

Disabled and Broken (An answer to: "Why does DAS do what it does?")

Damaging effect on the disabled of the rise in the cost of living

[ITV News reported](#) that families looking after those who are disabled were increasingly worried about being able to pay their bills as the cost of living soared. As essential services and goods like heating, travel, equipment and therapies became more expensive, families living with less and less were being forced to go without essential items.

Unequal impact of the pandemic

The pandemic disproportionately affected the disabled according to the [Office for National Statistics](#) that showed the risk of death was more than 3 times greater for the more-disabled compared with non-disabled.

A report from [Public Health England](#) found the death rate for those with a learning disability was 30 times higher in the 18-34 age group; and according to the [Daily Mirror](#) disabled people made up 6 in 10 of all Covid deaths. Mencap said the government had "failed to protect" a group already experiencing health inequalities.

Poverty and social exclusion

The New Policy Institute in its report [Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2016](#) found, "One aspect of poverty that can be understated in the official statistics is disability. When the extra costs of disability are partially accounted for, **half of all people in poverty are either disabled, or in a household with a disabled person.** Disability and family type are significant in explaining the children still in workless households; 46% of children in workless households have at least one disabled adult in the household."

UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People - Government Civil Society Shadow Report

[This report](#) was put together by Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations led by Inclusion London comments on how well the government is doing to implement the Convention. It references the laws and policies introduced since 2017 when the UK was last examined by the UN Disability Committee. The key findings were:

- The situation for Disabled people has gotten worse.
- The government has taken some positive steps, but has not addressed key problems.
- *The pandemic response discriminated against disabled people and violated their equal right to life.*
- Disability, equality and human rights approaches towards disability have been further undermined.

Homelessness and the disabled

The number of ill and disabled people [becoming homeless](#) surged by 53% in 2019 as local councils found themselves increasingly unable to provide them with support.

According to Government data, councils across the UK reported a 14 per cent rise in households which have at least one resident classed as suffering physical ill health or disability presenting as homeless.

Economically, being disabled is tougher

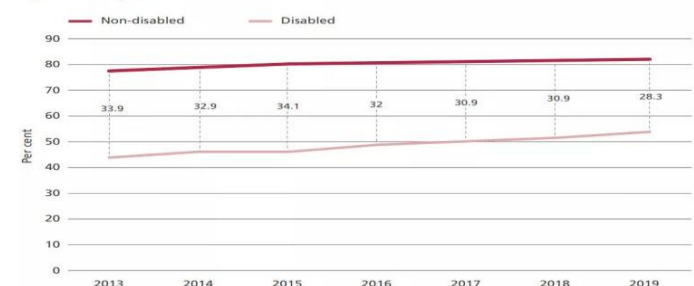
According to [Scope.com](#):

- Life costs £583 more a month if you are disabled.
- The disabled are over twice as likely to be unemployed.

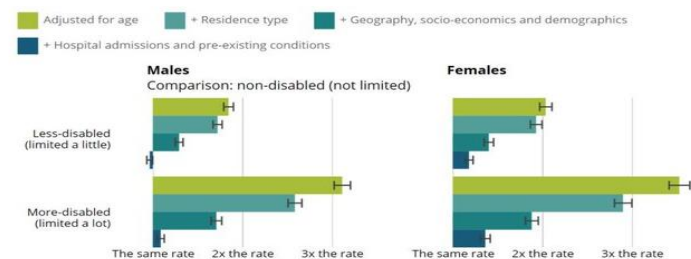
And according to [The Centre for Social Justice](#) there are 7.7 million working age-disabled people in the UK of whom 54% (4.1 million) are in work which compares to an employment rate of 82% non-disabled people meaning there is an employment gap of 28.2 per cent.

The disability employment gap

Figure 1: Disability employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people aged 16-64 years, UK

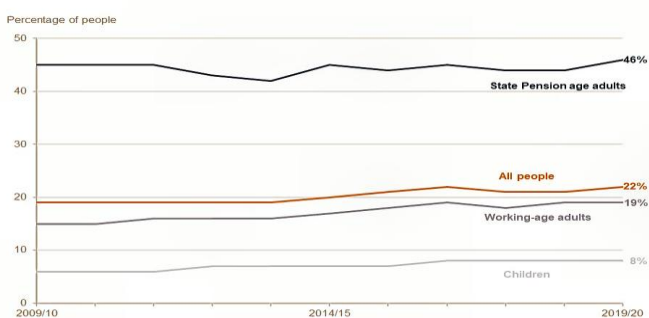


Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Market AOB dataset, Labour Force Survey.



Extent of Disability in the UK

The latest government statistics from the DWP Family Resources Survey show that overall one in five of us (22%) has a disability:



[A person is considered to have a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment that has 'substantial' and 'long term' negative effects on their ability to do normal daily activities. This is the core definition of disability in the Equality Act 2010.]

Being disabled remains a journey less equal

The Equality and Human Rights Commission promotes and enforces the laws that protect our rights to fairness, dignity and respect. In [Being disabled in Britain: A journey less equal](#) it assessed the state of equality and human rights for disabled people in Britain and set out the key areas requiring improvement. The picture emerging from the data is that disabled people were facing more barriers and falling further behind. They still are.

For certain health types, the numbers are even more concerning. Working-age people with learning disabilities in England have an employment rate of just 6% despite the fact that 65% want to work.

According to the [Centre for Social Justice](#) there are 7.7m working-age disabled people in the UK, of whom 53.6% (4.1 million) are in work. This compares to an employment rate of 81.9% for working-age non-disabled people – meaning there is an employment gap of 28.2%.

For certain health types, the numbers are even more concerning. Those with learning disabilities have an employment rate of just 5.9% despite the fact that 65% of them want to work.

The disabled suffer more from domestic abuse

The SafeLives report [Disabled People and Domestic Abuse](#) reported that women and men with a long standing illness or disability were more than twice as likely to experience some form of domestic abuse than those without. Disabled victims also suffer more severe and frequent abuse over longer periods than non-disabled victims.

The data revealed that disabled victims typically endure abuse for an average of 3.3 years before accessing support, compared to 2.3 years for non-disabled victims. Even after receiving support, disabled victims were 8% more likely than non-disabled victims to continue to experience abuse. For one in five (20%) this ongoing abuse was physical and for 7% it was sexual.

The abuse experienced by the disabled is often directly linked to their impairments and is perpetrated by the people they are dependent on for care, such as partners and family members. Disabled victims are much more likely to suffer abuse from a current partner (31%) than non-disabled victims (18%) and they also suffer more severe and frequent abuse over longer periods of time.

£443m spent on fighting disability claimants

Meanwhile, tax payers fund more than [£60m a year fighting disability claims](#) even though 3 out of 4 (or 100% in 2020 and 2021 for DAS) that go to appeal are lost. Tick-box health assessments by giant outsourcing firms lead to many flawed decisions that mean the outlay by the DWP is wasted. The impact on the disabled by forcing them to fight in the courts, however, can be devastating, pushing some into poverty and much increased levels of stress and anxiety.

Two years ago the cost was £44m and that 39% increase is far greater than the 13% increase in applications over the same period. Despite all this, the outsourcing firms in 2020 had their lucrative multi-million-pound contracts extended a further two years to 2023.

This is despite, according to the DWP's own report [Fraud and Error in the Benefit System](#), fraud overpayments for the other benefits it controls are in the range 2.2-4.7% whereas the rate for Personal Independence Payments is only 1.2%.

Research carried out by Scope and reported by [ITV News](#) found that £200m of the total expenditure of £443.5m between 2013 and 2021 was spent resisting genuine cases, where the initial rejection was later overturned. Altogether, more than 1.2 million decisions concerning PIP and ESA payments were found to be wrong.

Two whistle-blowers who both worked as PIP assessors in 2016 and 2020 claimed the system was to blame, arguing it was *"not designed to help disabled people but to try to block them from getting benefits"*. Both said they were:

- ordered by managers to downgrade the points they wanted to award to claimants;
- told to mark people down if arriving at interview well-kempt – with neatly brushed hair or clean-shaven; and
- asked to assess people with conditions for which they had little or no specialist knowledge.

DWP's own report on how benefit claimants are unable to afford food was suppressed

The [Daily Mirror](#) reported on the DWP's refusal to publish its own report that admitted its applicants are often unable to meet essential day-to-day living needs, such as heating their house or buying food. Ministers refused to reveal this damning 80-page report for more than a year until a committee of MPs demanded it from the research firm that carried it out. It found some of the poorest claimants – those in low-paid jobs, with unmanageable debt, or out-of-work households whose only income came from the welfare system *"were often unable to meet essential day-to-day living needs, such as heating their house or buying food"*. These poorer benefit claimants with children were sometimes led to *"limit or stop spending on their health"*.

Anastasia Berry of the MS Society said: *"Despite the DWP's relentless attempts to bury this research, we can finally see what they've been so desperate to hide. It has uncovered the inadequacy of these benefits for many disabled people. It shows some are struggling to pay for essential day-to-day expenses, such as food, heating and medications. The DWP's failed cover-up of this damning research is just the latest example of their disregard for disabled people. For years, disabled people have been subject to a benefits system which is stressful, confusing, and fails to provide the basic support they need. Now, with the cost of living crisis erupting, many are reaching breaking point."*



For 37 years DAS has been working at the heart of the East Suffolk community providing free, impartial advice, advocacy and crisis support and our Listening Service to the disabled and their carers.

It is our mission to build confidence, enabling those who live with disabilities to gain the same rights and quality of life opportunities as others.

das
disability advice service
(East Suffolk)

Free independent disability advice
www.daseastsuffolk.org