

# Disability statistics

## 1.1 Educational outcomes and experiences

### Attainment at school

Most school data records whether children and young people have identified special educational needs (SEN), rather than a disability as such. SEN and disability are not coterminous; some children with SEN may not be disabled, and some disabled children may not have SEN.

This section mostly concentrates on children and young people with identified SEN, compared to their peers with no identified SEN.

#### Key stage two (end of primary school)

At the end of primary education, pupils take national curriculum assessments, commonly known as SATs. The Department for Education (DfE) reports on the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standards in all of English reading, writing and maths. Results over time on this measure, by SEN status, are in the table below.

Children receiving SEN support will usually have less complex needs, whilst those with education, health and care (EHC) plans will have more complex needs.

#### % meeting expected standard in reading, writing and maths England, end of key stage two

	SEN support	EHC plan	No SEN
2017/18	24%	9%	74%
2018/19	25%	9%	74%
2019/20	..	..	..
2020/21	..	..	..
2021/22	21%	7%	69%
2022/23	24%	8%	70%
2023/24	26%	9%	71%

Notes:

Data is not available for 2020 and 2021 as assessments were cancelled in these years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Figures for 2024 are based on provisional data. Figures for other years are based on final data.

State-funded schools

Source: Department for Education, [Key stage two statistics: 2023/24 academic year](#), 10 September 2024, [custom table](#)

## Key stage four (GCSE phase)

At key stage four, the DfE publishes a range of performance measures by pupil characteristics. Attainment 8 is a composite measure which awards scores based on pupil's performance across 8 subject areas. The maximum attainment 8 score is 90. A GCSE pass at grade four is considered a standard pass, and a 5, a strong pass. Attainment is lower for pupils with identified SEN on all three measures shown in the table below.

<b>Attainment at the end of key stage four (GCSE phase), by SEN status</b>									
State-funded schools in England									
	Attainment 8 score			Grades 4+ in English and maths GCSEs			Grade 5+ in English and maths GCSEs		
	SEN		No SEN	SEN		No SEN	SEN		No SEN
	support	EHC plan		support	EHC plan		support	EHC plan	
2018/19	32.6	13.7	49.9	32.3%	11.1%	71.0%	16.8%	5.5%	48.2%
2019/20	36.4	15.2	53.7	39.9%	14.1%	78.0%	20.5%	6.5%	55.8%
2020/21	36.7	15.7	54.5	42.1%	15.8%	79.0%	22.2%	7.8%	58.0%
2021/22	34.9	14.3	52.5	39.1%	13.5%	75.8%	22.5%	7.0%	55.8%
2022/23	33.3	14	50	36.9%	13.0%	72.1%	20.7%	6.9%	51.0%
2023/24	33.1	14.2	49.8	37.7%	13.0%	72.2%	21.6%	7.0%	51.9%

### Notes:

Data in 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021 is not comparable with data for years prior (or after) because grades were awarded more generously in these years owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figures for 2024 are based on provisional data. Figures for other years are based on final data.

State-funded schools

Source:

Department for Education, [Key stage four statistics: 2023/24 academic year](#), 5 December 2024, [custom table](#)

## School absence

The DfE publishes breakdowns of school absence rates by SEN status. The latest data is for the autumn and spring terms of the 2023/24 academic year.

The overall absence rate is the proportion of all sessions missed, on average, by pupils who share a particular characteristic.

Persistent absentees are those who miss 10% or more of possible sessions. The table below shows this data by SEN status. Overall absence rates are higher for pupils with identified SEN, as is the chance of being persistently absent.

## School absence by SEN status

Autumn and Spring term combined, each academic year

	Overall absence rate			% of persistent absentees		
	SEN support	EHC plan	No identified SEN	SEN support	EHC plan	No identified SEN
	2016/17	6.2%	8.2%	4.2%	17.4%	23.7%
2017/18	6.5%	8.7%	4.4%	18.4%	25.5%	9.8%
2018/19	6.3%	8.6%	4.1%	17.2%	24.3%	8.7%
2019/20	..	..	..	..	..	..
2020/21	5.8%	14.6%	3.3%	16.2%	42.2%	7.7%
2021/22	9.7%	12.1%	6.8%	31.2%	36.6%	19.9%
2022/23	10.1%	12.4%	6.5%	30.8%	36.3%	18.5%
2023/24	10.0%	12.5%	6.1%	28.9%	34.8%	16.2%

### Notes:

Data not collected in 2019/20 owing to coronavirus pandemic and school closures

State-funded schools in England

Source: Department for Education, [Autumn and spring term 2023/24, Pupil absence in schools in England](#), published October 2024, [custom table](#)

## Higher education participation, continuation rates and type of course studied

Information on disabled people's participation in, and experiences of, higher education can be found in section two of the library briefing paper, [Equality of access and outcomes in higher education in England](#).

## 1.2 Economic activity of disabled people

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes quarterly statistics on the labour market status of disabled people using data from the Labour Force Survey. All of the statistics in this section have been taken from this data unless marked otherwise.

The ONS did not publish these statistics in November 2023 as there were concerns over their reliability due to falling response rates in the Labour Force Survey.

In February 2024, the ONS reintroduced Labour Force Survey estimates, which also included a population reweighting for previously published data. Data has only been reweighted back to July to September 2022, meaning there is a break in the data for the period before and after this quarter. Data from before July to September 2022 is therefore not directly comparable with data from after July to September 2022.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the Library briefing [UK Labour Market Statistics](#) for more information.

This section provides the statistics that have been published by the ONS, but these statistics should be treated with more caution than usual.

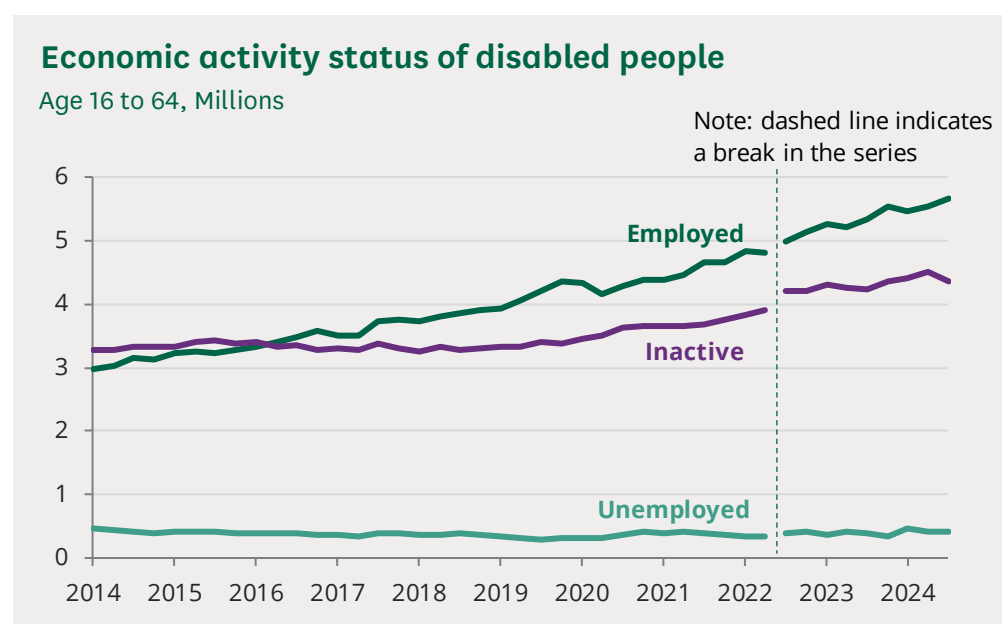
## Latest statistics on economic activity

In November 2024, the ONS published statistics up to July to September 2024.

In July to September 2024, 10.44 million people of working age (16 to 64) reported that they were disabled, which is 25% of the working age population.<sup>2</sup> This is an increase of 495,000 from the year before. Of these:<sup>3</sup>

- 5.67 million were in employment, an increase of 350,000 from a year previously.
- 409,000 were unemployed, an increase of 22,000 from a year previously.
- 4.35 million were economically inactive (meaning they were not in work and not looking for work), an increase of 122,000 from a year before.

The chart below shows changes in the economic status of disabled people from 2013 to 2024.



Source: ONS, [A08: Labour market status of disabled people](#)

Disabled people were considerably more likely than those who were not disabled to be economically inactive.

The economic inactivity rate for disabled people was 41.7%, which compared with a rate of 14.7% for those who were not disabled. Despite the increase in the number of disabled people who were inactive in the year to July to September 2024, the inactivity rate for disabled people decreased from 42.6% from a year previously. This was because the increase in economically

<sup>2</sup> All figures in this briefing are for people aged 16 to 64 unless stated otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> Office for National Statistics (ONS), [A08: Labour market status of disabled people](#), 15 August 2023

active disabled people was larger than the increase in economically inactive disabled people.

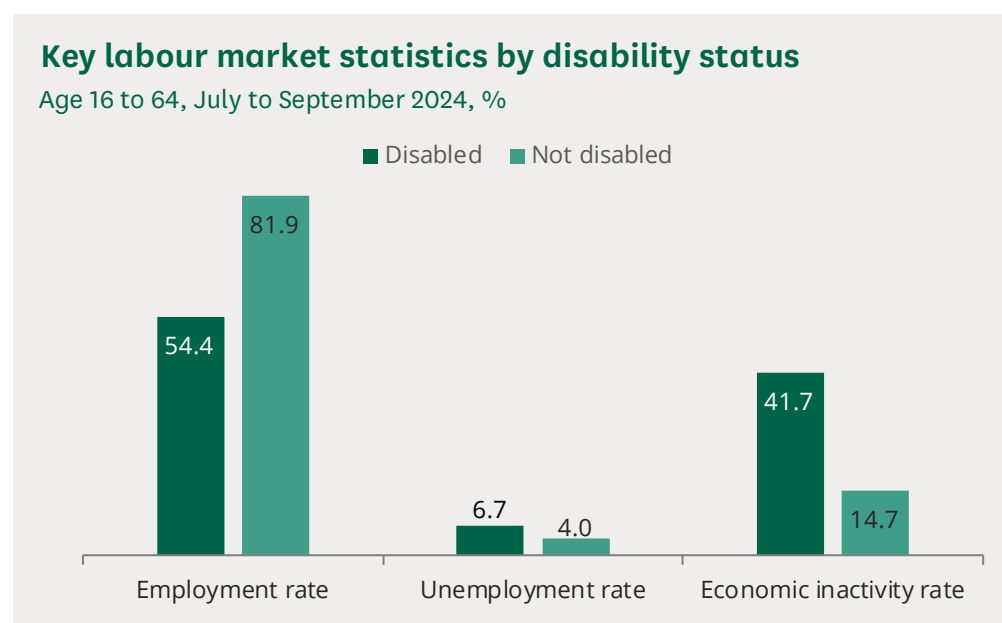
The unemployment rate for disabled people was 6.7%, which was similar to a year previously. This compared with an unemployment rate of 4.0% for people who were not disabled.

The high rate of economic inactivity, alongside a higher unemployment rate, explains why disabled people have a low employment rate.

The employment rate for disabled people was 54.4%, which was up from 53.5% a year previously. The employment rate for people who were not disabled was 81.9%, up slightly from 81.8%.

This means that, in July to September 2024, disabled people had an employment rate that was 27.5 percentage points lower than that of people who were not disabled. This difference is referred to as the disability employment gap. See section 1.3 of this briefing for more on the disability employment gap.

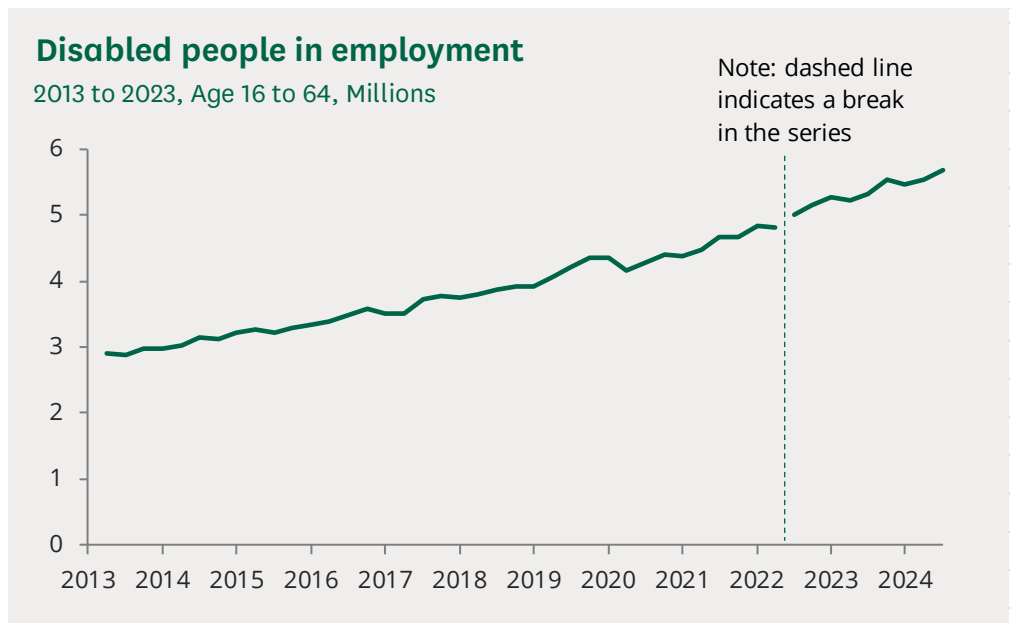
The chart below compares the employment, unemployment and inactivity rates in July to September 2024 for disabled people and people who were not disabled.



Source: ONS, [A08: Labour market status of disabled people](#)

## Employment trends since 2013

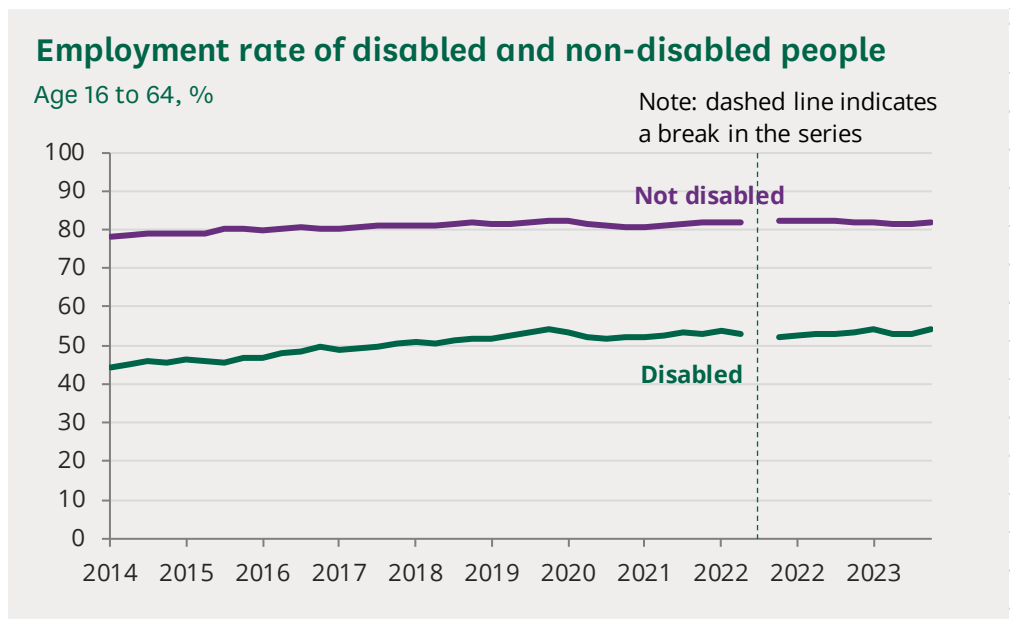
The number of disabled people who are in employment has been increasing since 2013, as shown in the chart below.



Source: ONS, [A08: Labour market status of disabled people](#)

Between July to September 2013 and July to September 2024, the number of disabled people in employment increased by around 2.8 million. During this period, the total number of disabled people aged 16 to 64 increased by around 3.8 million.

Over the same period, the proportion of disabled people who were in employment also increased, from 43.4% in July to September 2013 to 54.4% in July to September 2024. However, although the rate rose gradually up to the end of 2019, it has since remained at a similar level, as shown in the chart below.



Source: ONS, [A08: Labour market status of disabled people](#)

## Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

There has been a large increase in the number of working-age disabled people since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. There have also been increases in the numbers of disabled people who are employed and who are economically inactive.

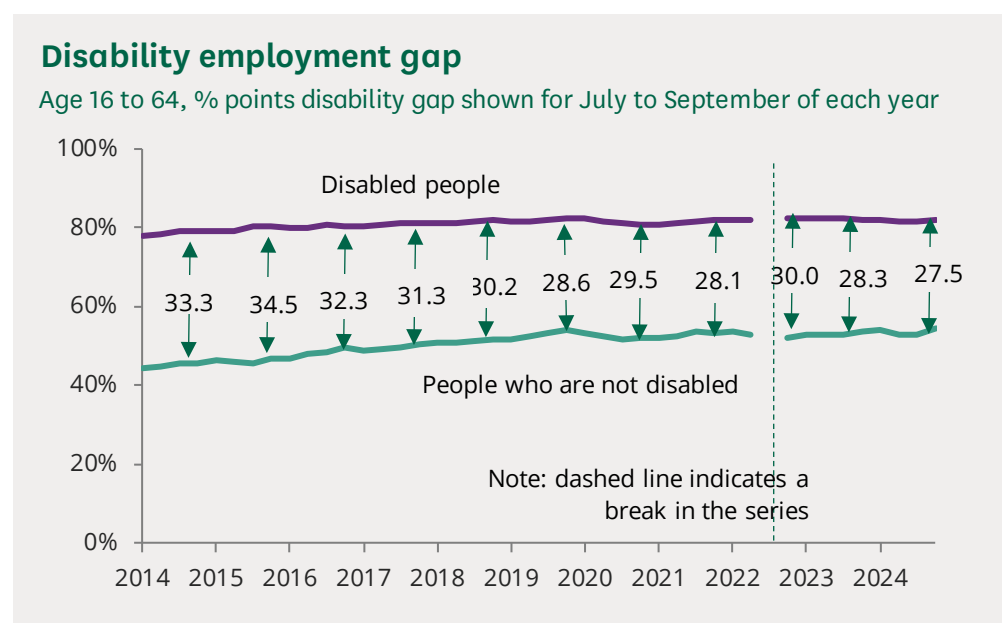
The number of disabled people aged between 16 and 64 increased by around 2.5 million between July to September 2019 and July to September 2024, while the number of disabled people in employment increased by around 1.5 million. The increase in the number who are economically inactive increased by close to 1 million.

## Disability employment gap

The 'disability employment gap' is the difference in the employment rate of disabled people and people who are not disabled. In July to September 2024, the employment rate for disabled people was 54.4% and the rate for people who were not disabled was 81.9%, meaning that the gap was 27.5 percentage points.

Between July to September 2013 and July to September 2019, the disability employment gap steadily narrowed, and it reduced by 5.9 percentage points over this period. This was because the employment rate for disabled people had been rising faster than the employment rate for people who were not disabled.

However, in the period between 2019 and 2024 the gap remained at a similar level, and in July to September 2024 the gap was only slightly smaller than the gap in July to September 2019. This is shown in the chart below.



Source: ONS, [A08: Labour market status of disabled people](#)

## 1.3 Barriers to employment

Scope have outlined some of the barriers that disabled people face when applying for and getting into work.<sup>4</sup> These include:

- Employers can have biases or negative attitudes about hiring disabled people.
- Disabled people are less likely to get an interview. They report that only half of disabled applicants get an interview, compared to two thirds of non-disabled applicants.
- Employment barriers that make it harder to apply for a job or attend an interview, such as a lack of accessible entrances at interview venues, inaccessible interview tests and formats, or jobs being posted on platforms that are not compatible with assistive technology.
- Due to the negative attitudes that disabled people have encountered, this can mean that some disabled people believe an employer will not take them on because of their impairment. Scope found that almost half of disabled people worry about talking to their employer about their impairment, which may mean they do not get the support they require.

### Equality Act 2010 protections

#### Discrimination based on protected characteristics

Section 4 of the Equality Act 2010 defines disability as a ‘protected characteristic’, which means it is within the scope of equality law.<sup>5</sup> A person has this protected characteristic if:

- they have a physical or mental impairment, and
- the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. This definition covers a variety of conditions, including impairments that are not visibility obvious and ones that recur sporadically.<sup>6</sup>

In some cases a condition is automatically deemed to be a disability under the 2010 Act.<sup>7</sup>

#### Discrimination at work and in recruitment

The Equality Act 2010 identifies two types of discrimination: direct and indirect.

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<sup>4</sup> Scope for business, [Understanding the challenges of disabled jobseekers](#), 6 February 2023

<sup>5</sup> [Equality Act 2010](#), s 4

<sup>6</sup> [Equality Act 2010](#), s 6

<sup>7</sup> The Equality Act 2010 (Disability) Regulations 2010 SI 2010/2128, [reg 7](#)



Direct discrimination occurs when a person, because of a protected characteristic, treats another less favourably than they would treat those without the characteristic.<sup>8</sup>

Indirect discrimination occurs when a person applies a “provision, criterion or practice” which, although applied to persons with different protected characteristics puts one group of persons at a particular disadvantage.<sup>9</sup>

Indirect discrimination (and direct discrimination based on age only) may be lawful if shown to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.<sup>10</sup>

An employer must not directly or indirectly discriminate against prospective employees:

- in the arrangements they make for deciding whom to offer employment;
- as to the terms on which they offers the person employment; or
- by not offering that person employment.

An employer must not directly or indirectly discriminate against a current employee:

- as to the terms of employment;
- in the way they afford access to opportunities for promotion, transfer or training or for receiving any other benefit, facility or service;
- by dismissing them; or
- by subjecting them to any other detriment.<sup>11</sup>

Section 15 of the Equality Act 2010 prohibits treating a disabled worker unfavourably because of something arising in consequence of their disability (rather than simply for having a disability).<sup>12</sup> For example, dismissing a worker with multiple sclerosis for taking extended disability-related sick leave.

An employer does not contravene this prohibition if they can show that they did not know, and could not reasonably have been expected to know, that the employee had the disability. Nor do they contravene it if they can show that the treatment was a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.<sup>13</sup>

### Reasonable adjustments

Broadly, an employer is under a statutory duty to take such steps as are reasonable in the circumstances to:

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<sup>8</sup> [Equality Act 2010](#), s 13

<sup>9</sup> [Equality Act 2010](#), s 19

<sup>10</sup> [Equality Act 2010](#), s 19(2)(d)

<sup>11</sup> [Equality Act 2010](#), s 39

<sup>12</sup> [Equality Act 2010](#), s 15

<sup>13</sup> [Equality Act 2010](#), s 15

- avoid putting disabled persons at a substantial disadvantage where a provision, criterion or practice would put them at that disadvantage compared with non-disabled persons;
- remove, alter or provide means of avoiding physical features (e.g. stairs) where that feature puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage compared with non-disabled persons; or
- provide an auxiliary aid where a disabled person would, but for the provision of that aid, be put at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with persons who are not disabled.<sup>14</sup>
- A “substantial” disadvantage is one that is “more than minor or trivial”.<sup>15</sup>

For further information on disability discrimination law, see section 8 of the Library briefing on [Key Employment Rights](#) and the Library briefing [Disability discrimination](#).<sup>16</sup>

## Access to work

The Access to Work scheme was introduced in 1994 and provides support to disabled people in the workplace. Access to Work grants are available to employees and to the self-employed and aim to provide practical and financial support to help disabled people find or stay in work.<sup>17</sup>

Access to Work provision was approved for 67,720 people in 2023/24, which was the highest level of approvals in any financial year since 2007/08.<sup>18</sup> Of the individuals it was approved for, 3,100 reported that their primary medical condition was difficulty in seeing. There are usually around 3,000 approvals with this primary medical condition every year.

Access to Work provision includes elements such as:

- Communication support for interviews
- Special aids and equipment
- Adaptations to premises and vehicles
- Help with travel costs
- Support workers
- Mental health support<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Equality Act 2010, sections 20-21 & Schedule 8

<sup>15</sup> [Equality Act 2010](#), section 212

<sup>16</sup> Commons Library research briefing CBP-7245, [Key Employment Rights](#); CBP-9061, [Disability discrimination](#), 4 January 2023

<sup>17</sup> GOV.UK, [Access to Work: get support if you have a disability or health condition](#)

<sup>18</sup> Data for years prior to 2007 is not available due to unreliable data

<sup>19</sup> DWP, [Access to Work Statistics](#), 31 October 2024, table 1

The most common element that was approved was a support worker, which was approved for just under half of those who had any provision approved.

The maximum annual amount an individual can receive was set at £69,260 from 8 April 2024. This is updated annually every April.<sup>20</sup>

Employers may be expected to pay some of the cost of the elements that are implemented by Access to Work.

### Adjustments to Access to Work

As part of the March 2023 [Transforming Support white paper](#), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) announced it will pilot a new Access to Work “enhanced package”, which will be aimed at disabled people who need more support than the existing scheme can provide.<sup>21</sup>

Two new elements have been tested as part of this expanded “Access to Work Plus” support:

1. An enhanced package of personal support.
2. Support for employers “who are willing to make adjustments to the workplace and/or shape the job roles” to provide employment opportunities for disabled people who have high in-work support needs.<sup>22</sup>

The pilot of this new package was expected to last for up to 12 months.

Since summer 2021, the DWP has begun a series of adjustment passport trials. These passports provide information on a disabled person’s working requirements and the workplace support and adjustments that they require. The passport can then be shared with employers, with the aim of reducing the time it takes to obtain an Access to Work award.<sup>23</sup>

The roll-out of a health adjustment passport, which is intended to support disabled jobseekers, was completed by May 2022.<sup>24</sup>

### Criticism of the Access to Work scheme

In the consultation before the Transforming Support white paper, respondents said the Access to Work scheme is helpful, but that not enough people know about it and that the application process can be complex.<sup>25</sup>

Similar criticisms about a lack of awareness of the scheme and a difficult application process were provided in the evidence for the Work and Pensions Committee’s [Disability employment gap inquiry](#).<sup>26</sup> The committee called on

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<sup>20</sup> DWP, [Access to Work factsheet for customers](#), 10 April 2023

<sup>21</sup> DWP, [Transforming Support: The Health and Disability White Paper](#), 15 March 2023

<sup>22</sup> PQ 168044 [on [Employment: Chronic Illnesses and Disability](#)] 17 March 2023

<sup>23</sup> DWP, [Transforming Support: The Health and Disability White Paper](#), 15 March 2023

<sup>24</sup> DWP, [Health Adjustment Passport](#), 23 December 2022

<sup>25</sup> DWP, [Transforming Support: The Health and Disability White Paper](#), 15 March 2023

<sup>26</sup> Work and Pensions Committee, [Disability Employment Gap](#), 30 July 2021

the DWP to launch a marketing campaign targeted at employers and disabled people who are in, or applying for, work. It also said that the “digital transformation” of the application process was long overdue.<sup>27</sup>

The DWP reported in May 2024 that Access to Work grants could now be applied for online.<sup>28</sup>

### Outstanding applications

There has been a large increase in the number of people waiting for Access to Work assessments in recent months.

In October 2024 the government said that there are 55,500 applications outstanding nationally.<sup>29</sup>

Mims Davies, the then Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, reported there were 36,721 applications outstanding on 7 May 2024.<sup>30</sup> This was an increase from 26,924 applications reported as of February 2024 and 21,780 reported as of September 2023.<sup>31 32</sup>

Mims Davies also said that the average timescale for an application in April 2024 was 43.9 days.<sup>33</sup>

The government has said it will look to reduce waiting times for Access to Work applications by increasing the number of staff processing claims and by prioritising applications from customers who are about to start a job.<sup>34</sup>

## 1.4 Impact on disabled people

### Disability and mental health

#### Wellbeing

According to [ONS data](#), wellbeing among disabled people was generally lower and anxiety higher than among non-disabled people. The chart below shows that overall scores of happiness, feeling life was worthwhile, and life satisfaction were about 1 point lower for disabled than non-disabled persons (self-reported scores from 1 to 10). Disabled people also reported higher levels of anxiety than non-disabled respondents.

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<sup>27</sup> Work and Pensions Committee, [Disability Employment Gap](#), 30 July 2021

<sup>28</sup> DWP, [DWP's Access to Work applications go digital](#), 8 May 2024

<sup>29</sup> [PQ 6749](#), 14 October 2024

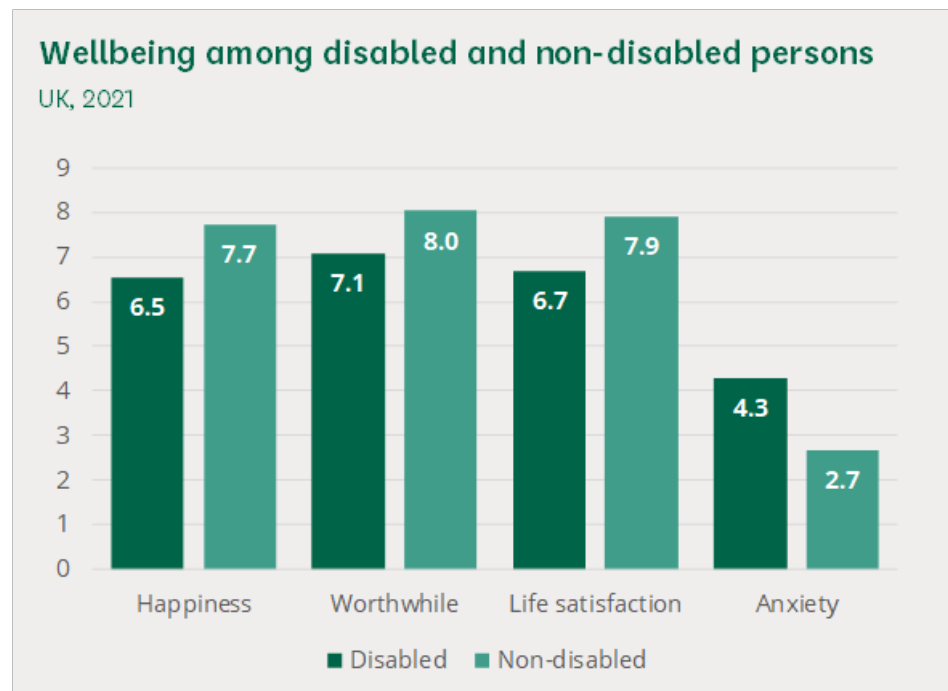
<sup>30</sup> [HC Deb 13 May 2024](#)

<sup>31</sup> [PQ 12720](#), 8 February 2024

<sup>32</sup> [PQ 197834](#), 11 September 2023

<sup>33</sup> [HC Deb 13 May 2024](#)

<sup>34</sup> [PQ 9705](#), 23 October 2024



Source: ONS, [Disability, well-being and loneliness](#), UK: 2019

## Treatment

Around one in seven of those referred to [talking therapies](#) in 2022/23 reported having a disability. They were less likely to experience improvement after therapy (62% compared with 68% of those reporting no disability) and less likely to recover from their mental health condition (40% compared with 51% of those reporting no disability).

Research from the [Office for National Statistics](#), covering 2017/18, found that people with disabilities are underrepresented in talking therapies treatment.

For more information around disability and mental health, see the Library's briefing papers on [UK disability statistics](#) and [mental health statistics](#).

## Poverty

Poverty rates are higher among families where at least one member is disabled, compared to families where no one is disabled. In 2022/23:

- The proportion of people in relative low income before housing costs was 20% for families where someone is disabled, compared to 16% for people living in families where no one is disabled.
- The rate of relative low income after housing costs was 24% for families where someone is disabled, and 20% for those where nobody is disabled.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> DWP, [Households Below Average Income](#), 2022/23, Table 3.12ts

People living in families where someone is disabled comprised around 43% of the population in relative low income before housing costs and 43% after housing costs in 2022/23. This compares to 38% of people across the total UK population living in families where someone is disabled.

However, these figures take no account of the additional living costs that people with disabilities might have. If we could take these costs into account then it is very likely that more disabled people would be counted as living in poverty, but this is complicated by the fact that costs vary widely.

Nevertheless, the measure of income used to calculate the relative low income threshold does include benefits paid as a contribution towards the extra costs of disability: Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Attendance Allowance (AA) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP). Around 10% of the total UK population live in families in receipt of disability benefits. Excluding these benefits from income means more families with a disabled member are counted as being in relative low income.

Using this adjusted measure of income, people living in families where someone is disabled made up around 50% of the total population in relative low income before housing costs and 48% after housing costs.

Poverty rates are higher for children living in families where someone is disabled than for the population as a whole. Based on income excluding disability benefits, the rate of relative low income for children living in families where someone is disabled was 28% before housing costs and 37% after housing costs.

Children in families with a disabled member were more than three times as likely to experience low income and material deprivation (22%) than children in families where no one is disabled (8%).<sup>36</sup>

## Disabled people and housing

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) published a bulletin, [Outcomes for disabled people in the UK: 2021](#), which uses data from the Annual Population Survey to look at housing outcomes for working-age disabled people.

In 2021, disabled people aged 16-64 were less likely to be owner-occupiers than non-disabled people (40% were, compared with 53% of non-disabled people). They were more likely to live in social housing (25%, compared with 8% of non-disabled people).<sup>37</sup>

The [English Housing Survey for 2022/23](#) found that privately-renting households where someone had a long-term illness or disability were more likely to live in poor quality homes. Amongst private renters, 26% of households with a disabled person lived in a home that did not meet the [Decent Homes Standard](#), compared with 19% of households with no disabled

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<sup>36</sup> Note that here, 'low income' is defined as household income of less than 70% instead of less than 60% of median household income.

<sup>37</sup> ONS, [Outcomes for disabled people in the UK: 2021, Section 6](#), 10 February 2022

people. In total across all tenure groups, around 1.4 million households where someone had a long-term illness or disability lived in a non-decent home.<sup>38</sup>

The Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee published a [report from its inquiry on disabled people in the housing sector in May 2024](#). The report highlighted increasing demand for accessible housing in the UK, and cited research from the Equality and Human Rights Commission which found that disabled people are more likely to live in unsuitable accommodation in the private and social rented sectors, compared with people who own their own homes.<sup>39</sup>

## Financial costs of disability

While there is no official data on the financial costs of disability, the charity Scope has attempted to measure the extra costs faced by disabled people.

Scope's analysis for its [Disability Price Tag 2024 report](#) found that in the 2022/23 financial year:

- On average, disabled households (with at least 1 disabled adult or child) needed an additional £1,010 a month to have the same standard of living as non-disabled households. When adjusted to account for inflation, this increased to £1,067 a month in 2023/24 prices.
- On average, the extra cost of disability was equivalent to 67% of household income after housing costs.

The report contains more information on the reasons for increased costs including the potential need for specialist and more expensive foods, the need for warmer homes for certain conditions causing higher energy bills, and the potential inaccessibility of some public transport leading to higher transport costs. It also covers the impact of increased costs, such as levels of debts, the role of grants and support, and some policy recommendations that may be of interest.

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<sup>38</sup> MHCLG, [English Housing Survey 2022 to 2023: housing quality and condition](#), 18 July 2024

<sup>39</sup> Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee, [Disabled people in the housing sector](#), 24 May 2024, Paragraphs 6 to 7