



Department
for Work &
Pensions

JSA and ESA benefit sanctions rates

Explanation of methodology

July 2015

Background

This publication provides an explanation of the statistics used in the Press Statement accompanying the Benefit Sanctions statistics release on 13 May 2015, which stated “Sanctions are only used as a last resort in a small percentage of cases, with over 94% of JSA claimants and 99% of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants not being sanctioned”.

See link for this:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/benefit-sanctions-down-as-more-people-helped-into-work>

The publication outlines the methodological approach taken to calculate these rates using publically available data.

Methodological approach

The figures quoted relate to an estimate of the proportion of JSA and ESA claimants that are sanctioned in a given month. They are not designed and should not be used to infer the proportion of claimants sanctioned over a long time period, e.g. a year.

The figures are based on the ratio of three separate, published sets of Official Statistics:

- 1) DWP's statistics on decisions to apply a sanction;
- 2) the Office for National Statistics (ONS) statistics on the number of people claiming JSA (known as the Claimant Count), and;
- 3) DWP published statistics on the number of ESA claimants in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG).

All sets of Official Statistics are publicly available ([Stat-Xplore](#), [NOMIS](#), [DWP Tabulation Tool](#)).

The figures are based on an average monthly ratio of the total number of sanctions to the claimant count, i.e. the average number of decisions to apply a sanction per month divided by the average monthly JSA claimant count or number of ESA claimants in the WRAG group.

In 2014 the monthly average number of JSA sanctions was 50,466, and the monthly average number of ESA sanctions was 3,068. The monthly average JSA claimant count in Great Britain was 977,165 and the monthly average number of ESA claimants in the ESA WRAG group was 522,325 (see Annex).

For the year 2014 these calculations give monthly rates of 5.2% for JSA and 0.6% for ESA WRAG. This was translated in the press statement to say that “more than 94 % of JSA claimants and more than 99% of ESA claimants (are) not being sanctioned”.

Some further methodological choices are explained below:

1. The number of sanctions applied is the number of Varied, Fixed Length and Entitlement Decision referrals where there has been an adverse decision. It is the number of adverse decisions that have remained in place after review or sanctions appeals.
2. Reserved decisions, where a sanction can not be applied because the claimant no longer claims JSA, are not included in this measure of total number of sanctions.
3. Data on the size of the claimant population, which is subject to conditionality and sanctions is published in the form of the JSA Claimant Count on a monthly basis. Based on the publicly available data the Department therefore decided to calculate a monthly rate. Data on ESA WRAG caseloads is published every quarter.
4. An average over a 12 month period was chosen to take account of seasonal factors in the data, and to recognise that sanction decisions may go through reconsideration and appeal processes, which means the latest published statistics are subject to revision.
5. The period to which the sanctions statistics and the claimant count statistics relate are slightly different. The sanction statistics relate to a calendar month (i.e. the total number of decisions to apply a sanction in a calendar month), whereas the JSA statistics relate to the number of people claiming JSA on a particular day in the month (the second Thursday of the month), and the ESA WRAG caseload relates to the last day of the calendar month.
6. The ratio is based on number of sanctions rather than individuals sanctioned. The number of individuals sanctioned over one month will be slightly lower as a small number of claimants could have been sanctioned more than once.
7. There are a number of different ways to calculate sanctions rates, for example over different time periods, which will provide different estimates of the proportions of claimants being sanctioned.

Annex

Data source	DWP Stat-Xplore	DWP Stat-Xplore	NOMIS	DWP tabulation tool
Measure	Decision Outcome: Decision to apply a sanction (adverse) - JSA	Decision Outcome: Decision to apply a sanction (adverse) - ESA	JSA claimant count	ESA WRAG caseload
January 2014	69,890	2,985	1,183,083	
February 2014	62,682	3,179	1,184,157	551,920
March 2014	61,697	3,724	1,138,573	
April 2014	54,984	3,473	1,086,293	
May 2014	51,458	3,551	1,035,254	533,490
June 2014	53,126	3,162	967,398	
July 2014	52,005	3,151	943,207	
August 2014	44,077	2,465	907,891	511,710
September 2014	43,912	2,542	870,863	
October 2014	39,587	2,678	836,373	
November 2014	37,219	2,626	798,066	492,180
December 2014	34,958	3,274	774,816	
Average in 2014	50,466	3,068	977,165	522,325
	JSA ratio	50,466/977,165 = 5.2%	ESA ratio	3,068/522,325 = 0.6%

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