



MC23  
Musicians' Census

# Musicians' Census

## Financial Insight Report

September 2023

Help  
Musicians

Musicians'  
Union  
MU

# Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	<b>3</b>
<u>Executive summary</u>	<b>7</b>
<u>Musician demographics</u>	<b>9</b>
<u>Key findings</u>	<b>13</b>
<u>Next steps</u>	<b>24</b>
<u>Endnotes</u>	<b>26</b>
<u>Glossary</u>	<b>28</b>





# Introduction

It's been a long-standing ambition of both Help Musicians and the Musicians' Union to build a comprehensive picture of the lives and careers of musicians across the UK. In 2023, we are proud to say that our organisations fulfilled that ambition with the launch of the first ever Musicians' Census.

Together with the support of key organisations and individuals in the music industry, the Musicians' Census achieved almost 6000 responses. Thank you to everyone who shared their experiences of work and life with us.

This fantastic response will allow us to release a series of Insight Reports over the next 12 months focusing on specific communities, issues and sectors, bringing light to the challenges musicians face.

This first report provides a detailed insight into the demographic makeup of respondents, their working lives, barriers to career progression, and the economic challenges they face.

It confirms that musicians are a diverse community, working across multiple instruments, genres and roles. It gives evidence to the fact that the majority of musicians need jobs outside of the music industry to support their career as a musician, and that this has a significant impact on their ability to further develop their musical careers.

The Musicians' Census also reveals the many barriers musicians face and that, despite how challenging pursuing a career as a musician is, most musicians want to stay working in the industry. Armed with the rich data from the Musicians' Census, we aim to support them to do so.

Fundamentally both Help Musicians and the Musicians' Union exist to make the lives of musicians better.

The Musicians' Census was always about making change, and your responses will help to make the industry a fairer more equitable place for all musicians.



**Sarah Woods**  
Chief Executive, Help Musicians



**Naomi Pohl**  
General Secretary, Musicians' Union

## Our aim

The Musicians' Census 2023 is a long-term project delivered by Help Musicians and the Musicians' Union. Our aim is to provide a fuller picture of the musician population in the UK today and to track how key themes change over time. What we learn from this survey will inform the way we help musicians and support the wider music industry to understand and respond to musicians' needs. Ultimately, we hope to see the Census helping to foster a thriving and diverse musician population, now and in the future.

## Our approach

Census data was collected via a 15-minute online survey, which was open from January to March 2023. Help Musicians and the Musicians' Union collaborated with music industry partners to reach as many musicians as possible.

Walnut Unlimited were appointed to develop the survey, manage the data collection and run the initial analysis of the data. All aspects of the research were conducted in accordance with ISO 20252 and ISO 27001, the international standards for market research and information data security respectively.

All musicians aged 16 and over "who earn or intend to earn money" from music were invited to respond. The survey was voluntary. Participants were self-selecting and required to give informed consent and complete a set of initial screening questions.



## The data

A total of **5,867** musicians completed the 2023 Census. Results in this report are based on all respondents unless otherwise stated. Sub-group differences have been included where relevant.

While the findings of this Census only represent the musicians who responded, it provides a powerful snapshot of the demographics, finances, wellbeing and careers of musicians today. This will help us to understand trends relevant to all musicians, as well as important differences in the experiences of diverse groups of musicians.

We recognise that there were potential barriers to participation including digital accessibility, trust, language barriers and challenges in reaching musicians who aren't part of more formal industry networks. We're committed to widening access in future Census surveys to ensure that the largest possible number of participants can share their experiences.

**We would like to thank everyone who worked with us to help disseminate the census through their networks and Fourth Pillar who supported the management of the Census Stakeholder Group.**

## Census stakeholder group

Representatives from across the music industry formed a stakeholder group who were involved in shaping the survey design, sharing it amongst their communities and providing feedback on the results. This group helped make sure the Census was inclusive and representative and we're thankful for their collaboration and support.

- Arts Council England (ACE)
- Association for Electronic Music (AFEM)
- Association of British Orchestras (ABO)
- Attitude is Everything (AiE)
- Black Lives in Music (BLiM)
- Drake Music
- Drake Music Scotland
- English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS)
- Featured Artists Coalition (FAC)
- The F List
- Independent Society of Musicians (ISM)
- The Ivors Academy (The Ivors)
- Music Managers Forum (MMF)
- Parents and Carers in Performing Arts (PiPA)
- Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL)
- Performing Rights Society (PRS) Foundation
- Punch Records (Punch)
- Royal Society of Musicians of Great Britain (RSM)
- Safe In Sound
- shesaid.so
- UK Music



# Executive summary

The first Musicians' Census gathered data from 5,867 musicians across the UK about their demographics, careers, wellbeing and their experiences in the music industry.

This report presents key findings related to musicians' earnings and career progression and barriers. This is the first in a series of Insight Reports which will each share findings related to key Census themes.

A musician's average annual income from music is £20,700. 23% of musicians told us that they cannot support themselves or their families from being a musician. Furthermore, 17% of musicians overall reported being in debt, rising to 30% of musicians with a mental health condition.

Under half (40%) of musicians earn all of their income from music. Of those making 100% of their income from music, the average annual income is around £30,000. Therefore, over half (53%) of musicians need to sustain their career by sourcing other forms of income outside of music and many have diverse, portfolio careers. The Census indicates that of those who earn £34,000 or more a year, men have higher earnings than other gender groups. Just 3% of musicians report that they earn £70,000 or more from music each year and 79% of these are men.

Only a third of disabled musicians reported making 100% of their income from music and there is a negative pay gap of around £4,000 between disabled and non-disabled musicians.

There is also an ethnicity pay gap of almost £1,000 between white respondents and those who identify as being from the Global Majority.

The majority (72%) of musicians are self-employed. Those self-employed musicians who earn 100% of their income from music make on average about £10,000 less than musicians who make all of their income from music and are employed full time (£27,600 vs £38,875).

80% of musicians reported at least one or more career-restricting barriers with 46% of musicians reported career-restricting barriers including: cost of equipment (30%), cost of transport (27%), and the cost of training (18%) limiting their careers.

The Census also evidences that financial challenges are interwoven with non-financial career restricting barriers. For example, amongst musicians aged 35-54, 52% reported family and caring commitments as a barrier, and around half (49%) of this group are primary carers (compared to 23% of musicians overall).





# Musician demographics

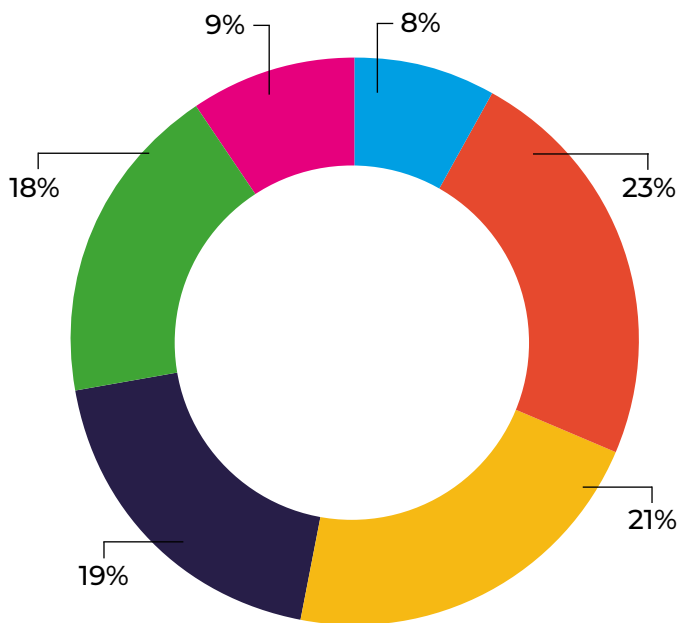
**“As an older person some venues want performers who ‘look young’. I have found the music business really hard to deal with. These days I am self-managing, self-promoting, self-releasing and I just do what I can with techniques I’ve learned along the way.”**

Male, age 73, West Midlands

**“I work 5 days a week and I literally can’t fit any more work in yet even with nearly 20 years’ experience as a community musician I still make less than the average UK salary.”**

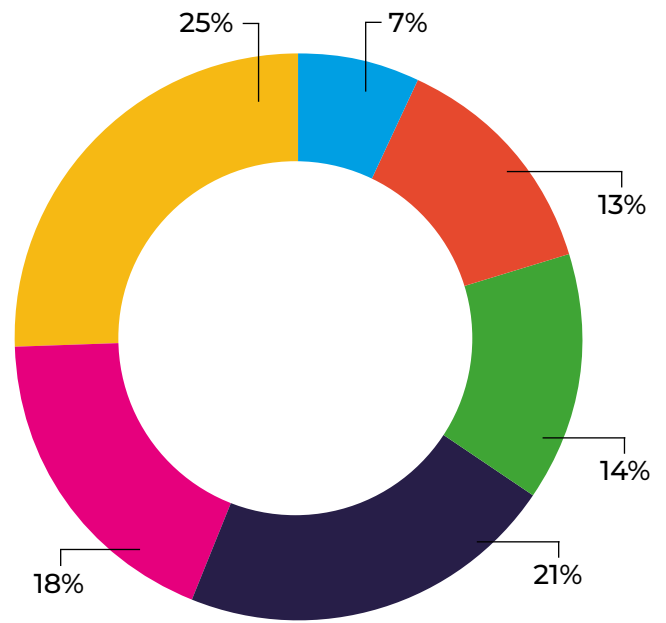
Male, age 50, Scotland

Musicians’ ages



- Under 25
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

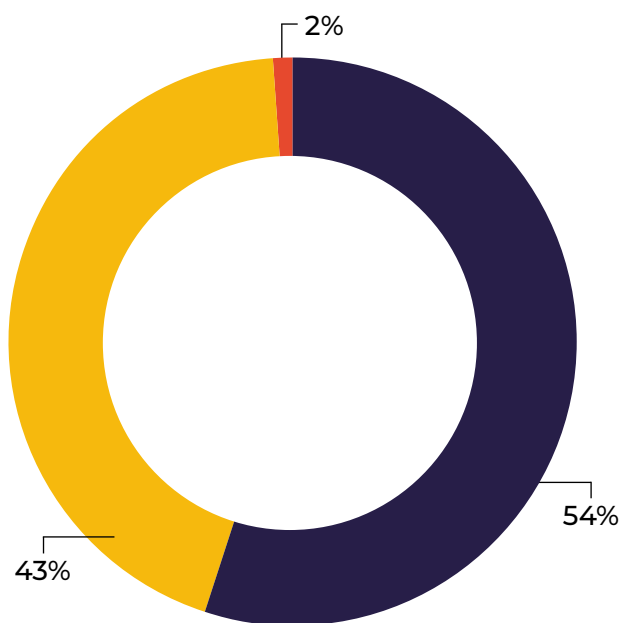
Years earning as a musician



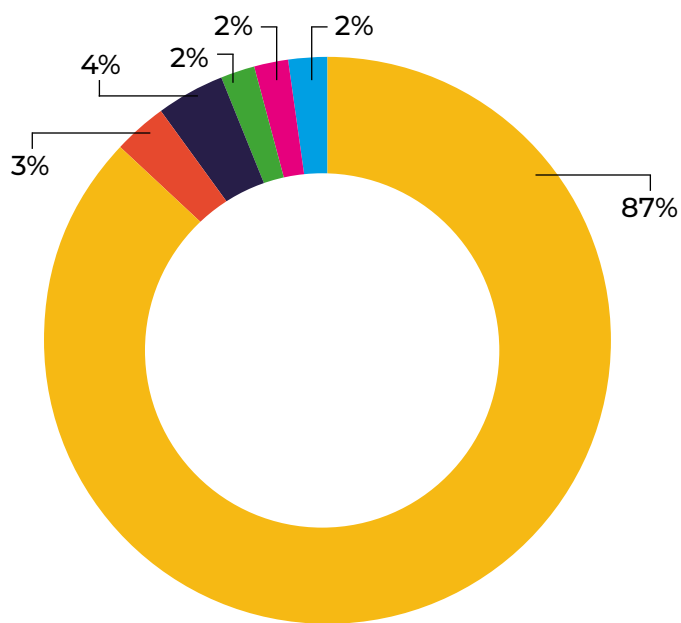
- <1 year
- 1-5 yrs
- 6-10 yrs
- 11-20 yrs
- 21-30 yrs
- 30+ yrs

10 Musician demographics

Gender



Ethnicity

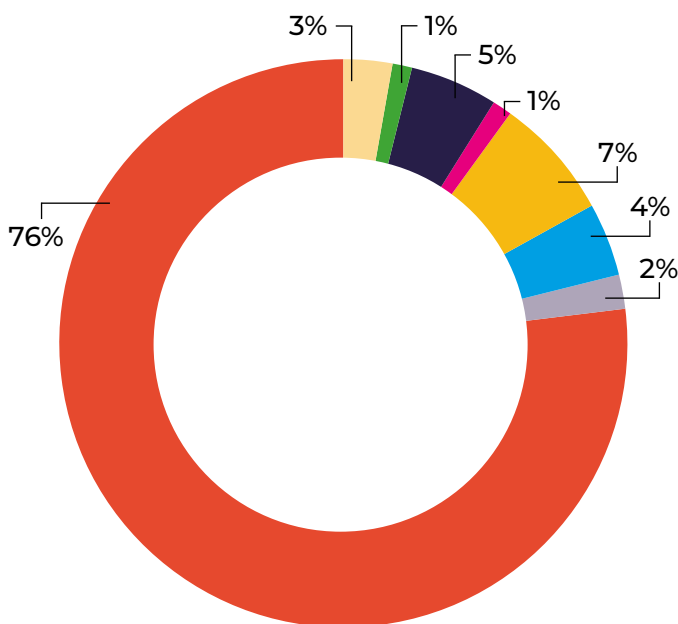


- Male
- Female
- Another gender identity<sup>1</sup>

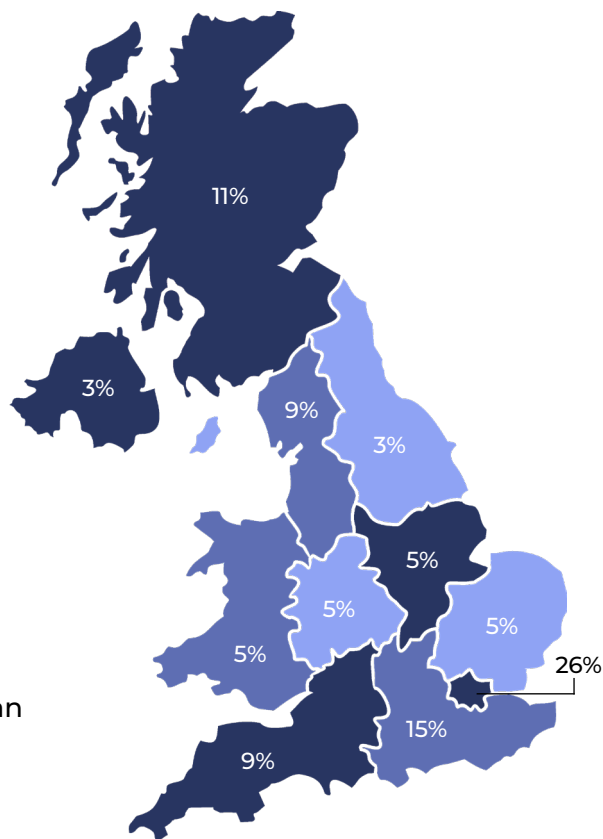
- White
- Black/Black British
- Mixed/dual heritage
- Asian/Asian British
- Other ethnically diverse groups
- Prefer not to say

2% of all respondents, across all gender groups, identified as trans

Sexuality



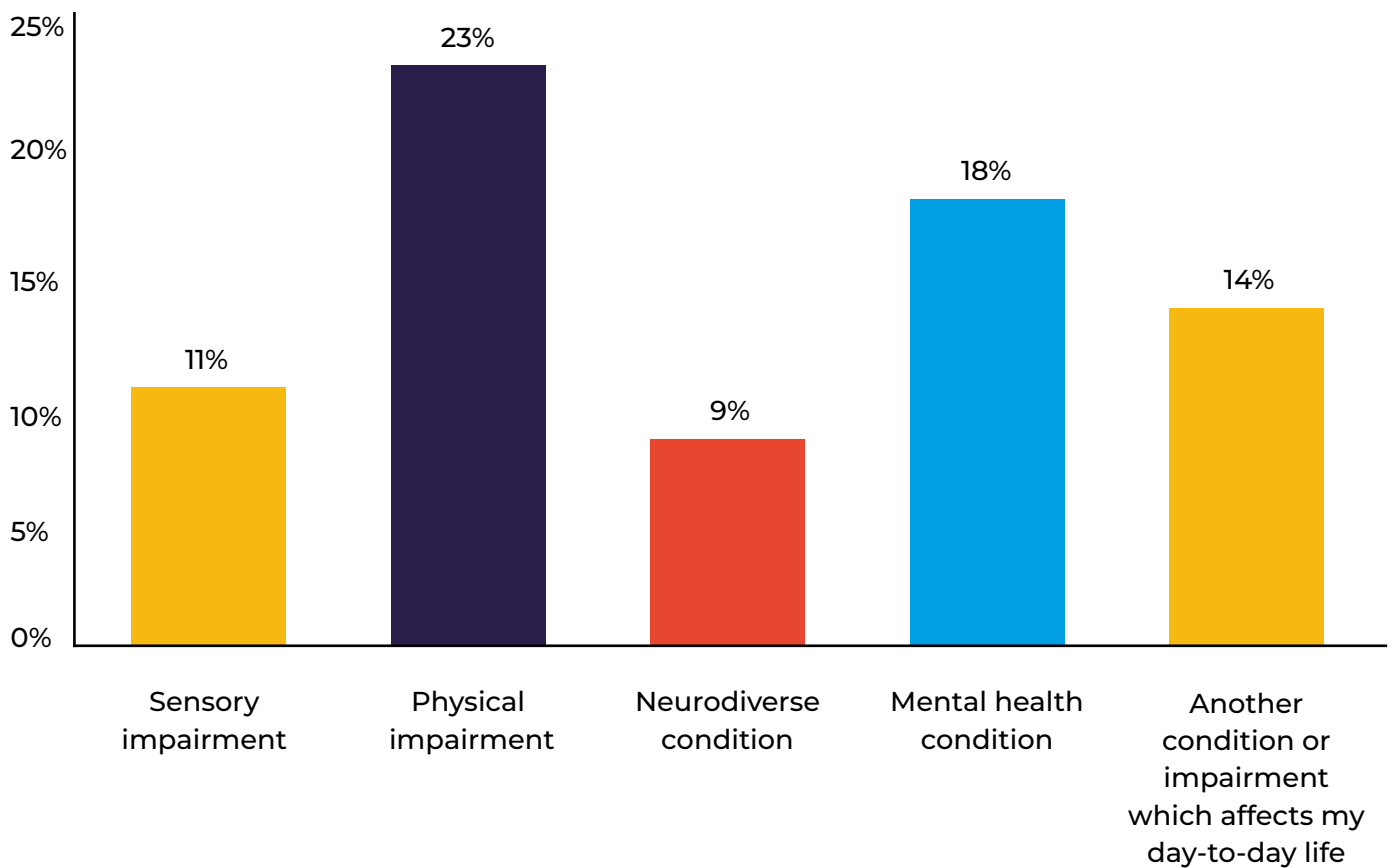
Where musicians live



- Bisexual
- Gay man
- Gay woman / lesbian
- Queer
- Asexual
- Heterosexual
- Prefer not to say
- Prefer to self-describe

## 11 Musician demographics

### Disability

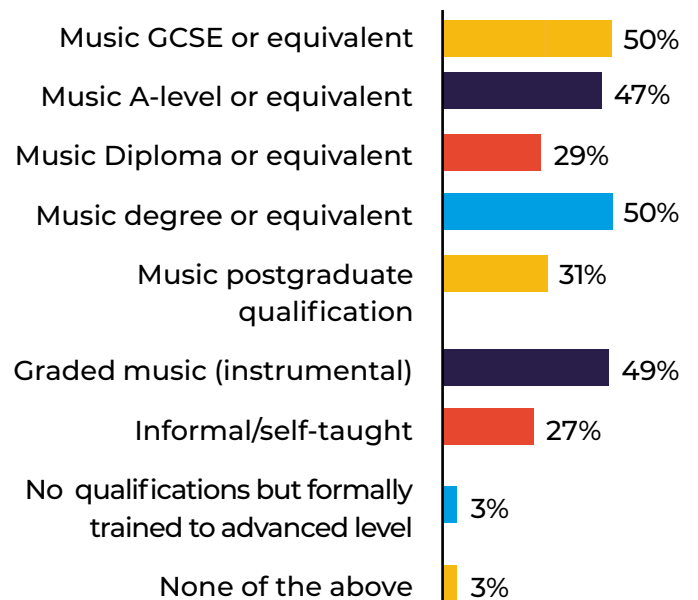


### Qualifications

The majority (70%) of respondents reported that their highest education level was a degree or higher.

In relation to music education specifically, 50% had a music degree. Over a quarter (27%) of respondents stated they were self-taught, with 35% of Global Majority respondents being self-taught.

In addition, many of those who identified as another gender identity and transgender musicians were also self-taught (43% and 48% respectively - note that some musicians identified as both another gender identity and trans so there is some overlap in these cohorts).





# Key findings

## Musicians' annual income

The Census shows that the average annual income from music is £20,700<sup>2</sup> and most musicians have a portfolio career, supplementing their income from music with income from other industries.

For many (44%), a lack of sustainable income is cited as a barrier to their music career.

Under half (40%) of musicians reported earning all of their income from music and this falls to just 17% amongst those who report as being “self-taught” without a formal music qualification.

Of those making all of their money from music, the average annual income is around £30,000. Only 23% of those making all their income from music reported earning more than £41,000 per year.<sup>3</sup>

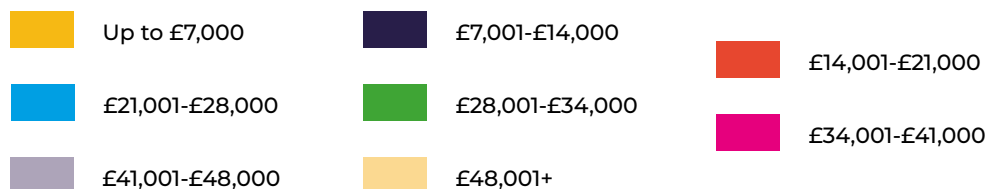
The Census shows that as musicians progress through their career they're likely to earn a higher percentage of their income from their craft. Three quarters of musicians<sup>4</sup> earning more than 75% of their income from music have been in the industry for 10 or more years, while around half<sup>5</sup> of those who earn 50% or less of their income from music are in the first decade of their career, and two thirds of this group<sup>6</sup> are aged under 35.

17% of musicians overall reported being in debt.

**“I rely on freelance work for performance, this can be sporadic and opportunities have got fewer over the last the few years. Increases in financial responsibility and caring mean it's difficult to survive as a freelancer now.”**

Female, age 39, North West England

### Annual income from music (includes musicians reporting any % of their annual income from music)





## Pay gap: gender

We can see that men and women are paid equally up to the point of earning an annual income of £34,000 from music. After £34,000, men report higher earnings from music than both women and musicians identifying their gender in another way.

152 musicians (3%) reported earning £70,000 or more from music each year. 79% of these are men, while just 19% are women.

At the other end of the income scale, men made up the highest proportion (57% of men compared to 39% of women) of those earning less than £7,000 each year from music. However, of these, 73%<sup>7</sup> earned just a quarter of their annual income from music. This indicates the majority of their income is from work outside of music and might suggest that men are more likely than women and musicians identifying their gender in another way to maintain their music career alongside other work.

Amongst musicians who earn 100% of their income from music, there is an estimated £4,000 pay gap between self-employed men and women, and an estimated £2,000 pay gap for men and women in full-time employment in music.

**“Music does not provide a stable income and so progression is often slowed by needing to spend time on other work to make a living.”**

Female, age 30, London



## Pay gap: disability

Only 1/3 of disabled musicians make all of their income from music, and there is a pay gap of around £4,000 between disabled and non-disabled musicians who make all of their income from music.

30% of musicians with a mental health condition report being in debt.

Only around 25% of disabled musicians reported currently being in receipt of a state benefit, tax credits or other government support.

**“I now need assistance with driving and carrying equipment, but as a solo performer in a niche genre, the fees are never enough to support a tour manager or roadie”**

Female, age 30, London

## Pay gap: LGBTQ+

The mean annual income of all heterosexual musicians who make 100% of their income from music is £31,200<sup>8</sup>. The mean annual income of all LGBTQ+ musicians who make 100% of their income from music is £29,500, indicating a pay gap of around £1,700.





## Pay gap: ethnicity

There is an ethnicity pay gap of almost £1,000 between white respondents and those who identify as being from the Global Majority. Mean income for Global Majority Musicians sits at an estimated £30,000 per annum, while white counterparts make an estimated £30,900 (+3%). These calculations are based on those who earn 100% of their income from music.

It is worth noting that while 43% of white respondents make 100% of their income from music, only 32% of Global Majority Musicians do. At the same time, a quarter of white musicians earn less than 25% of their income from music compared to almost a third of Global Majority Musicians.

**“It often feels like when it’s time to pay proper money, management and labels find it easier to do that with a fresh out of Uni white person with no experience than a black person with a proven track record and experience to do the job.”**

Male, age 35, Midlands

## Pay gap: employment status

Those who earn 100% of their income from being employed full-time in music have an average annual income of £38,875. A number of musicians working full time in music additionally report undertaking self-employed work in music and their average total income from music is similar at £38,750. However, the fact that they are reporting freelance work on top of full time employment in music suggests some musicians have to top up lower annual salaries with extra work. This has implications for their wellbeing and financial security.

Additionally, the average annual income for those who make 100% of their income from being self-employed in music is £27,600. This is a significant pay gap of £10,000 compared to those making all their income solely from full time employment in music.

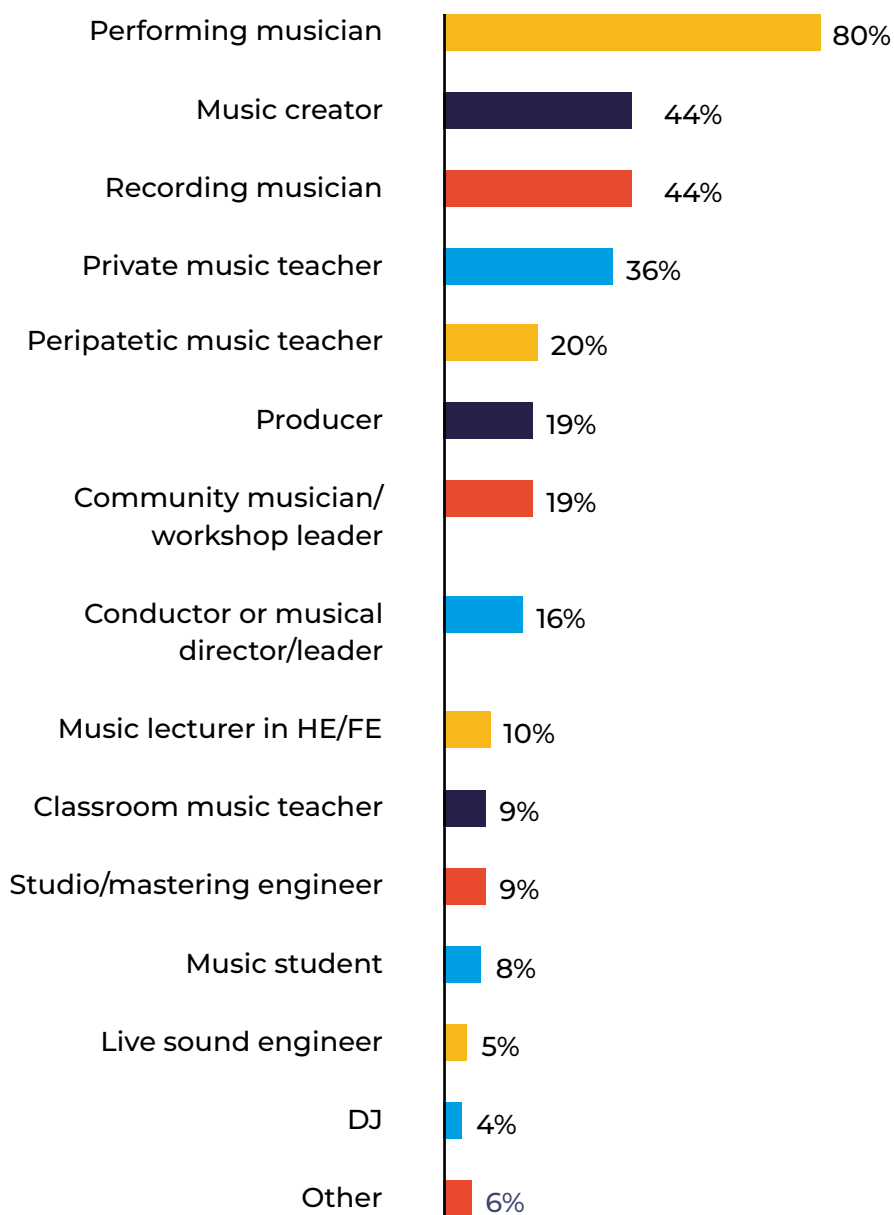
## Working patterns

Although the census results indicate that sustaining a consistent and high level of income as a musician can be tough, those in the profession also demonstrate great agility and flexibility in their approach to finding work.

While most musicians (80%) indicate that they consider themselves as performers, on average, a working musician holds 3-4 different roles in music, highlighting the need and ability to juggle different types of roles to sustain a career.

Musicians tend to have a breadth of creative outputs too. Responses suggest that a typical musician works across 4-5 genres and plays 2-3 instruments - one fifth (20%) of musicians report playing four or more instruments.

Working status as a musician





## Employment benefits

As a largely self-employed group, musicians have limited access to the kind of protections and benefits that are provided by employers and 54% of musicians have no access to employment benefits.

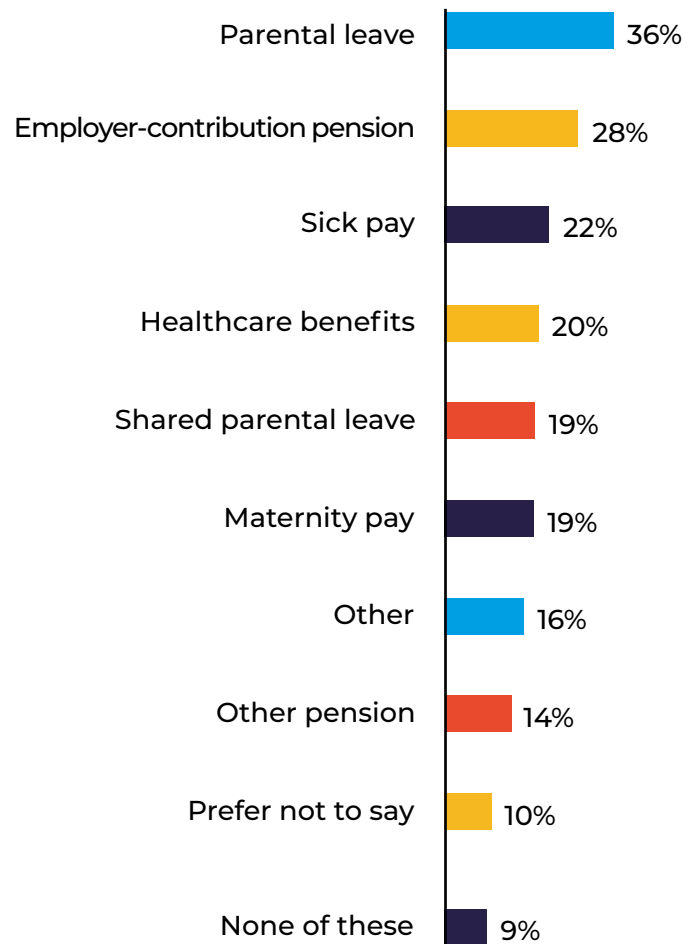
Only 28% of musicians report having an employer-contribution pension, compared with an overall workplace pension participation rate<sup>9</sup> in the UK of 79% in 2021, indicating musicians may be especially vulnerable to poverty in older life.

Even amongst those employed full time in music, only two thirds (64%) had access to an employer-contribution type pension, and only 57% had access to sick pay. Amongst self-employed musicians, only 14% reported access to sick pay.

**“I recently started to work freelance as a producer. This is much more flexible, but I’ve had to start with very low prices to build up a portfolio, meaning I need to fit it in around my ‘day job’ to be able to earn a sustainable income and access employment benefits.”**

Male, age 30, North West England

### Access to employment benefits (excl. students & retired)



## Career barriers

The Census shows 80% of musicians reported at least one or more career-restricting barrier, demonstrating the challenging nature of building a sustainable career in music.

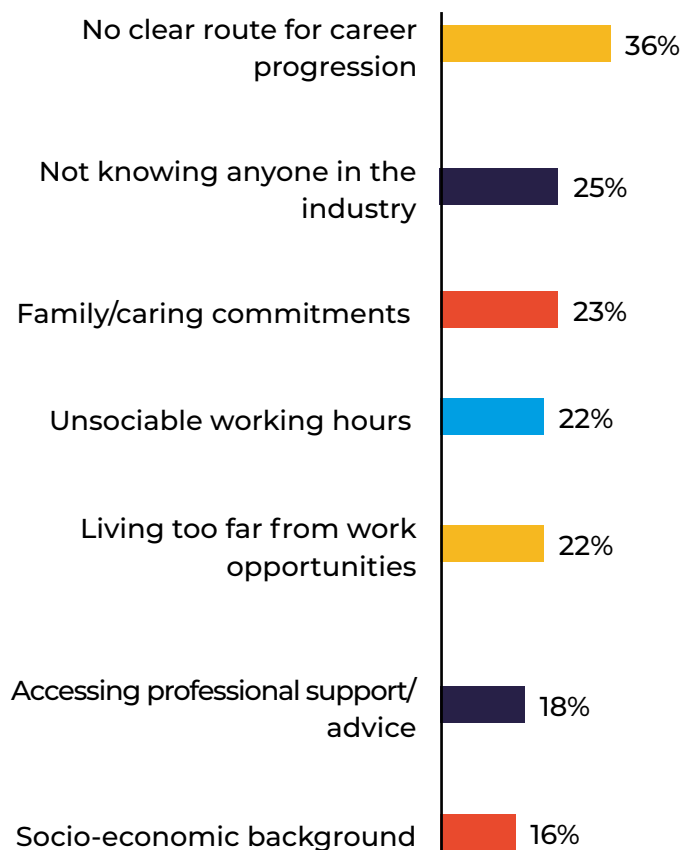
Financial obstacles are persistent, with 46% of musicians reporting cost-related barriers including: cost of equipment (30%), cost of transport (27%), and the cost of training (18%) limiting their careers.

Three quarters (73%) of musicians reported experiencing other forms of barriers (unrelated to finances) during their music career. These other barriers are influenced by musicians' different life and career stages. For example, 53% of musicians aged 25-34 reported not having a clear route for career progression as a potential barrier compared to 38% of musicians overall.

Almost a fifth (18%) of the total Census respondents reported being parents<sup>10</sup> and 5% of the total Census respondents reported being carers to disabled adults or older people<sup>11</sup>. Women musicians are more likely to be parents and/or carers than men (28% compared to 22%). Almost two thirds (69%) of parents and carers are aged 35-54, which represents 36% of all musicians in this age group. The majority (71%) of all respondents who reported finding appropriate childcare as a barrier are aged 35-54 and in this age group, half (52%) of musicians reported that family/caring commitments are a barrier to career progression. 15% of all female Census respondents reported finding appropriate childcare as a barrier compared to 7% of men. Additionally, 14% of all female Census respondents experienced discrimination due to parenting and caring responsibilities, compared to 4% of men.

Socio-economic barriers were reported by 16% of musicians and some raised this directly in open text responses, highlighting that the pressure to generate income where there is limited other resources and a lack of industry networks can be significant barriers to career development.

### Top non-financial barriers to career progression (excl. students & retired musicians)



**“There is a real glass ceiling in terms of performance pay with fees for most performance opportunities the same as they were 20 years ago. Which is fine when you’re in your 20s but not in your 40s and with a family and small children. The hours are unsociable, rehearsals are often unpaid and there is much (unpaid) waiting around. Being a full time musician and trying to be present as a parent is effectively impossible.”**

Male, age 43, North East England

**“Not having the ‘right’ socio-economic background meant I wasn’t automatically part of the relevant networks of people.”**

Male, age 48, South West England



## Other income

The Census shows us that over half (53%) of musicians need to sustain their career by sourcing other forms of income outside of music.

Of those musicians who supplement their income, two thirds (62%) generate additional funds from employment outside of the music industry.

Other key sources of financial support cited as outside of the field of music include support from family and friends (14%), and Universal Credit or other benefits (12%) - rising to 25% amongst disabled musicians.

75% of those who have other income (in addition) to music report only seeking this work for financial reasons.

The need to access other work can have a significant impact on musicians' long term music career and access to opportunity.

### Top 3 types of employment



**“I have to spend most of my time on working in other jobs to earn money, therefore not much time is left to pursue my career.”**

Female, age 24, London

## Travelling for work

Location plays an interesting factor in how musicians can work, for example, only 40% are able to find work each week within 10 miles of their home.

The distance of travel to work is also linked to income, with those earning more being more likely to travel greater distances.

450 (7%) of respondents reported travelling internationally once a month or more frequently, and 2186 (37%) of musicians travelled internationally once or more within a year. Therefore, issues around visas, Brexit and other issues related to movement between countries are relevant to musicians today.

**“Travelling is expensive in England. Trains cost a lot. Buses are ok but they don’t go where gigs are a lot of the time. Hiring a car and keeping one on the road is expensive.”**

Male, age 44, South East England





## Debt and home ownership

Nearly a quarter (23%) of musicians state they do not earn enough to support themselves or their families. This increases to 28% amongst those with caring responsibilities and 35% for Global Majority musicians.

17% of musicians reported being in debt, rising to 30% amongst those with a mental health condition and 28% for Black/Black British musicians.

Musicians in certain types of musical roles are also more vulnerable to debt, with 27% of DJs, producers and studio/mastering engineers reporting carrying debt.

Employed musicians are more likely to own their home with 71% of full-time employed musicians owning their home compared to 58% of self-employed musicians.

**“The cost-of-living crisis is something huge, that has impacted my welfare and career progress [...] My biggest issue at the moment is that I simply don’t have time to practice fully anymore, I don’t have the means to organise gigs with my band as they all have better paying opportunities... It all seems like a vicious cycle that pushes musicians out.”**

Female, age 26, London

**“Earning a consistent income has always been the most difficult part of working as a performing musician. This can be especially difficult when looking to rent somewhere to live, and landlords/agencies require proof of reliable income or salary.”**

Male, age 21, South East England





# Next steps

This first Insight Report from the Musicians' Census 2023 details the complex nature of being a musician in 2023.

Musicians are agile and resilient in the ways they find to sustain their careers, often balancing different types of employment and self-employment. Musicians are multifaceted: they are multi-instrumentalists, they work across different genres and in a wide range of contexts. They demonstrate great flexibility and versatility. However, these rich musical lives are situated within challenging circumstances.

From financial insecurity and low earnings, to barriers such as a lack of sustainable income or clear routes to career progression, many musicians face adversity in their working lives, and this can impact their personal lives. That said, 81% think they will still be working in the music industry in 5 years' time, despite evidence of these challenges, and we look forward to mapping musicians' lives with future iterations of the Census.

To ensure the health, wellbeing and diversity of the music industry we must continue to address the barriers and challenges that are reported by musicians, and fight to protect the mechanisms and provisions that enable musicians to thrive in their careers.

This briefing is part of a series of Insight Reports from Musicians Census data on a range of themes.

To get involved with the future development of the Musicians' Census or if you have any questions, please contact Help Musicians ([communications@helpmusicians.org.uk](mailto:communications@helpmusicians.org.uk)) or Musicians' Union ([equalities@themu.org](mailto:equalities@themu.org)).



# Endnotes

- 1** This includes non-binary and genderqueer musicians, and others who identify outside of the gender binary.
- 2** Annual income from music is based on all respondents earning any % of their total income from music.
- 3** To calculate mean incomes of those who earn 100% income from music we included those who reported earning 100% of income from music and provided their annual income data, and we've excluded those earning less than £7000 per year, and grouped together those earning £48,000+.
- 4** 2,318 of 3,075 musicians who reported earning 75% or more of their income from music.
- 5** 946 of 2028 musicians reported earning less than 50% of their income from music.
- 6** 603 of 946 of musicians reported earning less than 50% of income from music in their first ten years in the music industry.
- 7** 697 of 955 men earning less than £7000 from music.
- 8** Heterosexual income based on 1783 respondents, LGBTQ+ based on 358 respondents.
- 9** Office for National Statistics, Employee workplace pensions in the UK: 2021 provisional and 2020 final results.
- 10** This includes anyone who said they were a primary carer to a child.
- 11** 23% of respondents overall reported caring responsibilities (1,357 of 5,867). Respondents were asked 'Do you have any caring responsibilities? By caring responsibilities we mean anyone who is responsible, unpaid, for the care of a friend, family member or another person who, for a variety of reasons, is not currently able to cope without their support' and were able to respond to one or more of the following four options: Primary carer for a child or children (aged under 18)/ Primary carer or assistant for a disabled adult or adults/Primary carer or assistant for an older person or people/ Secondary carer (another person carries out main caring role). When we refer to parents in the report we are interpreting this as anyone who stated they are a primary carer for a child or children, and acknowledge that this may include other caregivers or guardians who act in this role. When we refer to carers, we specifically mean those caring for a disabled adult or older person. A limitation of that data is that, in the context of the Census, we have interpreted the term 'primary carer' as interchangeable with parent/carer because there was not specifically a question 'are you a parent or carer'.



# Glossary

This report uses the following terms in relation to demographics:

**Musicians with another gender identity:** this includes non-binary and genderqueer musicians, and others who identify outside of the gender binary.

**Disabled musicians:** we asked respondents to report any long-standing impairments and conditions, meaning those which have lasted or are expected to last for more than 12 months.

**Global Majority musicians:** musicians from ethnically diverse communities who specifically experience racial marginalisation. This includes musicians who identify as Asian/Asian British, Black/Black British, mixed/dual heritage e.g. white & Black Caribbean, white & Asian, and other ethnically diverse groups.

**LGBQ+ musicians:** musicians who describe themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, asexual or in other non-heteronormative ways.

**Parents and carers:** anyone who undertakes the primary care of a child aged under 18, disabled adult or adults, older person or people or is a secondary carer for any of these.

**Transgender musicians:** musicians whose gender identity is different to the one assigned at birth.

This report also uses the following terms:

**Roles:** this refers to types of activities musicians undertake to generate income from music for example, a performer, or a producer etc.