



**MC23**  
Musicians' Census

# Musicians' Census

## Mental Wellbeing Report


November 2023

Help  
Musicians

Musicians'  
Union  
**mu**

# Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	<b>3</b>
<u>Executive summary</u>	<b>7</b>
<u>Mental wellbeing</u>	<b>9</b>
<u>Which musicians experience low mental wellbeing?</u>	<b>12</b>
<u>What impacts low mental wellbeing?</u>	<b>19</b>
<u>Next steps</u>	<b>24</b>
<u>Endnotes</u>	<b>26</b>





# Introduction

The World Health Organisation tells us that mental wellbeing enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their communities. It states that mental wellbeing is an integral component of health that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental wellbeing is a basic human right.

An experience we all share is that maintaining mental wellbeing is not always easy, and this report shows it can be particularly difficult if you are a musician. Here we see data that indicates how different kinds of musicians experience mental wellbeing, clarifying the extent of challenges faced by disabled and LGBTQ+ musicians, musicians in different age and income groups, musicians in different job roles and settings, and those with caring responsibilities.

While we might not be surprised to learn that there are strong connections between, say, low income and low mental wellbeing among musicians, data confirming these connections has previously been rare or based on relatively small samples, making this report a welcome addition to existing research. Importantly, the data in this report also shows that any musician can struggle with low mental wellbeing, regardless of socioeconomic bracket or any other categorisation.

Musicians contribute greatly to society's mental wellbeing, but they need robust support to maintain their own mental wellbeing. This report calls on the music sector to keep developing its support for musicians based on the specific needs identified here. This is vital if we are to encourage musicians to persevere in their careers over the course of their working lives, and to ensure that diversity within the music industry is supported and continues to increase.

As the UK continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic while facing other challenges such as the fallout from Brexit, international instability and the climate emergency, the obstacles facing professional musicians are unlikely to decrease. We hope this report will encourage the music industry to think both broadly and specifically about how we can continue to support musicians' mental wellbeing at a time when we need musicians more than ever.



**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
- she said.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' mental wellbeing, how this is experienced by different groups of musicians, and affecting factors. This is the third in a series of Insight Reports which will each share findings related to a key census theme.

Almost a third (30%) of all musicians reported experiencing negative mental wellbeing. This group were twice as likely to say it was unlikely that they would be working in music in one to five years.

Almost two thirds of musicians who defined their gender in another way reported low mental wellbeing, over twice as many as musicians overall. Additionally, 63% of trans musicians reported low mental wellbeing. Almost half of all LGBTQ+ musicians report low mental wellbeing and half of all disabled musicians reported low mental wellbeing, compared to just one fifth of those who did not have a disability, and 80% of musicians who reported extremely negative physical wellbeing also reported low mental wellbeing. People who were primary carers for disabled adults or older people reported higher rates of low mental wellbeing, at 39% and 36% respectively, than those with no caring responsibilities.

Musicians in particular roles and genres experienced higher rates of low mental wellbeing, with studio/mastering engineers and live sound engineers (38%), producers (37%), and musicians working in dance music (35%), rock and alternative (33%) and UK Rap (33%) having the highest rates.

Those earning the lowest incomes from music (<£7,000) were twice as likely to report low mental wellbeing than those earning more than £55,000 from their music work each year. Further, only a third (36%) of musicians reporting low mental wellbeing say they earn enough to support themselves or their family, compared to 44% of all respondents.

94% of musicians reporting low mental wellbeing said that they had experienced at least one barrier to career development, compared to 85% of musicians generally – these included not being able to make a sustainable income, no clear route for career progression, and not knowing anyone in the industry. Additionally, discrimination of all kinds was reported at a higher rate by those who reported low mental wellbeing.





# Mental wellbeing

Mental wellbeing can be thought of as 'feeling good and functioning well.' Mental wellbeing changes over time and people can be living with long-term mental illness but still be functioning well, likewise, people can be living without mental illness but still be unhappy with the conditions of their life (and therefore have poor mental wellbeing).

In the Musicians' Census, musicians were asked about both long-term mental health conditions which might affect their day-to-day functioning and about mental wellbeing. It's important to understand both since each requires different support. For example, someone living with long-term mental illness may need support

with access to work. Similarly, changes to the working environment and work patterns may help improve mental wellbeing but may not on their own reduce mental illness.

In this report we explore the self-reported mental wellbeing of respondents to our Musician's Census. We examine which musicians are most likely to experience negative mental wellbeing and which experiences while working as musicians can increase the likelihood of low mental wellbeing.

The results in this report are based on detailed information provided by 5,867 UK musicians in 2023 to our Musicians' Census.

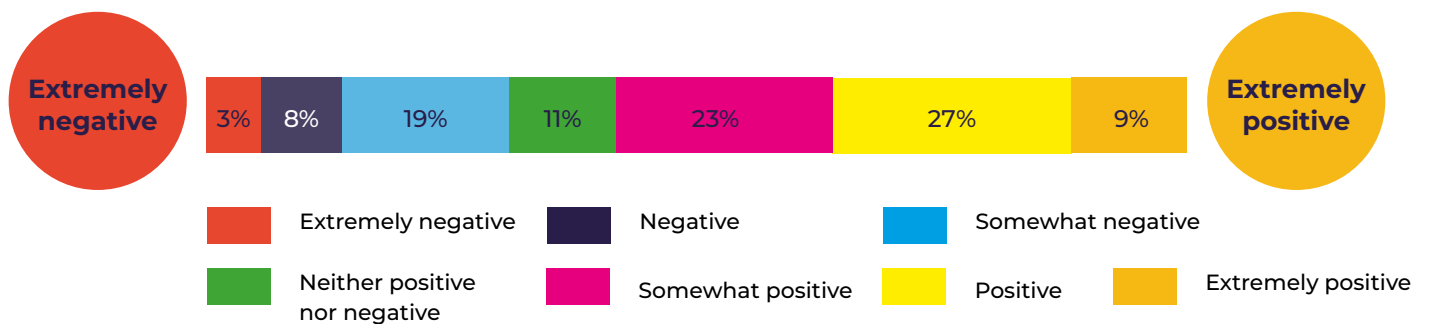


# Mental wellbeing amongst musicians

The Census reveals that almost a third (30%) of musicians are experiencing negative mental wellbeing with this ranging between somewhat negative, negative, and extremely negative (throughout this report we will refer to this group as musicians reporting low mental wellbeing). A further 11% report their mental wellbeing as neither positive nor negative.

**“The music industry has several issues, mainly due to poor working conditions and instability. This causes poor mental health in musicians themselves, which then goes on to affect our working relationships and environments.”**

Male, age 25-34, London

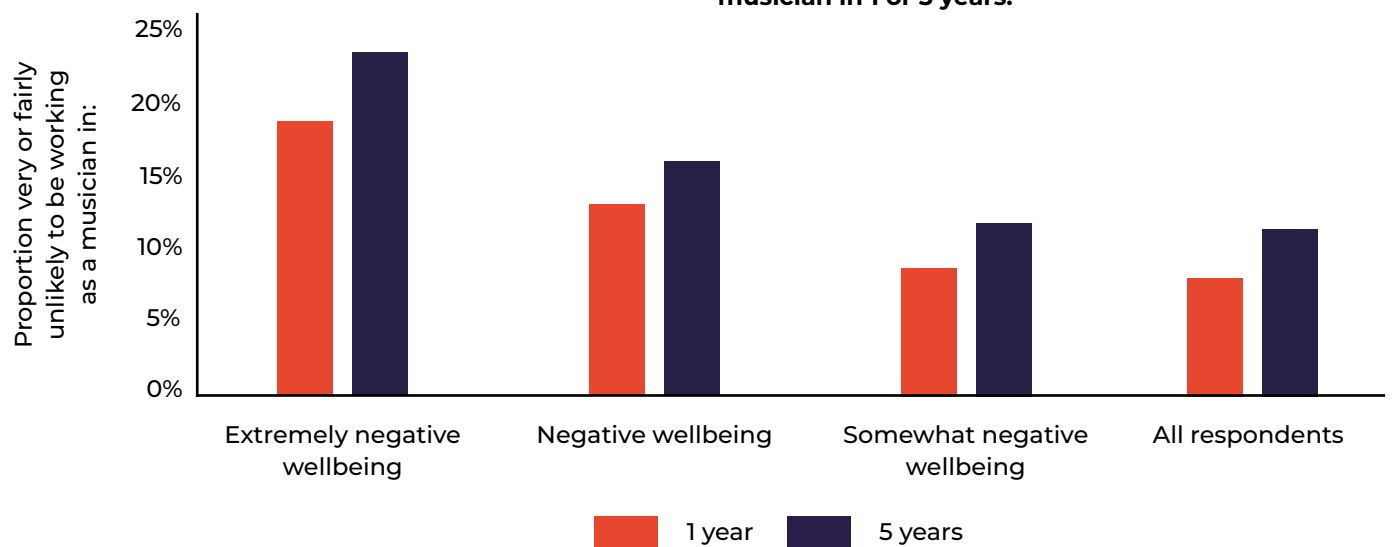


The Census shows that low mental wellbeing affects musicians’ expected likelihood of remaining working in music in the future, with the proportion of musicians who think it’s likely they will be working in music in one or five years decreasing as mental wellbeing becomes more negative.

in music in one or five years (19% and 23% respectively) than musicians generally (7% and 11% respectively). While this will have an impact on the careers of individual musicians, it will also have potential consequences for the diversity of the music industry with those demographics of musicians more likely to experience low mental wellbeing, potentially being more likely to leave music sooner.

Musicians reporting extremely negative mental wellbeing were more than twice as likely to say they were very or fairly unlikely to be working

### 1.3 Thinking about the future, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that you will be working as a musician in 1 or 5 years:

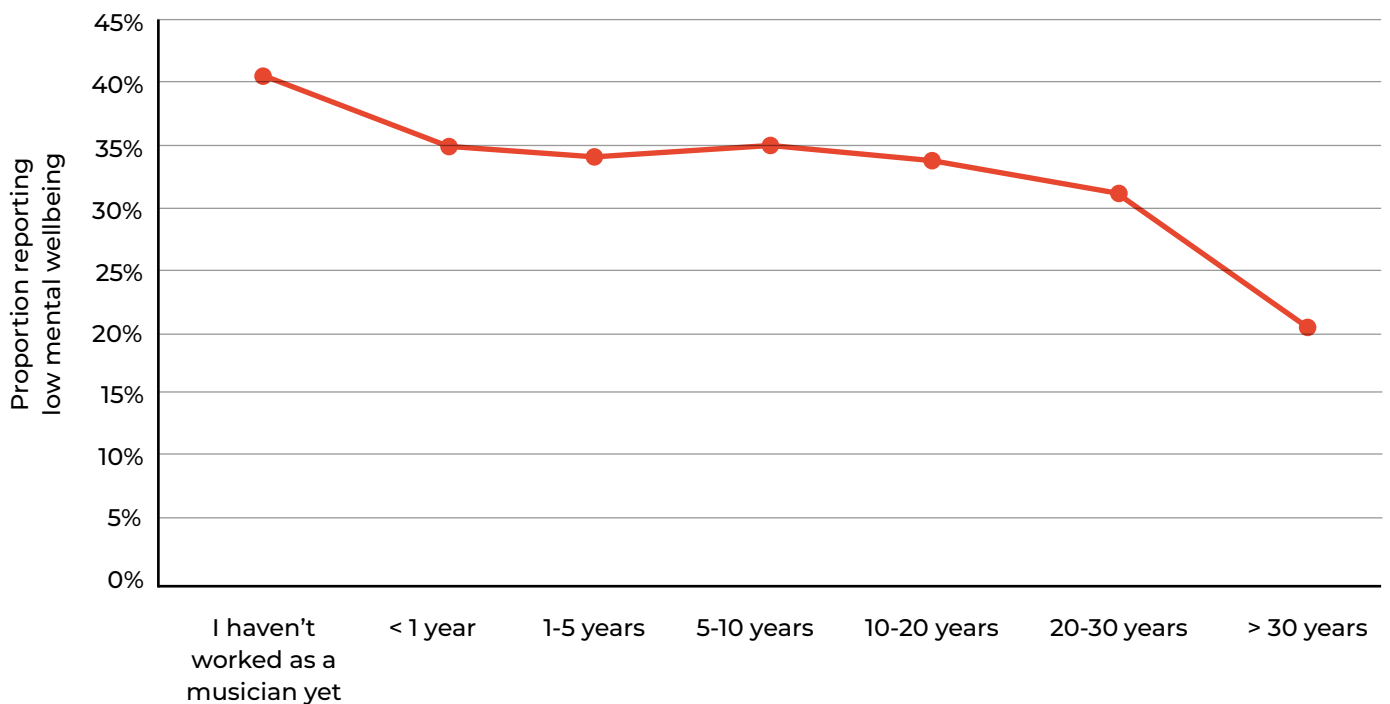


## 11 Mental wellbeing

The Census also indicates that the proportion of musicians reporting low mental wellbeing declines the longer they had been working as musicians. While a third (34%) of musicians with 1-5 years' experience report low mental wellbeing, just a fifth (20%) of those with more than 30 years' experience report the same. This suggests that musicians experiencing negative mental wellbeing do leave the industry over time.

The highest rates of negative mental wellbeing by career stage are reported amongst students (41%) and those not yet working as a musician (41%). This suggests the need for dedicated support for those at the very early stages of a musicians' career.

**1.4 In total, how many years has it been since you started earning from your work as a musician? If you don't know exactly, please give your best estimate:**



# Which musicians experience low mental wellbeing?

## Age

Younger respondents were much more likely to report low mental wellbeing than older respondents with a third (36%) of musicians aged under 45 reporting negative mental wellbeing compared to around a quarter (28%) of those aged 45-65 and just a tenth (10%) of those aged 65 and over.

While this could suggest mental wellbeing increases with age, it could also indicate those experiencing the poorest mental wellbeing leave the industry sooner, leaving a higher proportion of those with better mental wellbeing remaining in the industry long-term.

## Gender

Men were the least likely to report low mental wellbeing (28%), with women slightly more likely to do so (31%) and people who defined their gender in another way<sup>1</sup> significantly more likely to do so, with more than twice as many (63%) musicians in this group reporting low mental wellbeing than musicians generally. Trans musicians were also over twice as likely to experience low mental wellbeing (63%)<sup>2</sup> compared to those musicians whose gender identity was the same as their sex assigned at birth (30%).

Without appropriate support to retain these musicians in the industry, there is a risk that overall music will become less diverse, losing musicians who are outside of the gender binary.



### 13 Which musicians experience low mental wellbeing?



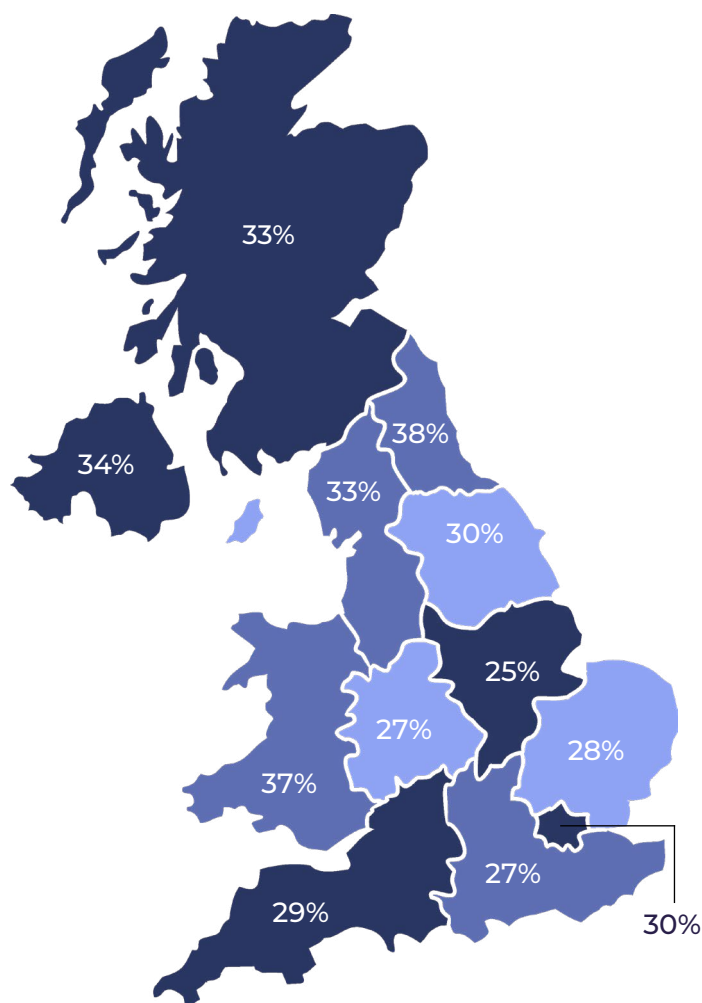
## Region

Musicians in England were least likely to report low mental wellbeing (30%) compared to respondents in other nations: Wales (37%), Northern Ireland (34%) and Scotland (33%).

Within England, the North East region had the highest proportion of respondents with negative mental wellbeing (38%) and the East Midlands had the least musicians reporting negative mental wellbeing (25%).

**“I’ve been restricted in opportunities I can avail of due to my mental health and lack of specific opportunities available where I’m based.”**

Female, age 25, Northern Ireland



## LGBQ+

LGBQ+ musicians are more likely to report low mental wellbeing than heterosexual/straight musicians. While a quarter (28%) of heterosexual/straight musicians report low mental wellbeing, this rose to around a third of gay men (33%) and lesbian/gay women (37%), and to around half of bisexual (47%), queer (49%) and asexual musicians (50%)<sup>3</sup>.

Overall, more than 2 in 5 (43%) of all LGBQ+ musicians reported low mental wellbeing. Reported low mental wellbeing was higher still among those who are not open about their sexuality at work. While just over a third (38%) of LGBQ+ respondents who are open with everyone at every place report low mental wellbeing, this rose to 45% of those who are open with some people at some of the places where they work, and to half (50%) of those who are not open with anyone at work about their sexual orientation.

## Carers

People with caring responsibilities are more likely to report negative mental wellbeing than those without. While only 30% of those with no caring responsibilities reported negative mental wellbeing, this increased to 39% of those who reported being a primary carer for a disabled adult and 36% of those who are primary carers for older people. Amongst primary carers for children, 31% reported low mental wellbeing.

## Ethnicity

Overall, 31% of respondents from all Global Majority backgrounds reported low mental wellbeing, compared to 30% of respondents from British, English, Northern Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and any other white background.





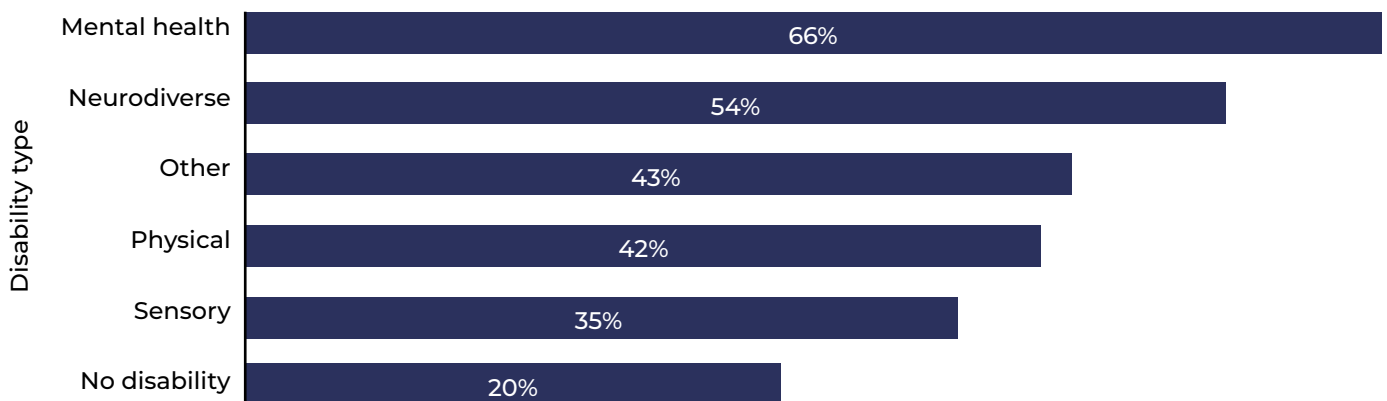
## Disability

Musicians with disabilities are much more likely to report low mental wellbeing than non-disabled musicians. Overall, half (49%) of disabled musicians reported low mental wellbeing, almost 2.5 times as many as the proportion of those with no disability (20%).

**“Unsupported mental health illness. Stigma as an autistic individual working in leadership and creative positions. Poor health and stress due to work environments on tour.”**

Male, age 30, West Midlands

Proportion of musicians reporting low mental wellbeing by disability or long standing impairments or conditions



2.4 Are you disabled or do you have any of these long-standing physical and/or mental health impairments or conditions?



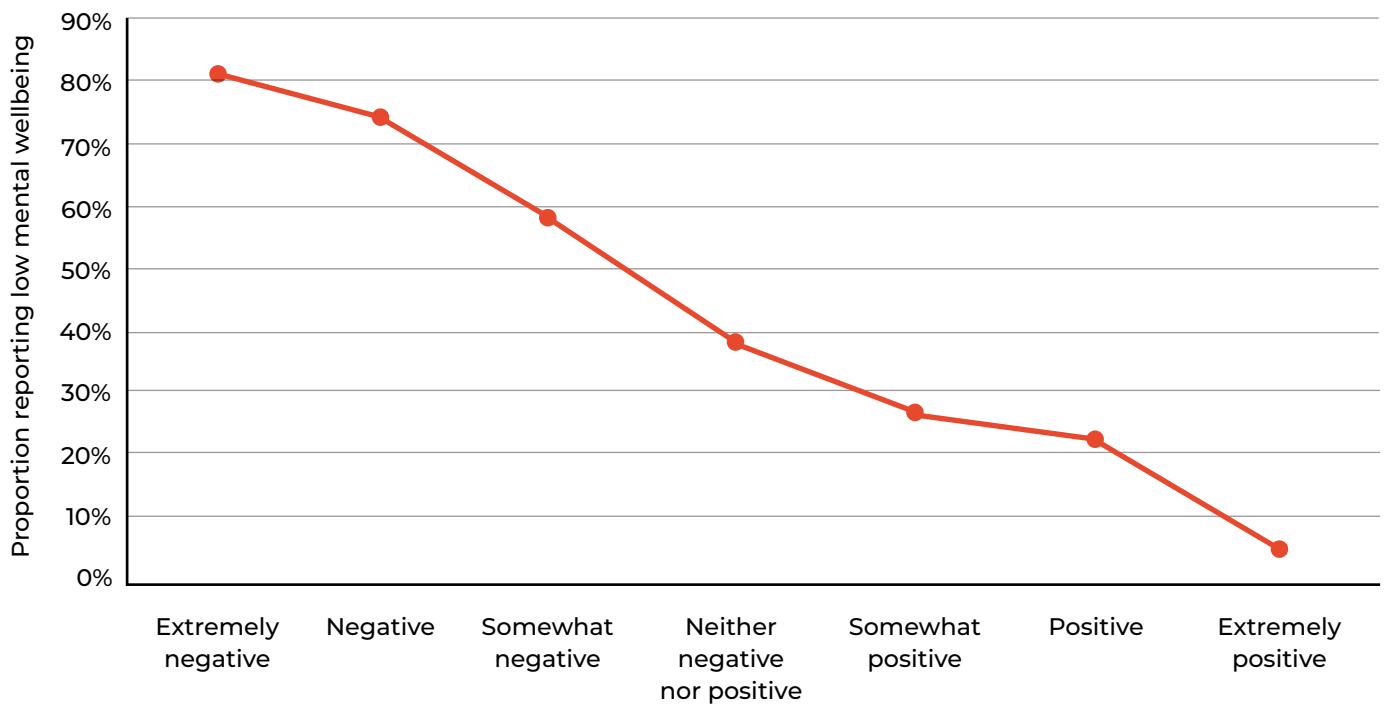
## Low mental wellbeing and physical wellbeing

4 in 5 (80%) people who reported extremely negative physical wellbeing also reported low mental wellbeing. Three quarters (74%) of those reporting negative physical wellbeing, and 3 in 5 (59%) of those reporting somewhat negative physical wellbeing, also reported poor mental wellbeing.

**“If you struggle from physical and mental health issues, as I do, being expected to create full time while working demanding part time jobs is physically exhausting and destructive. I accept the struggled balance that will be normal for the next five years. This is why most people quit, it is so much to expect of a person and a very particular and difficult life to lead. But we love music, so there is no other choice for us.”**

Female, age 27, London

2.5 On a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 is 'Extremely negative' and 7 is 'Extremely positive', how would you say you currently feel about your physical wellbeing?



## Mental wellbeing and music role

Reported mental wellbeing differs by music role with studio/mastering engineers and live sound engineers (38%) and producers (37%) the most likely to report low mental wellbeing. This may be connected to the isolated nature of some of these roles, the environments where such roles are typically based and the pressured nature of the work such roles may typically involve.

**“It’s a very discriminating and not rewarding industry, skills are rarely what actually matters. Too often musicians and sound engineers are not protected from last minute cancellations”**

Male, age 35-44, London

Music role	% reporting negative mental wellbeing
Music teachers and tutors (all)	30%
Performing musician	30%
Recording musician	33%
Music creator	34%
DJ	35%
Producer	37%
Engineer (studio/mastering engineering & live sound)	38%

## Mental wellbeing and genre

Musicians in dance music (35%)<sup>4</sup>, rock and alternative<sup>5</sup> (33%) and UK Rap<sup>6</sup> (33%) genres have higher rates of low mental wellbeing than musicians working in other genres.

**“I think dance music in general needs to be regulated”**

Female, age 45-54, London

Music role	% reporting negative mental wellbeing
Classical	29%
Musical theatre	30%
Jazz & Blues	30%
Pop & RnB	31%
UK rap (all)	33%
Rock & alternative (all)	33%
Dance (all)	35%



# What impacts low mental wellbeing?

## Income and Financial Security

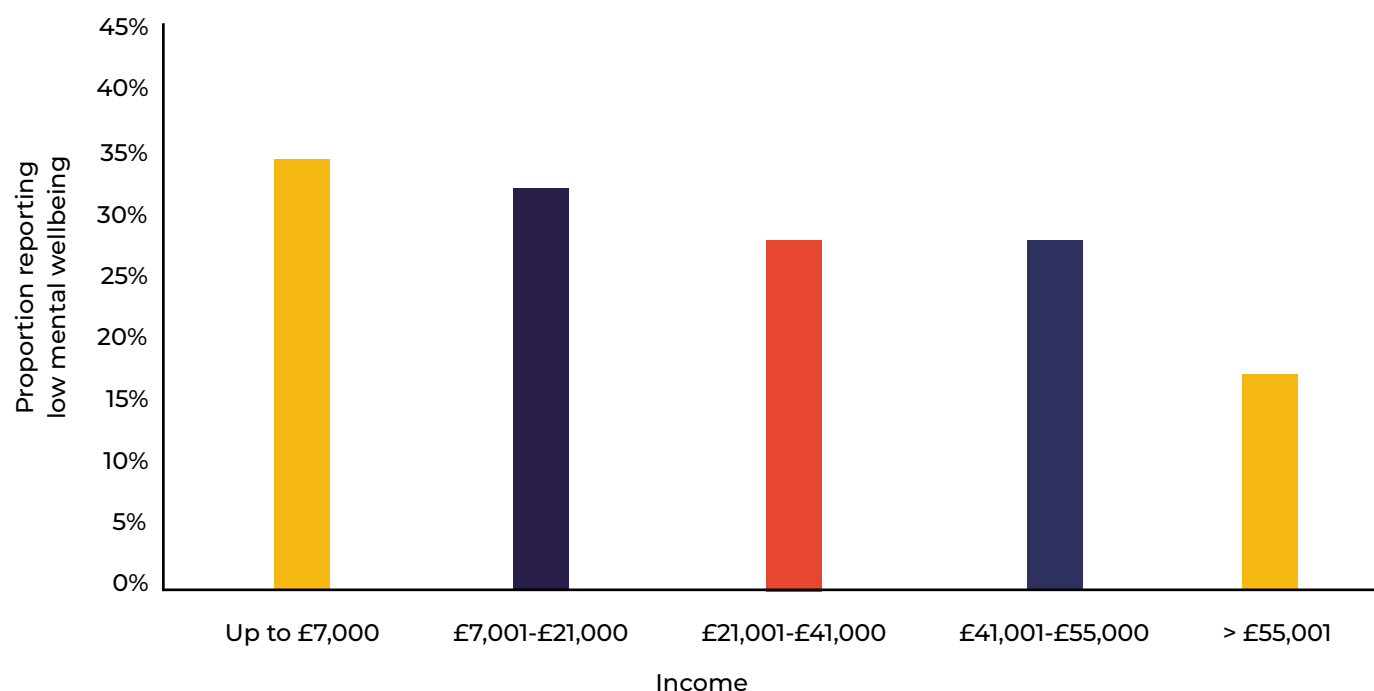
Musicians on the lowest incomes are most likely to report low mental wellbeing, and those earning the highest amounts (equivalent to the top 12% of UK earners<sup>7</sup>) are significantly less likely to report low mental wellbeing.

More than a third (34%) of those earning up to £7,000 each year from music reported low mental wellbeing, compared to 29% of those earning £21,000 to £41,000 each year from music and just a sixth (17%) of those earning more than £55,000 of their annual income from music. Musicians earning less from music are more likely to be juggling other roles to make ends meet and this financial precarity, combined with having less time to make music, may contribute to lower mental wellbeing.

**“To be honest, my career progression would have been much easier if I didn’t suffer mental health difficulties - these stem in part from my socio-economic background. I also have had to spend a lot of time not doing music in order to pay the rent and for food etc.”**

Female, age 47, London

**3.1 How much of your personal annual income, prior to tax being deducted, comes from being a musician?**



## 20 What impacts low mental wellbeing?

More than a third (37%) of musicians reporting low mental wellbeing say they don't earn enough to support themselves or their family, compared to under a quarter (23%) of musicians generally, and overall almost half (48%) of those who don't earn enough to support themselves or their families report low mental wellbeing.

Debt is also more common among musicians with low mental wellbeing, with almost half (47%) reporting being in debt.

Those reporting low mental wellbeing were also less represented among those reporting good financial security. Only 20% of musicians reporting low mental wellbeing say they have enough money left over each month to pay for the things they enjoy, compared to almost a third (30%) of all respondents.

## Finding work as a musician

Musicians with low mental wellbeing were more likely to report finding it difficult to work. Two-fifths (40%) of musicians reporting low mental wellbeing said they found it very hard or quite hard to find work at all distances<sup>8</sup> compared to a quarter (24%) of all respondents.

Further, only a third (36%) of musicians reporting low mental wellbeing say they earn enough to support themselves or their family, compared to 44% of all respondents.

**“I struggled with mental health challenges for some years which affected my ability to work in general and left me in heavy debt. It's now a struggle to prioritise my career when I don't even make enough for financial stability.”**

Male, age 24, London

**“I have taken many jobs over the years but they do not let me take any time off for touring so I end up having to leave eventually.”**

Female, age 25-34, East Midlands





## Other sources of income

Musicians with low mental wellbeing were more likely to report needing to find work outside of music for financial reasons. While almost a quarter of all musicians report this (24%), this rises to 30% among musicians with low mental wellbeing.

While low proportions of musicians overall said that they enjoyed working outside of music, those reporting low mental wellbeing were the least likely to do so. 9% of musicians reporting low mental wellbeing said they enjoyed working outside of music, compared to 10% of musicians overall and 11% of those reporting all other levels of wellbeing.

**“Mental health issues brought about by the difficulty of establishing and maintaining a career in music without needing to do other jobs to survive.”**

Male, age 29, South West

## Career development

94% of musicians reporting low mental wellbeing said they had experienced at least one barrier to career development, compared to 85% of musicians generally. Career barriers experienced by musicians with low wellbeing include:

- Over half (58%) report not being able to make a sustainable income as a career restriction, compared to 44% of all musicians.
- Almost half (47%) reported no clear route for career progression as a career restriction, compared to around a third (38%) of all musicians.
- A third (33%) reported not knowing anyone in the industry as a career restriction, compared to a quarter (25%) of all musicians.

**“The lack of a clear career progression for a songwriter/producer is difficult. It’s hard to know who I should be approaching to find further work, and how best to approach people that may be able to help.”**

Male, age 45-54, North West

## Discrimination

Musicians with low mental wellbeing were more likely to report experiencing discrimination of all kinds, suggesting experiencing discrimination has a negative impact on musicians, and could affect their likelihood of staying in the industry.

Just over a fifth (21%) of musicians with low mental wellbeing report experiencing career restricting discrimination, compared to 14% of musicians overall.







# Next steps

The third Insight Report from the Musicians Census 2023 explores the prevalence of low mental wellbeing and how this affects musicians today..

Almost a third of musicians (30%) self-reported somewhat negative, negative or extremely negative mental wellbeing, and this was higher among groups with particular experiences, demographics and roles within the music industry. In contrast to the significant benefit to mental health that music brings to listeners, musicians themselves are in need of more robust mental health support, particularly in the early stages of their careers if they are to continue making music.

Over twice as many musicians with low mental wellbeing felt it was unlikely they would be working in music in one or five years' time, compared with musicians generally. Alongside this, 40% of musicians with low mental health reported finding it difficult to find work, compared to 24% of musicians generally.

When we consider how low mental wellbeing intersects with gender, sexuality, disability, physical wellbeing, and income, it's clear that diversity in the music industry can be nurtured and developed by focusing on improving mental wellbeing, leading to the development of more sustainable careers that allow musicians to continue to create, develop as artists, and contribute to the music scene in the UK throughout their lives.

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** 112 of respondents stated their gender identity was not the same as their sex assigned at birth. Of these musicians, 70 stated they had low mental wellbeing.
  - 3** Of all respondents, 38 indicated they were asexual; 431 indicated they were bisexual; 232 indicated they were gay men; 125 indicated they were gay women/lesbian; 4465 indicated they were heterosexual/straight; 176 indicated they were queer; 87 indicated they preferred to self-describe; and 313 preferred not to say.
  - 4** Dance music category included all respondents who selected at least one of the following genres as a genre they create in: dance, drum 'n' bass/jungle/dubstep/garage, electronic, house, techno, trance.
  - 5** Rock and alternative category included all respondents who selected at least one of the following genres as a genre they create in: alternative/punk, folk/folk rock, rock, heavy rock.
  - 6** UK Rap category included all respondents who selected at least one of the following genres as a genre they create in: drill/grime, hip hop/rap, reggae/dub..
  - 7** Office for National Statistics, Percentile points from 1 to 99 for total income before and after tax, pre-tax income of £54,600 is equivalent to the 88th percentile of UK earners in 2020/21, the latest available year of data.
  - 8** We asked musicians how easy they found it to find work at the following distances (i) Up to 10 miles from where I live (ii) Between 10 to 50 miles from where I live (iii) In the UK, more than 50 miles from where I live (iv) Internationally, results exclude those who responded 'not applicable'.
- 