

The missing information on unemployment is the 1.3 mill...

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As the [Guardian](#) notes this morning:

The UK's unemployment rate rose to 5% in the three months to November — up from 4.9%, and the first time it's been that high in more than four years, according to the the Office for National Statistics.

This means that the number of payroll employees has fallen by 828,000 since February 2020 and that around 1.72 million people were out of work in the quarter, up 418,000 on the same period the previous year, and 202,000 higher than in the previous quarter.

All of these numbers are troubling. I have a loathing of unemployment and real concern for all who suffer it. And yet, what is also baffling is how low the figures are. The economic crisis we are facing remains very deep. Why are so few unemployed?

One answer is, of course, continuing economic support via furlough and other schemes. This results in data being massively distorted, albeit with hope that jobs might just survive this crisis still.

There is also another factor that the [FT notes today](#). Foreign workers are fleeing the UK as the coronavirus pandemic and Brexit impact on job prospects. I have read the data underpinning their findings, which rightly says the figures are uncertain, but it is likely that 1.3 million people have left the UK in little over a year, with 700,000 leaving London alone.

The figures are, of course, approximate, but they are also evidence based. And they also seem likely. Many in sectors badly hit by coronavirus, in particular, have given up hope of working in the UK, and left.

No wonder unemployment seems so small.

And no wonder rents are falling in London.

But this is not all good news. Some of these people priced themselves into work here,

without doubt. But many did so by bringing skills way in excess of that their pay rate suggested they have. They will be badly missed when recovery begins.

The real story behind unemployment is always lost potential. There is more being lost in the UK at present than the headline stats reveal. And that does not have good long term implications. .