

# Study finds 1.3 million disabled workers trapped in insecure work in UK

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New research by the Work Foundation at Lancaster University reveals 1.3 million disabled workers are trapped in severely insecure work in the U.K.—and 430,000 say they want to work more hours.

Disabled workers are 1.5 times more likely to be in severely insecure work compared to their non-disabled peers and are more likely to be in "involuntary temporary work"—meaning they would prefer to be on permanent contracts.

The new report is based on the latest wave of analysis from the Work Foundation's [UK Insecure Work Index](#), first launched last year give a clear picture of the stability of the labor market. Defining "insecure work" as roles that have unpredictable pay, no guarantee of set hours or future work, and no access to employment rights and protections; the think tank uses a single measure to reflect these three dimensions, based on analysis of 20 years' of ONS Labor Force data.

Its most recent analysis hones in on the specific experiences of disabled workers, based on data captured in the ONS Labor Force Survey April—June 2022.

Ben Harrison, Director of the Work Foundation, said, "The U.K. economy is under pressure. Our labor market continues to hold record numbers of vacancies and the numbers of workers on long-term sick is at record levels—yet structural inequalities remain, stopping many groups of workers from accessing the good quality work they deserve.

"While the [Government's pledge](#) back in 2017 to get 'one million more [disabled people](#) back into work within a decade' may have been achieved five years early—research shows the strategy of pushing them into 'any work' rather than quality, secure work risks not only workers' health, but also that of the wider economy.

"Having a bad experience or feeling trapped in severely insecure work can worsen their conditions—or can push them to leave the labor market altogether."

Data shows disabled people are over-represented in lower paid, more precarious work and are more likely to work part-time than non-disabled workers. While a shorter working week may be a personal choice to help manage [health conditions](#) or caring responsibilities for some, 10% of disabled workers (430,000) say they would like to work more hours, compared to 7% of non-disabled workers.

Analysis also reveals:

- Disabled workers are less likely to be with the same employer for more than two years, which means they are missing out on key rights and protections, such as access to redundancy pay
- Disabled workers are more likely to be self-employed because of the barriers they face in finding employment. 13% of disabled people (450,000) are self-employed compared to 9% of non-disabled people and are less likely to access the rights and protections that come with contracted employment
- Disabled women face a dual disadvantage and are approximately 2.2 times more likely to be in severely insecure work than disabled men
- Disabled workers from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to be in severely insecure work relative to white disabled workers (29% vs. 26%)
- One in three autistic workers (38%) and a quarter of people with mental health conditions (28%) are in severely insecure work, compared to 20% with other disabilities and conditions
- Disabled workers are less likely to have access to flexible working arrangements as they are more likely to be in "routine and semi-routine occupations" (e.g. cashiers, bricklayers and waiters) where flexible working is less common. Disabled workers are less likely to be in professional and managerial work.

Nearly a quarter of working adults are now disabled (23%) and over the

last ten years, the employment rate for disabled people has been approximately 30 percentage points lower than non-disabled people.

"[Recent research](#) suggests a disabled household needs an additional £1,122 a month to have the same standard as living as a non-disabled household—so the cost-of-living crisis is disproportionately impacting disabled workers," Ben Harrison continues.

"Supporting those with long term health conditions who want to work more hours to do so could provide a significant boost to the labor market, but the current support from Government and employers is failing them—including those on long-term sick.

"We need refreshed, robust policies in place to protect disabled [workers'](#) employment rights—and ensure the right levels of support in place from day one of a person entering a workplace. A better, more in-depth understanding of what is needed to support those on long-term sick back into work is also vital if we are to see any meaningful change."

Fazilet Hadi, Head of Policy at Disability Rights UK, said, "Disabled people are an asset to the workplace. Our lived experience often makes us fiercely driven, agile and adept problem solvers, with great interpersonal skills, and incisive insight into the commercial habits of the U.K.'s disabled population. A fifth of the people in the U.K. are disabled. The purple pound in the U.K. is worth £2.74 billion. As long as employers continue to erroneously see us as a liability to the sick leave bill rather than strong assets in a diverse workforce, they are missing out on improved working culture and practices, diverse market growth and ultimately, profit."

The Work Foundation calls for an ambitious and transformative approach from Government and employers to tackle the disability insecurity gap and genuinely overcome structural inequalities in the labor

market.

The report's recommendations include the introduction of wide-spread flexibility in roles; an Employment Bill to shift the onus onto organizations to prove a worker is not eligible for employment rights and protections; to protect disabled benefit claimants from conditionality for the first six months and include those with short-term health conditions.

**More information:** The Disability Gap: Insecure work in the UK:  
[www.lancaster.ac.uk/work-found...ecure-work-in-the-uk](http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/work-found...ecure-work-in-the-uk)

Provided by Lancaster University

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