not a category clearly defined or reported in current literature. To establish a rigorous operational definition, a rapid evidence review was conducted and detailed in Annex A. For the purpose of this research a long-term benefit recipient is defined as a working-age adult receiving means-tested benefits for 12 months or more. To operationalise this core definition using Understanding Society data, a *Long-term* benefit recipient is a working-age adult reporting receipt of means-tested benefits in 2 consecutive annual interviews. This reflects the role of means-tested benefits as a safety net for households experiencing unemployment, low earnings or high housing costs. It also distinguishes recipients from those receiving non-means-tested benefits. The latter are designed to compensate for additional costs mainly associated with disability or caring responsibilities and are not directly tied to labour market status, earnings or income.

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receipt' CASE report 176, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics and Political Science.

UC has blurred the traditional boundary between out-of-work and in-work benefits, reinforcing the need to examine means-tested benefit receipt as a whole rather than focusing on specific claimant groups. Evaluation of UC as it becomes the predominant means-tested benefit will inform, not just if people can move from unemployment into work, but whether they can secure sufficient and stable earnings to achieve financial independence. This broadens the research scope, while still recognising the distinct barriers faced by different types of claimants.

An individual's means-tested benefit status reflects the circumstances of the family unit to which they belong. Entitlement to means-tested benefits are assessed by household need and other sources of income which can meet that need. A household may be a single adult or couple, plus any dependent children. Because need and income are assessed jointly at the household level, an individual's benefit status reflects the circumstances of the family unit to which they belong.

This report presents findings across 3 main areas:

- Chapter 1 examines 15-year trends in means-tested benefit receipt, analysing demographic profiles (including age, sex, household composition and local area deprivation) and the impact of compounded risks for long-term recipients.
- Chapter 2 investigates long-term benefit dynamics, focusing on inflows, exit rates and persistence, to evaluate whether prolonged receipt reduces the likelihood of achieving financial independence.
- Chapter 3 integrates these findings to set out policy recommendations for supporting social mobility.

Chapter 1: Prevalence and characteristics of Long-term benefit recipients, 2009-10 to 2023-24

Key findings:

- **Long-term means-tested benefit receipt has fallen since the period following the 2007-08 financial crisis**. Although most working-age adults are not claiming means-tested benefits, receipt and long-term receipt remain quite common, affecting around 1 in 5 working-age adults in 2023-24.
- **Long-term receipt recently increased following the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis**.
- **Different measures of long-term receipt reveal a considerable amount of 'churn'**, highlighting how periods moving off means-tested benefits can be closely followed by a need to return.
- **Long-term receipt is not evenly distributed across the working-age population**. Higher than average rates are found for women, some ethnic minority groups, disabled people, lone parents, people with low or no qualifications, those living in deprived areas, people who are unemployed or economically inactive and workers in low-skilled occupations.
- **Despite the overall downward trend in long-term receipt, prevalence did not decline for all groups**. Time trends are flat or increasing among people aged 55 years and over, those with no qualifications, individuals reporting poor general health, and disabled people. This means that an increasing share of claimants have these characteristics.
- **Results from statistical models of the probability of being a means-tested benefit recipient or a long-term recipient, provide estimates of statistically significant independent effects of risk factors**. These models highlight independent effects of sex, age, qualifications, ethnicity, disability, general health, household type, local area deprivation and employment status.

- **These risk factors do not occur in isolation. An important contribution of this research is the demonstration of how risks accumulate across different characteristics** using the results from the statistical models. Examples of compounding risks are derived from estimated marginal effects to predict the probability of being in receipt or long-term receipt of means-tested benefits through creating stylised hypothetical individuals. For example:
- A 45 to 54-year-old unemployed, disabled White woman with GCSEs, living with her partner and dependent children in one of England's most deprived areas, has a 92% predicted probability of long-term receipt of means-tested benefits.
- In contrast, a 35 to 44-year-old degree-educated, disabled White woman, who is employed in a lower managerial/lower professional occupation, lives with her partner with no dependent children in a deprived area of England has an estimated 3% predicted probability of long-term receipt of means-tested benefits.
- In between these examples are a whole range of risks associated with different characteristics and their combinations. For example, a Black African man aged 35 to 44 years, with A level or equivalent qualifications, who is not disabled, employed in a low-skilled occupation group, lives with a partner and dependent children in one of the most deprived areas of England has an estimated 30% probability of long-term receipt of means-tested benefits.

This chapter explores the prevalence of benefit receipt in the UK working-age population and the characteristics of those in *Long-term* receipt between 2009-10 and 2023-24. It explores the characteristics of means-tested benefit recipients, including sex, age, ethnicity, health, education and local area deprivation. Finally, it examines the impact of compounding risks with illustrative pen portraits of the types of people experiencing the highest risks of becoming *Long-term* benefit recipients. The analysis utilises data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study (also known as Understanding Society) covering 15 years from the start of the survey 2009-10 to the most recent data available collected in 2023-24.[25] For more information about this data source, please see the Understanding Society text box.

Means-tested social security plays an essential role in protecting working-age individuals and families in non-working households from destitution and

[25] University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research, 'Understanding Society: Waves 1-15, 2009-2024 and Harmonised BHPS: Waves 1-18, 1991-2009'. Published on DATACATALOGUE.UKDATASERVICE.AC.UK.

topping up income in households with low earnings. While for many this support may only be required for a short period of time, for example following job loss, a relationship breakdown or period of ill health, for others longer-term support may be necessary.

Extended periods on means-tested benefits are increasingly understood as the cumulative outcome of repeated exposure to low income, insecure or intermittent work, indebtedness and administrative uncertainty. Prolonged receipt, particularly within a system that includes extensive in-work benefits, cannot be explained simply by episodes of unemployment.[26] Instead, it reflects inadequate and unstable earnings, fluctuating household composition, poor health, caring responsibilities, and high fixed costs, especially housing.

Understanding Society

This household survey has been running since 2009-10, following the same sample through annual interviews which collect a broad range of information on the lives of participants. Information is collected from all adults living in a sample household along with information on any dependent children. The original sample included around 38,000 households.[27] Boost samples, in 2014-15 and 2022-23, have helped replenish the sample as some members choose to leave the survey (attrition), and to increase the size of smaller population groups (in particular, ethnic minority groups). In addition, boost samples aim to improve the representativeness of the survey through including migrants who entered the UK after the start of the survey or since the previous boost sample took place. Sampling weights (cross-sectional and longitudinal, as appropriate) are applied to provide, as far as possible, representative estimates and to correct for sample attrition. However, it is important to be aware that even weighted samples can only provide estimates and that, between boost sample years, the population which the sample is weighted to represent is the UK population either in the first year of the survey or the later boost sample years. This means that changes to the UK population, particularly the arrival of new migrants, are not represented in the sample in the intervening years.

As the same sample is interviewed annually it is possible to link these records to define longer-term measures of benefit receipt. These measures are more data demanding than measures which assess receipt at a single point in time, as they require complete and continuous records over a set number of years. This reduces the sample size and requires the use of longitudinal weights. It also means that time series start later as individuals need to have provided survey responses for a number of years before the measures can be derived.

[26] Peter Dwyer and others, 'Work, welfare, and wellbeing: the impacts of welfare conditionality on people with mental health impairments in the UK', 2020. Published on ONLINELIBRARY.WILEY.COM.

[27] University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research, 'Understanding Society: Waves 1-15, 2009-2024 and Harmonised BHPS: Waves 1-18, 1991-2009'. Published on DATACATALOGUE.UKDATASERVICE.AC.UK.

The advantage of using Understanding Society for this analysis, over administrative sources on social security benefit receipt, is the breadth and richness of information available not just on individuals, but also on the households in which they live. It is possible to identify means-tested benefit recipients as a whole rather than looking at different claimant groups. This helps to understand what has happened to means-tested benefit receipt during a period which spans the rollout of Universal Credit (UC). Statistics related to claims for UC provide only a partial picture and can be misleading as they cover new claims and people migrating from the legacy benefit system or exclude them altogether if they are still claiming legacy benefits. The longitudinal nature of the survey means that it is possible to track receipt of social security benefits over time alongside how personal and household circumstances change. There are some compromises, however. It is not possible to identify when a claim for means-tested benefit starts or ends, just whether or not an individual is in receipt of means-tested benefits at the time an annual interview takes place. However, this information is sufficient to build up a picture of long-term benefit receipt using tried and tested measures and methods.

Key measures defined

A number of key measures of benefit receipt and longer-term receipt are used in the analysis. State social security benefits include both means-tested and non-means-tested benefits. For example, means-tested benefits include Universal Credit (UC) and Housing Benefit, and non-means-tested benefits include Personal Independence Payments (PIPs) and new-style Jobseeker's Allowance. The analysis includes a measure of receipt of means-tested benefits at the time of an annual interview and 3 measures of longer-term receipt. They are:

Current – identifies individuals in receipt of benefits at the time of an annual interview.

Long-term - identifies individuals in receipt of benefits in 2 consecutive years (annual interviews) of Understanding Society. No information is available on when the claim started or whether claims were continuous between the annual interviews.

Intermittent - identifies individuals in receipt of benefits in any 2 of the previous 3 consecutive annual interviews. This captures people who may move temporarily out of benefit use, due to short periods of employment, higher household earnings or changes in household circumstances.

Persistent – identifies individuals in receipt of benefits in any 3 of the

previous 4 consecutive annual interviews.

To illustrate the main findings from this research, a selection of figures for a number of the measures are shown for different characteristics. Additional figures are provided in Annex B.

Trends in means-tested benefit receipt

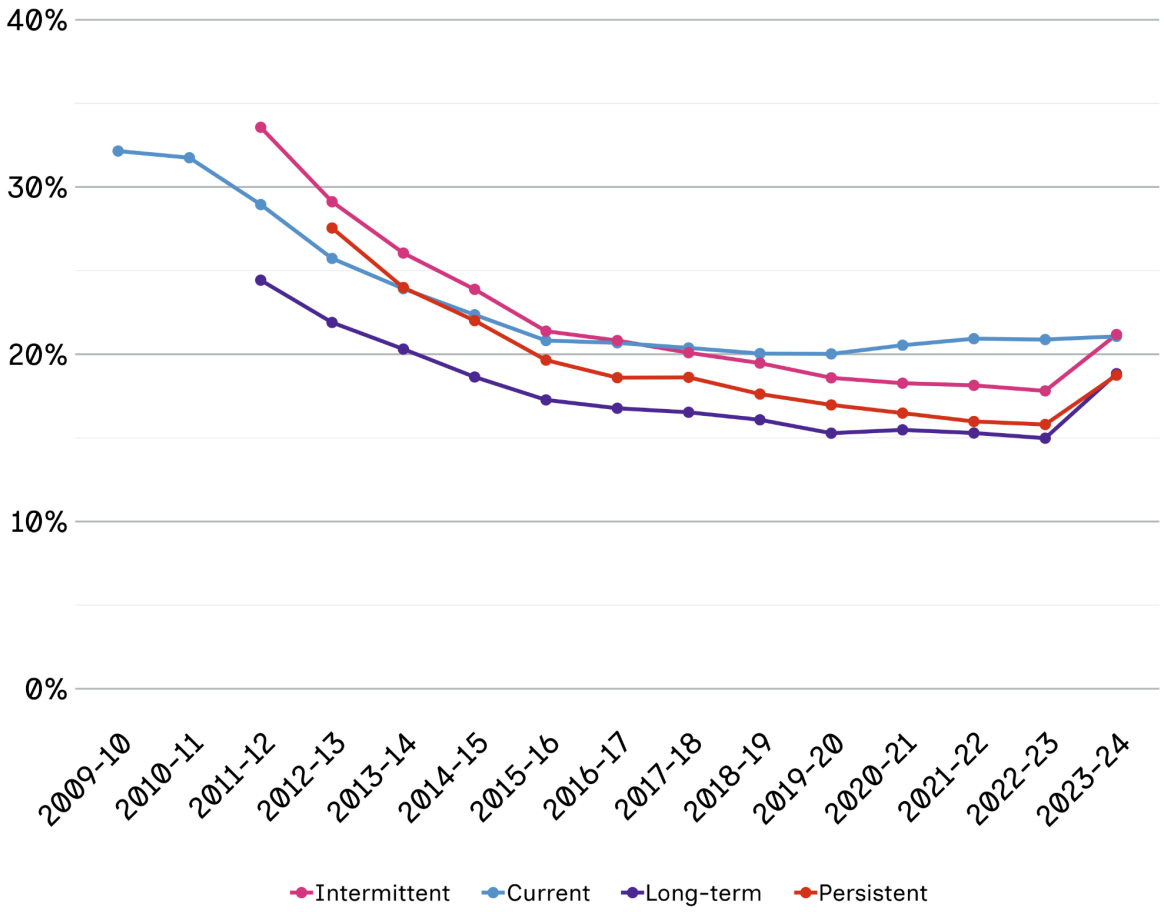
Long-term receipt of non-means-tested benefits can reflect very different circumstances than for means-tested benefits. Where entitlement to non-means-tested benefits is linked to long-term health conditions or disabilities (PIPs), or to dependent children (for example, Child Benefit for non-higher-rate taxpayers), receipt typically continues for many years.

For means-tested benefits, longer-term receipt indicates persistent low living standards. Of course, disability and dependent children can contribute to the risk of persistent low living standards, through associated labour supply constraints or even the ability to work, longer-term receipt of means-tested benefits can be more cause for concern than for longer-term receipt of non-means-tested benefits. This is because it is symptomatic of entrenched low-income and lack of progression to financial independence.

As means-tested benefits are a subset of state benefits, receipt rates are lower. In 2023-24 one-third of working-age adults were in receipt of any state benefits (33%, see Annex B), but just over one-fifth (21%) were in receipt of means-tested benefits (figure 1). The share of people in *Current* receipt of means-tested benefits has fallen from 32% in 2009-10 to 21% in 2023-24. However, rates of receipt of means-tested benefits are more sensitive to changes in living standards than non-means-tested benefits. Changes to means-tested benefits, most notably the rollout of UC (affecting eligibility and conditionality), are likely to have affected time trends.

Figure 1: Trends in means-tested benefit receipt have fallen since 2009-10, with just over one-fifth (21%) receiving this type of social security in 2023-24.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in receipt, and *Long-term* receipt, of means-tested benefits: 2009-10 to 2023-24.



Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

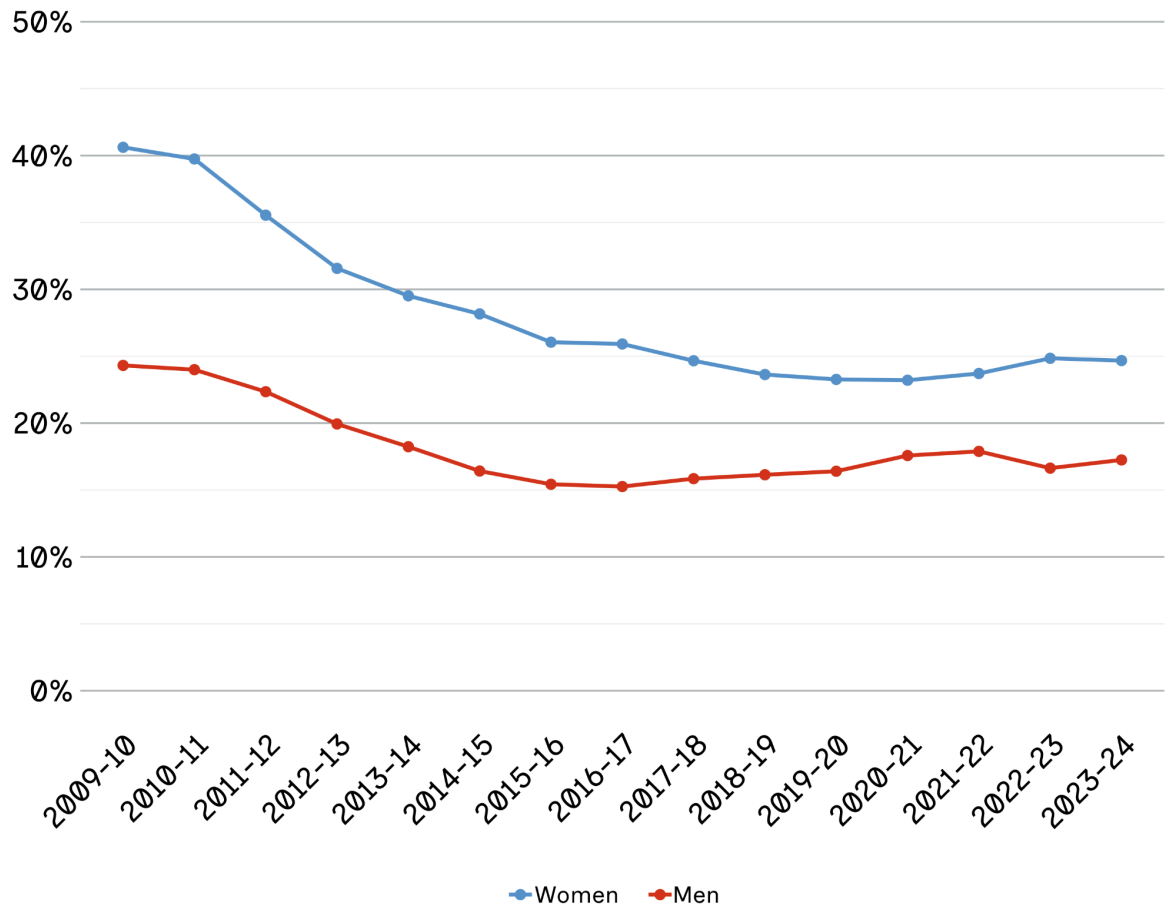
Rates of long-term receipt also declined over this period (figure 1). But the relationship between *Current* and measures of long-term receipt rates is sensitive to changes in the economy. From around 2017/18 rates of *Intermittent* long-term receipt are lower than rates of *Current* means-tested benefit receipt. This is particularly marked in 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2022-23, years affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, which are likely to have led to increases in new claims for means-tested benefits. The lag in the time it takes for these to feed through into increases in long-term receipt can be seen in the increase in the 3 measures of long-term receipt in 2023-24. In this year, the gap between *Current* receipt and *Intermittent* long-term receipt has disappeared.

Rates of long-term benefit receipt by sex

Rates of means-tested benefit receipt and long-term means-tested benefit receipt are higher among women than men. However, the gap between women and men in *Current* receipt narrowed between 2009-10 and 2023-24 with rates declining by 16 percentage points for women and 7 percentage points for men (figure 2). This pattern was also reflected among long-term benefit recipients (see Annex B). For example, in 2011-12, 17% of men were estimated to be in *Intermittent* receipt of means-tested benefits compared to 32% of women. By 2022-23 estimated rates had fallen to 12% of men and 18% of women. This narrowing gap was likely driven by increasing employment rates among women, especially mothers. *Long-term* receipt rates increased for both men and women between 2022-23 and 2023-24 but the gap between women and men widened due to a greater increase for women (see Annex B).

Figure 2: A greater share of women than men received means-tested benefits between 2009-10 and 2023-24.

Trends in the percentage of working age adults in *Current* receipt of means-tested by sex: 2009-10 to 2023-24.



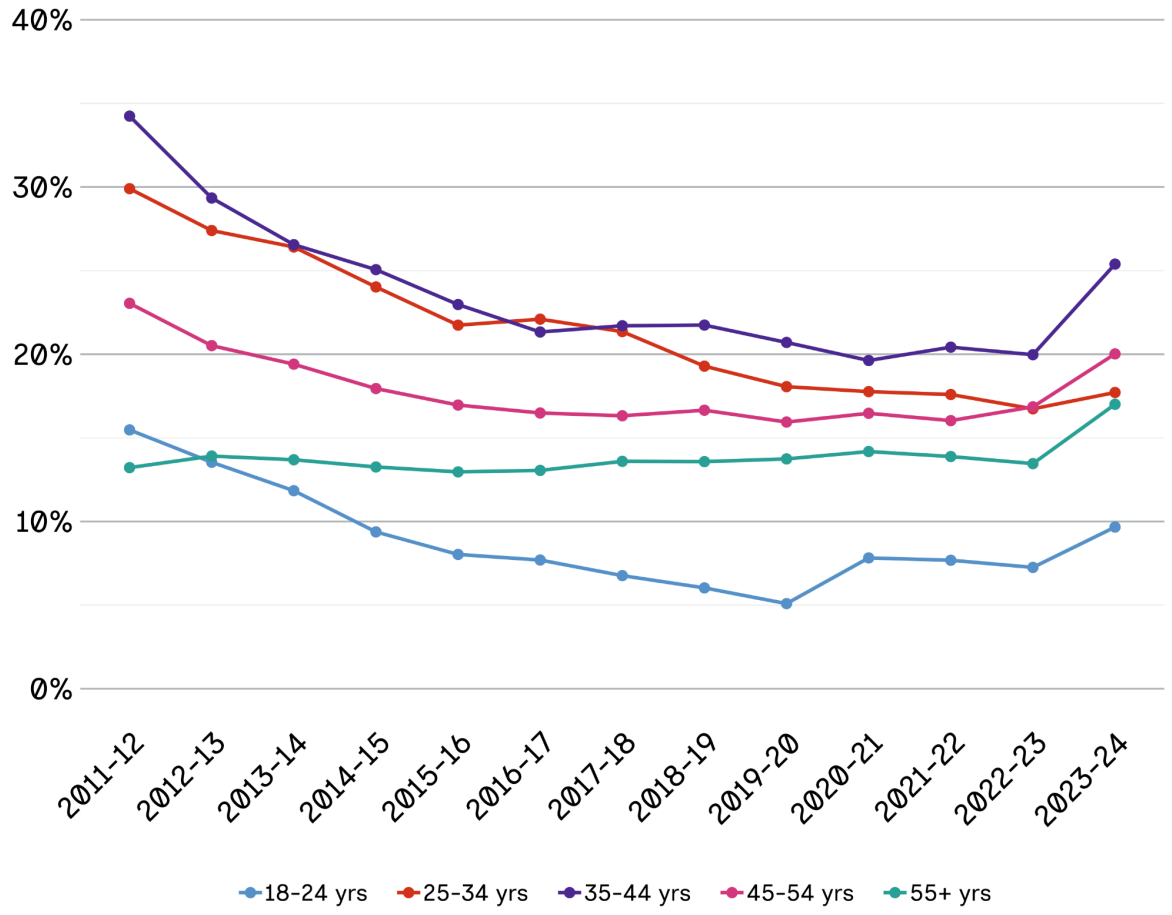
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Rates of long-term benefit receipt by age

The overall trends in *Long-term* means-tested benefit receipt shown in figure 1 are also found among most age groups except for the oldest age group (figure 3). Working-age adults aged 55 years and over appeared to have been less affected by the aftermath of the 2007-08 financial crisis in terms of higher rates of *Long-term* receipt. Furthermore, the time trend in rates for this age group was fairly flat throughout this period apart from an uptick in the final year (this pronounced uptick is not found for *Current* rates). *Long-term* rates were highest among 35-44 year-olds (likely due to the presence of dependent children) and rates were lowest among 18 to 24-year-olds. The lower rates here were likely to reflect the fact that some of this age group will still be living at home, with parents continuing to provide some with financial support. The age gap for *Current* benefit recipient rates (see Annex B) between 18 to 24-year-olds and older age groups was smaller than for *Long-term* recipients suggesting that claims for *Current* recipients tend to be shorter for this age group. This perhaps reflects shorter periods on means-tested benefits associated with finding work.

Figure 3: Between 2011-12 and 2023-24 rates of *Long-term* benefit receipt were highest for age groups most likely to have dependent children.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Long-term* receipt of means-tested benefits by age group: 2011-12 to 2023-24.



Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Existing evidence helps explain how age groups are affected by different risks. Younger claimants have been found to frequently move between insecure jobs and benefits, while older claimants with health conditions or limited qualifications face barriers to re-entry into stable employment.[28]

Rates of long-term benefit receipt by ethnicity

Rates of *Intermittent* long-term receipt vary between ethnic groups (figure 4). The risk of *Current* and long-term means-tested benefit receipt also varied between different ethnic groups (see Annex B).[29] The lowest rates of

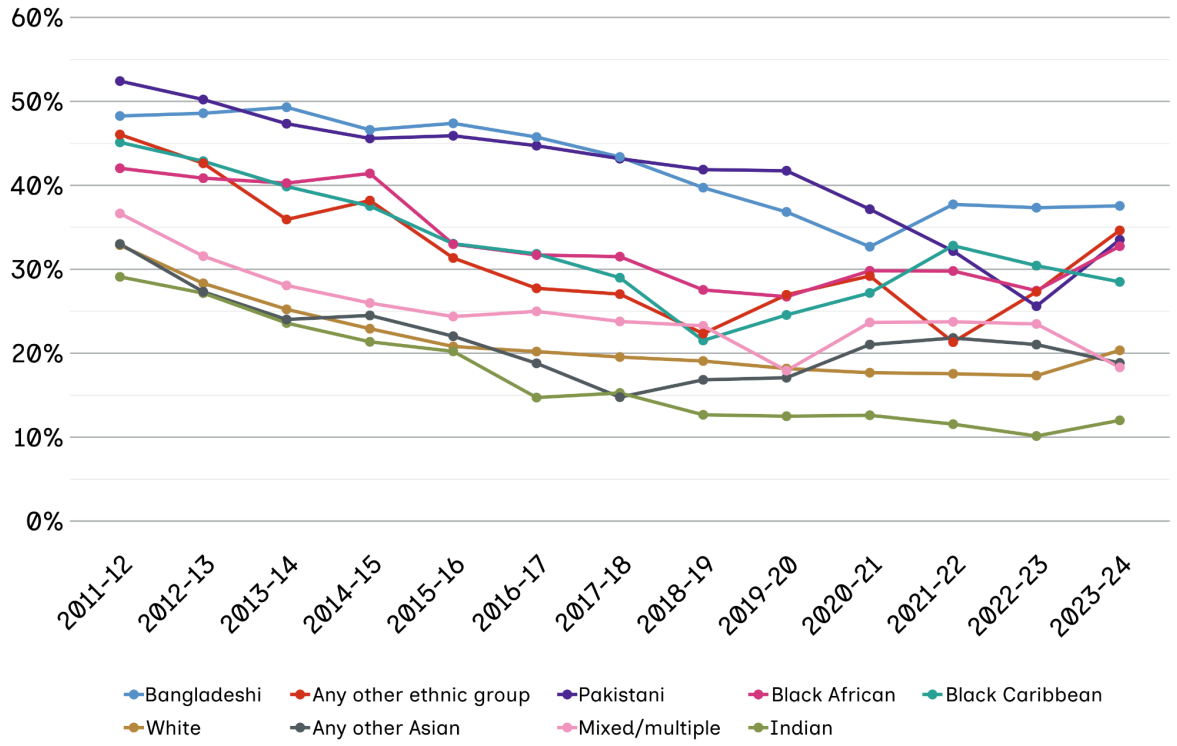
[28] Joseph Rowntree Foundation, (2024) '*UK Poverty 2024: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK*'.

[29] Numerically small ethnic groups lead to less precision in estimated rates for these groups

Intermittent receipt were among Indian working-age adults. The highest rates were among Pakistani and Bangladeshi adults. Black African and Black Caribbean groups also tend to have had higher rates than the majority White population.[30]

Figure 4: Between 2011-2012, Indian people consistently had one of the lowest rates of *Intermittent* benefit receipt.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Intermittent* long-term receipt of means-tested benefits by ethnic group: 2011-12 - 2023-24.



Note: ethnicity estimates for numerically small ethnic minority groups can be subject to greater variation between years due to less precision. However, confidence intervals show that the higher rates among Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups in most years are statistically significantly different from the White group as are the lower rates for the Indian group.

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which results in more variation in estimates between years. However, similar time trends across groups are evident.

[30] In 2023-24 the figure for Bangladeshi working-age adults is based on unweighted data. Applying longitudinal weights to this estimate provided an anomalous estimate of 52%. Experience tells us that the weights should not provide such a stark change in a point estimate which is out of line with other estimates and for which no intuitive explanation can be provided. For comparison, the weighted estimate for the Pakistani group is 34% and the unweighted estimate is 35%. Previous experience of the authors with using Understanding Society is that anomalous estimates in weighted figures can arise particularly for smaller groups. This means that this datapoint is not directly comparable with the other series which are all weighted.

Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Existing evidence highlights how ethnic minority households face disproportionate risks of persistent poverty and longer-term benefit receipt, often linked to difficulties accessing stable, well-paid employment, including discrimination in hiring and career progression, concentration in insecure work, and barriers to securing jobs that match their qualifications and experience.[31] While it is clear that risks vary between ethnic minority groups, these factors are likely to help explain the higher risks for some groups shown in figure 4.

Rates of long-term benefit receipt by qualifications

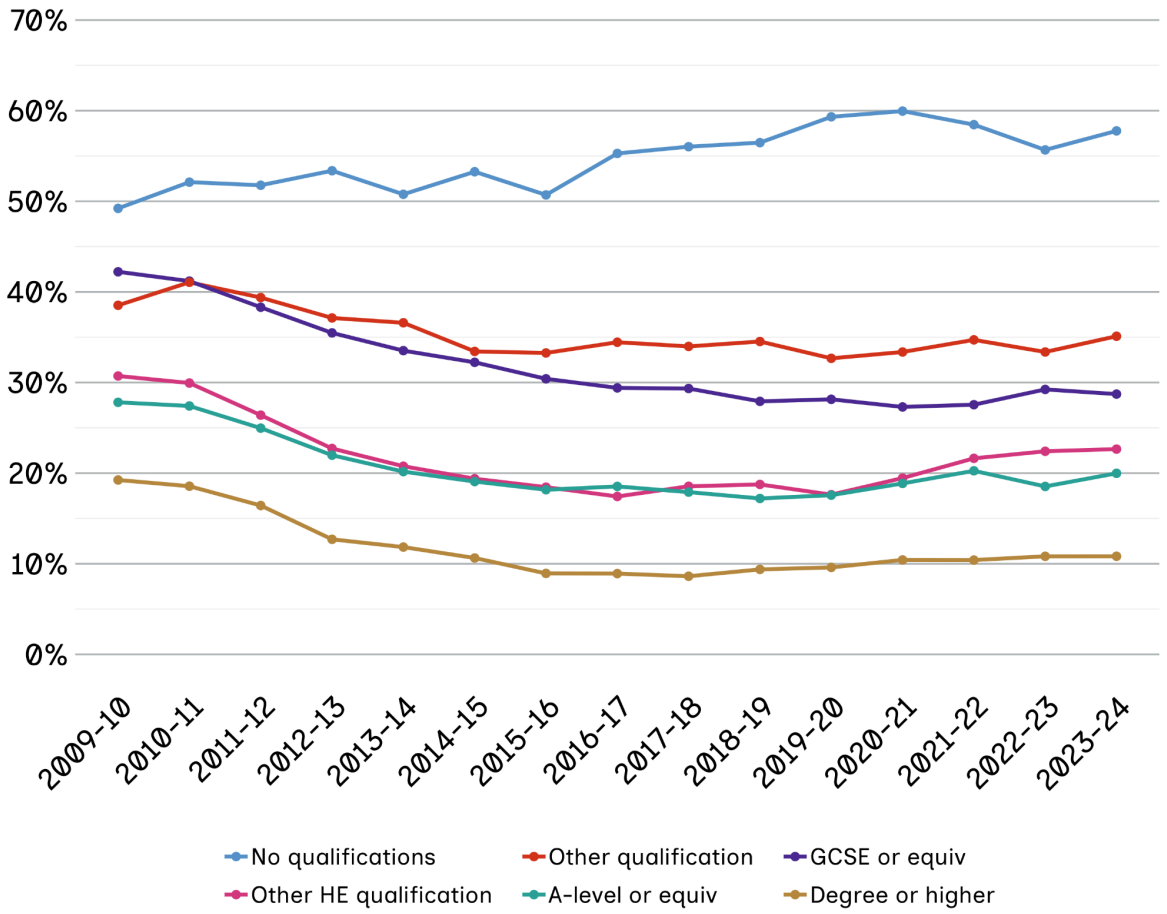
The share of adults in receipt of means-tested benefits and long-term benefit receipt also varied by level of qualification. Adults with low or no qualifications were most likely to be in receipt of means-tested benefits (*Current)*, while the share was lowest among those with a degree or higher (figure 5). A similar relationship held for *Long-term* and *Persistent* receipt of means-tested benefits (see Annex B).

Qualifications affect people's ability to find work and the type and quality of jobs they secure both in terms of pay and job security. These in turn influence household income and eligibility for means-tested benefits.

[31] Joseph Rowntree Foundation, (2024) '*UK Poverty 2024: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK*'.

Figure 5: Between 2009-10 and 2023-24 the share of adults in *Current* benefit receipt was highest and increased for those with no qualifications.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in receipt of means-tested benefits (*Current*) by highest qualification: 2009-10 to 2023-24.



Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

An important difference was evident in the time trends for different qualification groups. While there was a general downward trend in the share of different qualification groups receiving means-tested benefits, for adults with no qualifications the share increased from 49% in 2009-10 to 58% in 2023-24 (figure 5). Similar patterns were found for long-term receipt. The time trend was flatter for adults with "other qualifications" (below GCSE level), while adults with no qualifications showed an upward trend in *Long-term* receipt (see Annex B).

One contrast between *Current* means-tested benefit receipt and trends in the measures of long-term receipt is that there is a more pronounced increase at the end of the period in the share of long-term receipt for most qualification groups. This was shown earlier for overall trends in *Current* receipt and

measures of long-term receipt (figure 1) and shows the lag between an increase in claims during the COVID-19 pandemic and the later rise in long-term receipt driven by the cost-of-living crisis.

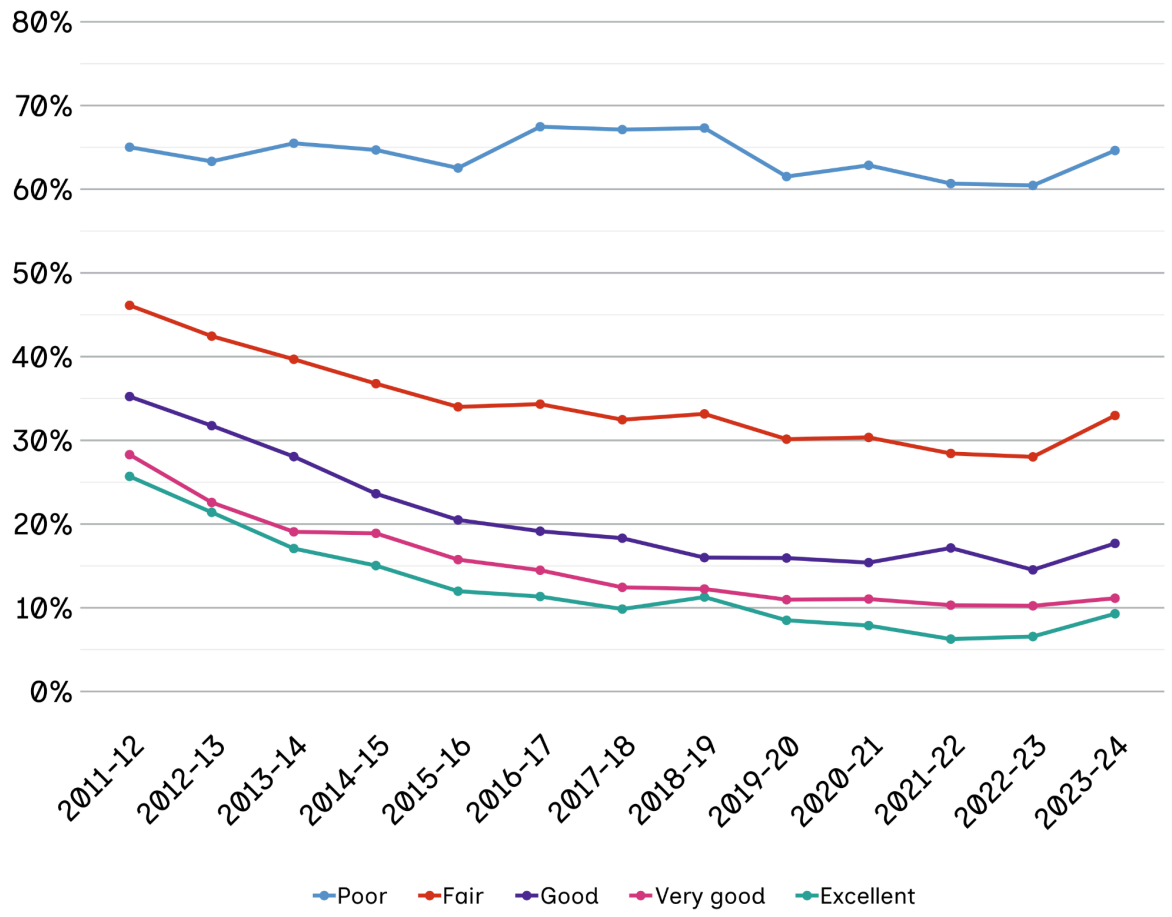
Rates of long-term benefit receipt by general health and disability

General health status was also associated with varying risks of receiving means-tested benefits with a clear gradient between individuals reporting excellent general health, who had the lowest share, through to individuals reporting poor general health, who had the highest share. Time trends in the share of individuals receiving means-tested benefits (*Current*) were generally downwards except for individuals reporting poor general health. For this group, the share increased from 59% in 2009-10 to 67% in 2023-24 (see Annex B).

Similar trends were observed for measures of long-term receipt (see Annex B) with the time trend for *Intermittent* long-term receipt again flatter for individuals reporting poor general health (figure 6).

Figure 6: People in poor general health had a higher share of Intermittent benefit receipt; unlike for other groups, risks have not declined over time.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Intermittent* receipt of means-tested benefits by self-reported general health: 2011-12 to 2023-24.



Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Health can affect the ability to work and the type and amount of work people can do. In turn, this affects household income and the need for means-tested benefits. The relationship between general health and receipt of means-tested benefits can run in both directions with long periods out of work having a negative impact on health and wellbeing.[32]

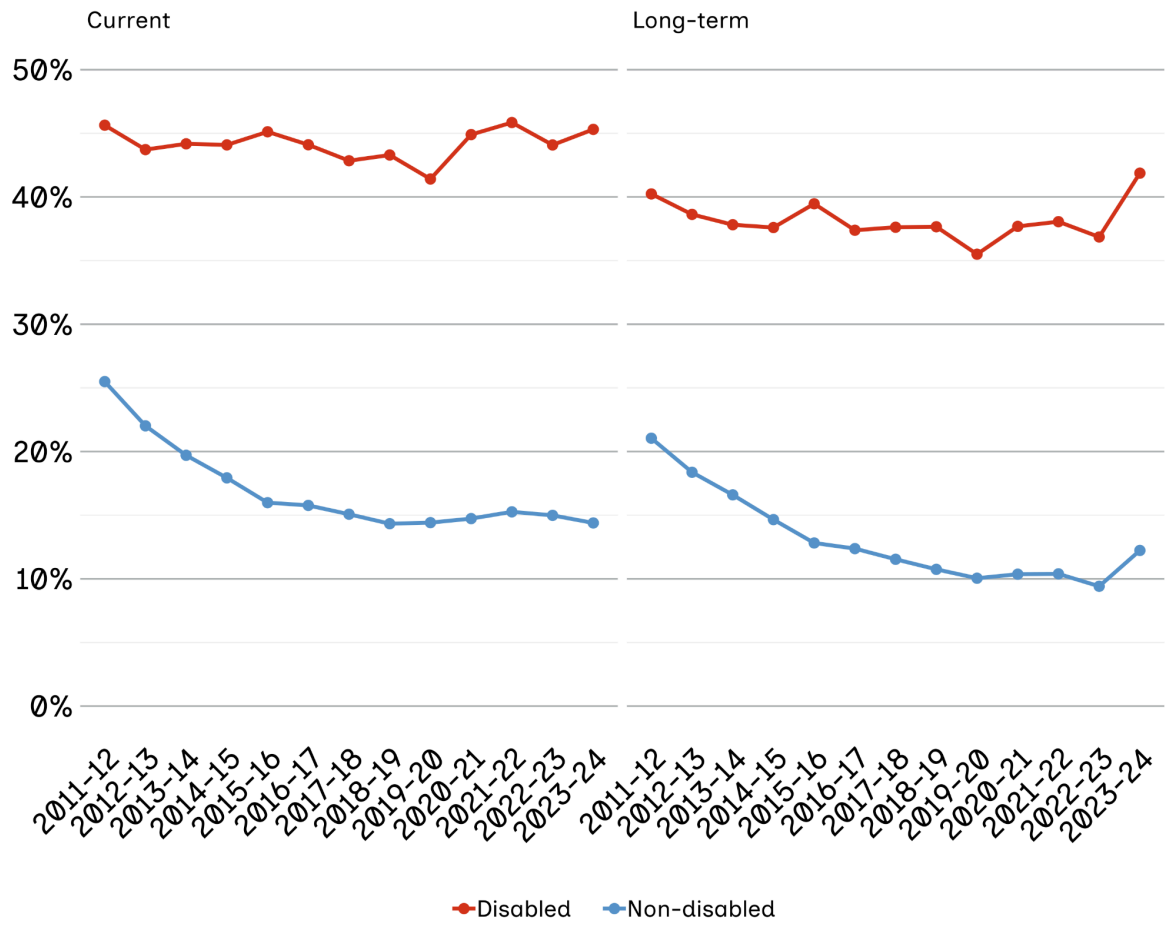
Similar divergent trends are also evident when comparing those with and without a reported disability (defined as longstanding limiting illness or disability) (figure 7). The share was much higher for those with a disability and the gap between them and their non-disabled peers widened over time. This was due to a downward trend in *Current* means-tested benefit receipt and

[32] Thomas Barnay, 'Health, Work and Working Conditions: A Review of the European Economic Literature', OECD Economics Department Working Papers, No. 1148, 2014, OECD Publishing, Paris.

Long-term receipt among people not reporting a disability, while shares were fairly flat among those reporting being disabled. There was an uptick in *Long-term* receipt for both groups at the end of the period.

Figure 7: Across 2011-12 and 2023-24, disabled adults were more likely to be in *Current* receipt of means-tested benefits than non-disabled adults.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Current* receipt and *Long-term* receipt of means-tested benefits by disability status: 2011-12 to 2023-24.



Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Recent research commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions on work aspirations among customers with health and disability needs found that many expressed a strong desire to work, but their ability to act on these aims was constrained by health conditions, caring responsibilities and fear of losing

entitlement if work attempts failed.[33] [34] [35] Claimants' perceptions of whether UC supports progression or creates administrative hurdles also shaped engagement with training and job search.

Recent data underscores how poverty risks are much greater among families with disabled members. During 2023/24, poverty rates reached 33% for households that included disabled adults or children, compared to 17% for those with no disabled family members.[36] Ultimately, these statistics demonstrate that families carrying heavier care responsibilities, health restrictions and financial strains face a disproportionate risk of persistent economic hardship.

Managing health-related fluctuations can create significant barriers to consistent work availability for disabled and health limited individuals. At the same time, low-income households must navigate intricate financial choices when faced with steep, non-negotiable cost-of-living expenses. Together, these constraints directly influence workforce participation, reliance on means-tested benefits, and the ability to achieve long-term financial independence from state assistance. For those with no capacity to work, the benefit system plays an essential role in supporting a minimum standard of living.

Rates of long-term benefit receipt by household type

There were stark differences in *Current* year means-tested benefit receipt and longer-term receipt by household type, reflecting differences in living standards between single adults and couples, and the impact of dependent children. The group least likely to be in *Current* receipt of means-tested benefits and in long-term receipt were adults living in couple households without dependent children (figure 8 shows trends for *Long-term* receipt, additional charts for *Current*, *Intermittent* and *Persistent* measures of long-term receipt can be found in Annex B). In 2023-24, 6% of couples with no

[33] Department for Work & Pensions, '[Work aspirations and support needs of health and disability customers: Interim findings report]', 2025. Published on GOV.UK.
[34] People receiving health-related benefits can sometimes remain entitled to support while trying work, but entitlement may change if their earnings or circumstances change or if they no longer meet the conditions attached to the benefit. Some forms of support may also be subject to reassessment. As a result, claimants may be concerned that an unsuccessful attempt to return to work could affect the amount of support they receive or require them to re-establish their entitlement through further administrative processes.
[35] From April 2026, DWP removed the immediate risk of losing certain benefits for disabled people who try work or volunteer. This means that starting a job no longer automatically triggers a reassessment of new-style Employment Support Allowance, Personal Independence Payment or the UC health element.
[36] Joseph Rowntree Foundation, '[Disability and poverty]', 2026. Published on JRF.ORG.UK.

dependent children were in *Long-term* receipt, 7% for *Intermittent* receipt and 6% for *Persistent* receipt.

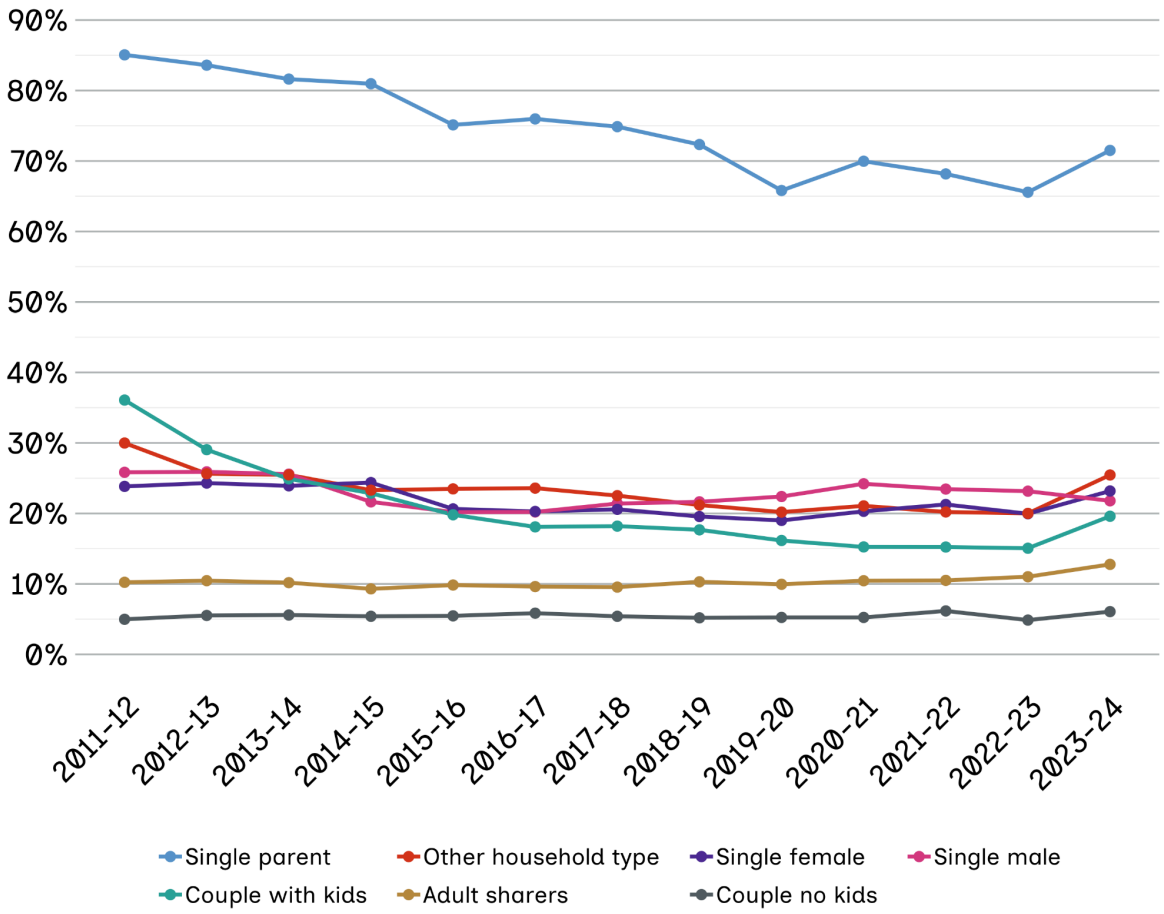
The rates for adults living as a couple without children contrasted with much higher rates for men and women living alone, couples with dependent children and particularly single parents. The majority (85%) of single parents were in *Long-term* receipt of means-tested benefits in 2011-12, but rates trended downwards to 72% 2023-24 (see Annex B). This downward trend reflects increasing employment rates among mothers (the vast majority of single parents are women).[37] [38] This was also reflected in the downward trend in *Current* means-tested benefit receipt in couple households with dependent children, from 52% to 23% between 2009-10 to 2023-24 and in other measures of long-term receipt (see Annex B). In contrast, time trends are much flatter for other household types.

[37] Office for National Statistics, '[Families and the labour market, UK: 2021]', 2022. Published on ONS.GOV.UK

[38] Office for National Statistics, '[Families and households in the UK: 2025]', 2026. Published on ONS.GOV.UK.

Figure 8: Single parents faced the highest risks of Long-term receipt relative to other household types.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Long-term* receipt of means-tested benefits by household type: 2011-12 to 2023-24.



Source: authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Similar to disabled people, single parents often face limited flexibility in working hours and individuals in larger or low-income households frequently manage complex budgeting decisions in the context of high and inflexible living costs. These pressures shape labour-market participation, means-tested benefit receipt, and the likelihood of sustained exits from means-tested support. Current analyses highlight the concentration of poverty among single-parent families. In 2023/24, 43% of children in lone-parent families lived in poverty, compared with 26% of children in couple families.[39] This highlights the disadvantage of having only one potential earner in a family. These patterns suggest that households facing greater care responsibilities and

[39] Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 'Overall poverty rates for children, working-age adults and pensioners', 2026. Published on JRF.ORG.UK.

financial pressures are disproportionately exposed to persistent economic disadvantage.

Consequently, evidence shows that lone parents and larger families are disproportionately reliant on long-term means-tested benefits and face structural barriers that limit mobility. The SMC State of the Nation (2021) report highlights that lone parents struggle to exit benefit receipt due to insecure work and inadequate childcare support.[40] More recent evidence also reinforces these findings. Research by Kitty Stewart and others (2025) finds that increases in child poverty since the early 2010s have been disproportionately concentrated among larger families, with social security reforms having particularly strong negative effects on households with greater support needs and lower work intensity.[41] Recent evidence from IPPR and Action for Children (2026) similarly highlights how children in single-parent families are more likely to enter poverty and less likely to escape it, while high childcare costs, limited childcare availability and inflexible employment continue to constrain parents' ability to increase earnings and progress in work.[42]

Larger families are similarly disadvantaged, with policies such as the two-child limit (however, now removed in April 2026) and the benefit cap intensifying hardship and making sustained progression less likely. Rising expenditure on benefits for these groups reflects wider systemic constraints, meaning factors beyond individual control, such as social security policy design, the cost of raising children, housing affordability pressures and limited opportunities to increase household earnings. Such constraints can go on to deepen disadvantage across generations.

Rates of long-term benefit receipt by socio-economic classification

Unsurprisingly employment status and type of job were associated with the share of the population in receipt of means-tested benefits. Using a modified version of the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) (with some categories merged, similar to the 5 categories used by the SMC) and a distinct category for unemployed/economically inactive, the data shows how these patterns varied between groups.[43] [44]

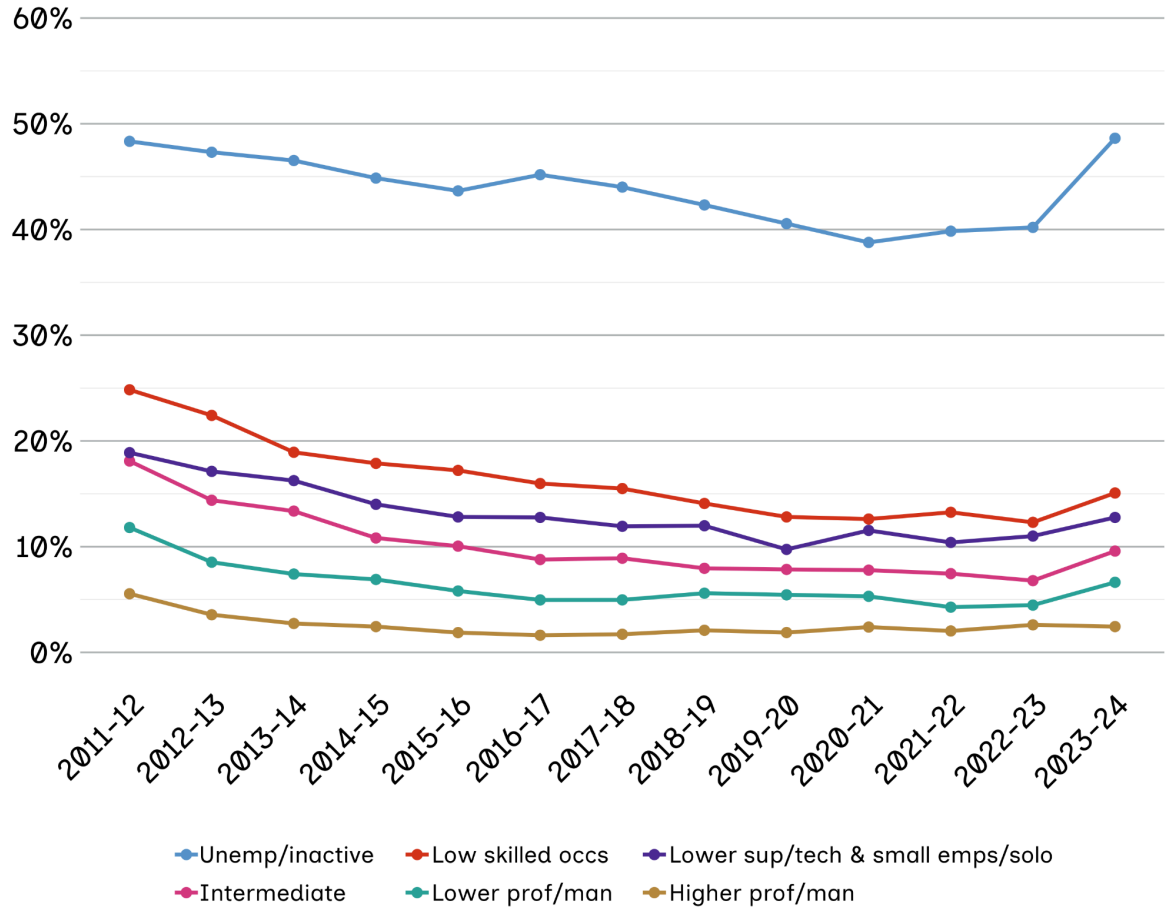
[40] Social Mobility Commission, 'State of the Nation 2021: social mobility and the pandemic', 2021. Published on GOV.UK.
[41] Kitty Stewart and others, 'A time of need: exploring the changing poverty risk facing larger families in the UK', 2023. Published on CAMBRIDGE.ORG.
[42] Scott Compton and others, 'Work isn't working: family, work and progression on a low income', 2026. Published on IPPR.ORG.
[43] Social Mobility Commission, 'State of the Nation 2023: people and places', 2023. Published on GOV.UK.
[44] The building blocks of National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) are occupations classified according to associated terms and conditions of employment (such as

Logically, people who were unemployed or inactive were the most likely to be in long-term receipt of means-tested benefits. Not all were in receipt of benefits due to household circumstances; they may live with a partner who is working and earning enough to take household income above the means-tested benefit threshold, they may have sufficient income from another source (such as a pension or income from capital), or they may be a student. Across long-term benefit recipient groups, employees in low-skilled occupations had the highest rates of *Long-term* means-tested benefit receipt among working-age adults in work. This reflects the lower earnings associated with these occupations (see figure 9 and Annex B).

aspects of pay (salary versus hourly paid), opportunities for promotion, notice periods, influence on working hours and key aspects of work autonomy). It is not possible to classify people who are not in work based on their occupation, and although the development of NS-SEC suggested additional categories for economically inactive groups, these are rarely used. Inclusion of a separate category for unemployed/economically inactive, allows a complete classification of the working-age population reflecting how means-tested benefits are payable to people in work and people out of work depending on their household circumstances.

Figure 9: Households working in skilled occupations had lower shares of *Long-term* benefit recipients than those in lower skilled occupations.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in receipt of *Long-term* means-tested benefits in 2 consecutive years by modified NS-SEC: 2011-12 to 2023-24.



Source: authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

The category with the lowest share of people in *Current* receipt and long-term receipt of means-tested benefits were higher professional/higher managerial occupations, reflecting higher rates of pay and conditions (see figure 9 and Annex B). Downward time trends in shares receiving means-tested benefits were evident across all categories, although less steep for unemployed/economically inactive. The uptick in recent years is most pronounced in the unemployed/economically inactive group.

Rates of *Long-term* benefit receipt by local area deprivation

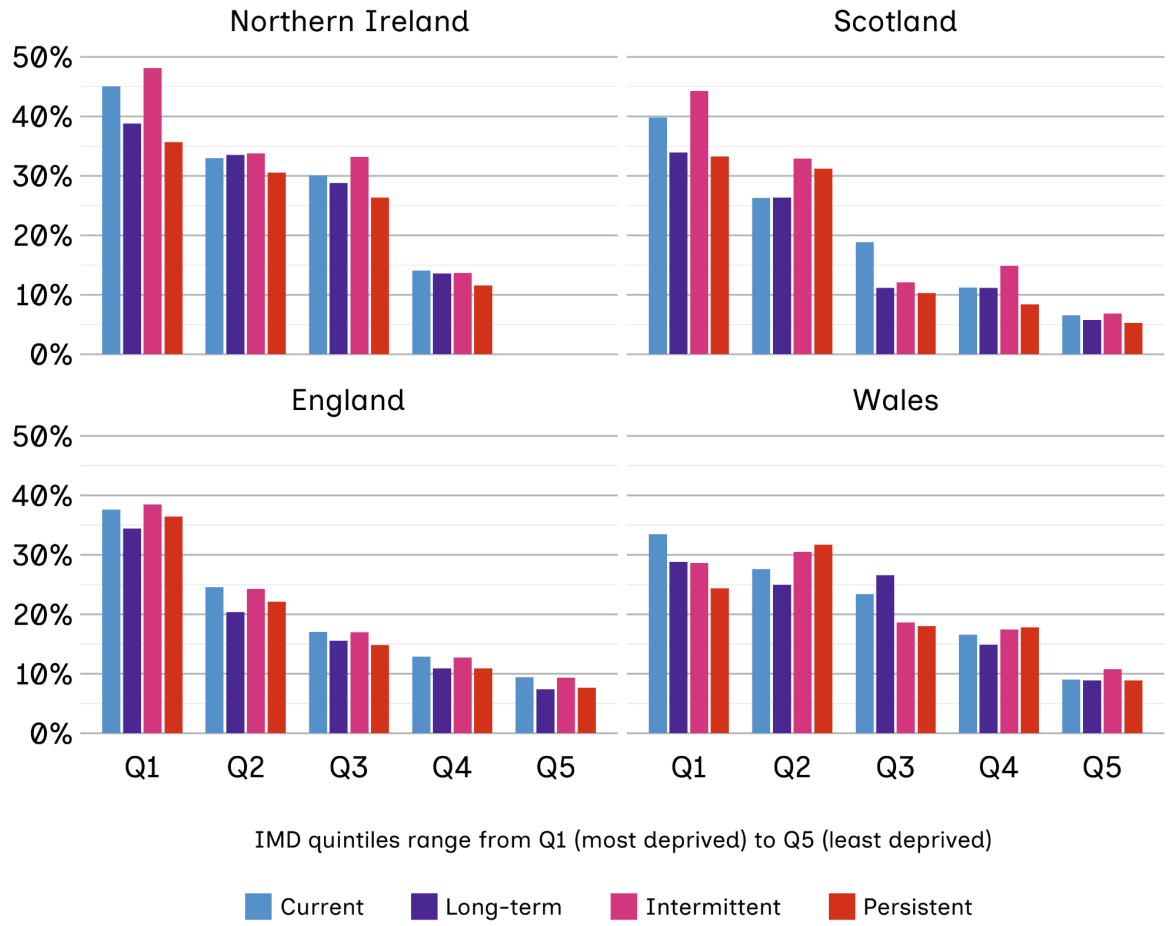
The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) indicates the level of deprivation in the

area where someone lives.[45] The level of deprivation in an area is associated with different risks of means-tested *Current and* long-term benefit receipt (figure 10). Within each nation, individuals living in the most deprived quintile had the largest share of people in *Long-term* receipt of means-tested benefits (rates are not comparable between nations). Interestingly, the gradient was not strictly defined in all cases. For example, estimates of longer-term receipt in Wales were higher in Q2 than Q1 for *Intermittent* and *Persistent* measures in 2023-24. This can arise where numerically smaller groups lead to less precision in estimates.

[45] The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) classifies small geographical areas according to a range of deprivation indicators. Different indices have been developed for the 4 UK nations and within nations areas are ranked from most to least deprived, which means that they are not directly comparable across nations. However, within nations it is possible to look at areas ranked by quintiles of multiple deprivation: Q1 identifies the most deprived areas (the lowest quintile (20%) of the distribution) and Q5 the least deprived areas.

Figure 10: Higher local area deprivation was associated with higher rates of long-term benefit receipt in each of the 4 nations.

Percentage of working-age adults in receipt of means-tested benefits (*Current/Long-term/Intermittent/Persistent*) by UK nation IMD quintile: 2023-24.



Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.
Note: Indices of Multiple Deprivation are not comparable across UK nations.

Patterns of intergenerational disadvantage vary markedly across the UK because household characteristics interact differently with local structural conditions.[46]

In former industrial regions and parts of the North and Midlands, the long-term effects of de-industrialisation, lower job density and concentrations of insecure work mean that households already facing constraints, such as lone parents or disabled adults, have fewer opportunities to secure stable

[46] Christina Beatty and Steve Fothergill, 'The long shadow of job loss: Britain's older industrial towns in the 21st century', 2020. Published on FRONTIERSIN.ORG; Paul Sissons and others, 'Linking the sectoral employment structure and household poverty in the United Kingdom', 2018. Published on JOURNALS.SAGEPUB.COM.

earnings. Longitudinal research shows that these labour-market conditions amplify personal circumstances, making repeated returns to means-tested support more likely.[47] This is reflected in the geographical concentration of benefit receipt and labour-market disadvantage in some local areas. For example, in November 2025, 39% of working-age people in Blackpool were in receipt of 'out of work' benefits, compared with 23.1% across England.[48] Similarly, in April 2025, the claimant count rate in Wolverhampton was 7.4%, compared with 4.2% nationally.[49]

Together, these figures suggest that disadvantage remains concentrated in certain local labour markets, reinforcing the importance of place in shaping long-term economic outcomes. In coastal towns and rural areas, limited transport, seasonal employment and reduced access to childcare and specialist services further restrict labour-market participation, particularly for disabled people and carers.[50] By contrast, in parts of London and the South, high housing costs mean that even full-time work may not provide a route off benefit receipt, especially for larger households or those with caring responsibilities.[51] Although social housing reduces exposure to high market rents, social renters remain in need of means-tested benefits where low earnings, disability or caring responsibilities limit labour-market participation. Recent evidence suggests that while poverty among private renters is often driven by housing costs, poverty among social renters is more commonly associated with low incomes and greater reliance on social security. [52] These geographical differences show that *long-term* benefit receipt reflects both household characteristics and place-specific opportunities, risks and constraints.

This inequality in geographical opportunity can lead to intergenerational disadvantage in more deprived areas. Macmillan (2014) finds that intergenerational worklessness is strongly shaped by local labour-market conditions, with children growing up in areas of high worklessness facing a greater risk of worklessness themselves in adulthood.[53] More recent evidence suggests that stronger labour markets do not necessarily eliminate these

[47] Christina Beatty and Steve Fothergill, 'Beyond the pandemic: older industrial Britain in the wake of the crisis', 2021. Published on SHU.AC.UK.
[48] Lancashire County Council, 'Benefit combinations', 2026. Published on LANCASHIRE.GOV.UK.
[49] West Midlands Combined Authority, 'Wolverhampton data pack', 2025. Published on CLOUDCDN.WMCA.ORG.UK.
[50] Daniel Edmiston and others, 'Navigating pandemic social security: benefits, employment and crisis support during COVID-19', 2021.
[51] Lindsay Judge and Charlie McCurdy, 'Income outcomes: assessing income gaps between places across the UK', 2022. Published on ECONOMY2030.RESOLUTIONFOUNDATION.ORG.
[52] Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 'Housing and poverty', 2026. Published on JRF.ORG.UK.
[53] Lindsey Macmillan, 'Intergenerational worklessness in the UK and the role of local labour markets ', 2014, Published on ACADEMIC.OUP.COM.

inequalities. The State of the Nation 2024 report identifies London and the neighbouring Home Counties as areas with some of the strongest labour-market opportunities and social mobility prospects in the UK.[54] However, research from the Mayor's Fund for London finds that substantial inequalities persist within the capital, with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds facing barriers linked to persistent poverty, unequal access to social capital and the highly competitive nature of London's labour market.[55] Together, these findings suggest that while stronger labour markets may reduce the risk of worklessness, they do not necessarily remove the factors that contribute to disadvantage across generations, including vulnerability to low income and associated receipt of means-tested support.

The impact of compounded risks

In the previous sections, it is clear that some characteristics, such as age, qualifications, single parenthood and area deprivation are associated with higher shares of long-term benefit receipt. It is important to note that the individual and household characteristics discussed already do not occur in isolation. Risks compound: for example, a disabled single parent living in a deprived area faces multiple factors that increase the likelihood of long-term benefit receipt. To explore this, the probability of being a *Current* benefit recipient or a long-term recipient was modelled using probit regression models which controlled for a range of characteristics including sex, age, ethnicity, qualifications, disability, NS-SEC, household composition and area deprivation.[56] This allows us to isolate and identify the characteristics which have statistically significant independent effects on the probability of being a *Current* or long-term recipient. These model estimates were used to compute predicted probabilities of being a *Current* means-tested benefit recipient or a long-term benefit recipient for a number of illustrative examples (table 1).

It was clear from this exercise that combinations of some characteristics led to very high risks of being in receipt of means-tested benefits. For example, a White woman aged 45 to 54 years who is unemployed or economically inactive, lives with her partner and dependent children, has a longstanding limiting illness or disability, and whose highest qualification is GCSE, living in one of the most deprived areas of England, has an estimated 95% predicted probability of

[54] Social Mobility Commission, 'State of the Nation 2024: local to national, mapping opportunities for all', 2024. Published on GOV.UK.
[55] Mayor's Fund for London and Oliver Wyman, 'One city, two worlds', 2024. Published onMAYORSFUNDFORLONDON.ORG.UK.
[56] A probit regression model is a statistical model used when an outcome is binary (yes/no, employed/unemployed, in long-term receipt/not in long-term receipt). It estimates the probability of the outcome.

being in *Current* receipt of means-tested benefits and a 92% predicted probability of being a *Long-term* recipient.

In contrast, a degree-educated, White woman, aged between 35 to 44 years, who is disabled, employed in a lower managerial/lower professional occupation, lives with her partner with no dependent children in one of the most deprived areas of England has a 7% estimated predicted probability of being in *Current* benefit receipt and a 3% probability of being a *Long-term* recipient.

In between these examples are a whole range of risks associated with different characteristics and combinations of characteristics. For example, a Black African man aged 35 to 44 years, with A level or equivalent qualifications, who is not disabled, employed in a low-skilled occupation group, lives with a partner and dependent children in one of the most deprived areas of England has an estimated 38% probability of being in *Current* receipt of means-tested benefits and a 30% probability of being a *Long-term* recipient

Table 1: Predicted probabilities of means-tested benefit receipt *and* long-term receipt.

Characteristics								Predicted probabilities of becoming:			
Sex	Age	Ethnicity	Qualification	Disabled	NS-SEC	Household	IMD	Current	Long-term	Intermittent	Persistent
Woman	45-54	White	GCSE	Disabled	Unemp/ inactive	Couple/children	Eng Q1	95%	92%	95%	94%
Woman	45-54	White	GCSE	No	Unemp/ inactive	Couple/children	Eng Q5	65%	58%	66%	66%
Woman	45-54	White	GCSE	No	Unemp/ inactive	Single parent	Eng Q5	94%	93%	96%	94%
Woman	45-54	White	GCSE	No	Unemp/ inactive	Couple/no children	Eng Q5	23%	17%	20%	17%
Woman	35-44	White	Degree	Disabled	Lower man/prof	Couple/no children	Eng Q2	7%	3%	4%	3%
Woman	35-44	White	Degree	Disabled	Lower man/prof	Couple/children	Eng Q2	36%	25%	34%	25%
Woman	35-44	White	Degree	No	Lower man/prof	Couple/children	Eng Q2	18%	11%	16%	10%
Woman	35-44	Pakistani	A level	No	Intermediate	Couple/children	Eng Q3	25%	19%	30%	23%
Woman	35-44	Bangladeshi	A level	No	Intermediate	Couple/children	Eng Q3	31%	23%	34%	26%
Man	25-34	White	A level	No	Unemp/ inactive	Couple/children	Eng Q1	36%	28%	44%	26%

Man	25-34	White	A level	No	Low-skilled occ	Couple/children	Eng Q1	10%	7%	16%	11%
Man	25-34	White	A level	Disabled	Low-skilled occ	Couple/children	Eng Q1	23%	18%	34%	26%
Man	25-34	White	A level	Disabled	Low-skilled occ	Single/no children	Eng Q5	4%	3%	6%	5%
Man	25-34	White	No quals	Disabled	Unemp/ inactive	Single/no children	Eng Q5	38%	34%	46%	44%
Man	45-54	White	No quals	Disabled	Unemp/ inactive	Couple/children	Eng Q5	87%	80%	87%	83%
Man	35-44	Black African	A level	No	Low-skilled occ	Couple/children	Eng Q1	38%	30%	42%	32%

Data source: Understanding Society. Q1 = Most deprived, Q5 = Least deprived.

Statistical pen portraits

Based on these stylised hypothetical individuals, pseudo-named statistical pen portraits can help communicate the findings from this statistical analysis. Anita, Eric and Aisha face different levels of risk of both *Current* and long-term means-tested benefit receipt. They help illustrate how the factors such as the presence of dependent children, unemployment, living in a deprived area and low qualifications can raise the risk of *Current* means-tested benefit receipt (as seen with Anita). In contrast, single men without dependent children, who are in work (albeit in a low-skilled occupation) and living in one of the least deprived areas, can face very low risks of longer-term *Intermittent* receipt of means-tested benefits despite leaving school with no qualifications and having a longstanding limiting disability (the case for Eric). Women like Aisha sit in the middle: a Bangladeshi woman living with her husband and 2 teenage children and working in customer service, she faces a 26% risk of *Persistent* long-term benefit receipt.

Pen portrait 1: Anita

Anita is a 45-year-old married White woman living in Blackpool which is one of the most deprived areas of England according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation. She left school after taking her GCSEs and while she previously worked as a cleaner, she lost her job when the firm she had been working for relocated. She is currently unemployed but looking for a job which fits around caring responsibilities for her 2 young children. With limited local job opportunities, Anita, and women like her, face a 95% risk of *Current* means-tested benefit receipt and a comparable long-term risk.

Pen portrait 2: Eric

Eric is a 27-year-old White man living in Sevenoaks which is one of the least deprived areas of England. He left school with no qualifications but managed to find work as a bakery assistant. He has a longstanding limiting disability following an accident on a construction site but has rarely been without work. Eric is currently single and has no children. Eric, and men like Eric, have a predicted probability of being in *Intermittent* long-term receipt of means-tested benefits of 46%.

Pen portrait 3: Aisha

Aisha is a 38-year-old Bangladeshi woman living in a part of Bedford with average levels of deprivation. She left school after completing her A levels. She lives with her husband and 2 teenage children. She works at a local customer service centre. Aisha, and women like Aisha, have a 26% predicted probability of *Persistent* long-term means-tested benefit receipt.

This chapter has illustrated that the prevalence of long-term benefit receipt is higher among people with specific characteristics, including single parents, disabled people and people with low qualifications. These characteristics interact with structural constraints such as employment quality, support for those with dependent children and high area deprivation with weak local labour markets. These issues compound to restrict a person's capacity to secure a stable income. Women, particularly single mothers, are more likely to experience Long-term benefit receipt due to caring responsibilities and limited access to secure, flexible work.

Chapter 2: Dynamics and persistence: what are the flows of people into and out of long-term benefit receipt?

Key findings:

- **A high proportion of means-tested benefit recipients go on to become long-term recipients each year**. Around half of claimants starting a recent claim in one year are estimated to also be in receipt of means-tested benefits the following year.
- **Some claimants face higher risks of becoming a long-term benefit recipient.** These include: women, 25 to 34-year-olds, disabled people, those with no or low levels of qualifications, single parents, unemployed, economically inactive or people working in lower skilled occupations and those living in the most deprived areas.
- **Exit and sustained exit from long-term means-tested benefit receipt have fallen over time**. In the most recent year for which Understanding Society data is available (2023-24) rates are around 10%, highlighting a degree of persistence. Falling exit rates are shaped by improvements in the economy following the financial crisis and may also reflect the greater continuity in means-tested support available through Universal Credit (UC).
- Changes in the profile of benefit recipients, as highlighted in chapter 1, can mean that **longer-term recipients increasingly comprise a group of claimants facing higher barriers to increasing household income**. Older people, those with no qualifications, and those reporting poor general health or a disability are less likely to exit long-term receipt.
- **Individuals who have been claiming means-tested benefits across a greater number of years have lower predicted probabilities of leaving means-tested support**. The predicted probability of exiting means-tested benefits is 7 to 8 percentage points lower for longer-term recipients after controlling for a range of characteristics. The predicted probability of achieving a sustained exit is 5 to 7 percentage points lower for longer-term recipients, again highlighting a degree of persistence.
- **There is evidence of 'churn': short breaks from means-tested benefits often followed by a quick return.** This suggests there are "fragile rungs on the ladder to financial independence".

- Marginal effects from model estimates are used to compute predicted probabilities for exiting long-term means-tested benefit receipt for stylised hypothetical individuals. These highlight how exit and sustained exit probabilities vary between individuals.

While chapter 1 establishes the prevalence and characteristics of people who are long-term means-tested benefit recipients across the sample, chapter 2 examines the factors that shape long-term receipt. Therefore, the analysis here is restricted specifically to benefit recipients, rather than the whole population. By doing this, chapter 2 isolates which demographic characteristics predict a transition from initial entry to *Long-term* benefit receipt, to understanding long-term reliance.

Patterns of benefit receipt increasingly highlight the dynamic nature of longer-term reliance. Research shows that extended spells are shaped not only by who enters the system, but by what happens to them over time.[57] Analysis from the Office for National Statistics found that only 24% of people who were out of work in one quarter had returned to work by the following quarter, while people who had spent longer out of work were among those least likely to return to employment.[58] Analyses of benefit trajectories demonstrate duration dependence, meaning the probability of leaving means-tested support declines the longer a claimant remains on it. This pattern reflects both genuine dependence, where extended periods out of stable work reduce exit chances, and spurious dependence, where underlying disadvantages make sustained exits less likely from the outset.[59] [60]

Genuine duration dependence occurs when the length of a benefit spell itself reduces the likelihood of exit. This can happen for the unemployed through skill depreciation, employer recruitment behaviour, or deterioration in physical or mental health, all of which reduce the chances of finding and securing work.

Spurious duration dependence, by contrast, reflects underlying differences between individuals: some people are simply more likely to experience long-term receipt due to ill health, low skills, caring responsibilities or limited employment opportunities in their local labour market.

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[57] Abigail McKnight and Margaret Kayitale (2026). 'Review of the existing evidence on long-term benefit receipt, barriers to progress and effective strategies to reduce long-term benefit receipt,' CASEreport 176, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics and Political Science.
[58] Office for National Statistics, 'Which groups find it hardest to find a job following a period out of work?', 2021. Published on ONS.GOV.UK.
[59] Melchior Vella and others, 'Mind vs matter: economic and psychologic determinants of takeup rates of social benefits in the UK', 2024. Published on ISER.ESSEX.AC.UK.
[60] Manudeep Bhuller and others, 'Time aggregation and state dependence in welfare receipt', 2016. Published on ONLINELIBRARY.WILEY.COM; Herwig Immervoll and others, 'Are recipients of social assistance 'benefit dependent'?', 2015. Published on OECD.ORG.

In the analysis in this chapter, longitudinal data in Understanding Society is used to look at the dynamics of benefit receipt. In particular, 2 key aspects are explored:

1. What is the probability of a *Current* benefit recipient becoming a *Long-term* benefit recipient?
2. Are longer-term benefit claimants less likely to stop claiming than shorter-term claimants?

The second aspect helps to address the question on whether there is any evidence of recipients getting 'stuck' on benefits. It is not possible to identify causal effects, so we cannot determine whether lower exit probabilities among longer term claimants (if found) are caused by the design of the benefit system or due to the duration of claims directly reducing exit probabilities. However, it is possible to estimate whether longer term benefit recipients have lower exit probabilities, identify what factors increase or decrease the probability of moving off benefits and the characteristics of individuals with higher or lower probabilities of remaining on benefits for long periods of time.

The probability of becoming a *Long-term* benefit recipient

The group at risk of becoming *Long-term* benefit recipients – defined as being in receipt for 2 consecutive years – are those who received means-tested benefits in the previous year but not in the year before that. This group is classified as being 'at risk' of becoming a *Long-term* recipient.

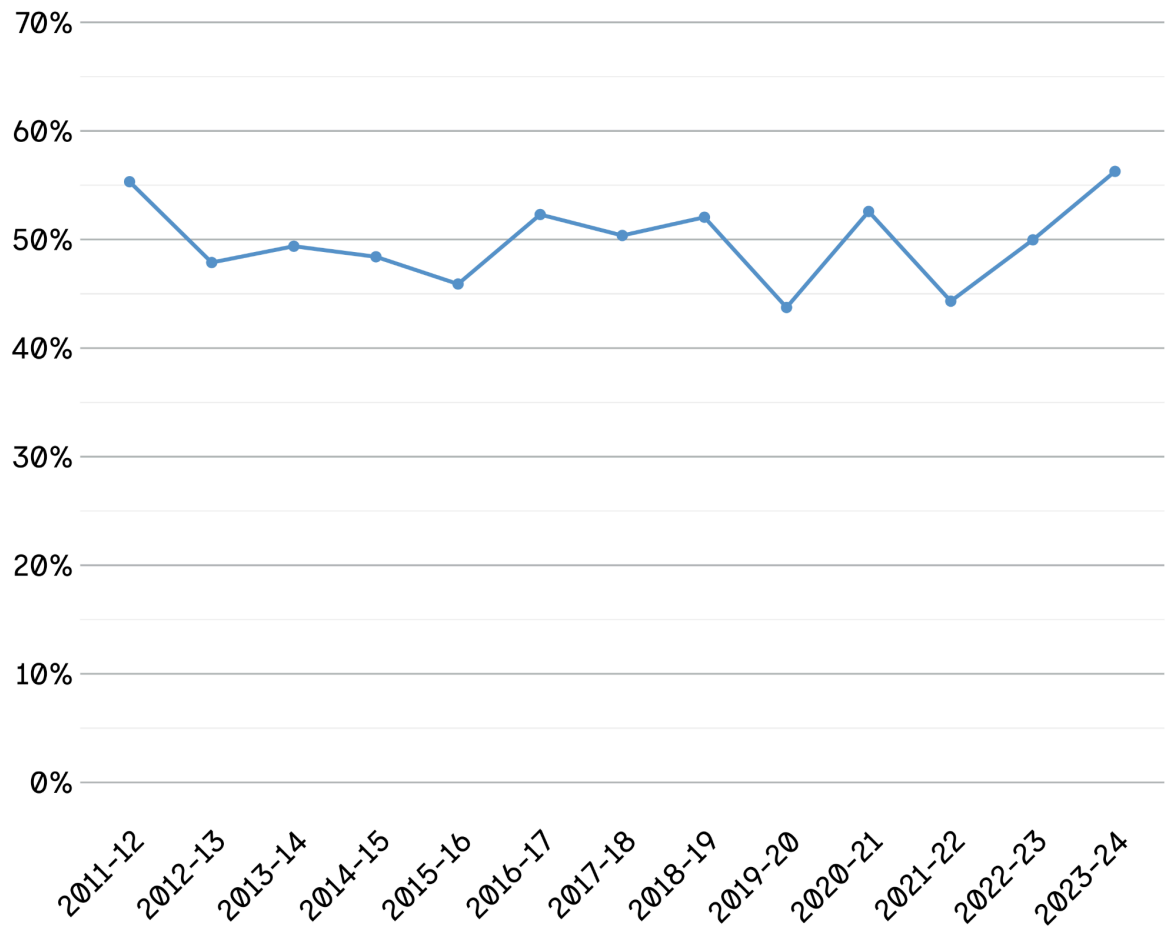
Figure 11 shows that in each year a high share of at-risk means-tested benefit recipients become *Long-term* recipients.[61] There is some fluctuation between years but around 50% of the at-risk group become *Long-term* means-tested benefit recipients each year.

In 2023-24, this figure was 56%. This does suggest a degree of 'stickiness'.

[61] Annual risks can be affected by changes in the economy (particularly those which affect job prospects), and changes to the benefit system. Estimates can be affected by changes to the composition of the sample and the sampling frame (see earlier note on how boost samples to Understanding Society change the sampling frame).

Figure 11: Between 2011-12 and 2023-24, around half of *Current* benefit recipients became *Long-term* recipients.

Trends in the percentage of *Current* benefit recipients who become *Long-term* benefit recipients: 2011-12 to 2023-24.



Source: authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Universal Credit (UC) blurred the boundary between being on and off benefits because support can continue when claimants find work and award values are reduced gradually as household earnings increase. This means that some people can receive UC while working if their income remains low enough to qualify. For example, in April 2026, 37.7% of people on UC were in employment.[62]

Qualitative research suggests that this continuity alters how some claimants understand their trajectories: some experience UC as an ongoing source of financial support alongside low-paid work, rather than as a temporary benefit received only while out of work.[63] For policymakers, this shift is significant as

[62] Department for Work & Pensions, 'Universal Credit quarterly statistics, 29 April 2013 to 14 May 2026', 2026. Published on GOV.UK.
[63] Ruth Patrick, 'For whose benefit? The everyday realities of welfare reform', 2017. Published on ACADEMIC.OUP.COM; Fran Bennett and Jane Millar, 'Inflexibility in an integrated system? Policy challenges posed by the design of universal credit', 2022. Published on BLOGS.LSE.AC.UK.

transitions are no longer simply about movement between 'welfare and work,' but about navigating overlapping conditions of poverty and entitlement. UC has redefined the meaning of 'exits' and 'returns,' making visible the insecurities of the labour market and embedding benefit receipt as a routine feature of working life for households with low earnings relative to basic living costs. The central question becomes whether employment is sufficiently stable and adequately paid to make UC receipt temporary rather than constant or recurrent.

To assess how risks of becoming a *Long-term* means-tested benefit recipients vary between different types of individuals, a probit regression model is estimated for the probability of becoming a *Long-term* recipient among the *Current* at-risk group (those who were in receipt of means-tested benefit in the previous wave but not in the wave before that). Distinct from the demographic profile of existing long-term recipients in chapter 1, this dynamic approach models the probability of transitioning into *Long-term* receipt, while controlling for a range of independent variables.[64] Detailed results are summarised below, the full model results are presented in Annex C.

The probability of becoming a *Long-term* benefit recipient by sex

While chapter 1 reported that women were more likely than men to be in receipt and *Long-term* receipt of means-tested benefits, there was no statistically significant difference in the predicted probability of becoming a *Long-term* recipient between at-risk men and women. In other words, women and men who received means-tested benefits in the previous wave have the same likelihood of becoming *Long-term* benefit recipients.

The probability of becoming a *Long-term* benefit recipient by age

Chapter 1 reported that those aged 35 to 44 years had the highest rates of *Long-term* benefit receipt in the whole population. Despite that, among *Current* recipients in the at-risk group, individuals aged 25 to 34 years have the highest probability of entering *Long-term* benefit receipt after controlling for other characteristics. Relative to 35 to 44-year-olds, the predicted probability of entering *Long-term* receipt is 5.3 percentage points higher. While 45 to 54-year-olds have a 3.2 percentage point lower risk. These results are statistically significant meaning that 25 to 34-year-olds have a significantly higher probability of transitioning into *Long-term* receipt. In other words, we

[64] This allows us to isolate the effects of different factors and determine where characteristics are statistically significant. Average marginal effects derived from these models show the percentage point differences between categories of a particular characteristic and a reference category.

are confident that age genuinely affects the risk of becoming a *Long-term* benefit recipient.

The probability of becoming a *Long-term* benefit recipient by ethnicity

Across ethnic groups there are no statistically significant differences relative to the majority White population. In other words, across most ethnic backgrounds, the probability of a recent benefit entrant becoming a *Long-term* recipient is essentially the same. The one exception is for Pakistani benefit recipients in the at-risk group, who have a statistically significant higher risk of becoming a *Long-term* recipient. This group has a 6.8 percentage point higher probability than the majority White population.

Wider evidence suggests that ethnic minority households face disproportionate risks of persistent poverty and long-term benefit reliance, often linked to labour-market discrimination, concentration in insecure sectors, and higher housing costs in urban areas.[65] These results suggest that the higher relative risk of Pakistani working-age adults becoming a *Long-term* means-tested benefit recipient cannot be explained by differences in qualification levels, whether they are in work and the type of work they do or type of household or any of the other control variables included in the regression model. This correlates with the Social Mobility Commission's findings that Pakistani women had the lowest level of relative occupational mobility.[66]

The probability of becoming a *Long-term* benefit recipient by qualifications

Chapter 1 outlined that adults with no qualifications were more likely than any other qualification group to be in receipt and long-term receipt of means-tested benefits. The analysis in this chapter highlights that the risks of becoming a *Long-term* recipient are statistically significantly higher for individuals with the lowest levels of qualifications (less than GCSE) or no qualifications relative to those with a degree-level qualification, after controlling for other characteristics. In other words, benefit recipients who started a claim in the previous year, and who have very low or no formal qualifications, face a significantly higher risk of becoming *Long-term* benefit recipients compared to benefit recipients with degrees. This means that the higher statistically significant rates of *Long-term* receipt among lower qualified individuals shown in chapter 1 is also found for the likelihood of becoming a *Long-term* recipient and, for example, differences in working status or the type

[65] Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 'UK Poverty 2024: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK', 2024. Published on JRF.ORG.UK.
[66] Social Mobility Commission, 'State of the Nation Data Explorer: relative occupational mobility by sex and ethnicity', 2023. Published on SOCIAL-MOBILITY.DATA.GOV.UK.

of occupation for those in work (modified NS-SEC), age, ethnicity, household type or local area deprivation. This highlights how educational attainment strongly drives employability, job stability and income security even within the benefit system.

The probability of becoming a *Long-term* benefit recipient by disability status

Chapter 1 highlighted that around 45% of disabled people were *Current* recipients of means-tested benefits (figure 7). The analysis in this chapter finds that the predicted probability of becoming a *Long-term* recipient is 12.5 percentage points higher for disabled people with a persisting limiting disability than for the non-disabled comparison group (this group was not disabled in 2 consecutive years). The model results show that this is statistically significant. Therefore, having an ongoing disability increases the probability of becoming a *Long-term* benefit recipient relative to someone with no such reported disability in 2 consecutive years.

The government estimates suggest that 2.8 million people were economically inactive due to health conditions in 2026, around 800,000 more than in 2019, with a further increase of 600,000 projected by 2030 without decisive action.[67] This is significant as this means that a growing number of working-age adults face health-related barriers to employment, increasing the risk of prolonged means-tested benefit receipt.

However, prolonged benefit receipt among this group cannot be explained by health status alone. Health-related limitations intersect with low qualifications, precarious work histories, insecure housing and limited access to treatment or support, producing a compound risk of sustained benefit receipt. Research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Health Foundation shows that recent increases in inactivity have been concentrated among groups already characterised by low earnings and insecure employment. Health shocks and disability-related barriers frequently occur within households already financially constrained, where limited savings, unstable working hours and high fixed costs reduce the capacity to absorb periods of sickness or fluctuating work capacity. Therefore, rising health- and disability-related inactivity is both a driver and a consequence of long-term benefit receipt: health limitations reduce exit probabilities, while prolonged low income can exacerbate conditions, creating a feedback loop.

The model results show that even after controlling for differences in low

[67] Department for Work & Pensions, Department for Business & Trade and Department of Health & Social Care, '[Keep Britain Working review – March 2026 update]', 2026. Published on GOV.UK.

qualifications, working status and occupational type (modified NS-SEC) and age, individuals reporting long-term limiting ill health or disabilities are more likely to be in receipt of means-tested benefits and to become *Long-term* recipients.

This prolonged benefit receipt has implications for social mobility: The SMC's State of the Nation (2023) shows that disabled adults experience weaker occupational mobility.[68] Only 16.5% of disabled adults from higher professional origins reach higher professional jobs, compared with 34.7% of non-disabled adults. They are also less likely to be upwardly mobile: 52.1% of disabled adults from lower working-class origins are employed in routine and manual occupations, compared with 20.6% of non-disabled adults. Disabled adults are also more likely to be downwardly mobile from intermediate origins into lower working-class occupations. With ill health and disability rates increasing in the working-age population. These figures show that this is not just an economic concern in terms of greater expenditure on disability-related benefits but a growing problem for future social mobility.

The probability of becoming a *Long-term* benefit recipient by household type

Figure 8 in chapter 1 revealed that over 70% of single parents were *Long-term* benefit recipients. In comparison, only 6% of couples with no children were *Long-term* means-tested benefit recipients. The analysis in this chapter reveals statistically significant differences across household types, with recent single-parent claimants of means-tested benefits facing the highest risk of becoming *Long-term* recipients after controlling for a range of other risk factors. Conversely, couples without children and adult sharers exhibit the lowest risk. No statistically significant differences were observed between single male- or female-headed households, couples with dependent children or other household types (see Annex C).

The SMC's State of the Nation (2021) highlights that single parents struggle to exit benefit receipt due to insecure work and inadequate childcare support, reinforcing cycles of dependency.[69] As single parents are the sole potential earners in their households and often the only childcare provider, they face particular challenges. Furthermore, the DWP's Income Dynamics series shows that a sizeable group of working-age adults experience persistent low income - being below 60% of median income in at least 3 out of 4 consecutive years - with single parents consistently over-represented among those in persistent

[68] Social Mobility Commission, 'State of the Nation 2023: people and places', 2023. Published on GOV.UK.
[69] Social Mobility Commission, 'State of the Nation 2021: social mobility and the pandemic'. 2021. Published on GOV.UK.

low income.[70] This has long-term social mobility implications: the SMC's State of the Nation report (2023) shows that low-income risks persist across generations.[71] Absolute income mobility has declined: 67% of children born in 1987 earned more than their parents by age 30 years, compared with over 75% of children born in the late 1970s. Relative income mobility remains low too, with intergenerational income elasticity estimates of 0.27 to 0.29 since the mid-2000s, indicating a strong link between parents' and children's incomes. Together, these trends suggest that families experiencing persistent low income (such as long-term means-tested benefit recipients) - particularly single parents - face constrained opportunities for upward mobility.

The probability of becoming a *Long-term* benefit recipient by NS-SEC category

In relation to the modified NS-SEC categories, risks of becoming a *Long-term* recipient tend to be lower among individuals currently working in higher level occupations (see Annex C). As the modified NS-SEC is a measure of individuals' current status, some of the individuals in the group at-risk of becoming *Long-term* benefit recipients (those included in the model) will have recently found work. Among individuals in work the highest risks of *Current* benefit recipients becoming *Long-term* benefit recipients are for those working in the category which encompasses lower supervisory and technical occupations along with small employers and own account workers. This is a heterogeneous group and the self-employed in this category often have low precarious income which is likely to contribute to the higher risk of becoming a *Long-term* benefit recipient; 16.6 percentage points higher than for individuals working in higher professional or higher managerial occupations. Individuals working in higher skilled occupations are likely to be receiving higher rates of pay which contribute to higher levels of household earnings and a reduced need for means-tested benefits. The group with the highest risk, unsurprisingly, is the unemployed/economically inactive. This is 41.2 percentage points higher than individuals working in higher professional or higher managerial occupations.

Are longer-term benefit recipients less likely to stop claiming than shorter-term claimants?

Exits from benefit receipt typically occur through increased earnings, transitions into full-time work, partnership formation or reductions in housing costs. Mike Brewer et al. (2019) show that moving into work or increasing hours

[70] Department for Work and Pensions, 'Income Dynamics: Income movements and the persistence of low income, 2010 to 2024', 2026. Published on GOV.UK.
[71] Social Mobility Commission, 'State of the Nation 2023: people and places', 2023. Published on GOV.UK.

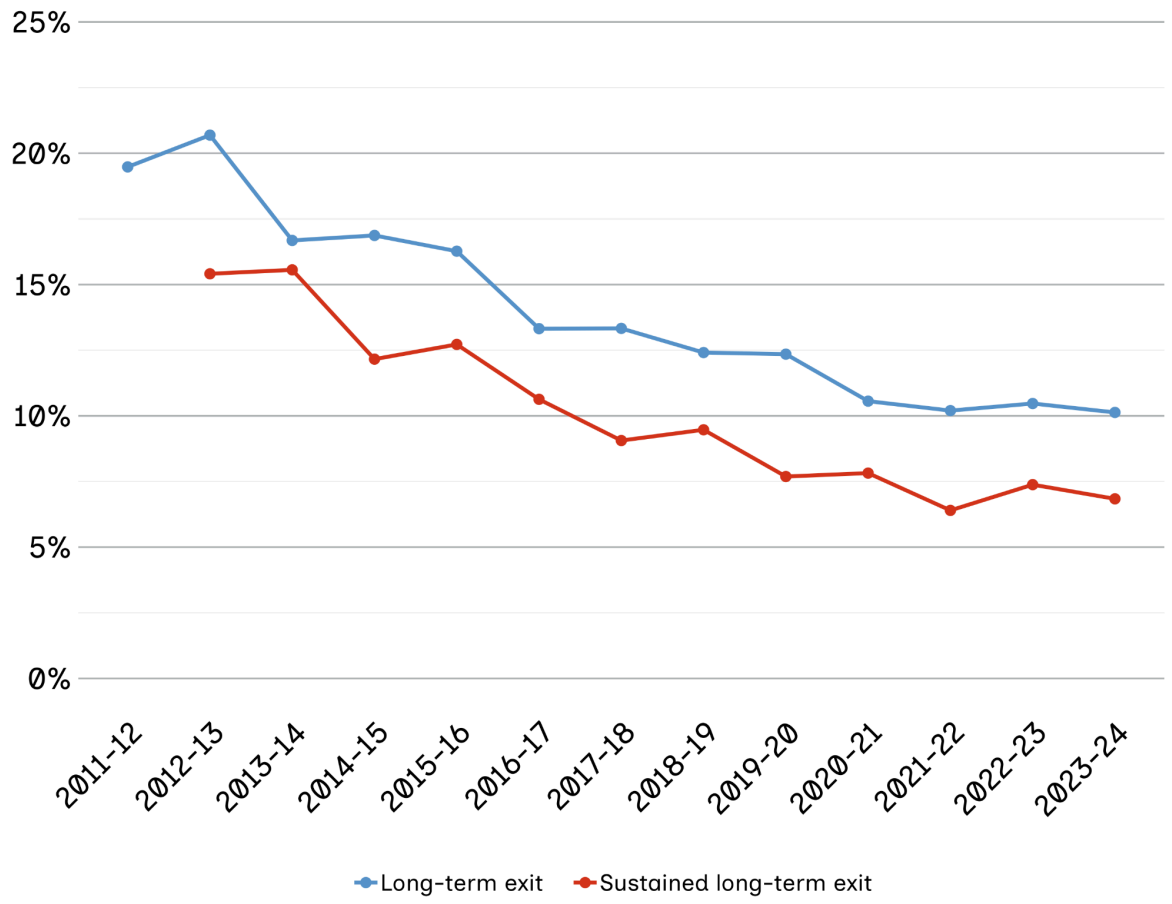
of work are the most common routes out of poverty, but that many such exits are fragile; job loss, relationship breakdown or health shocks frequently precipitate returns to benefits and low income.[72] For some groups, especially those with long-term health conditions or caring responsibilities (including childcare), exits from benefits are rare or short-lived.

To assess evidence on whether *Long-term* means-tested benefit recipients are less likely to exit means-tested benefit receipt than those who have been claiming for a shorter period, the analysis begins by looking at the share of *Long-term* benefit recipients who exit in each year.[73] This can be seen in figure 12.

[72] Mike Brewer and others, 'Universal credit and its impact on household incomes: the long and the short of it', 2019. Published on IFS.ORG.UK.
[73] As noted previously, Understanding Society records whether an individual is in receipt of means-tested benefit at the time an annual interview takes place. No information is available on benefit receipt in the intervening months.

Figure 12: The share of *Long-term* means-tested benefit recipients exiting, or achieving a sustained exit from benefit receipt, has declined over time.

Trends in the percentage of 'at-risk' working-age adults who exit *Long-term* means-tested benefit receipt: 2011-12 to 2023-24.



Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

We have explored 2 outcomes:

- 'Long-term exit': this is an estimate of the share of working-age adults who were *Long-term* means-tested benefit recipients in the previous year, who are not in receipt of means-tested benefits in the current year.

- 'Sustained long-term exit': this is an estimate of the share who have managed to achieve a 'sustained exit', defined as individuals who were *Long-term* means-tested benefit recipients 2 years previously, but in the last year and the current year they are not receiving means-tested benefits. The measure of sustained exit provides a better indicator of leaving means-tested benefit receipt as there is considerable churn with many leaving for short periods of time only to return in future years.

The share of *Long-term* means-tested benefit recipients exiting or achieving a sustained exit has declined over time, and exit rates are higher than sustained exit rates. Exit and sustained exit rates were highest in the years following the 2007/08 financial crisis as unemployment rates fell and there was some improvement in living standards. Exit rates have been fairly stable since 2020-21 at around 10% and sustained exits at around 7%. This means that the vast majority of *Long-term* means-tested benefit recipients remain on benefits.

These declining exit rates may reflect changes to working-age means-tested benefits linked to the rollout of UC. Under the legacy benefit regime, unemployed people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) who found work could qualify for means-tested in-work benefits such as Working Tax Credits or Housing Benefits, but there was more likely to be a break in receipt as claims for out-of-work benefits ended and new claims for in-work benefits were processed. Under UC, the transition for people who continue to qualify for means-tested support when they find work should be seamless as the value of a UC award automatically adjusts and no new claim needs to be processed. In other words, under UC, people who find work keep receiving payments automatically as their earnings change, whereas under the old system, finding a job ended their out-of-work claim completely and required a brand new claim for in-work support. It is not possible to assess the extent to which this change has affected exit rates but it could be a contributory factor.

A series of probit regression models were estimated to quantify the probability of exiting *Long-term* means-tested benefits, and achieving a sustained exit, for individuals who have been claiming for longer.[74] Exit models are estimated for an at-risk group, which is defined as being in *Long-term* receipt of means-tested benefits in the previous year, and estimate the probability of not being in receipt of means-tested benefits in the current year. Sustained exit models are also estimated for an at-risk group, defined as having been in *Long-term* receipt of means-tested benefits 2 years prior. These models estimate the probability of not being in receipt of means-tested benefits in the current year and the prior year as sustained exit is defined as remaining off means-tested benefits for 2 years. Please see table 2 below.

[74] These models include the range of control variables used in chapter 1 and in previous models (sex, age group, ethnicity, highest qualification, disability, household type, modified NS-SEC, IMD quintile, year) and additional variables on whether individuals recently found work, received training during the last 12 months, whether the number of dependent children in the household increased over the last year, and whether general health declined over the last year.

Table 2: Average marginal effects on the predicted probability of leaving *Long-term* means-tested benefit receipt.

Exit (not in receipt in the current year)	
Receipt of means-tested benefits for 3 years prior to the current year	-0.078
Long-term receipt of means-tested benefits measured 3 years prior to the current year	-0.079
Intermittent receipt of means-tested benefits measured 3 years prior to the current year	-0.071
Persistent receipt of means-tested benefits measured 3 years prior to the current year	-0.070
Sustained exit (not in receipt in the current and previous year)	
Receipt of means-tested benefits for 3 years prior to the last year	-0.069
Long-term receipt of means-tested benefits, measured 3 years prior to the last year	-0.061
Intermittent receipt of means-tested benefits measured 3 years prior to the last year	-0.062
Persistent receipt of means-tested benefits measured 3 years prior to the last year	-0.053

Data source: Understanding Society.
Note: All reported marginal effects are statistically significant at greater than the 1% level of significance.

The models test whether different measures of longer-term receipt are associated with a greater probability of moving off means-tested benefits. The first exit model includes a variable indicating whether an individual had also been in receipt of means-tested benefits 3 years prior to the current year which is when the outcome is assessed. For these individuals, the predicted probability of leaving means-tested benefits in the current year is estimated to be 7.8 percentage points lower than other long-term means-tested benefits in the previous year.

Extending the timeframe further, the second model includes a variable indicating whether an individual had also been in long-term receipt of means-tested benefits for 3 years prior (they had been in receipt of means-tested benefits for at least 4 years prior to the current year). For these

individuals, the predicted probability of leaving means-tested benefits in the current year is estimated to be 7.9 percentage points lower than other long-term means-tested benefit recipients in the previous year without such a long record of receipt.

Extending the timeframe even further to include longer-term measures of means-tested benefit receipt which allow for some churn (*Intermittent* receipt and *Persistent* receipt) in 2 further models. These models also estimate lower predicted probabilities of leaving *Long-term* means-tested benefit receipt (7.1 percentage points lower and 7.0 percentage points lower, respectively).

While some caution should be applied in making direct comparisons between models, due to differences in the composition of samples, the lower estimates for *Intermittent* receipt and *Persistent* receipt could be picking up that these longer-term receipt variables identify individuals who churn between periods of claiming and not claiming means-tested benefits. Therefore, the smaller negative marginal effects on the predicted probability of exiting *Long-term* means-tested benefit receipt could be further evidence of a group which churns, leaving means-tested benefits for short periods of time before returning.

For sustained exit (see lower panel of table 2), lower predicted probabilities are also estimated for individuals who have been in receipt of means-tested benefits for longer than the 2 consecutive years used in the definition of *Long-term* means-tested benefit receipt. For example, for individuals who had been in receipt of means-tested benefits in at least 3 consecutive years, the predicted probability of achieving a sustained exit is estimated to be 6.9 percentage points lower. Overall, these findings suggest that longer-term means-tested benefit recipients have a lower probability of exiting benefits and achieving a sustained exit from means-tested benefits.

Marginal effects from these model estimates can also be used to compute predicted probabilities for exiting *Long-term* means-tested benefit receipt for stylised hypothetical individuals. Table 3 contains these predicted probabilities for 6 such individuals with 2 predicted probabilities calculated for each individual, one for whether or not they were also in receipt of means-tested benefits 3 years prior to the current year. Note that these are illustrative examples and are not meant to represent an exhaustive list of possible individual types.

The first individual is a 45 to 54-year-old White woman living in one of the least deprived areas of England. She has a longstanding limiting disability and is a single parent working in a lower professional occupation. Prior to the current year she had been in receipt of means-tested benefits for at least 3 years at the time the survey interviews took place. Her predicted probability of

exiting means-tested benefits in the current year is 5%. If she hadn't been in receipt of means-tested benefits for longer than 2 years (at the time the interviews took place), her predicted probability of exiting would be 12%.

The other examples highlight how predicted probabilities of exiting *Long-term* means-tested benefit receipt vary between different individual and household characteristics and how *Long-term* means-tested benefit receipt reduces the predicted probability of leaving means-tested benefits while holding other characteristics constant. These results suggest a degree of persistence in means-tested benefit receipt or 'stickiness' with lower rates of leaving means-tested benefits for people who have been claiming for longer.

Table 3: Illustrative examples for predicted probabilities of exiting *Long-term* means-tested benefit receipt.

Sex	Age	Ethnicity	Qual	LLID	NS-SEC	Household	IMD	*Longer -term* receipt	Probability of exiting
Woman	45-54	White	GCSE	LLID	Lower man/prof	Single parent	Eng Q5	Yes	5%
Woman	45-54	White	GCSE	LLID	Lower man/prof	Single parent	Eng Q5	No	12%
Woman	45-54	White	GCSE	LLID	Lower man/prof	Couple/no children	Eng Q1	Yes	25%
Woman	45-54	White	GCSE	LLID	Lower man/prof	Couple/no kids	Eng Q1	No	39%
Woman	35-44	White	A level	not LLID	Intermedi ate occ	Couple/no kids	Eng Q1	Yes	27%
Woman	35-44	White	A level	not LLID	Intermedi ate occ	Couple/no kids	Eng Q1	No	42%
Man	35-44	White	A level	not LLID	Intermedi ate occ	Couple/kids	Eng Q1	Yes	24%
Man	35-44	White	A level	not LLID	Intermedi ate occ	Couple/kids	Eng Q1	No	38%
Man	35-44	White	A level	not LLID	Unemp/in active	Couple/kids	Scot Q2	Yes	3%
Man	35-44	White	A level	not LLID	Unemp/in active	Couple/kids	Scot Q2	No	7%
Man	35-44	Black African	A level	not LLID	Low skilled occ	Couple/kids	Eng Q1	Yes	18%
Man	35-44	Black African	A level	not LLID	Low skilled occ	Couple/kids	Eng Q1	No	30%

Data source: Understanding Society

Chapter 3: Conclusions and recommendations

The objectives for this research were to provide new evidence on long-term benefit receipt, identify the characteristics and circumstances of recipients and establish whether there is evidence that some claimants become stuck on benefits over long periods of time. The evidence demonstrates that while many move on and off benefits, there is evidence of 'stickiness': 50% of means-tested benefit claimants become Long-term recipients, claiming benefits in at least 2 consecutive years. Furthermore, those who have been claiming for even longer have a lower probability of leaving benefit receipt; a claimant who has been receiving benefits in 3 or more years is 7 to 8 percentage points less likely to exit than a shorter-term recipient. This demonstrates that the amount of time spent on benefits is negatively associated with future exit rates.

Despite clear public and political interest in the provision of an effective social security system that does not trap people into long-term use, there is surprisingly little known about long-term benefit recipients. By replacing long-standing assumptions with longitudinal evidence, this research fills an important knowledge gap, providing empirical evidence of prevalence, time trends, characteristics and flows of long-term claimants. In doing so, it identifies those for whom the system acts not as a temporary safety net, but may act as a trap that restricts social mobility with far-reaching consequences for the economy and society.

This research used the rich information available in Understanding Society survey data to look across different means-tested benefit types, and using participants' records linked across annual interviews to define a number of measures of means-tested benefit receipt and long-term receipt. The survey currently covers 15 years between 2009 and 2024, a period which spans the rollout of Universal Credit (UC). This research has revealed new evidence on long-term means-tested receipt including:

- **Means-tested benefit receipt and long-term receipt has declined in the working-age population over the last 15 years.** The share of adults receiving them, including those in long-term receipt, fell between 2009 and 2024.
- Rates for all 3 measures of long-term receipt defined in this research (*Long-term*, *Intermittent*, *Persistent*) decreased over this period. This trend reflects the greater need for means-tested support following the

2007/08 financial crisis and subsequent economic recession, followed by some improvement in employment and living standards. A recent uptick follows the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis.

- **Although most working-age adults do not receive means-tested benefits,** in 2023-24, just over one-fifth (21%) of working-age adults were in receipt or long-term *Intermittent* receipt of means-tested benefits. This reflects a high degree of persistent economic disadvantage in the working-age population.
- **Some groups face particularly high risks of receipt and long-term receipt.** These include women, 35 to 44-year-olds, Pakistani, Black African, Black Caribbean and particularly Bangladeshi ethnic groups, individuals with no or low qualifications, people reporting poor general health or longstanding limiting ill health or disabilities, single parents, the unemployed or economically inactive, people working in lower-skilled occupations and those living in the most deprived areas of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- **Despite the overall downward trend in long-term receipt, prevalence did not decline for all groups.** In particular, time trends are flat or increasing among people aged 55 years and over, those with no qualifications, individuals reporting poor general health and those with a longstanding limiting illness or disability. This means that an increasing share of the claimant group now has these characteristics.
- **Modelled risks of being a long-term recipient shows how risks accumulate for different combinations of characteristics while others have very low risks.** For example, a 45 to 54-year-old unemployed, disabled White woman with GCSEs, living with her partner and dependent children in one of England's most deprived areas, has a 92% predicted probability of long-term receipt of means-tested benefits. In contrast, a 35 to 44-year-old degree-educated, disabled White woman, who is employed in a lower managerial/lower professional occupation, lives with her partner with no dependent children in a deprived area of England has an estimated 3% predicted probability of *Long-term* receipt of means-tested benefit.
- **A high proportion of means-tested benefit recipients go on to become long-term recipients each year.** Around half of claimants recently starting a claim in one year are estimated to become long-term recipients in the following year.
- Rates of exit and sustained exit from *Long-term* means-tested benefits have fallen to around 10% a year, indicating persistent benefit receipt.
- Falling exit rates are shaped by improvements in the economy following the financial crisis and may also reflect the greater continuity in means-tested support available through UC. In addition, highlighted

changes in the profile of benefit recipients can mean that long-term recipients increasingly comprise a group of claimants facing higher barriers to increasing household income. Older people, those with no qualifications, and those reporting poor health or a disability are less likely to exit.

- **Individuals who have been claiming means-tested benefits across a greater number of years have lower predicted probabilities of exiting.** The predicted probability of exiting is 7 to 8 percentage points lower for longer-term recipients after controlling for a range of characteristics. The predicted probability of achieving a sustained exit is 5 to 7 percentage points lower, again highlighting a degree of persistence.

Working-age social security

The government must set out a clear and modern vision for the purpose of working-age social security, one that firmly positions social security as both a robust safety net against hardship and an effective trampoline for achieving self-sufficiency. At present, our analysis reveals that while the current system functions as a safety net, for some, it is failing on the 'trampoline' promise: working-age adults who enter the welfare system face a high likelihood of becoming dependent.

Means-tested social security plays an essential role in protecting non-working households from destitution and topping up earnings in low-income families. For many, this support is required only briefly following a temporary shock, such as job loss, ill health or relationship breakdown. For others, extended support remains necessary. Long-term recipients encompass diverse circumstances: for individuals managing chronic health conditions or severe disabilities, or primary carers supporting elderly or disabled family members, benefits provide an essential lifeline that sustains family-based care, saving the state substantially higher alternative social care costs. However, for those with capacity for work or earnings progression, the welfare state must be redesigned to foster progression and enable sustained transitions off state support.

Historically, a primary concern with means-tested benefits was the "unemployment trap," where entering work created financial cliff-edges that made taking a job unviable. By unifying out-of-work and in-work support into a single system, UC smoothed this transition, allowing support to taper off gradually as earnings rise. In this way, UC acts as a crucial financial buffer, topping up low wages or enabling primary carers to balance part-time work with family responsibilities.

However, by blurring the boundary between work and welfare, UC has introduced a secondary structural challenge: the "in-work benefit trap." High withdrawal rates (taper rates) combined with the reduction of local authority support (such as Council Tax Support) mean that as claimants increase their hours or secure small pay rises, a substantial proportion of every additional pound earned is clawed back. Consequently, many claimants fall into long-term benefit receipt without the support, flexibility or financial incentives needed to progress beyond low-paid, part-time, insecure work. While the Department for Work and Pensions introduced in-work conditionality to mandate work-search activities for low earners, mandatory compliance checks alone cannot overcome these structural disincentives.

To improve social mobility prospects for long-term benefit recipients, policy must remain ambitious: the welfare state should strive to enable health-limited claimants to access suitable, supportive employment wherever possible, while ensuring working parents and low-paid workers are supported to progress beyond low-pay traps rather than remaining capped in persistent low income. To strengthen the benefit system's role in supporting upward social mobility, the Social Mobility Commission (SMC) sets out 5 core recommendations for the government:

Recommendation 1: Improve the supply of quality local employment opportunities through place-based growth

Geographic disparities in the availability of high-quality employment affect levels of benefit dependence. In former industrial areas, coastal communities, and high-deprivation neighbourhoods, persistent benefit reliance reflects deep-seated structural weaknesses in the local economy: low job density, seasonal or zero-hours contracts, and weak employer demand.

Because around 38% of *Long-term* means-tested benefit recipients are working, benefit reliance cannot be solved solely by pushing claimants into any job. Evidence demonstrates that work-first activation in weak local labour markets frequently leads to a revolving door of precarious, low-paid employment and repeat benefit claims ('churning').[75] [76] Reducing long-term dependency and promoting social mobility requires transforming the supply and quality of local employment, ensuring that entry-level positions provide stable hours, decent pay, and clear progression ladders.[77]

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[75] Department for Work & Pensions. 'Universal Credit quarterly statistics, 29 April 2013 to 14 May 2026'. Published on GOV.UK.
[76] Mike Brewer and others, 'Universal credit and its impact on household incomes: the long and the short of it', 2019. Published on IFS.ORG.UK.
[77] This recommendation builds directly on the framework published by the SMC's Economic Growth and Investment Group in 'Innovation, Investment and Inclusion: A Framework for

Simultaneously, local employers face genuine financial pressures including rising National Insurance contributions, which make recruiting inexperienced or low-skilled candidates feel like a significant financial risk. The government and local Mayoral Combined Authorities should connect regional regeneration projects (such as Enterprise Zones, Town Deals, and local multiversity developments) to active labour market policies.[78] [79] Local economic strategies must include explicit commitments to create sustainable, living-wage employment pathways that reduce long-term means-tested benefit dependency.

Recommendation 2: Foster relational, tailored coaching as employment support

Evidence, including the SMC's recent exploration into the lived experiences of young people who are not in education, employment or training, demonstrate that rapid 10-minute check-ins, and benefit sanctions offer low long-term value for supporting claimants.[80] While sanctions can force immediate short-term entry into any available job, Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) evidence confirms that sanctioned claimants exit less quickly into paid employment (Pay As You Earn earnings, earn less upon exiting, and are frequently pushed into complete economic inactivity or lower-quality work).[81]

Furthermore, mandatory 10-minute work coach appointments are too brief to deliver meaningful career guidance, functioning primarily as administrative compliance checks that can erode trust between claimants and public services. In contrast, relational, empathetic support can build self-efficacy and long-term labour market attachment. Reallocating resources away from sanction enforcement toward relational coaching can provide savings in the medium term through reduced social security spending and improved employment outcomes.[82] [83]

Regional Renewal', local economic strategies must connect economic development with social mobility pipelines. Left-behind regions require business-led, locally coordinated Strategic Growth Plans that are appropriate for the region.

[78] Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 'Enterprise Zones', 2024. Published on GOV.UK.

[79] Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government 'Town Deals: full list of 101 offers', 2021. Published on GOV.UK.

[80] The Social Mobility Commission, 'Understanding the experiences of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Blackpool', 2026. Published on SOCIALMOBILITY.INDEPENDENT-COMMISSION.UK.

[81] Department for Work & Pensions, 'The impact of benefit sanctions on employment outcomes', 2023. Published on GOV.UK.

[82] The Social Mobility Commission, 'Understanding the experiences of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Blackpool', 2026. Published on SOCIALMOBILITY.INDEPENDENT-COMMISSION.UK.

[83] IPS Grow, 'What is IPS?', Published on IPSGROW.ORG.UK.

Aligning with the reformed direction set out in the Get Britain Working White Paper (including the merger of Jobcentre Plus with the National Careers Service to become the Jobs and Careers Service), Jobcentre operations must pivot away from transactional conditionality toward personalised, localised career development. Work coach performance metrics must move away from measuring the numbers of people leaving benefits quickly after claiming them (known as rapid off-flows) to looking at sustained 12-month earnings progression.

Recommendation 3: Align family-centred benefit support and childcare provision to reward work intensity

Current means-tested benefit and childcare structures can provide weak financial incentives for work and progression for low-income families. Under UC, families attempting to increase their work intensity face much higher effective marginal tax rates: as earnings rise above the work allowance, the 55% taper rate, when combined with Income Tax, National Insurance, and Council Tax Support withdrawal, means working parents can lose 64p or more for every additional £1 earned.[84]

High effective marginal tax rates, together with the costs and barriers associated with entering work or increasing hours, such as childcare and travel costs, can discourage people from leaving means-tested benefits. While there are policies in place to mitigate these costs, for example entitlement to free childcare for working parents, high marginal effective tax rates combine with, and exacerbate, multiple barriers to labour market entry and progression. We know that the longer people are out of work, the higher the risk of becoming long-term benefit recipients, so time lost can also erode long-term employability. Parents who have several children spread over a long period of time may also find these barriers lead to long periods detached from the labour market. Many may also be stuck in imperfect 'holding patterns' of part-time work, with barriers to increased work intensity, or churning in and out of work. Future research could track how parents' benefit receipt, family size, and employment change over time as their children grow older.

These issues are especially strong for single parents and large families. The majority (72%) of single parents were in *Long-term* receipt of means-tested benefits in 2023-24, reflecting the impact of sole caring responsibilities, one potential earner, rigid shift patterns, high fixed living costs, and compounding system disincentives.

[84] Institute for Fiscal Studies, 'Universal credit review: challenges and options for reform', 2026. Published on IFS.ORG.UK.

The government should review UC work allowances, taper interactions and benefit withdrawal rates to ensure taking on extra hours delivers a clear financial gain, particularly for single parent households.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen vocational adult training opportunities for long-term means-tested benefit recipients through targeted adult skills budgets and alignment with further education

Adults with no formal qualifications face a 15 percentage point higher probability of *Long-term* benefit reliance than graduates. Evidence shows that long-term vocational training and work-based learning are effective in delivering positive, durable, long-term employment and pay progression outcomes. Conversely, short-term "work-first" schemes show temporary entry effects and frequently lead to repeat benefit claims ('churning').[85]

Currently, the UK lacks an integrated lifelong learning strategy that explicitly bridges Further Education (FE) skills provision with the social security safety net. Adult learning budgets have been historically squeezed, and low-skilled adult claimants are frequently underserved by short-term, low-level interventions.[86] [87] Furthermore, as highlighted in the SMC's State of the Nation and place-based reports, adult skills provision is often disconnected from local economic demand and employer progression pathways.[88] [89]

The government should establish dedicated adult skills allocations for UC claimants, explicitly bridging FE provision with the social security system. It must scale up funded, intermediate-level vocational pathways, aligned with local mayoral growth strategies, to build human capital and break the low-pay, no-pay cycle.

Recommendation 5: Address health inequalities and structural barriers to disability employment and job retention

Controlling for education, age and household structure, the presence of a longstanding limiting health condition or disability increases the probability of *Long-term* means-tested benefit receipt by 10.6 percentage points. Expenditure on health-related benefits has grown sharply post-pandemic,

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[85] Mike Brewer and others, 'Universal credit and its impact on household incomes: the long and the short of it', 2019. Published on IFS.ORG.UK.
[86] Luke Sibieta and others, 'Adult education: the past, present and future', 2022. Published on IFS.ORG.UK.
[87] David Card and others, 'What works? A meta analysis of recent active labor market program evaluations', 2018. Published on ACADEMIC.OUP.COM
[88] Social Mobility Commission, 'State of the Nation 2025: the evolving story of social mobility in the UK', 2025. Published on SOCIALMOBILITY.INDEPENDENT-COMMISSION.UK.
[89] Social Mobility Commission, 'Regional insights: regional roundtables and place-based opportunity bottlenecks', Published on SOCIALMOBILITY.INDEPENDENT-COMMISSION.UK.

rising from £36 billion in 2019/20 to £48 billion in 2023/24, driven by a surge in working-age economic inactivity linked to physical conditions (such as musculoskeletal disorders) and mental health challenges. Consequently, rising health-related inactivity is one of the biggest challenges for welfare and social mobility.

Evidence shows that rising health- and disability-related inactivity is both a driver and a consequence of *Long-term* benefit receipt: health limitations and disability reduce the probability of exiting benefits, while prolonged low income and insecurity can exacerbate physical and mental health conditions, creating a feedback loop.[90] Traditional active labour market policies have been shown to fail when health barriers are met with punitive compliance regimes. Standard Work Capability Assessments and threat-based reassessments generate severe anxiety, often pushing health-limited claimants further into economic inactivity.[91]

Aligning with the Get Britain Working White Paper and *Pathways to Work* reforms, the government must shift away from threat-based capability testing toward proactive healthcare integration, employer-led job retention, and workplace adaptation. The DWP should introduce a "Work Guarantee" allowing health-limited claimants to test employment without risking immediate loss of benefit entitlement if the job attempt proves unsustainable.

[90] Michael Marmot and others, 'Health equity in England: the Marmot review 10 years on', 2020. Published on BMJ.COM.
[91] Annie Irvine and Tianne Haggar, 'Conceptualising the social in mental health and work capability: implications of medicalised framing in the UK welfare system', 2023. Published on LINK.SPRINGER.COM.

Annex A: Defining long-term benefit receipt

The first stage of this project was to agree on a working definition of working-age long-term benefit receipt to guide both the literature review and the quantitative analysis. A rapid review of existing research was carried out to support this decision. The review considered evidence on overall benefit receipt, specific claimant groups (such as people receiving unemployment-related or disability-related benefits), and related groups including the economically inactive, people living in poverty and low-paid workers. It explored: 1) which social security benefits should be in scope, 2) deciding on the unit of analysis where the benefit recipient is determined at a benefit unit level, 3) how to determine the threshold length for benefit claims to be considered long-term. It also assessed how easily different definitions could be applied in the quantitative data. This section summarises the findings and sets out the agreed working definition, drawing on academic practice, government statistics and parliamentary usage.

Across the literature, the questions of who counts as a 'benefit recipient' and what length of time someone must receive benefits before it is considered 'long-term' are treated as measurement choices. These choices depend on the purpose of the research, the data available and the policy mechanisms being examined. For this project, the definition needs to support how common benefit receipt is and how many people are affected by it at a given time, help describe who experiences long-term receipt, and allow analysis of persistence over time.

Scope: which social security benefits are relevant?

Two main approaches appear in the literature. The first focuses on working-age recipients of means-tested benefits – primarily Universal Credit (UC) and the 6 legacy benefits it replaced (income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit). This activation-oriented framing is used to understand employment support, conditionality, sanctions or claimant behaviour. Receipt of means-tested benefits determines the conditions claimants must meet, their access to active labour market programmes (such as Access to Work), and the administrative processes that shape their experience of the system.

It also recognises that some claimants with limited capability for work or

disability-related entitlements, which follow different administrative pathways, and are not exposed to the same conditionality regime.[92] The second approach treats the benefit system as a whole, including means-tested, contributory and universal benefits. This system-wide framing is more suitable when the aim is to understand redistribution, income composition or household living standards.[93]

For this project, the narrower focus on working-age, means-tested benefits is most appropriate. These benefits provide temporary safety-net support that responds to changes in earnings, employment and household circumstances. They are closely linked to policy levers such as work-search requirements, sanctions and the way benefits are reduced as earnings rise. Universal and contributory benefits play a more stable role and are not usually intended to support short-term changes in income. Non-means-tested disability-related benefits may still be relevant where they help explain patterns of long-term means-tested benefit receipt, but they are not the main focus of the definition.

Unit of analysis: who is the recipient?

Although quantitative studies often analyse individuals, entitlement to means-tested benefits in the UK is assessed at the household level - usually a single adult or couple plus any dependent children.[94] Administrative and survey data therefore distinguish between claims, named claimants and benefit units, and these differences matter when interpreting individual-level measures.[95] Because need and income are assessed jointly at the benefit-unit level, an individual's benefit status reflects the circumstances of the unit to which they belong.

Where the research question focuses on sanctions, claimant behaviour or individual labour-market attachment, claimant-level measures (the named adult or adults on the claim) may be appropriate, provided this choice is clearly justified.[96] Even when individuals are used as the unit of analysis, it is

[92] Hayley Bennett and others, 'Universal Credit: administrative burdens of automated welfare', 2026. Published on CAMBRIDGE.ORG; Sharon Wright and Peter Dwyer, 'In-work Universal Credit: claimant experiences of conditionality mismatches and counterproductive benefit sanctions', 2022, Published on CAMBRIDGE.ORG.
[93] Hilary Hoynes and others, 'Benefits and tax credits', 2024. Published on ACADEMIC.OUP.COM.
[94] While we tend to refer to households, which are commonly understood as family units living together, DWP uses benefit units to assess benefit eligibility. Although most households contain only one benefit unit, some contain more than one. For example, children aged 18 years or over living in the parental home or elderly parents living with adult children.
[95] Paul Fisher and Olena Hussein, 'Understanding Society: the income data', 2023. Published on ONLINELIBRARY.WILEY.COM.
[96] Hayley Bennett and others, 'Universal Credit: administrative burdens of automated welfare', 2026. Published on CAMBRIDGE.ORG; Sharon Wright and Peter Dwyer, 'In-work Universal Credit: claimant experiences of conditionality mismatches and counterproductive benefit sanctions', 2022, Published on CAMBRIDGE.ORG.

important to recognise that entry into, exit from and duration of benefit receipt are shaped by household circumstances, including changes in partnership status, caring responsibilities and the characteristics of other members of the benefit unit.

Timeframe: how long is 'long-term'?

Two main approaches are used to define long-term receipt. The first is a continuous-spell definition, where someone is considered a long-term recipient after 12 uninterrupted months on benefits. This reflects conventions established by the International Labour Organisation and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development for defining long-term unemployment. It is widely used because the chances of returning to work tend to fall after a year and the risks of labour-market 'scarring' increase (the long-term negative effects of unemployment)[97].

The second approach focuses on a definition of long-term receipt which allows for fluctuations in benefit receipt over time. This identifies long-term receipt through repeated or sustained benefit receipt across several years, for example, receipt in 3 out of 4 consecutive years. This captures patterns of moving on and off benefits and aligns with the DWPs' definition of persistent low income (DWP, 2026a) and EU measures of poverty persistence.[98]

Eligibility thresholds in employment support programmes can also help inform the definition of long-term receipt. These thresholds vary depending on the programme. Mainstream programmes such as the Work Programme (2011 to 2017) or the Restart Scheme (2021-2024) have typically applied unemployment durations of around 6 to 18 months, but some, such as the Work and Health Programme (2017 to 2024), have used longer thresholds of up to 24 months. This variation reflects different target groups and policy aims and shows how 'long term' is not a fixed category but one determined by policy design.

Data constraints also matter. Administrative data which includes start and end dates of benefit claims allows precise measurement of continuous spells, while annual panel surveys which tend to collect information on benefit receipt at the time of annual interviews, are better suited to identifying repeated receipt

[97] David Card and others, 'What works? A meta analysis of recent active labor market program evaluations', 2018. Published on ACADEMIC.OUP.COM; Louis D'hert and others, 'Unemployment, inactivity, and hiring chances: a systematic review and meta-analysis', 2026. Published on ACADEMIC.OUP.COM.
[98] Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (European Commission), 'Poverty dynamics in the EU: exploring the experience and trajectories of poverty over time', 2026. Published on OP.EUROPA.EU.

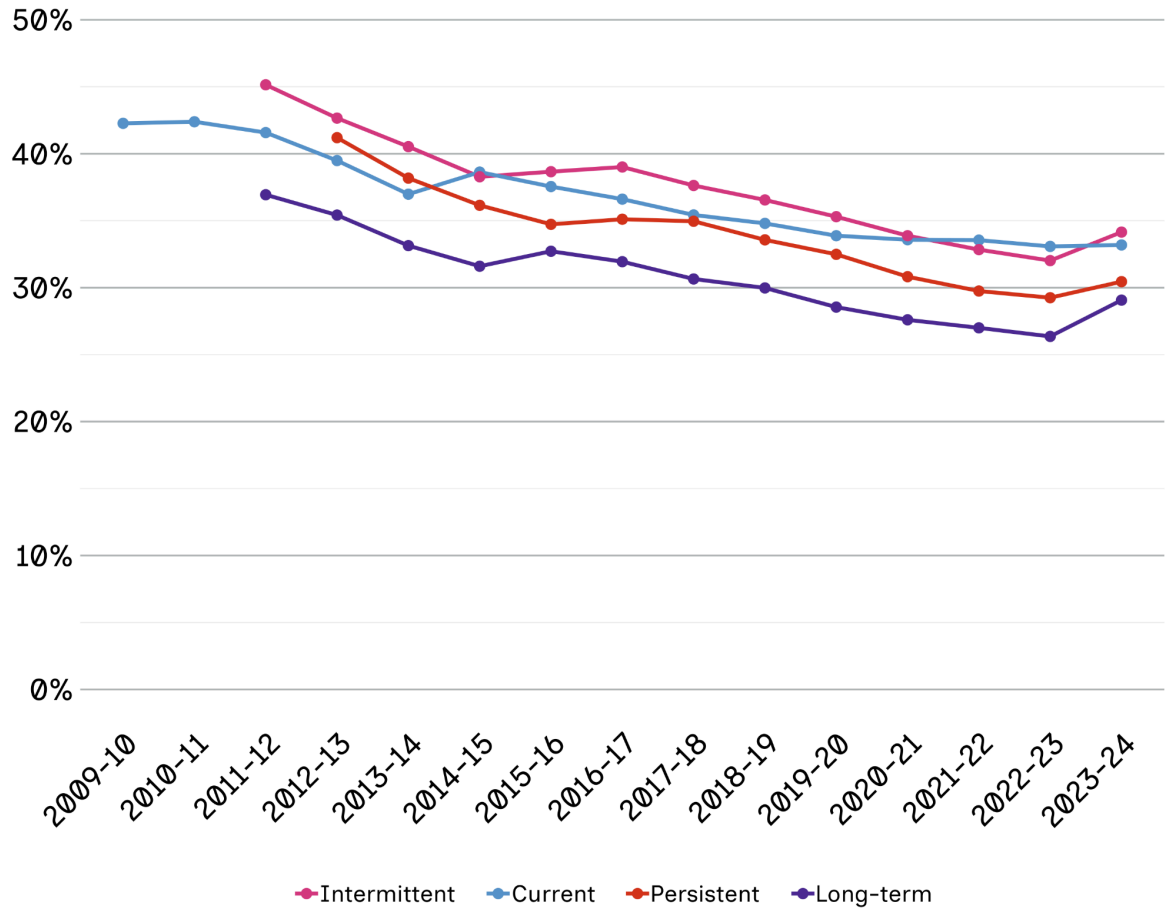
across waves.[99] The new quantitative research conducted in this project uses data from Understanding Society, which is an annual panel survey. This means that it is not possible in this dataset to measure the precise length of benefit claims as no information is available on start and end dates.

Taking all these factors into account, the agreed core definition for this project is being in receipt of means-tested benefits for at least 12 months. This provides a clear and practical basis for reviewing the evidence and assessing strategies to reduce long-term benefit receipt. For the quantitative analysis using annual panel data, a range of measures are tested, including receipt at the time of the interview, receipt in 2 consecutive annual interviews, in 2 out of 3 consecutive annual interviews and in 3 out of 4 consecutive annual interviews. While it is not possible to identify whether individuals receive means-tested benefits in the months between annual interviews, these measures help capture long-term, repeated and persistent benefit receipt.

[99] Paul Fisher and Olena Hussein, 'Understanding Society: the income data', 2023. Published on ONLINELIBRARY.WILEY.COM; Sharon Stevelink and others, 'Universal credit trajectories among individuals who access secondary mental health services: analysis of linked data', 2026. LINK.SPRINGER.COM.

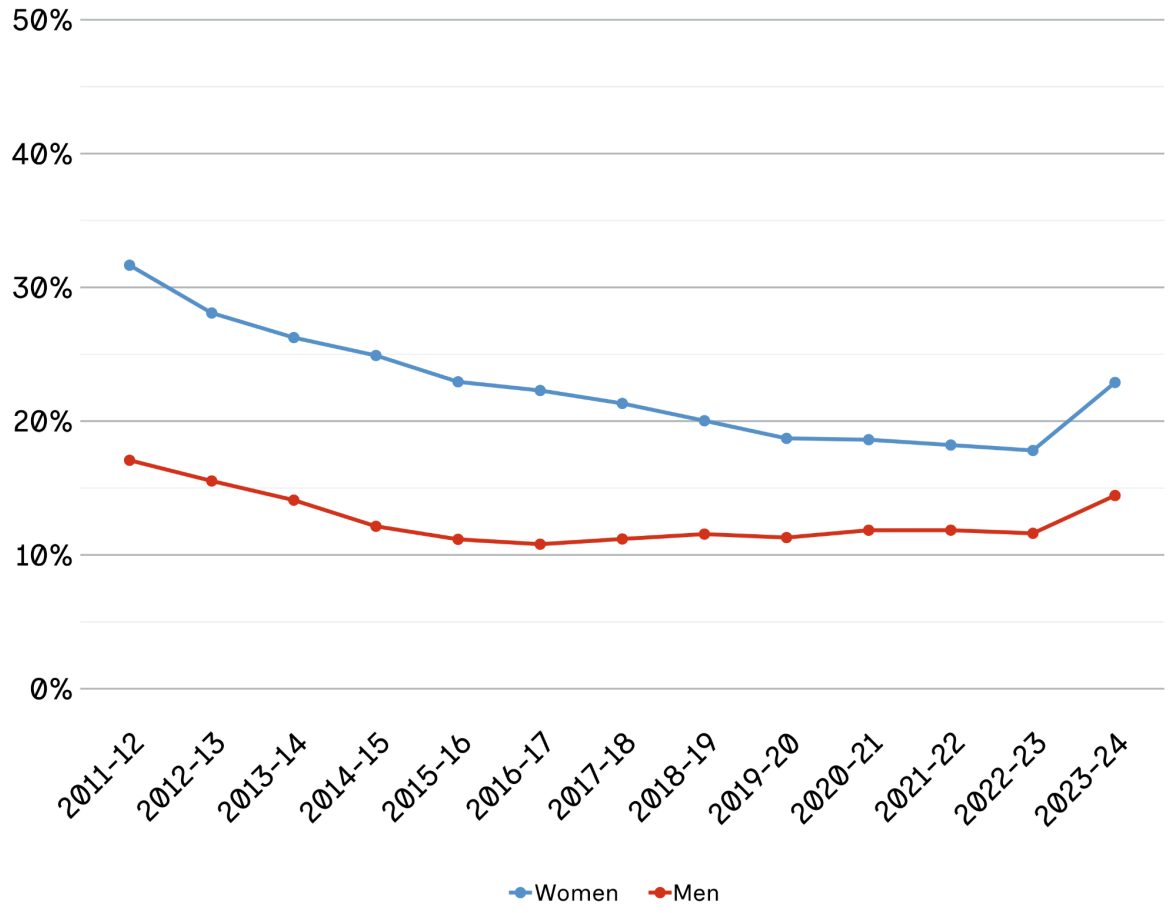
Annex B: Supplementary analysis

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in receipt and *Long-term* receipt, of any state benefits: 2009-10 to 2023-24.



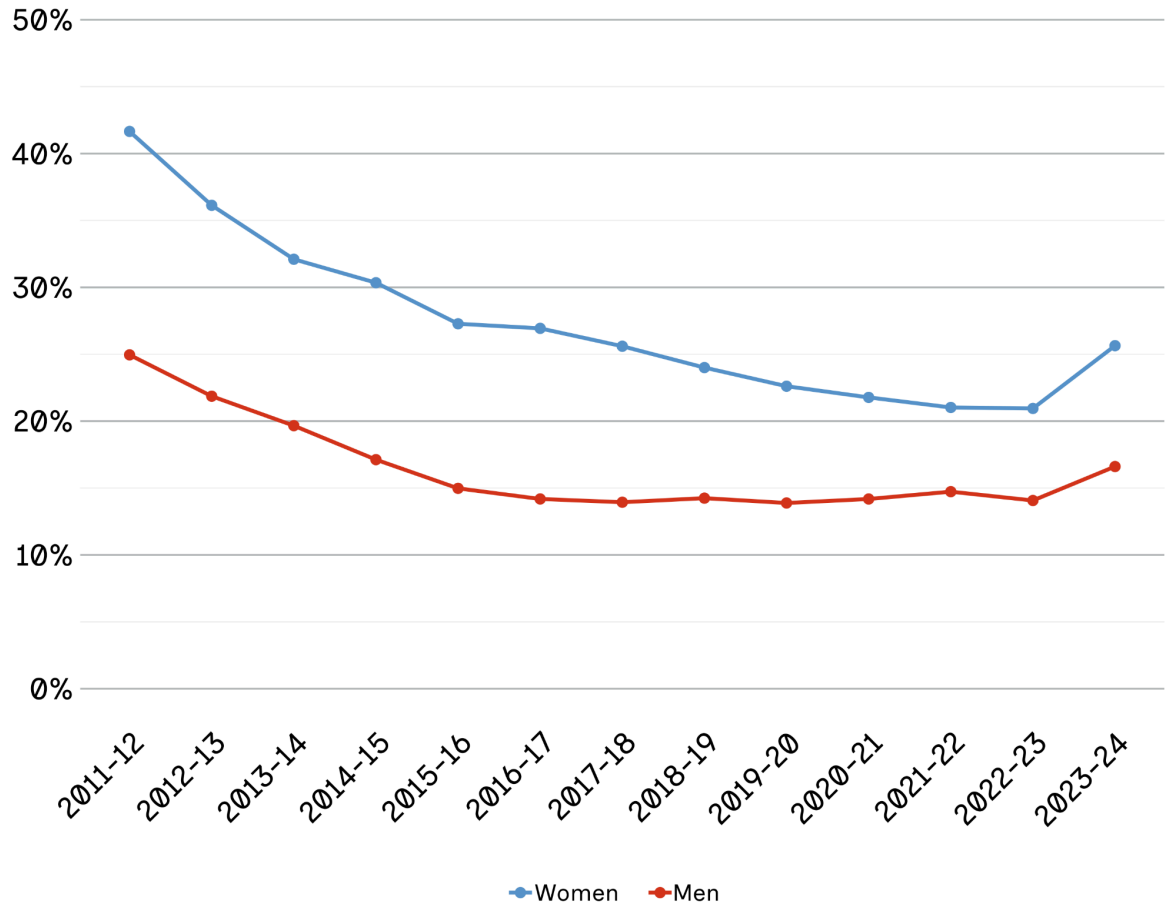
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Long-term* receipt of means-tested benefits, by sex: 2011-12 to 2023-24.



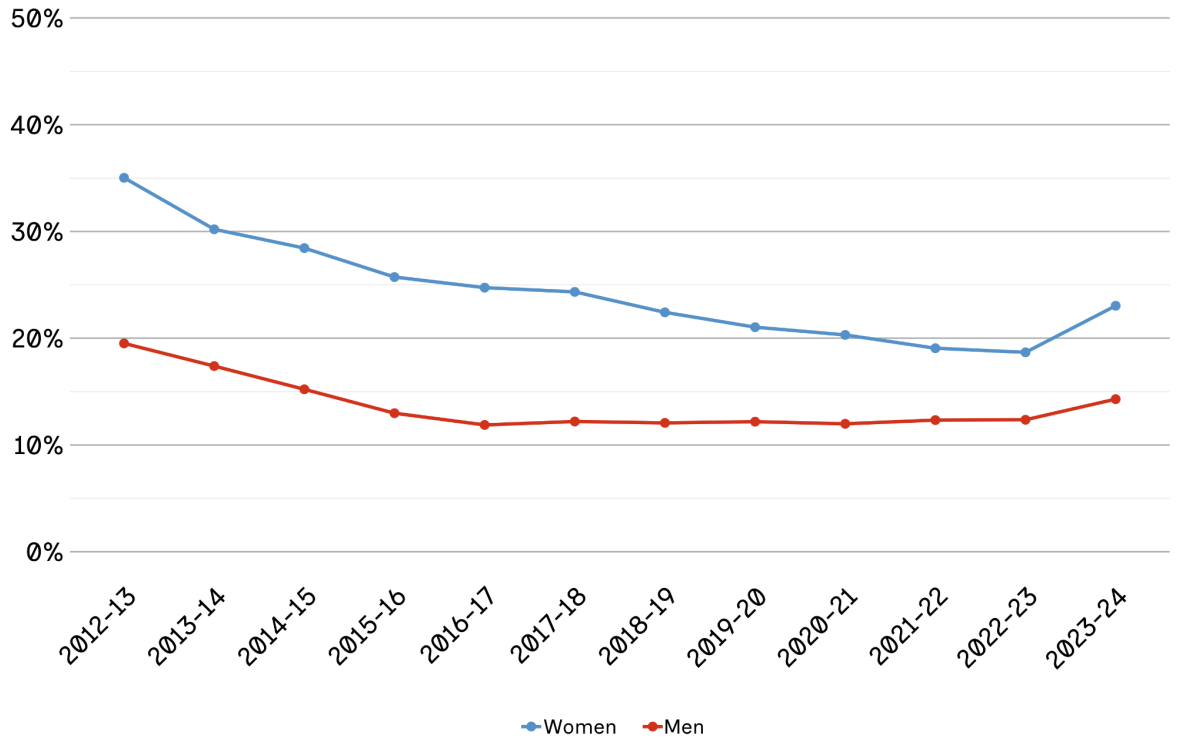
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Intermittent* receipt of means-tested benefits, by sex: 2011-12 to 2023-24.



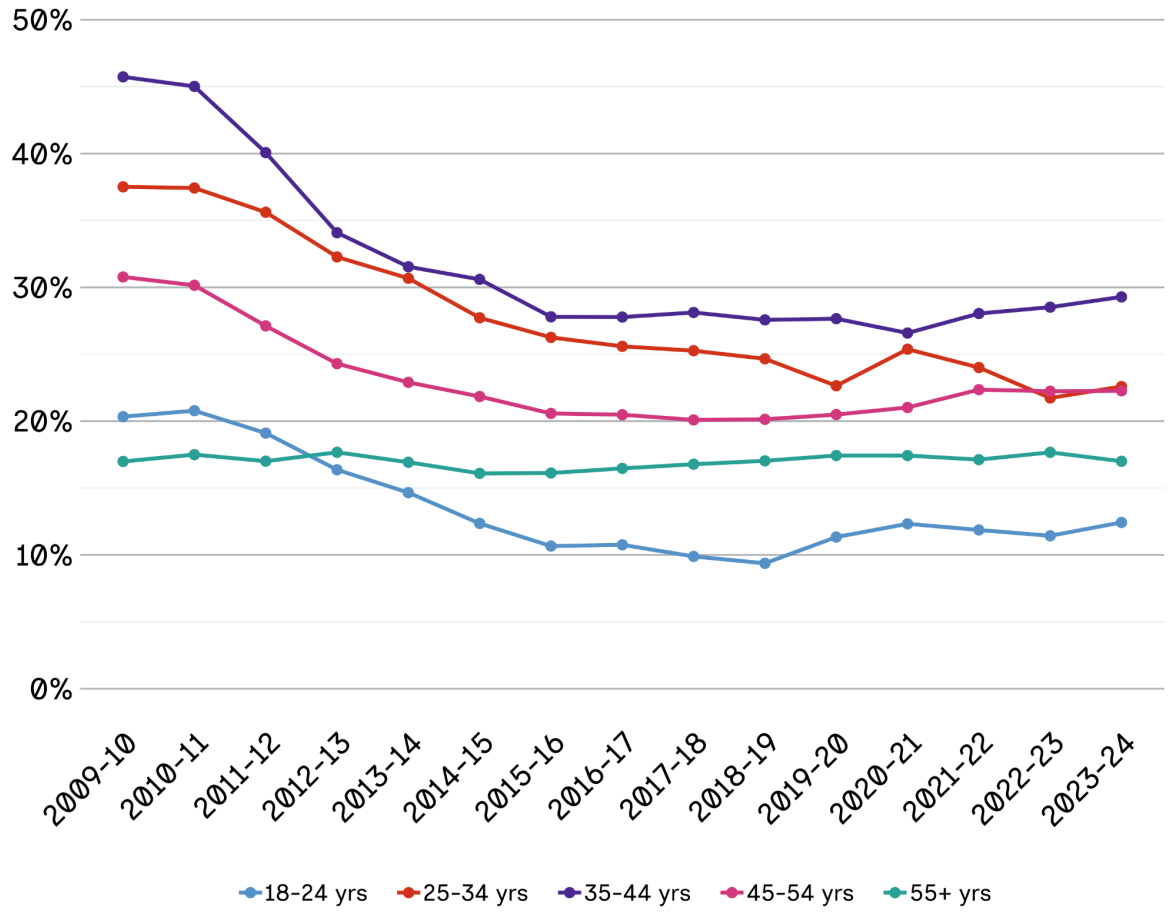
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Persistent* receipt of means-tested benefits, by sex: 2012-13 to 2023-24.



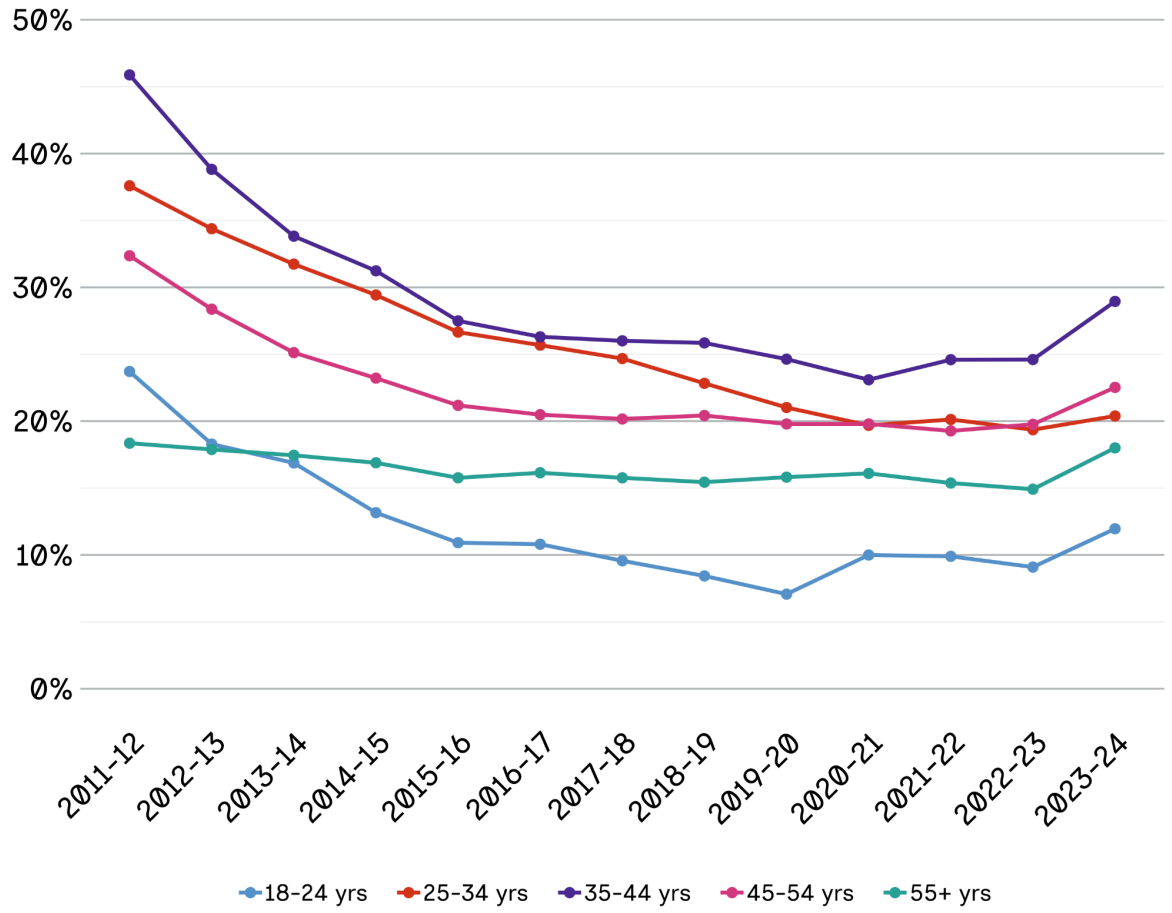
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Current* receipt of means-tested benefits, by age groups: 2009-10 to 2023-24.



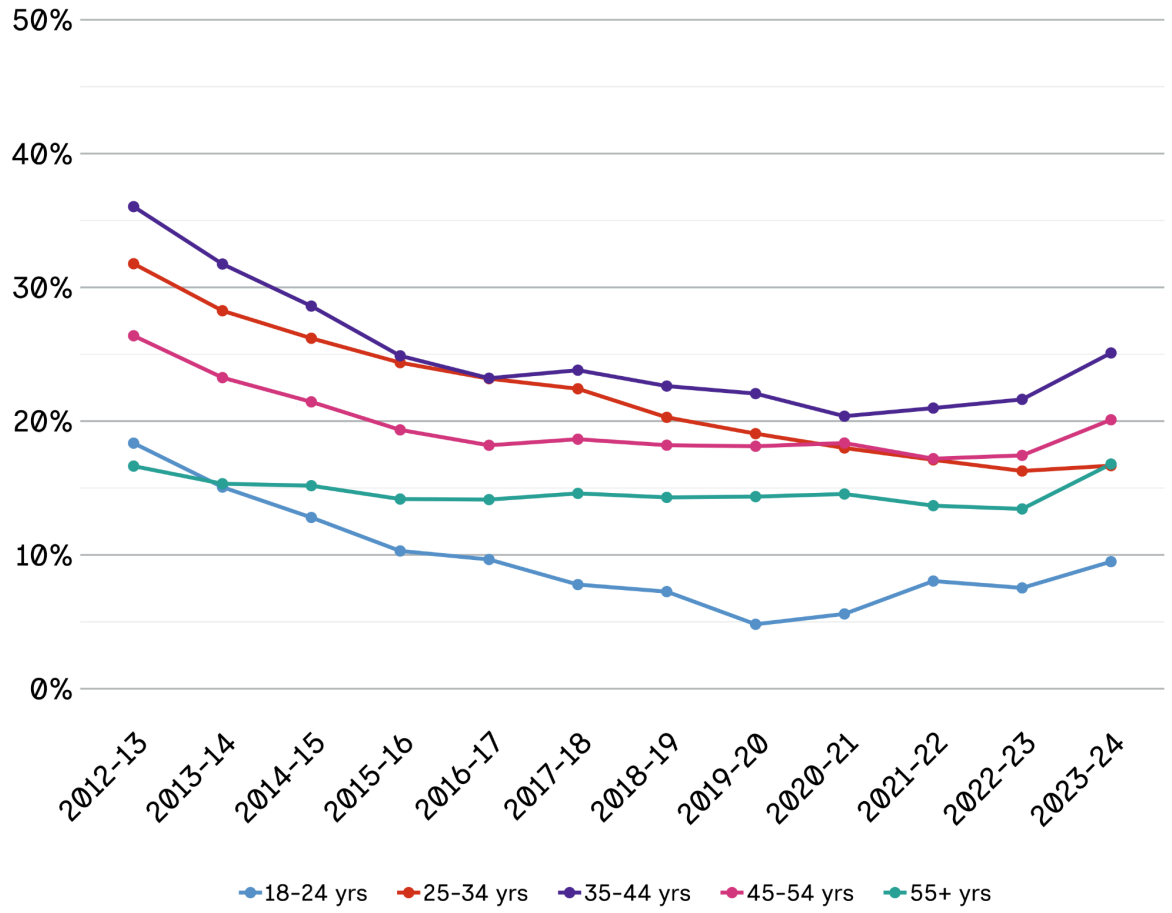
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Intermittent* receipt of means-tested benefits, by age groups: 2011-12 to 2023-24.



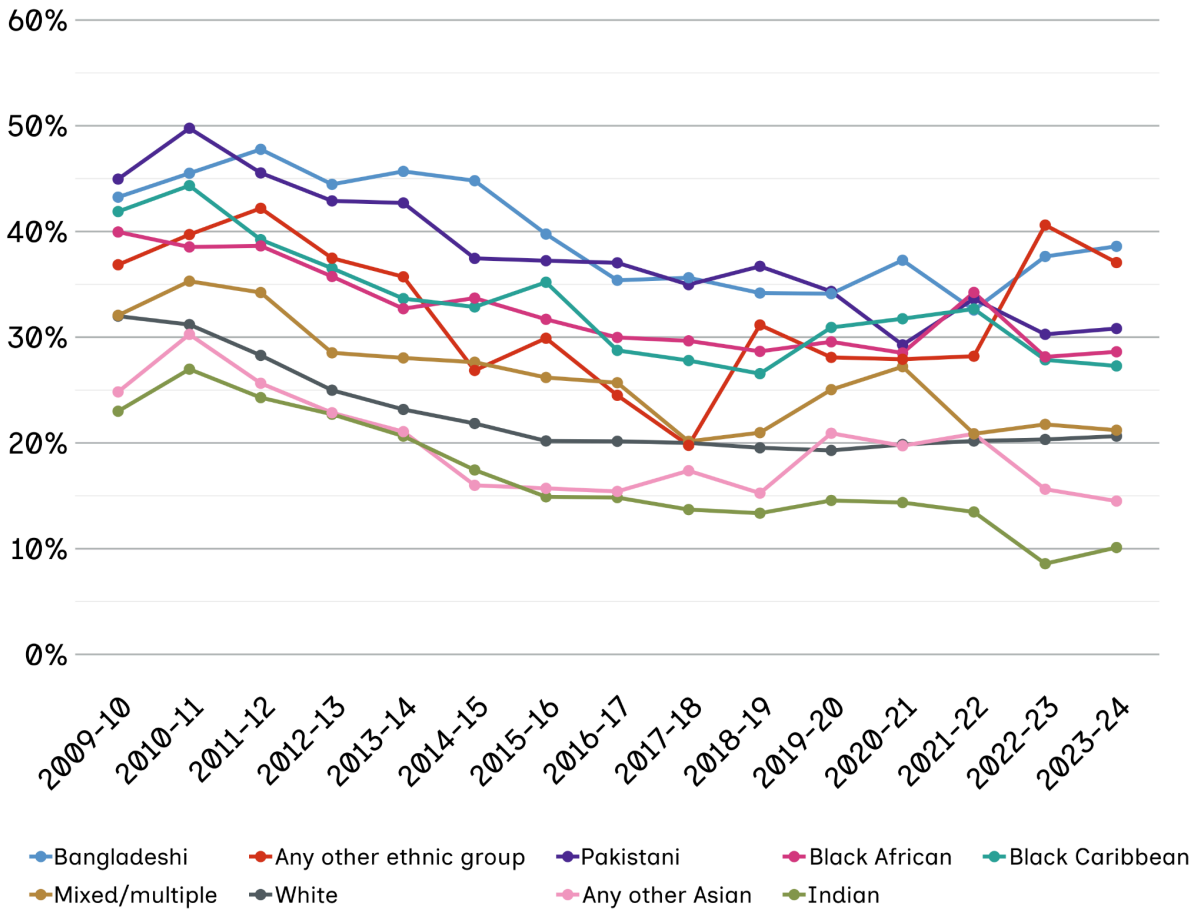
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Persistent* receipt of means-tested benefits, by age groups: 2012-13 to 2023-2024.



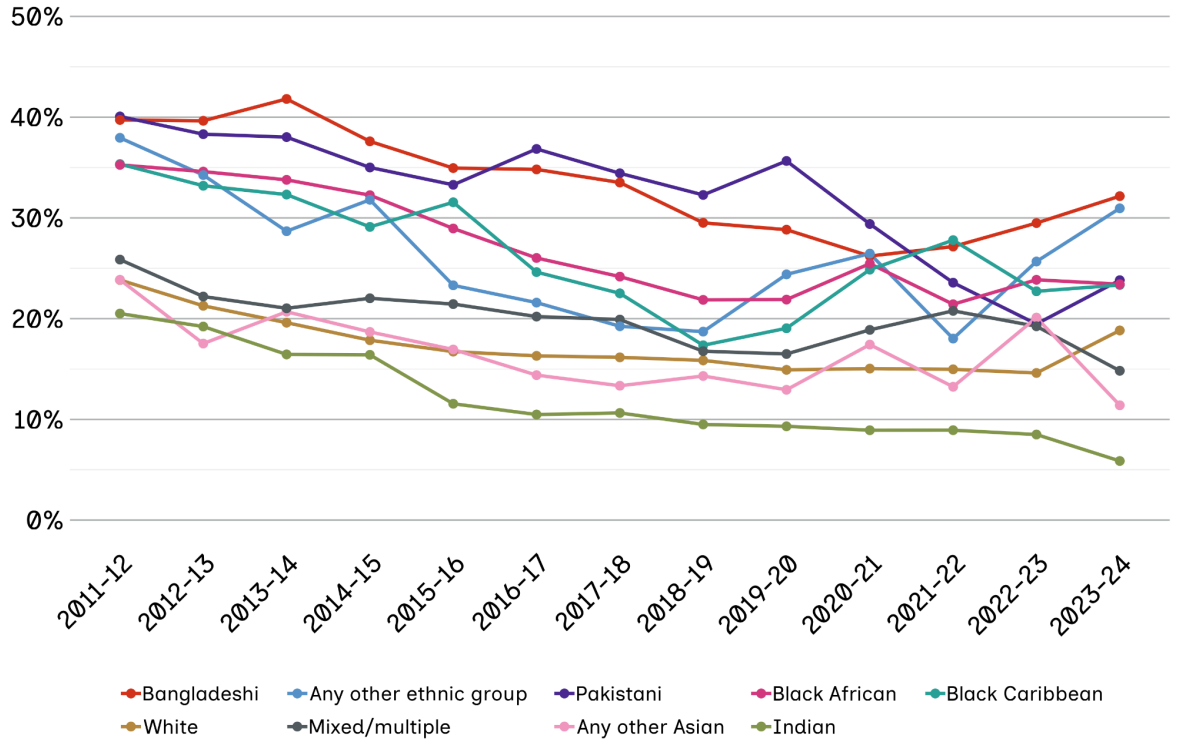
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Current* receipt of means-tested benefits, by ethnic group: 2009-10 to 2023-24.



Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data. The 2023/24 data for the Bangladeshi group is unweighted.

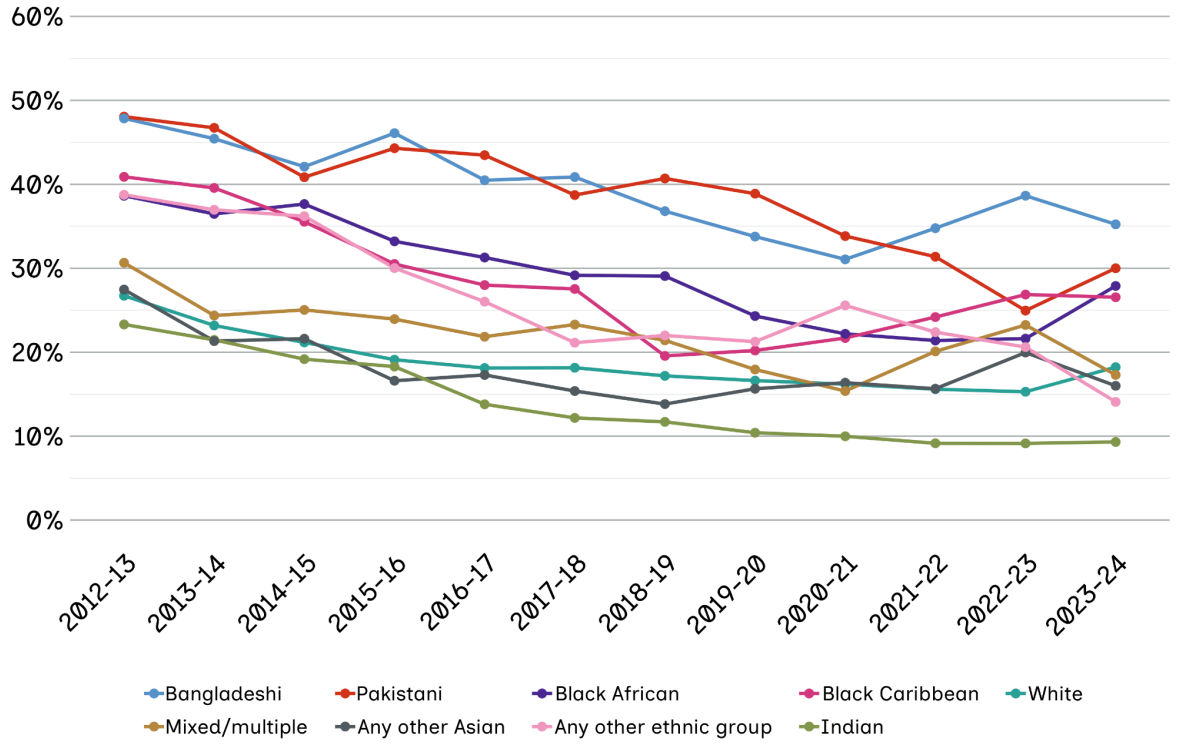
Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Long-term* receipt of means-tested benefits, by ethnic group: 2011-12 to 2023-24.



Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

The datapoint for Bangladesh in 2023-24 is unweighted.
Note: Applying longitudinal weights to this estimate provided an anomalous estimate of 52%. Experience tells us that the weights should not provide such a stark change in the estimate out of line with other estimates and for which no intuitive explanation can be provided. For comparison, the weighted estimate for the Pakistani group is 34% and the unweighted estimate is 35%. Previous experience of the authors with using Understanding Society is that anomalous estimates in weighted figures can arise particularly for smaller groups. This means that this datapoint is not directly comparable with the other series which are all weighted.

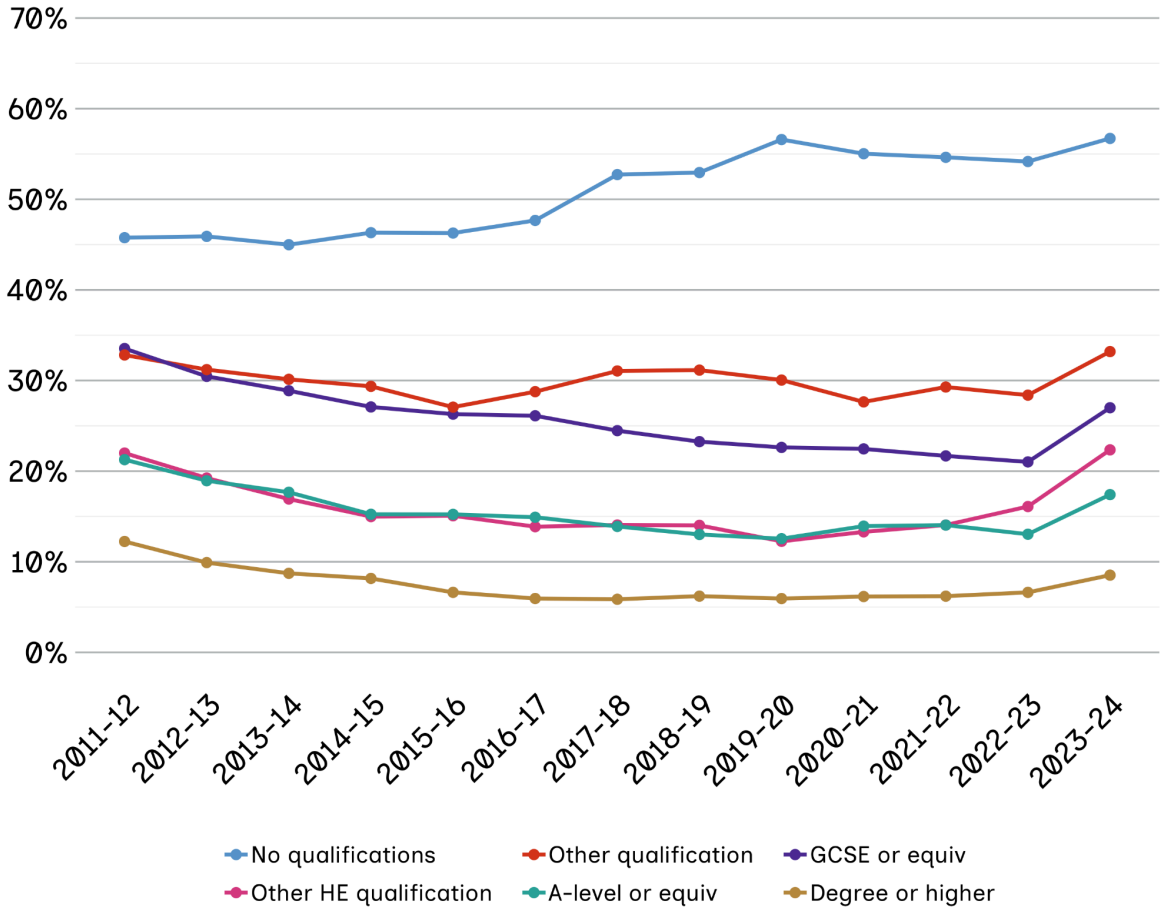
Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Persistent* receipt of means-tested benefits, by ethnic group: 2012-13 to 2023-24.



Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

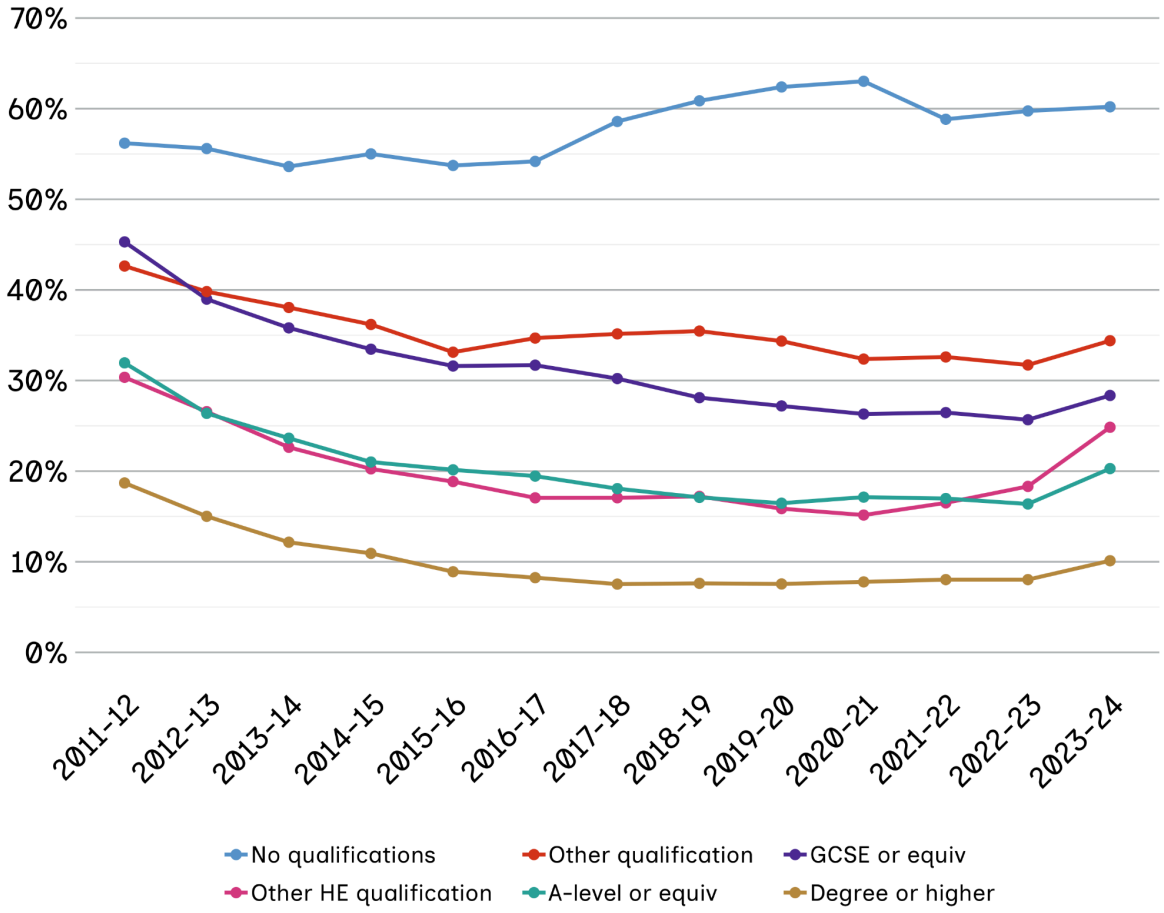
Note: the datapoint for Bangladesh in 2023-24 is unweighted. See further details in the figure note beneath the *Long-term* receipt figure above.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Long-term* receipt of means-tested benefits, by highest qualification: 2011-12 to 2023-24.



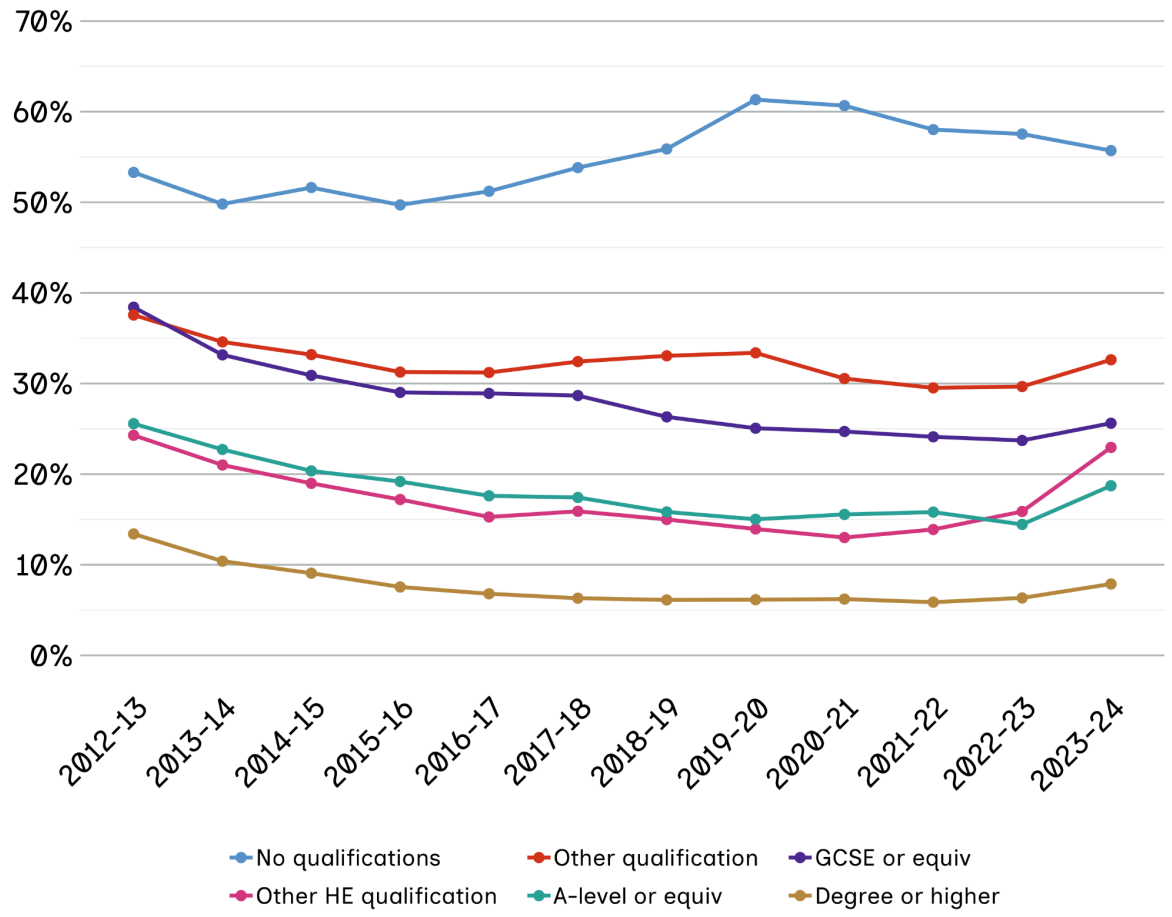
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Intermittent* receipt of means-tested benefits, by highest qualification: 2011-12 to 2023-24.



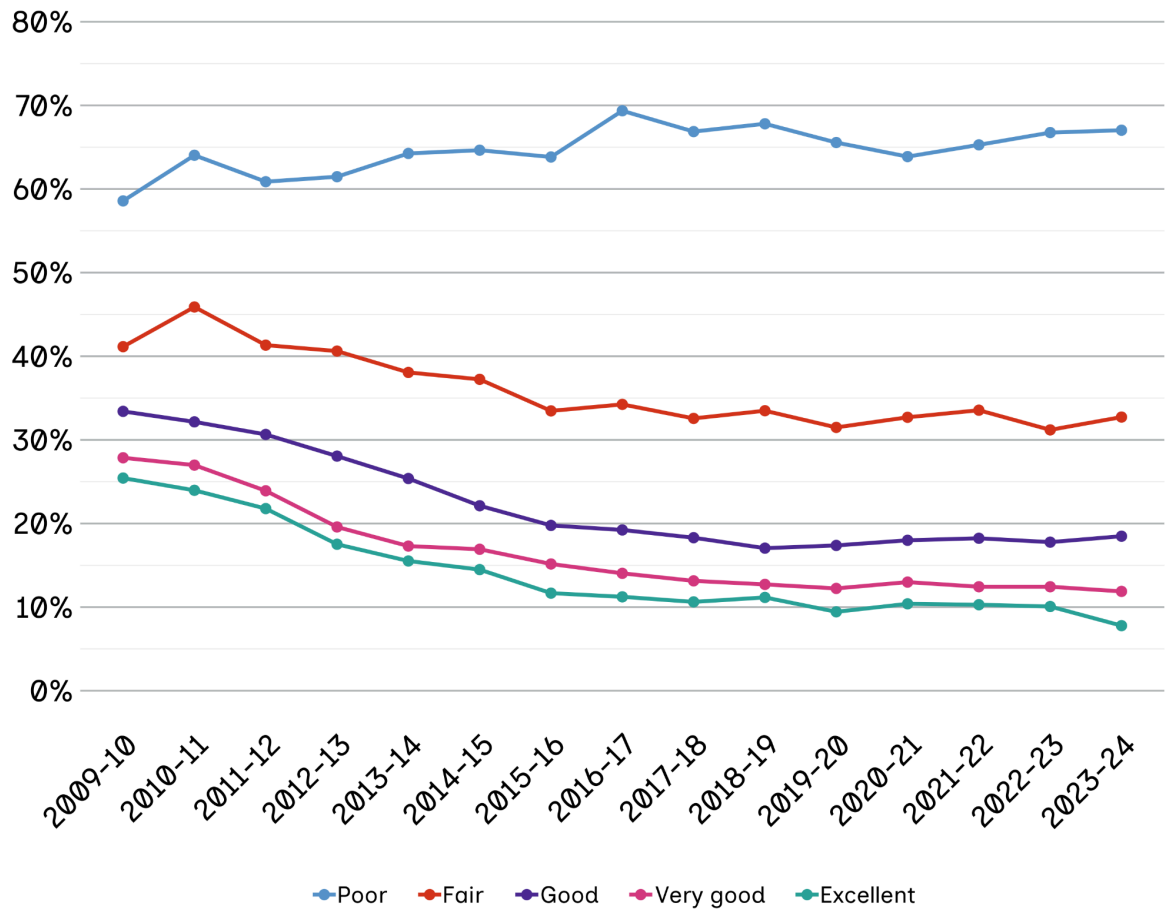
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Persistent* receipt by highest qualification: 2012-13 to 2023-24.



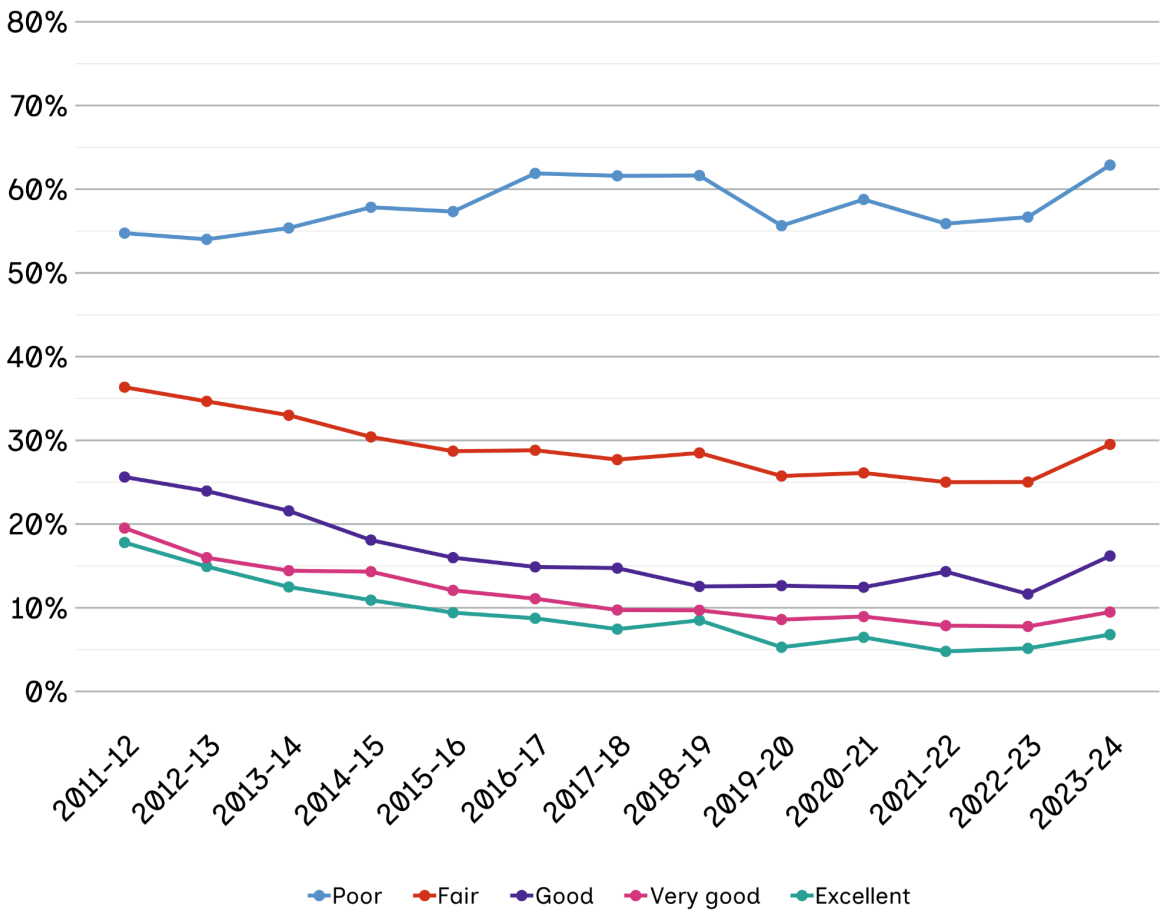
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Current* receipt of means-tested benefits by self-reported general health: 2009-10 to 2023-24.



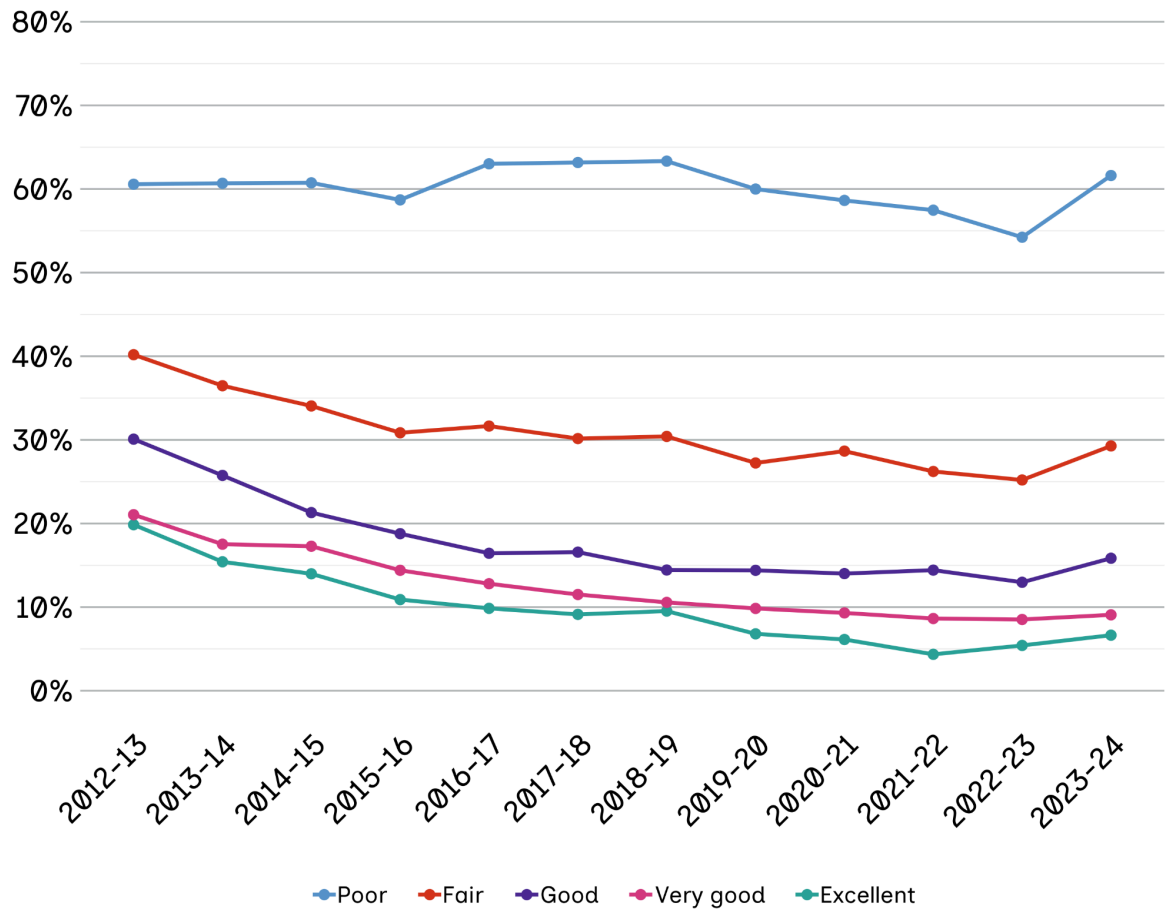
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Long-term* receipt of means-tested benefits by self-reported general health: 2011-12 to 2023-24.



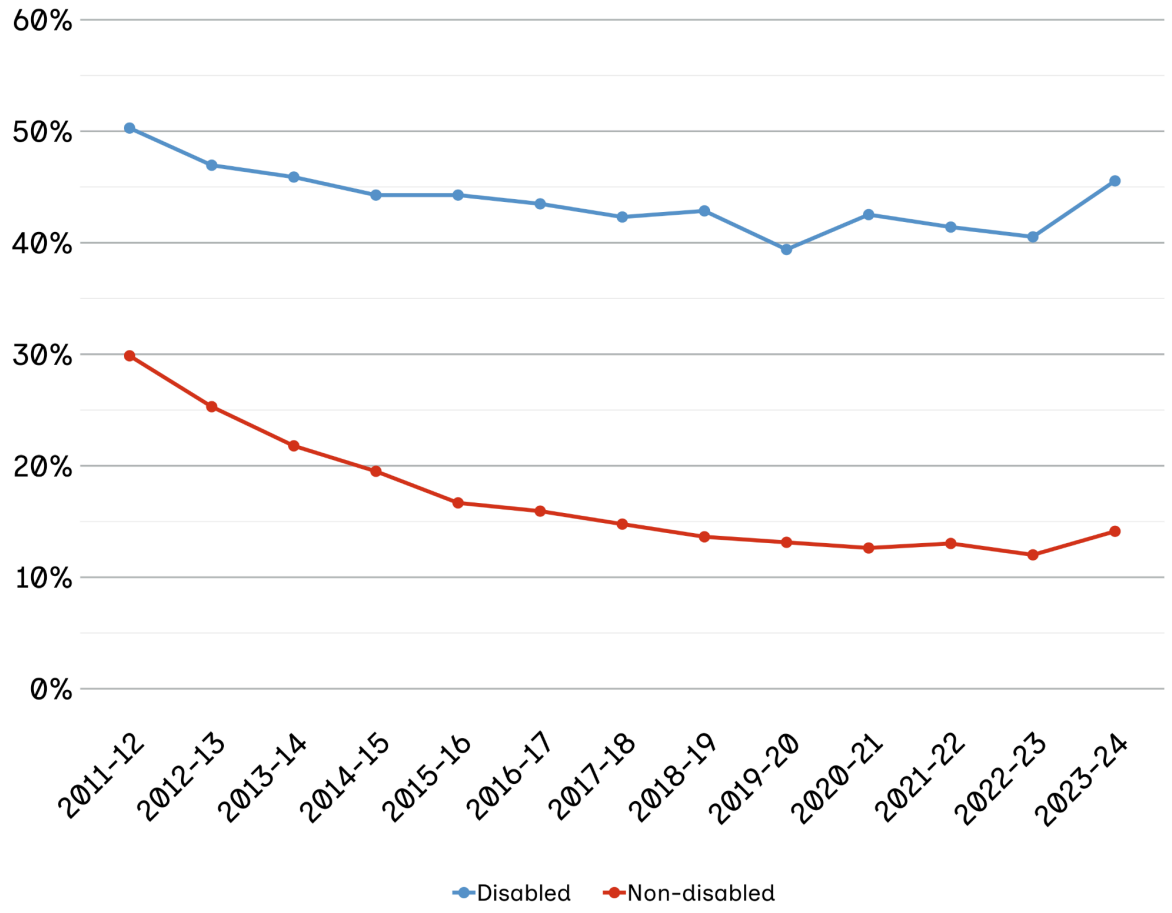
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Persistent* receipt of means-tested benefits by self-reported general health: 2012-13 to 2023-24.



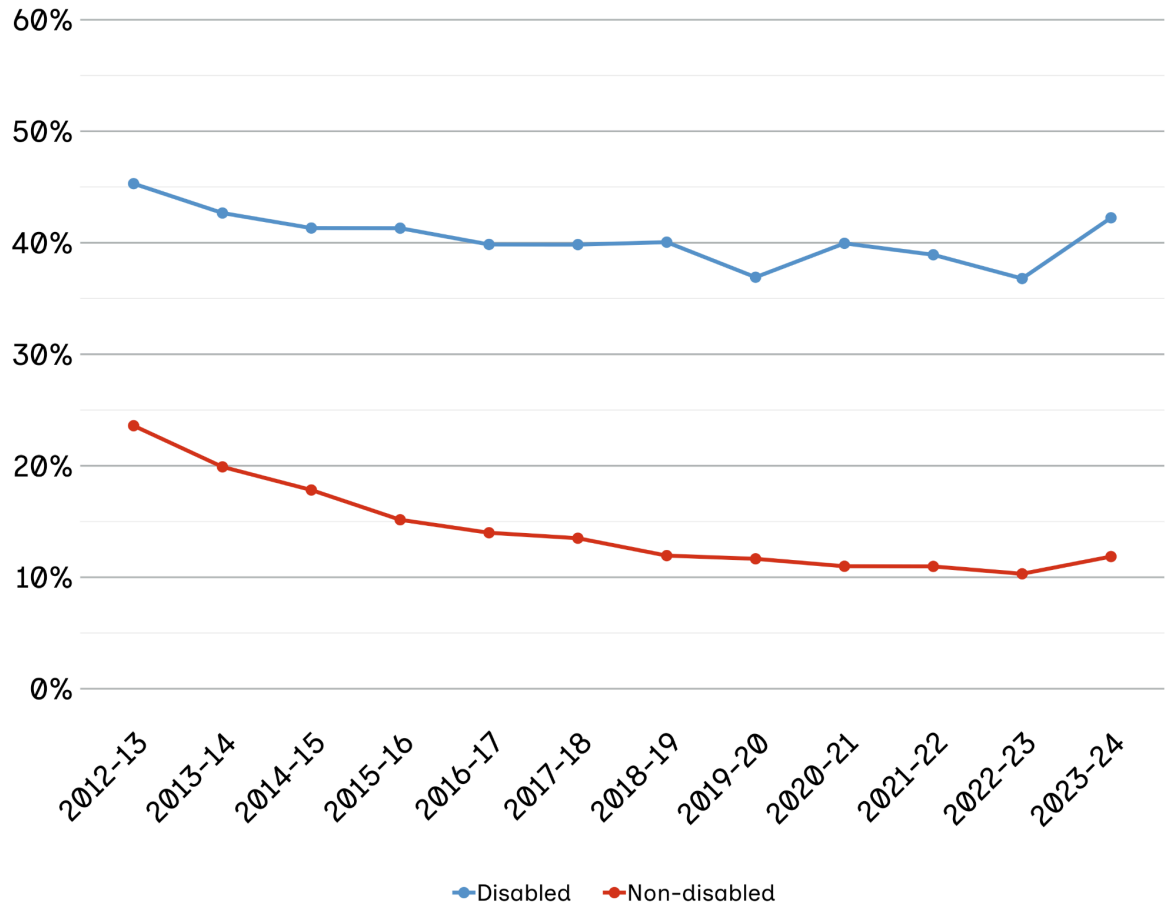
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Intermittent* receipt of means-tested benefits by disability status: 2011-12 to 2023-24.



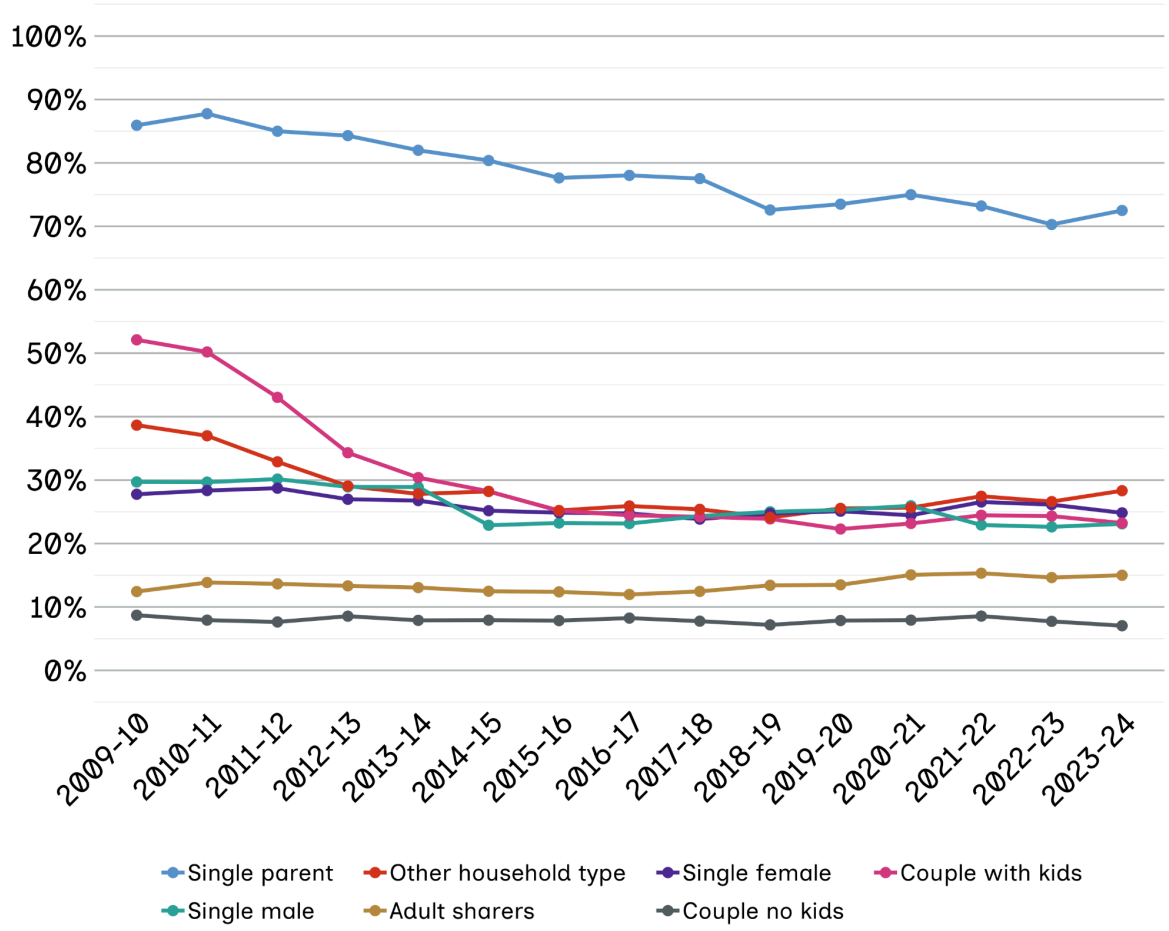
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Persistent* receipt of means-tested benefits by disability status: 2012-13 to 2023-24.



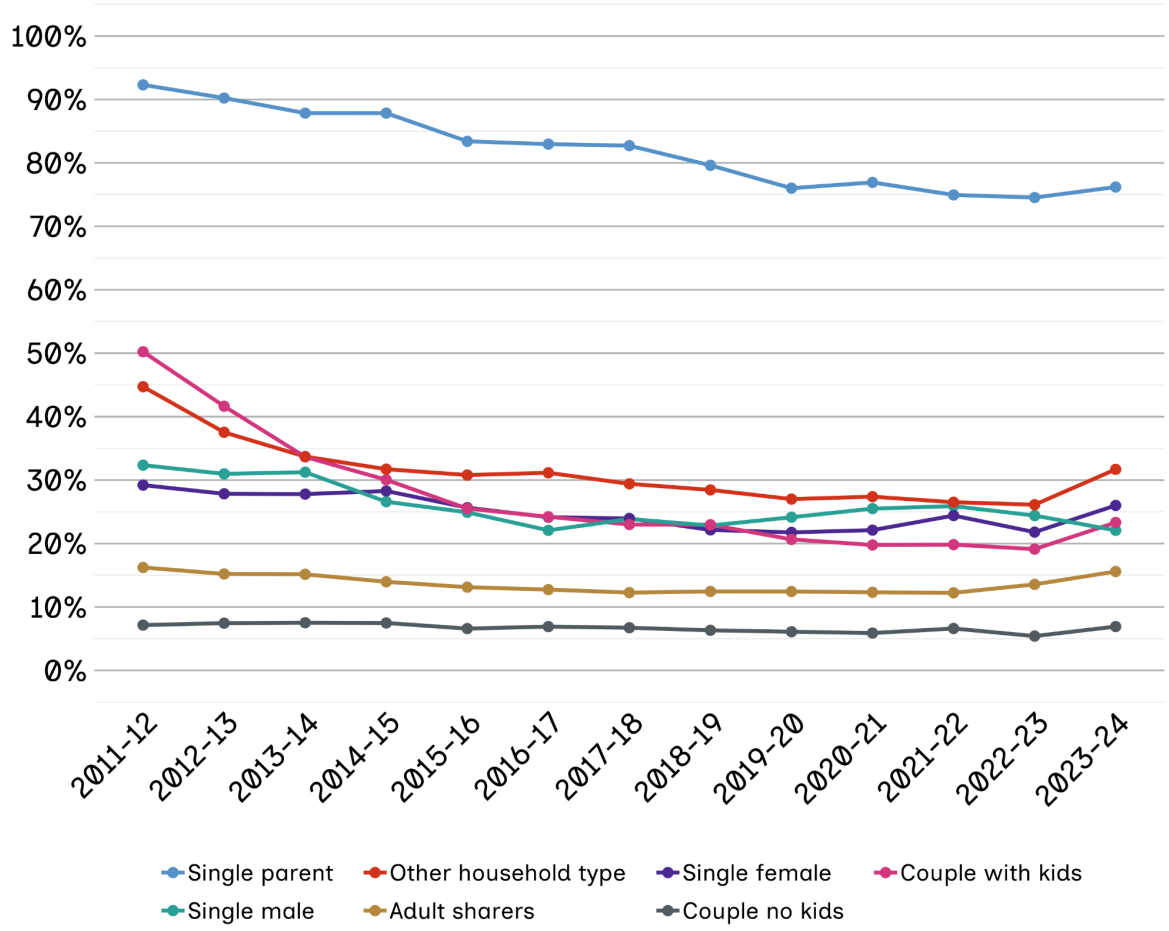
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Current* receipt of means-tested benefits by household type: 2009-10 to 2023-24.



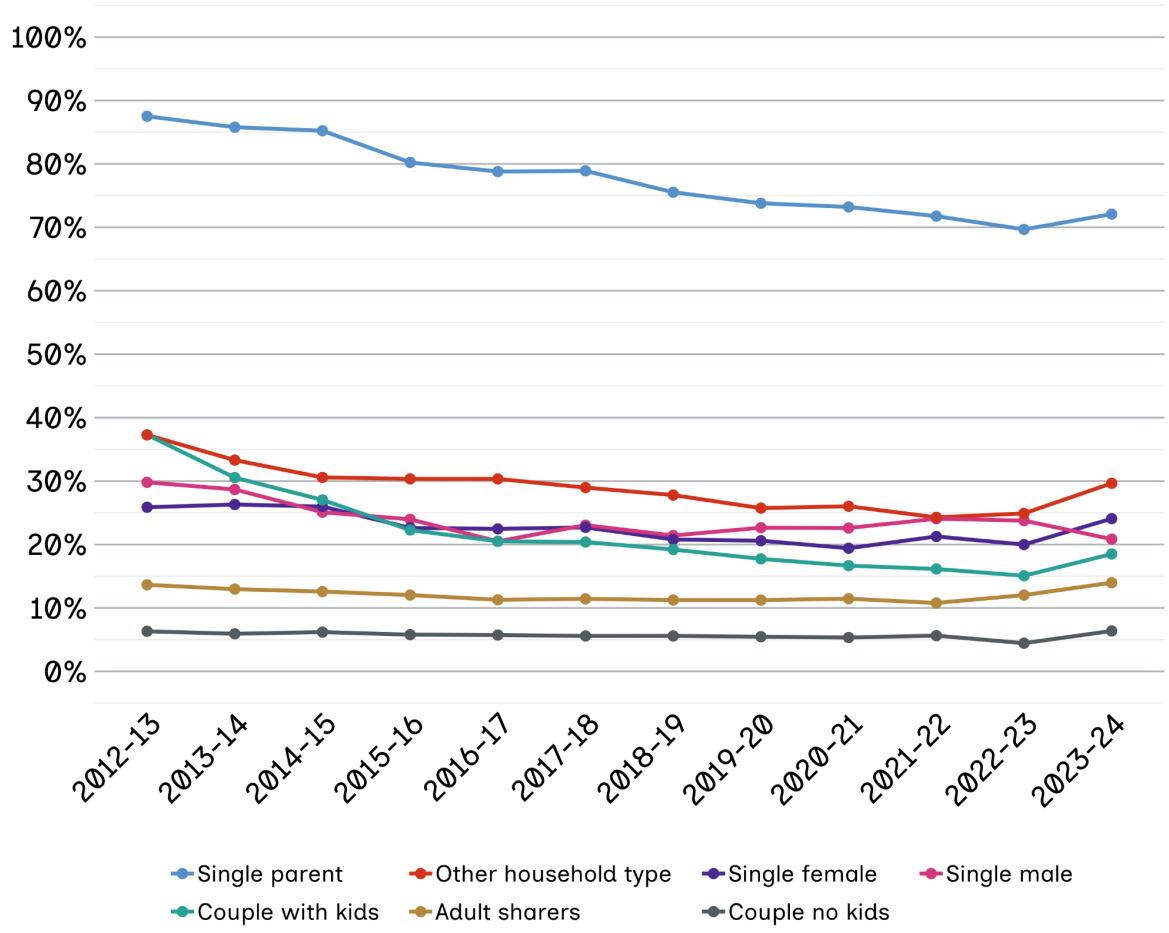
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Intermittent* receipt of means-tested benefits by household type: 2011-12 to 2023-24.



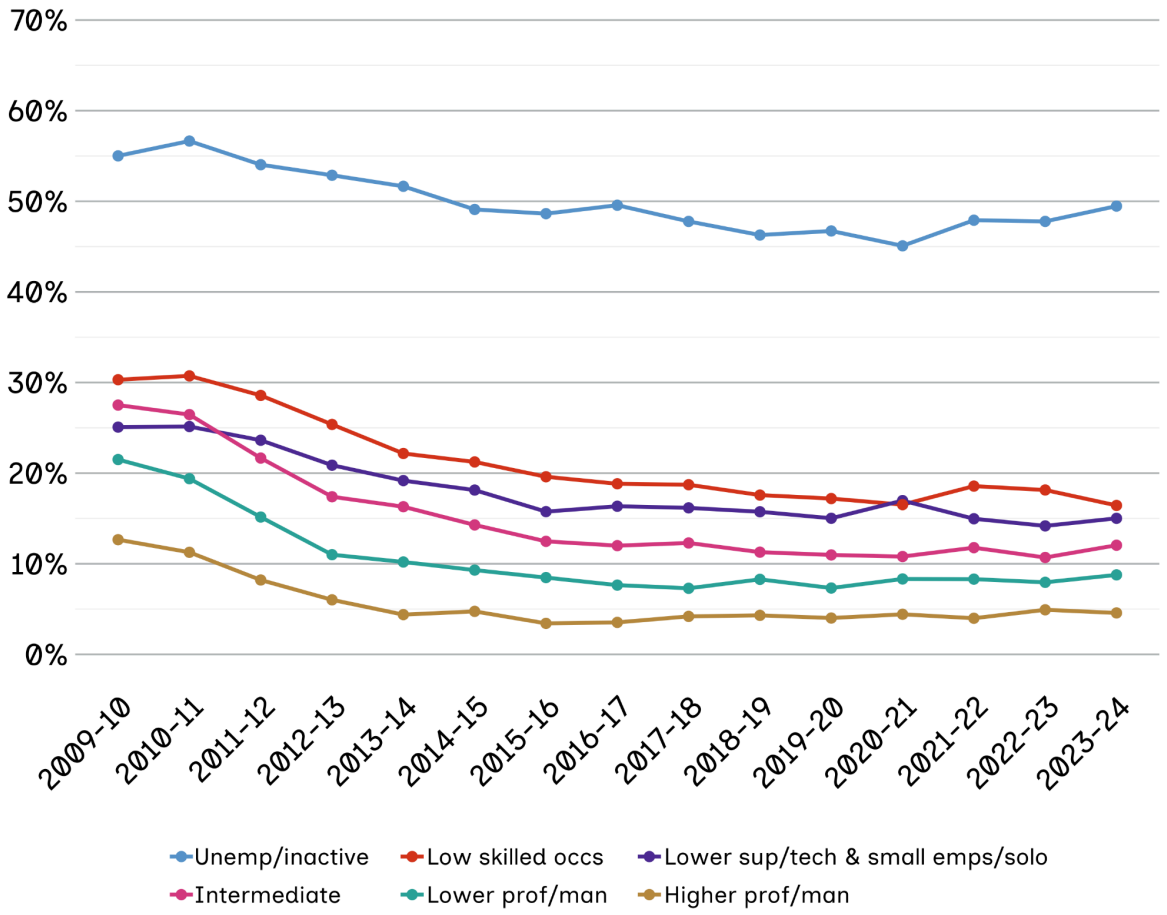
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in *Persistent* receipt of means-tested benefits by household type: 2012-13 to 2023-24.



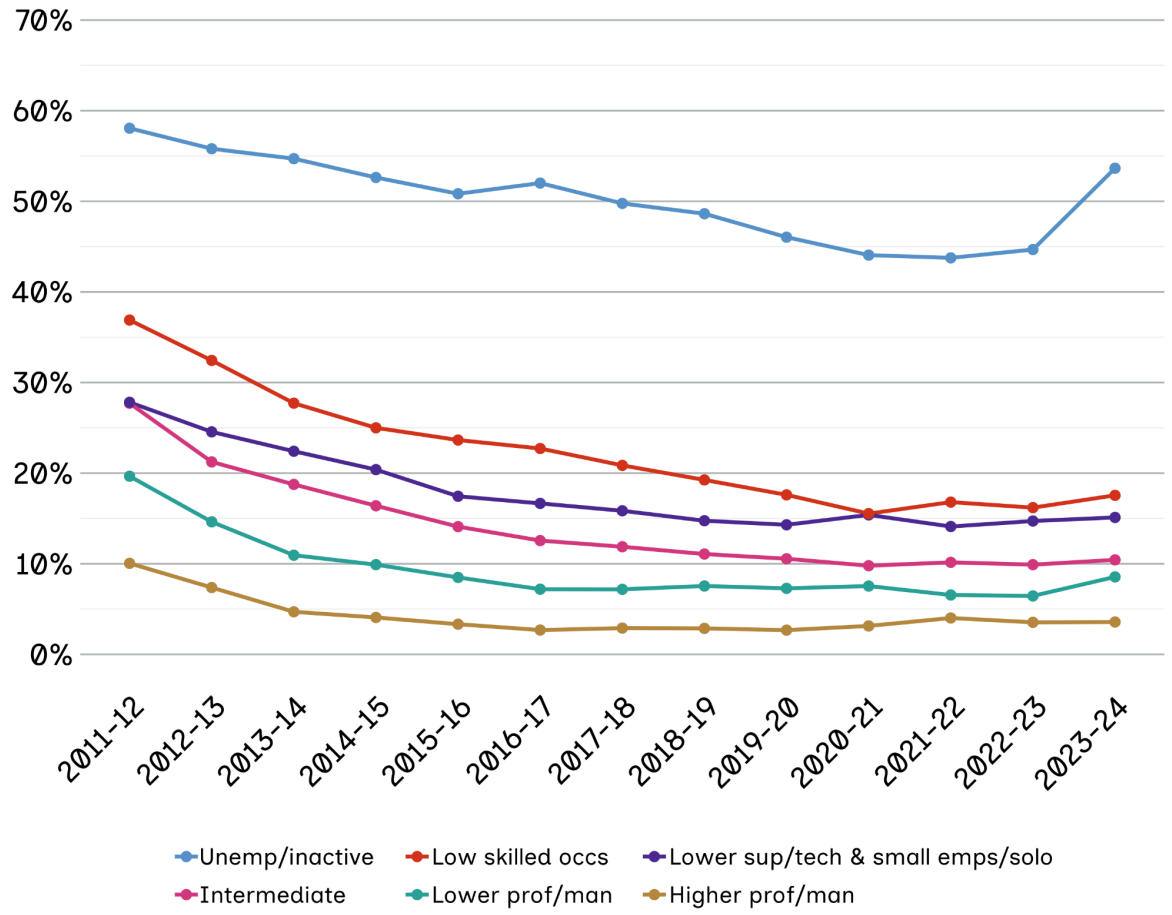
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in receipt of *Current* means-tested benefits in 2 consecutive years by modified NS-SEC: 2009-10 to 2023-24.



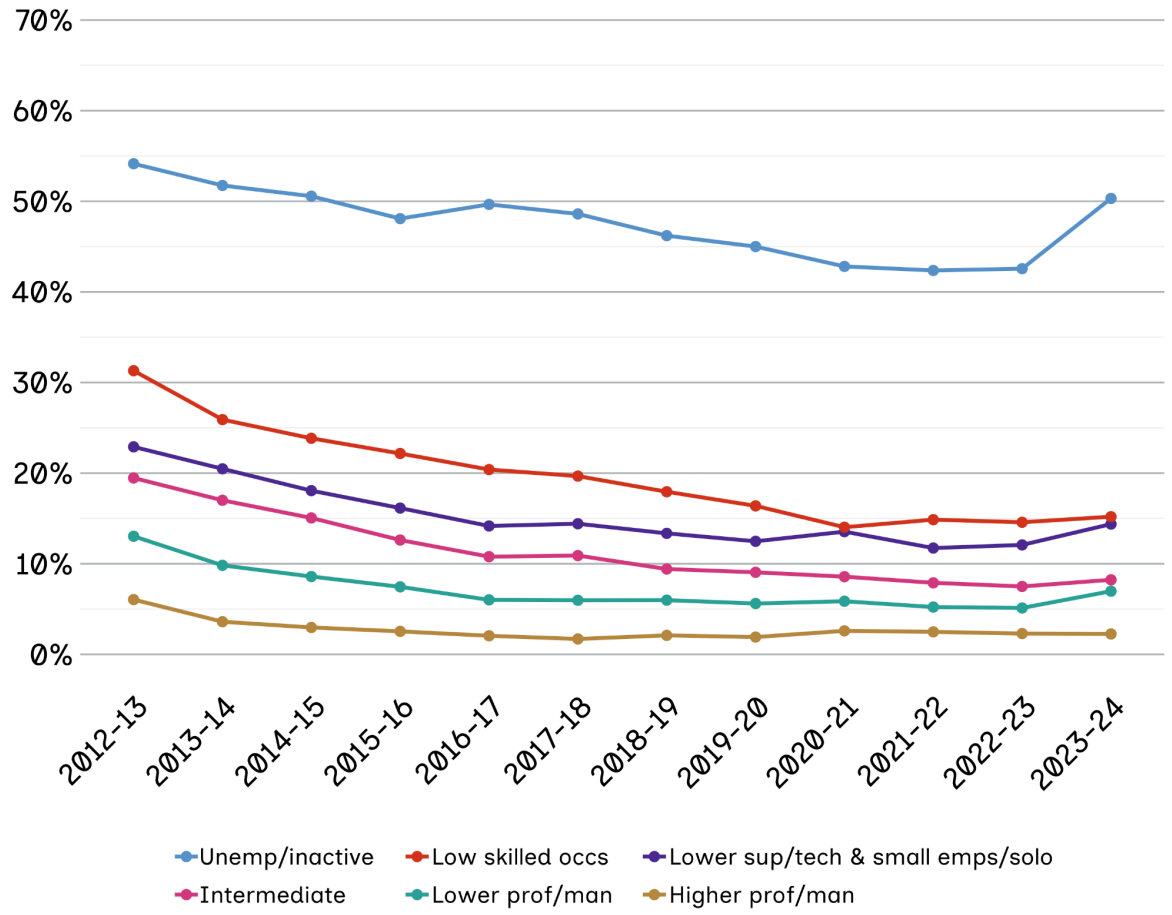
Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in receipt of *Intermittent* means-tested benefits in 2 consecutive years by modified NS-SEC: 2011-12 to 2023-24.



Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Trends in the percentage of working-age adults in receipt of *Persistent* means-tested benefits in 2 consecutive years by modified NS-SEC: 2012-13 to 2023-24.



Source: Authors' analysis of Understanding Society data.

Annex C: Average marginal effects on the predicted probability of becoming a *Long-term* means-tested benefit recipient

Estimated average marginal effects on the predicted probability of becoming a *Long-term* means-tested benefit recipient (percentage point difference from reference category).

Explanatory variables	% points
Sex	
Male (reference group)	
Female	2.3
Age group	
18-24	-1.3
25-34	**5.3**
35-44 (reference group)	
45-54	**-3.2**
55+	-3.3
Ethnic group	
White (reference group)	
Indian	1.6
Pakistani	**6.8**
Bangladeshi	8.1
Any other Asian background	-2.3
Black Caribbean	4.9
Black African	2.4
Mixed/multiple	0.6
Any other ethnic group	5.7
Disability status	
Not LLID last 2 waves (reference group)	
LLID last 2 waves	**12.5**
Became LLID last wave	4.0
No longer LLID current wave	4.4

Qualification level		
Degree or higher (reference group)		
Other HE qualification		**4.8**
A level or equivalent		**6.8**
GCSE or equivalent		**8.2**
Other qualification		**10.9**
No qualification		**9.1**
Modified NS-SEC		
Higher professional/managerial occupations (reference group)		
Lower professional/managerial occupations		**7.1**
Intermediate occupations		**8.8**
Lower supervisory/technical & small employers/solo		**16.6**
Low skilled occupations		**12.3**
Unemployed/inactive		**41.2**
Household type		
Single male (reference group)		
Single female		5.9
Single parent		**32.1**
Couple no children		**-11.0**
Couple with children		0.2
Adult sharers		**-11.4**
Other household type		-1.8
Number of dependent children increased		4.7
General health declined		-1.2
Number of observations	8,137	
Pseudo R2	0.1412	
Log pseudolikelihood	-5131	

Data source: Understanding Society.
Notes: Additional explanatory variables included in the model: year and local area deprivation (IMD). **Bold** indicates average marginal effects statistically significant at the 5% level.