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Statistics on access to cash, bank branches and ATMs



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Summary

Use of cash

In recent years, cash has been used less often for payment by people and businesses, while the use of digital payment methods – led by debit cards – has accelerated.

The pandemic saw a drop in cash use. In 2021, just 15% of payments were in cash.

In 2022, about three quarters of adults (74%) used cash occasionally or rarely. About a fifth (20%) used cash and other payment methods equally. About 6% used cash for most things or for everything.

Some groups of people are particularly likely to use cash for most things, for example the digitally excluded and older adults.

Access to cash from any source

In Apr-Jun 2022, 3.5% of the UK population lived further than 2km from a bank, building society, Post Office branch or ATM where they could access cash.

Bank branches

Since the mid-1990s, the number of bank branches in the UK has been falling, while the number of building society branches has been more steady.

Between 2012 and 2022, the total number of bank and building society branches in the UK fell by 40%.

There have been falls in the number of bank and building society branches in all UK countries and regions over this period. The smallest decrease was in Northern Ireland (-13%) and the largest was in the South West (-45%).

Post offices

Post offices provide some consumer financial services and sometimes act as an alternative to bank branches. In March 2022, there were 11,635 post offices in the UK. Post office numbers are discussed in detail in the Library briefing [Post office numbers](#).

ATMs

ATMs (cash machines) provide essential financial services to individuals by providing access to cash, balance and account information and some other limited functions.

At the beginning of June 2023, there were 49,421 cash machines in the UK, 78% or 38,612 of which were free to use. The total number of ATMs in the UK peaked in 2015 at 70,588 and has fallen each year since then.

Between July 2018 and June 2023, the number of ATMs in the UK fell by 16,516 or 25%. There was a fall in the number of ATMs in all regions and countries of the UK. The largest fall was in London (-30%). The smallest fall was in Northern Ireland (-17%).

Further information

The Excel file attached to the [landing page for this briefing](#) contains data underlying the charts, and some constituency data for ATMs.

1 Introduction

Consumer banking services have traditionally been provided in branches. But for many years, bank branches have been closing.

Explanations include cost cutting by banks; mergers within the industry; competitive pressures from new entrants in the banking sector; the increasing popularity of internet banking; the decline in the use of cash; the decline in

the use of cheques; and fewer people being paid in cash. The coronavirus pandemic led to even fewer people using cash for transactions.¹

Despite the availability of alternative ways to access cash and banking services, branch closures are still controversial. Many customers value face-to-face services and some people are unable to access online alternatives. Bank branches also play a role in community cohesion, particularly in rural areas with few other amenities.

For information on government policy to address the issue of access to cash and bank branch closures see the Library briefing [The future of local banking services and access to cash](#).

Ways of accessing cash and financial services

Bank branches provide consumer financial services to individuals and businesses, but they are not the only providers of these services.

Building societies also provide many of the same services, and so figures for bank and building societies are often combined to give the total number of ‘bank branches’.

The Post Office also provides financial services to customers, and figures for post offices are also included in this briefing.

ATMs (Automatic Telling Machines), or cash machines, are another source of financial services - particularly cash.

While this briefing focusses on these ways of accessing cash and financial services in person, others are also available – for example banks generally have banking apps, and around 490,000 places provided cashback in 2020.²

¹ Bank of England, [Cash in the time of Covid](#), Nov 2020

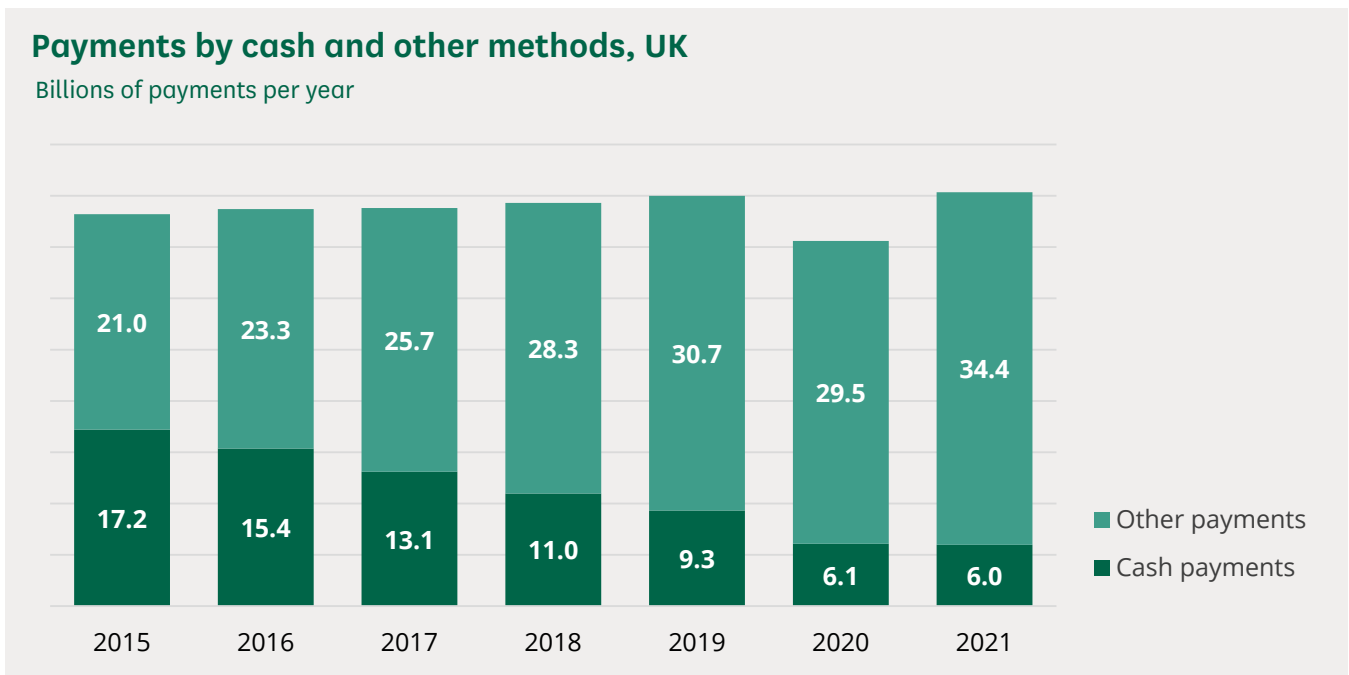
² FCA, [Access to cash coverage in the UK 2022 Q3](#), May 2023. Cashback locations are the unique locations of vendors which are known to have offered cashback at some point in 2020 to customers using either a Mastercard or a Visa card.

2 Use of cash

In recent years, cash has been used less often for payment by people and businesses, while the use of digital payment methods – led by debit cards – has accelerated.

2.1 Payments in cash

The pandemic saw a drop in cash use. In 2021 just 15% of payments were in cash.

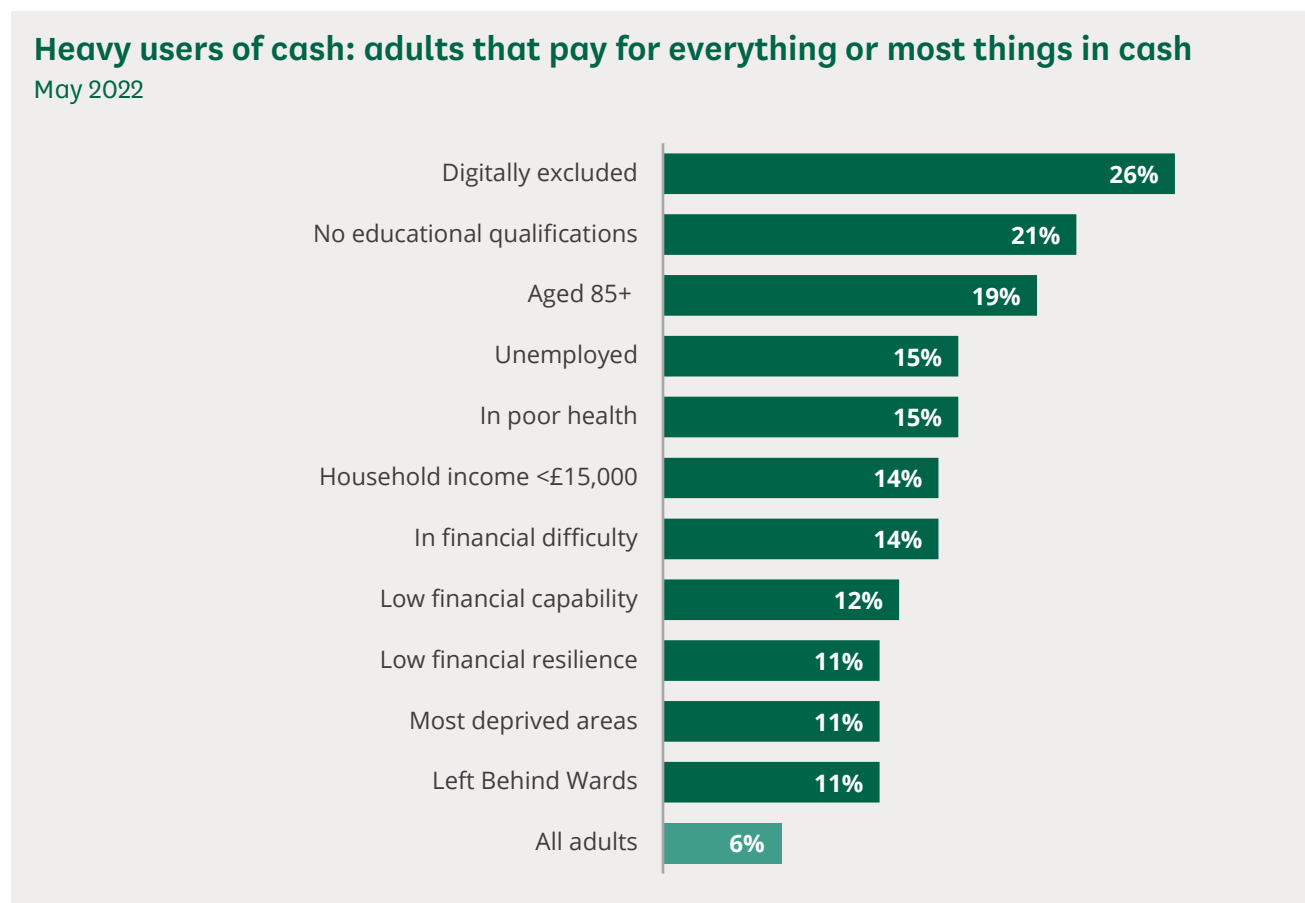


Source: UK Finance, UK Payment Markets Summary, 2016 to 2022 editions

2.2 Reliance on cash

In 2022 about three quarters of adults (74%) used cash occasionally or rarely. About a fifth (20%) used cash and other payment methods equally. About 6% used cash for most things or for everything.³

As shown in the next chart, some groups of people were particularly likely to use cash for most things, for example the digitally excluded and older adults.⁴



Source: FCA [Financial Lives 2022 \(main report\)](#), July 2023. For definitions see the report's glossary.

³ UK Finance, [UK Payment Markets Summary 2022](#), August 2022. Based on question "How often have you used cash (rather than other payment methods) in your day-to-day life in the last 12 months?". Possible answers were: I pay for everything, including bills, in cash (very often); I pay for most things in cash, including larger purchases and bills (often); I use cash and other payment methods equally (moderately); I occasionally use cash (rarely); I almost always use other payment methods, even for everyday purchases (very rarely)

⁴ FCA [Financial Lives 2022 \(data table 2\)](#), July 2023

For further information on the use of cash, see the FCA's [Financial Lives 2022](#) report (July 2023) and RSA, [The cash census: Britain's relationship with cash and digital payments](#), March 2022 (supported by LINK).

3 Access to cash from all sources

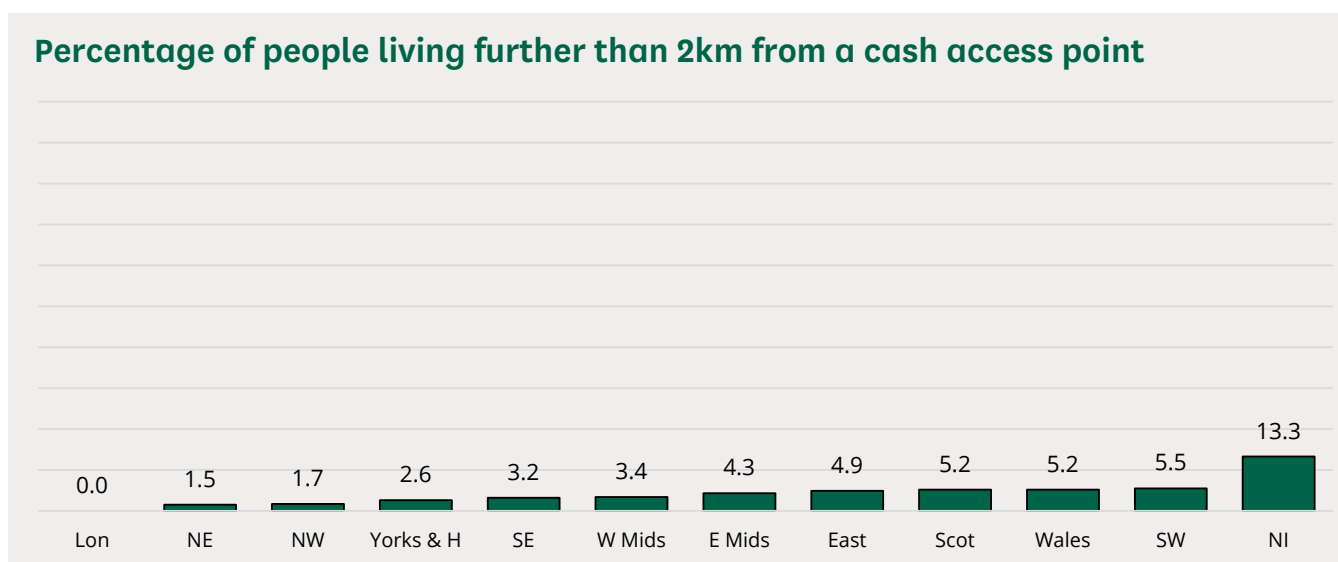
Looking at figures for access to any of bank, building society, Post Office branches or ATMs, in Apr-Jun 2022:

- 96.5% of the UK population were within 2km of a cash access point – and 3.5% were not
- 99.8% of the UK population were within 5km of a cash access point – and 0.2% were not.

These figures vary across the UK, from 100% of people in London being within 2km of a cash access point, to 86.7% in Northern Ireland.

If cashback is included alongside other ways of accessing cash, the figures improve – with 99.4% of the population within 2km of a way of accessing cash (and 0.6% not), or 100% within 5km (and 0% not).⁵

The FCA’s [Access to cash coverage in the UK](#) statistics have much more detail and the underlying figures, including maps, breakdowns by local area and different ways of accessing cash, and information on opening hours and accessibility.



Source: FCA, [Access to cash coverage in the UK 2022 Q2](#), May 2023 - access to any of bank, building society, Post Office branches or ATMs (free or paid) – does not include cashback

⁵ FCA, [Access to cash coverage in the UK 2022 Q2](#), May 2023. Cashback locations are locations where a cashback transaction is known to have taken place in 2020.

4

Bank branches in the UK

Box 1: Sources of data on bank branches

This Briefing Paper uses a range of sources to give information on the historic number of branches, branches by region and the number of closures:

1. **British Bankers' Association (BBA)**: For historic information on bank and building society branches, this Briefing Paper uses data from the BBA. This data is based on returns from BBA members. It does not include branches of banks that are not BBA members (which excludes only a very small number of financial institutions). The BBA data runs from 1986 to 2014.
2. **Office of National Statistics (ONS)**: More recent data on the number of bank branches comes from the ONS publication, Business activity size and location, via the [NOMIS database \(UK Business Counts variable\)](#). This data is based on VAT and PAYE returns of 'local units' (also referred to as individual sites or workplaces) in the [Bank](#) (Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) code 64.19/1) and [Building Society](#) (SIC code 64.19/2) industries. Note that a few of these local units may not be branches. Figures are for a date in March each year.
3. **Which?**: The consumer affairs organisation has researched the question of [bank branch closures](#). They publish information on the total number of branch closures, including closures by bank, region and **constituency**.

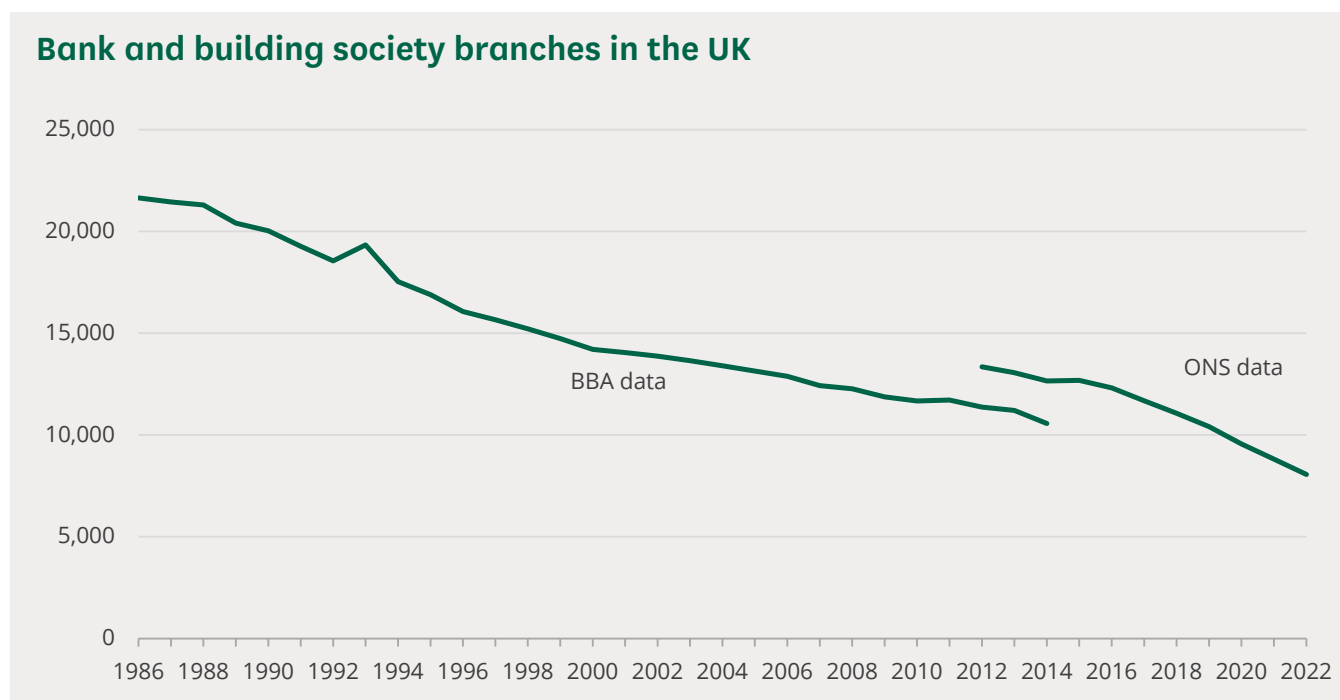
Although these sources broadly correspond, they use different methods to produce their data and so should be compared cautiously.

4.1

Total number of bank and building society branches

The chart shows the total number of bank and building society branches in the UK since 1986. British Bankers' Association (BBA) data ended in 2014. Data from 2012 onwards is from the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The data in the charts in this section is available in an Excel attachment to the [landing page for this briefing](#).



Source: 1986 to 2014 = BBA data; 2012 onwards = ONS, Business activity size and location, via the [NOMIS database \(UK Business Counts variable\)](#)

Over the past three decades, the number of bank branches has fallen steadily. In 1986 there were 21,643 bank or building society branches in the UK. In 2014 there were 10,565. Over this period, from 1986 to 2014, the total number of bank and building society branches fell by 11,078 or 51%.

Using the ONS data, the total number of bank and building society branches fell from 13,345 in 2012 to 8,060 in 2022, a fall of 5,285 or 40%.

4.2 Bank vs building society branches

The next chart separates the data for bank and building society branches in the UK since 1986. The number of bank branches has fallen steadily since the mid-1990s. The number of building society branches has been broadly steady over this period.

In 1986, there were 14,689 bank branches and 6,954 building society branches in the UK.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the number of bank and building society branches fell gradually.

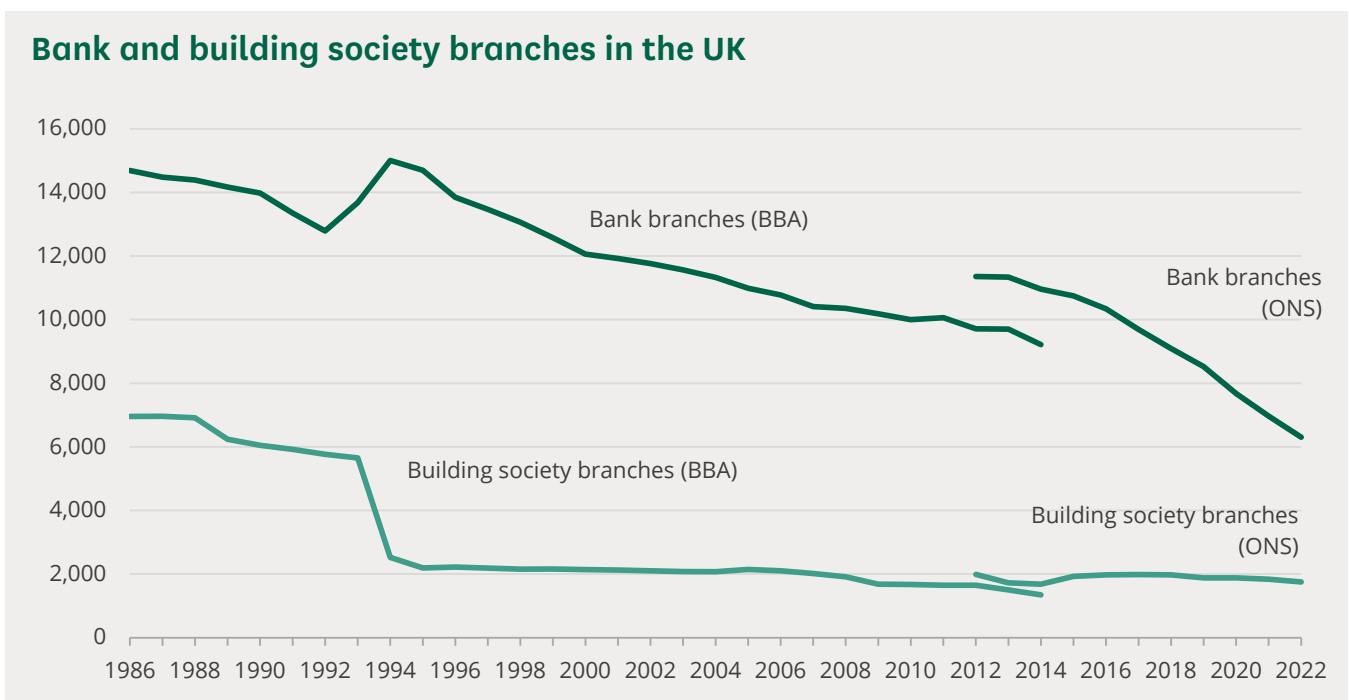
Between 1992 and 1994, some building societies reclassified as banks (including Halifax and Abbey National), which had the effect of increasing the

number of bank branches and reducing the number of building society branches.

Between 1995 and 2008 the number of building society branches in the UK remained steady at around 2,000, but the number of bank branches fell from 14,698 to 10,354.

The fall in the number of bank branches accelerated from 2008 onwards. Using the BBA data, the number of bank branches fell from 10,354 in 2008 to 9,713 in 2014.

Using the ONS data, the number of bank branches has fallen by 5,050 or 44% between 2012 and 2022. The number of building society branches fell by 235 or 12%.



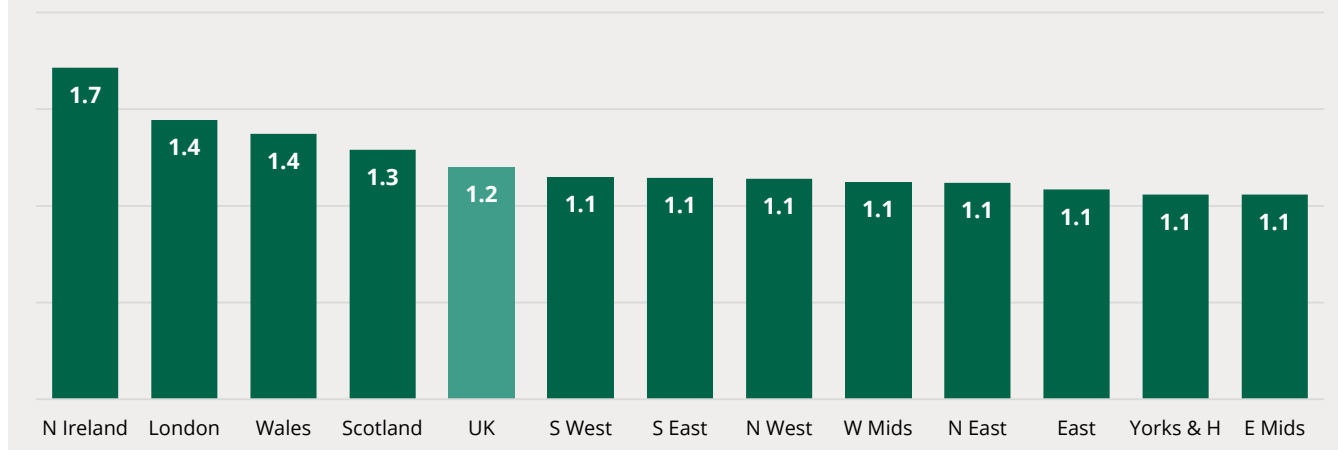
Source: 1986 to 2014 = BBA data; 2012 onwards = ONS, Business activity size and location, via the [NOMIS database \(UK Business Counts variable\)](#)

4.3 Branches in UK regions and countries

The following chart shows the number of bank and building society branches per 10,000 residents in each region and country of the UK in 2022.

The number of bank and building society branches ranges from 1.1 branches per 10,000 residents in most English regions to 1.7 branches per 10,000 in Northern Ireland.

Number of bank and building society branches per 10,000 population, 2022



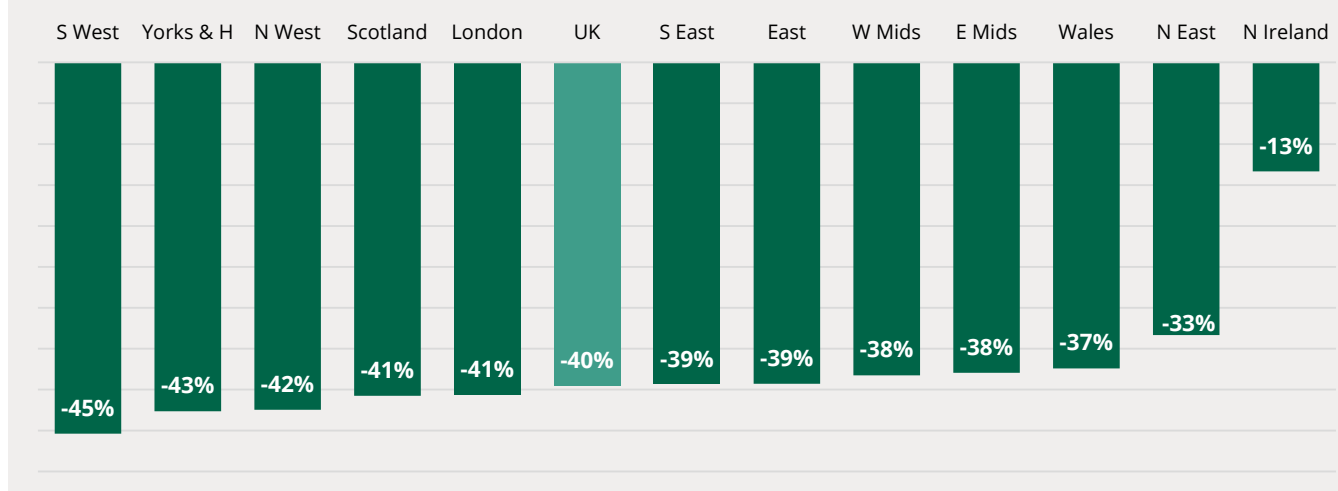
Source: ONS, [Business counts](#) and [Population estimates](#) for 2020; House of Commons Library calculations

4.4 Change in the number of branches by region and country

The following chart shows the percentage change in the number of bank and building society branches by region and country of the UK from 2012 to 2022.

There have been falls in the number of bank and building society branches in all UK countries and regions over this period. The smallest decrease was in Northern Ireland (-13%) and the largest was in the South West (-45%).

Change in number of bank and building society branches, 2012 to 2022



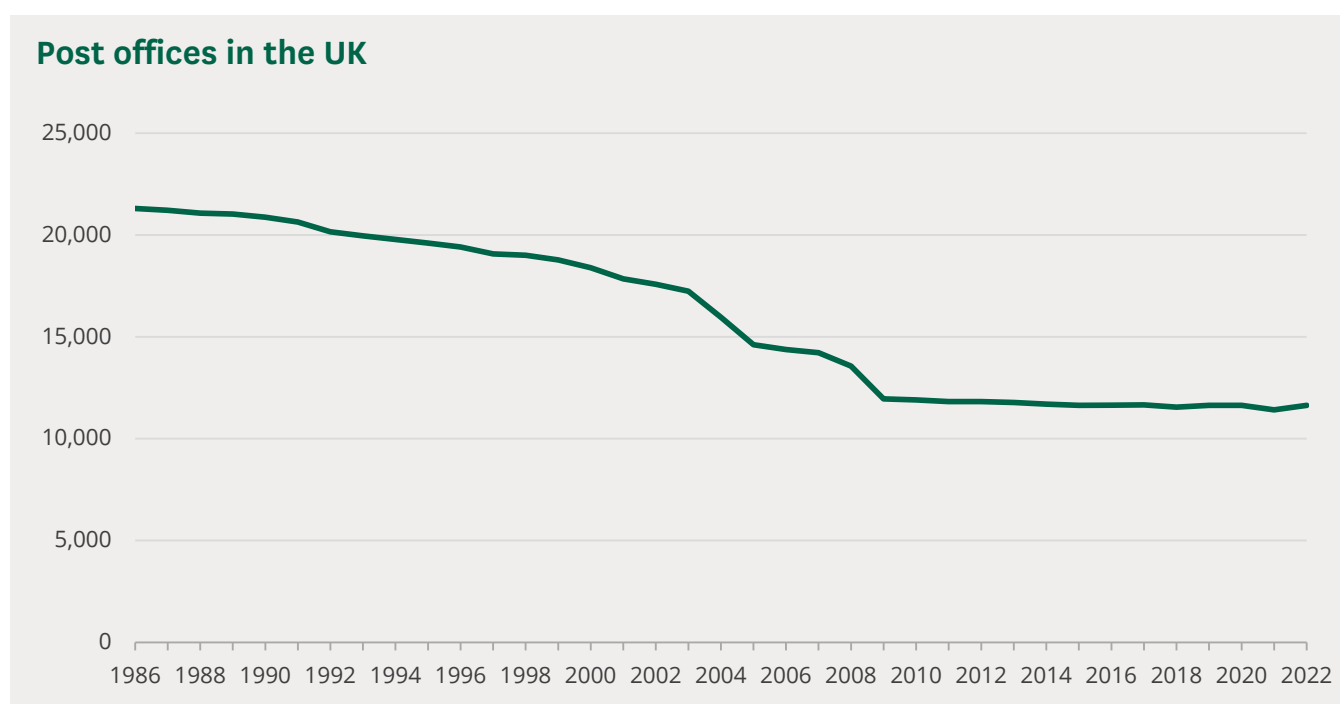
Source: ONS, Business activity size and location, via the [NOMIS database](#) ([UK Business Counts variable](#))

5 Post offices

Post offices provide some customer financial services and so are often cited as an alternative to bank or building society branches. They are discussed in detail in another Library Briefing Paper: [Post Office numbers](#).

The following chart shows the number of post offices in the UK at the end of March each year. In March 2022, there were 11,635 post offices in the UK, returning to a similar level to in 2020 after a slight dip in 2021. The number of post offices in the UK has remained at around the same level since around 2009.

Whilst the recent trend has been stable, over the longer term there has been a decline in the number of post offices.⁶



Source: : Post Office, various sources – see Post Office Numbers briefing for full details. Note discontinuities between 2005 and 2007

Post offices must meet certain requirements for their geographical spread, as explained in [Post Office numbers](#).

⁶ Note that there are discontinuities in the data between 2005 and 2007 so comparisons should be made cautiously).

Number of post offices by UK region and country

	Number in 2022	Number per 10,000 population	Change 2012 to 2022	
			Change	% change
East Midlands	883	1.8	1	0.1%
East	1,154	1.8	14	1.2%
London	687	0.8	3	0.4%
North East	499	1.9	3	0.6%
North West	1,093	1.5	-40	-3.5%
Northern Ireland	502	2.6	22	4.6%
Scotland	1,334	2.4	-91	-6.4%
South East	1,373	1.5	-35	-2.5%
South West	1,270	2.2	-30	-2.3%
Wales	967	3.1	10	1.0%
West Midlands	916	1.5	-5	-0.5%
Yorkshire & The Humber	957	1.7	-35	-3.5%
UK	11,635	1.7	-183	-1.5%

Source: Post Office Network Reports; population for 2021 from ONS via NOMIS

Notes: Data refers to March in each year

6 ATMs

ATMs (cash machines) provide essential financial services to individuals by giving access to cash, balance and account information and some other limited functions.

[LINK](#) operate the vast majority of cash machines in the UK; their network includes “virtually all the UK’s ATMs” according to their website.⁷ They publish data on ATMs in the UK on their [Statistics and Trends](#) website.

6.1 Total number of ATMs

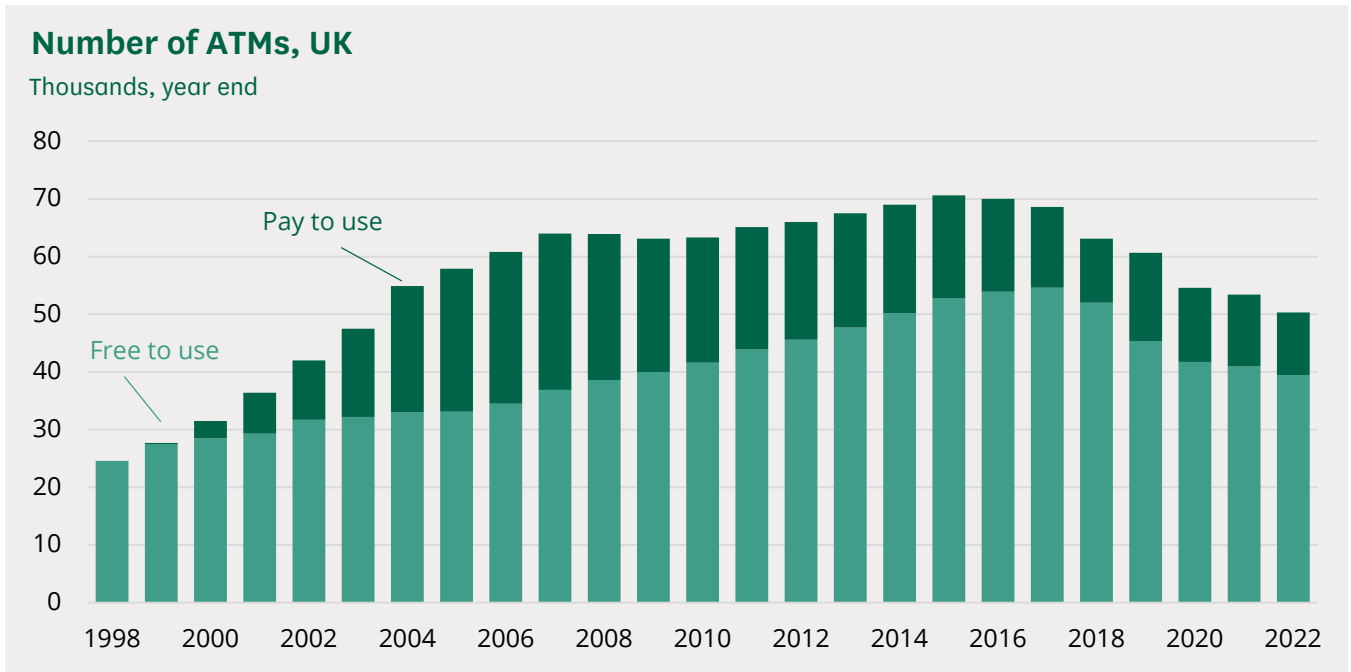
At the beginning of June 2023, there were 49,421 cash machines in the UK, 78% or 38,612 of which were free to use. The remaining 10,809 cash machines were pay to use.⁸

The total number of ATMs in the UK rose quickly from 1998 until 2007, driven mainly by the growth of pay to use cash machines. Between 2007 and 2018, the number of pay to use cash machines fell each year, whilst the number of free to use cash machines rose up to 2017. For the first time in 20 years, the number of free to use cash machines in the UK fell in 2018 compared to the year before and has fallen in each year since.

The total number of ATMs in the UK peaked in 2015 at 70,588 and has fallen each year since then.

⁷ LINK, [An introduction to us](#), accessed 1 Sept 2023

⁸ LINK, [Constituency data](#) for June 2023



Source: LINK, [Statistics and Trends](#)

6.2 ATMs across the UK

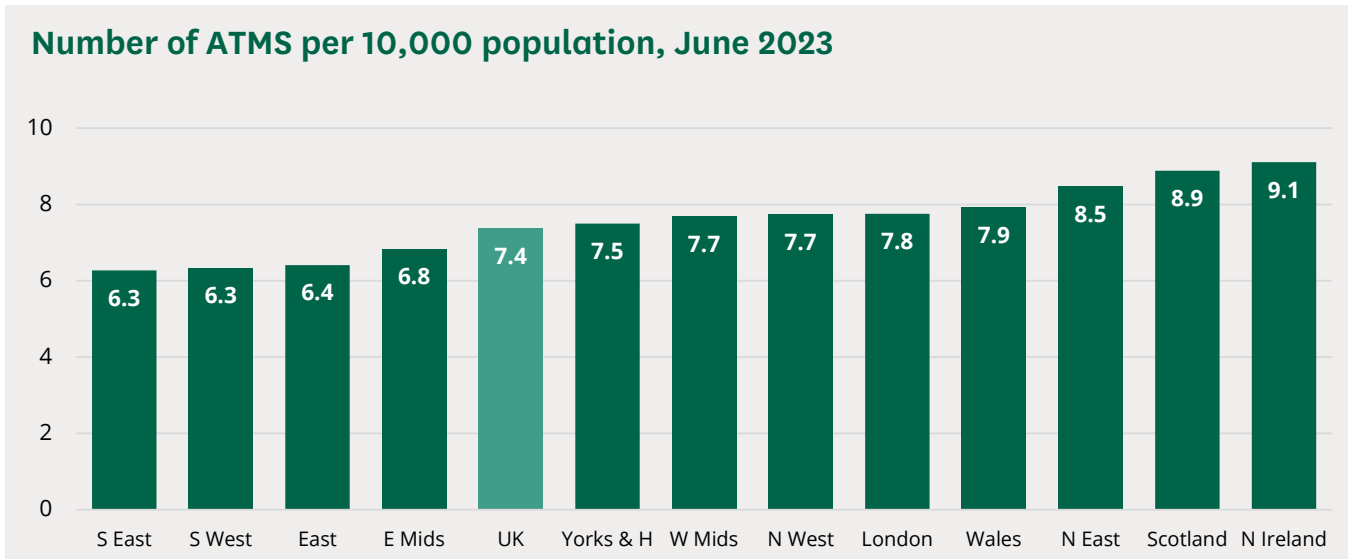
Data on ATMs by region and country of the UK, change on year and ATMs per 10,000 residents – along with data by parliamentary constituency – is shown in the table in an Excel file that is attached to the [landing page to this briefing](#).

The following charts illustrate this data, which are based on data on ATMs by parliamentary constituency that LINK publish in their [Monthly ATM footprint report](#). Note that the LINK data is updated more frequently than this briefing paper.

ATMs per 10,000 residents

The following chart shows the number of ATMs in each region and the country of the UK per 10,000 residents. In the UK overall in June 2023 there were 7.4 ATMs per 10,000 residents.

Northern Ireland had 9.1 ATMs per 10,000 residents, the highest of any country or region of the UK. In the South East and South West there were 6.3 ATMs per 10,000 residents.

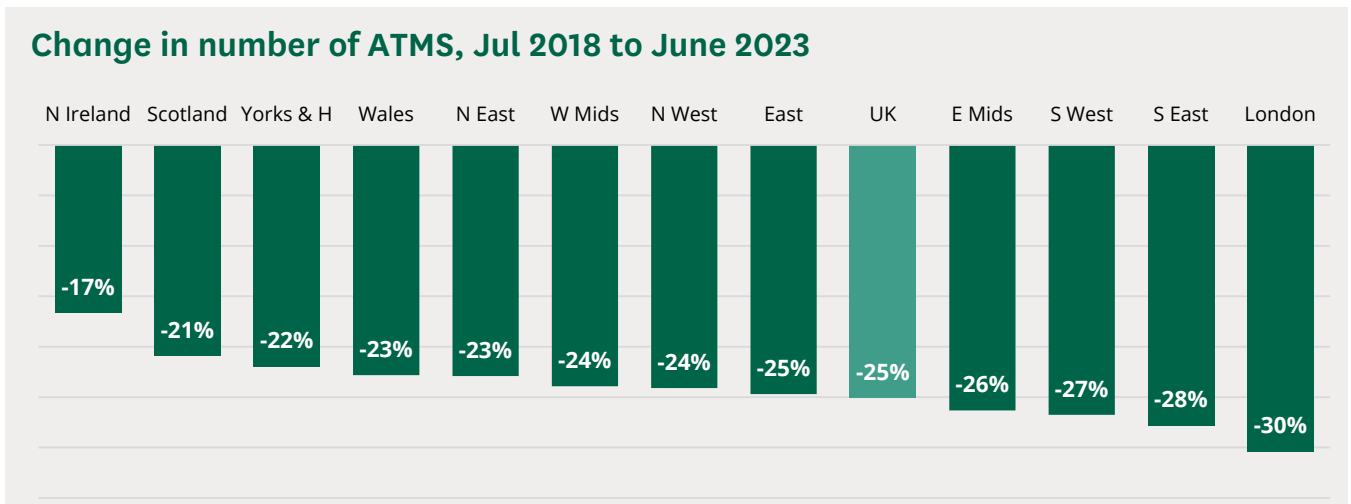


Source: LINK, [Constituency data](#) for Sept 2022; ONS, [Population estimates](#) for 2021, and House of Commons Library calculations.

Change in number of ATMs

Between July 2018 and June 2023, the number of ATMs in the UK fell by 16,516 or 25%.

There was a fall in the number of ATMs in all regions and countries of the UK. The largest fall was in London (-30%). The smallest fall was in Northern Ireland (-17%).



Source: LINK, [Constituency data](#) (July 2018 and June 2023)

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