

# There are many reasons disabled people can't just work from home: Cutting benefits won't fix the wider problems

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As part of the UK government's latest economic plan, disabled people

may [have to look](#) for jobs they can do from home or face cuts to their benefits. Previously, disabled people with limited ability to work may have received benefits without being required to look for work. Now, Laura Trott, chief secretary to the Treasury, has said that disabled people not in work must "do their duty" and work from home.

While more disabled people have found work over the past decade (mirroring more general increases in employment), there remains a significant employment gap. In [January to March 2023](#), 53.7% of disabled people were in employment compared with 82.7% of non-disabled people.

Getting more disabled people into work just isn't that simple. A stick-only approach is likely to make things worse for tens of thousands of people, whose incomes, physical and [mental health](#) are already affected more by the [cost of living crisis](#).

Work is not a tap that can simply be turned on or off. There are many factors already making it difficult for disabled people to find good jobs. Inflexible working practices, discrimination and a lack of [reasonable adjustments](#), such as providing specialized equipment, are barriers that will not be fixed by requiring people to work from home.

## **There aren't enough remote jobs**

[Our recent study](#) found that disabled people greatly valued having access to hybrid and remote working. And 80% regarded having access to remote working as essential or very important factors when looking for a new job. Disabled women, caregivers and people with multiple impairments in particular considered remote working as essential.

As one of our participants said, "I have a quiet and comfortable environment at home. I can concentrate much better and I can rest when

I need to. This has had a major positive impact on my health and confidence in my work. I'm much more productive and have a much more positive attitude about myself and work in general."

But there simply aren't enough remote jobs to go around. A glance at the government's ["find a job" website](#) on the day of the autumn statement showed that only 1,413 out of over 140,000 jobs fit the description of working from home. Most jobs required applicants to work some days on-site.

It is unlikely then that the thousands of disabled people facing sanctions will successfully find remote employment, not least because disabled people are competing with all other workers for these jobs too.

Even before this announcement, the lack of enough fully remote jobs meant disabled people often could not obtain secure jobs with enough flexibility in them, therefore opting into poor quality, insecure jobs, such as zero-hour contract roles. This is why [disabled workers](#) in the UK are 1.5 times more likely to be in severely insecure work than non-disabled workers.

## **Home working is not always viable**

Additionally, just because a job is remote does not mean it is accessible or available to disabled workers.

Lack of access to inclusive education means that disabled [young people](#) tend to have [fewer qualifications](#) than non-disabled peers. Those with a degree are less likely than non-disabled graduates to move into permanent work [appropriate to their qualifications](#).

As a result, disabled people are [over-represented](#) in lower-skilled and lower-paid jobs that cannot be done remotely. These barriers leave many

in a situation in which they are under-qualified for a number of remote working positions, but also unable to work on-site due to the nature of their conditions.

For some people, the home environment is not suitable for remote working. Younger people in lower-paid roles may live in shared accommodation without dedicated office space, a particular problem for workers who need specialist equipment.

Working from home [can be isolating](#), and some disabled people have reported they are concerned that being fully remote means they may lose out on development opportunities, pay and progression due to being less visible than on-site colleagues. This may exacerbate the existing lack of representation for disabled workers at the managerial level, and gives employers less incentive to make accessibility adjustments for on-site disabled workers.

Mandating unemployed disabled people into remote roles could lead to a greater uptake of [poor quality](#), insecure and temporary [jobs](#), with detrimental consequences for their health.

## **What would a better approach look like?**

In our [ongoing study](#), we, along with colleagues Alison Collins, Jacqueline Winstanley and Alice Martin, are researching how employers can design working practices to be inclusive.

Forcing disabled workers into any kind of job will be counterproductive if it undermines health, well-being and job satisfaction. Remote and on-site workers need to have [equal access](#) to development and training opportunities so that remote workers' careers don't stall.

Organizations need to invest in the right technology so that meetings

involving both in-person and remote employees are easier to navigate. And [disabled people](#) who need adapted or specialist equipment to do their job must have that equipment in whichever location they work in.

Threatening people with sanctions is not a sensible approach that addresses any of these issues, and is certainly not as simple as the government suggests. And telling vulnerable people to "do their duty" without significant investment in making work actually accessible is insidious language that undermines the possibility of an inclusive society.

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