



GMB Disabled Workers

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Despite the duty for employers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled workers having been in force for almost a quarter of a century, many disabled workers still face a daily battle with bosses for the basic adjustments they need to do their job.

Many disabled workers experience significant barriers and discrimination to getting and being able to stay in work due to poorly written job adverts, non-inclusive interview processes, poor progression and development opportunities, discrimination and even violence in the workplace.

A recent TUC report showed that disabled workers often face double discrimination. Not only are disabled people less likely to be in a paid job but disabled workers in paid employment still earn substantially less than their non-disabled peers.

What are some of the issues that disabled workers face in the workplace?

Recruitment Process

Disabled workers often face discrimination before they get in to the workplace, with significant barriers to getting work or in gaining a promotion through application processes that are not accessible, interview processes which are not inclusive of disabled workers' needs and employers lacking understanding and confidence of what adjustments could be made.

Prejudice

Disabled workers face prejudice before even getting a chance to show that they can do the job. Almost a quarter of UK employers say they would be less likely to hire someone with a disability, and 60 per cent of those reported concerns that a disabled person would not be able to do the job. Worse still of those surveyed, around one in five had their job offer withdrawn because of their disability.

Pay

The disability pay gap has a huge impact on the financial stress experienced by disabled workers. Disabled workers face a pay gap of 15.5 per cent, earning £1.65 less an hour on average or around £3,003 less a year than non-disabled workers.

Reasonable Adjustments

Many employers fail to carry out their legal duty to make – and keep in place – the reasonable adjustments their disabled staff need to do their jobs. These adjustments could include providing specially adapted equipment (like a chair, desk or computer), temporarily changing the duties of the job, changing break times or working patterns, or allowing flexible working or time off for medical appointments. This is a particular issue for disabled workers when changing line managers or when adjustments are taken away without the consent of the worker.

Sexual Harrasment

We know that disabled people report significantly higher levels of sexual harassment than non-disabled people, with disabled women and girls facing levels of sexual harassment and experiencing gender-based violence, discrimination and stigma at disproportionately higher rates.

Public Sector & Social Security Cuts

GMB members report that, while large employers in the private and public sectors tend to talk a good game on inclusion, disabled workers are often the first to be targeted for redundancy

or capability proceedings.

1.5 million disabled people live in relative poverty due to cuts to public services, benefits and lack of accessible job opportunities. Universal Credit and PIP is an issue which has a huge, cruel and disproportionate impact on disabled people's health, wellbeing and ability to participate in wider society. The United Nations (UN) convened a committee to investigate state violations of the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Last year the UN published their report and concluded that the Conservative Government had committed 'grave, systematic violations of the rights of persons with disabilities.'

Domestic Abuse

Disabled people experience disproportionately higher rates of domestic abuse. They experience, on average, domestic abuse for longer periods of time and more severe and frequent abuse than non-disabled people. Disabled workers may face additional barriers to seeking support in the workplace due to difficulties to accessing support such as health and social care services or domestic abuse services. Many services do not have accessible accommodation or information available in accessible formats such as braille or TEXT.

How does being a member of GMB make a difference to Disabled workers lives?

Our disabled members tell us that being a GMB member makes a huge difference to their working lives.

Support when you need it

On an individual basis, on average, union members get higher pay than non-members. They are also likely to get better sickness and pension benefits, more paid holiday and more control over things like shifts and working hours. This is because workers, through their union, can join together to negotiate pay and conditions.

GMB is the trade union for everyone. We have members working in public services and private companies, in full and part time jobs. We exist to get a better deal for our members and to support you when you need help. This includes if you experience ableism or face discrimination in the workplace due to a disability or impairment, individually, or as something that affects you and your colleagues.

GMB is committed to tackling, with our disabled members, structural barriers to disabled workers and dismantling institutional ableism.



If you need help or advice you should contact your rep or [GMB region](#).

Social model of disability

Disability is a trade union issue. The values of our union and our movement demand an inclusive society in which disabled people can live and work with dignity and independence and without fear of stigma, ignorance, and discrimination.

GMB endorses and adopts the social model of disability, which recognises that people are disabled by social barriers. We call for more awareness of the social model and for it to be fully implemented by the government, other public bodies, and employers. This means that all of our work around disabled workers focuses on shaping and creating accessible and inclusive workplaces for all.

Thinking differently at work

In 2018 GMB held a consultation with neurodivergent members (a term for people who process information differently, including dyslexia and autism spectrum conditions). This produced the GMB [Thinking differently at work](#) toolkit. The toolkit includes information and advice around getting a diagnosis, access to work funding and getting support at work as well as specific information on neurodiversity and the law and dyspraxia in the workplace.

Reasonable adjustment passport

As part of that consultation we then co-produced with the GMB/TUC [Reasonable Adjustment Disability Passport](#) in 2019.

A reasonable adjustments passport is a live record of adjustments agreed between a worker and their manager to support them at work because of a health condition, impairment or disability. The passporting system means that disabled members who move roles or have a change in line manager do not have to re-explain or renegotiate their reasonable adjustments.

Already almost 17,000 workers are covered by the passport and GMB is lobbying for the creation of a national reasonable adjustments passport to be implemented which would accompany disabled workers wherever they worked.

Supported employment

GMB also recognises the importance of supported employment models and supported businesses. We celebrate the role that disabled workers' co-operatives and other genuine supported businesses are playing in improving the lives of disabled workers. GMB supports



the creation of a new supported employment network, backed by public funding, which learns from the strengths and weaknesses of the Remploy model.

Intersectionality

GMB also recognises the additional impact on disabled people in terms of the barriers created in the workplace for:

- Women disabled workers and getting reasonable adjustments
- Being a LGBT+ disabled person - which can for some people mean additional barriers to coming out and being active in the LGBT+ community
- Additional stereotypes and prejudice Young and BAME disabled workers face.

How do I get active around equality around disabled workers' issues or activities?

Get active in your region by contacting your regional equality officer to ask about joining a self organised group.

For example GMB London's self-organised group Ability is a group for self-defined disabled people actively campaigning against and questioning stereotypes surrounding disability in the workplace, challenging employers to look past the 'dis' in disability and to look at the [ability] of the person.

We oppose all forms of prejudice and discrimination, acting as a contact and support for all London GMB disabled members. It's free to join as a GMB member and the self-organised group (SOG) aims to create a safe space to discuss and tackle issues around disability equality, wherever you work.

GMB also organises, participates in and celebrates a number of events across the year including Disability History Month, World Mental Health Day, World AIDS Day, and sends delegates and motions to TUC Disabled Workers Conference.

GMB held its first disability and neurodiversity consultation in 2018 and we are planning our first Disabled Workers Summit.

