

Disability Facts and Stats

- The UK Disability Discrimination Act (1995) defines a disabled person as someone with 'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his (sic) ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'. Disabilities are diverse and range in severity. They may be either visible or invisible, or both.
- The key types of disability relate to problems with mobility, sensory mechanisms, learning and communication difficulties, mental health issues and hidden disabilities like diabetes, epilepsy and heart disease. Many of these forms of disability are treatable or may be alleviated by broader changes in social perceptions.
- It is estimated that there are about 9.8 million people in the UK with some form of disability - one in seven of the population . At the last count, in 1996, there were 750,000 wheelchair users in the UK . In 2002-03, 19 per cent of men and 13 per cent of women reported having hearing difficulties, and in 2004 55,000 people were registered as deaf. In 2003, 157,000 people were registered as blind. In terms of hidden disabilities, there are about 1.8 million diabetics in the UK and over 350,000 people with epilepsy, for example.
- The incidence and experience of disability differs by socio-economic status, gender, age, religion and ethnicity. As would be expected, the odds of being disabled increase significantly with advancing age. In England the likelihood of having a disability is 8 times higher among those aged 75 and over than among those aged 16-44. Only 28 per cent of wheelchair users are under 60.
- People in lower social-economic classes are more likely both to be, and to become disabled, and disabled people are more likely either to be or become lower class. Figures from 2001 show that 8 per cent of people in Social Class I were disabled, compared to 24 per cent of people in Social Class V.
- The geography of disability in the UK shows marked regional variations. As Table 1 shows, while only 17 per cent of households in the South East accommodate one or more disabled adult under the pension age, in the North East this rises to 27 per cent [\[15\]](#). This is consistent with regional patterns of other health indices [\[16\]](#).

Table 1: Regional patterns in UK disability

Area	% Households with one or more disabled adults
North East	27
North West and Merseyside	23
Yorkshire and the Humber	24
East Midlands	21
West Midlands	20

Eastern	20
London	18
South East	17
South West	21
Wales	25
Scotland	24
Northern Ireland	26
UK average	21

- 38 per cent of men and 37 per cent of women with a disability were in paid employment, compared to 81 per cent of men and 69 per cent of women with no disability. Unemployment rates for disabled people are about twice as high as those of people without a disability. In part this disparity results from the large number of disabled people who are permanently unable to work. 46 per cent of men and 34 per cent of women of working age with a disability were unable to work, compared with 2 per cent of men and 1 per cent women with no disability.
- In 2003 2.5 million people in the UK received financial support through the disability living allowance. In 2002 the UK spent 2.5 per cent of its total GDP on disability benefits. As Table 2 shows this is slightly above the European average of 2.2 per cent but less than Sweden, which spend 4.3 per cent [\[17\]](#).

Table 2: Percentage of GDP spent on disability benefits in different European countries

	1994	1998	2002
Spain	1.7	1.6	1.5
France	1.7	1.7	1.7
Italy	1.8	1.5	1.5
Ireland	0.8	0.7	0.8
Netherlands	4.1	3.2	3.0
Germany	1.8	2.2	2.3
Finland	4.9	3.8	3.4
Sweden	4.1	3.8	4.3
UK	2.9	2.6	2.5
European average	2.2	2.2	2.2

- Although attitudes are changing as a result of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), there is evidence that the low level of labour market participation amongst disabled people is also due to tacit discrimination on the part of employers, and on practical difficulties in getting to work . In a survey carried out by the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), 46 per cent

of the public thought that disabled people were still treated unfairly by society. Furthermore, some 32 per cent of all economically inactive working-age disabled people said they would like to be in paid employment compared to 26 per cent of non-disabled people. In a further survey, the DRC discovered that 73 per cent of disabled people with mobility and sensory impairments in the UK have difficulty accessing goods and services. Primarily this is due to steps, heavy doors and a lack of parking and lifts. In the British Social Attitudes Survey (2000) over 65 per cent of people thought that more could be done to make shops and services more accessible to disabled people.

Information sources:

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5. Office for National Statistics, 2002 General Household Survey <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=867>;
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6. Department of Health, 2004 *Registered blind and partially sighted people* http://www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/Statistics/StatisticaIWorkAreas/StatisticalSocialCare/StatisticalSocialCareArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4082697&chk=NrtmK1
7. Diabetes UK <http://www.diabetes.org.uk/diabetes/get.htm>; The Epilepsy Research Foundation <http://www.erf.org.uk/>
8. Department of Health, 2001 *Health Survey for England* <http://www.archive2.official-documents.co.uk/document/deps/doh/survey01/disa/disa01.htm>
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11. Office for National Statistics, 2004 *The Health of Children and Young People* <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=795&Pos=2&ColRank=1&Rank=358>

12. Grundy et al 1999, *Disability in Britain*, Department of Social Security Research Report no. 94
13. Office for National Statistics, Census 2001 <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=959&Pos=5&ColRank=1&Rank=208>
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15. Department of Work and Pensions, *Family Resources Survey 2003-2004* http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/frs/2003_04/pdfonly/frs_2003_04_report.pdf
16. Grundy et al 1999, *Disability in Britain*, Department of Social Security Research Report no. 94
17. European Social statistics, Eurostat http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-DC-05-001/EN/KS-DC-05-001-EN.PDF
18. Department of Work and Pensions, *2002 Disabled for life?* <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/173summ.asp>
19. *The Disability Rights Commission Attitudes and Awareness Survey*, 2003 http://www.drc-gb.org/uploaded_files/documents/10_519_ResearchSurveyAttitudes202003.pdf
20. Office for National Statistics, 2002 *Labour market experiences of people with disabilities* http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/labour_market_trends/People_with_disabilities_aug2002.pdf
21. British Social Attitudes Survey 2000, National Centre for Social Research data available from www.esds.ac.uk

- Only **17% of disabled people were born with their disabilities** (Source: [Institute for Public Policy Research](#) article *Work for disabled people*)
- **One in four people** will be affected by **mental ill health** in the course of their life (Source: [Mind](#))
- Mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, now account for **more Incapacity Benefit claims** than back pain (Source: *Mind, Stress and mental health in the workplace*, 2005)
- **Sickness absence** is estimated to have cost the UK economy almost **£12.2 billion** in 2004 (Source: [Confederation of British Industry](#) press release, 2005)

Source; <http://www.shaw-trust.org.uk/page/6/90/>

The following is according to the UK's Office for National Statistics' *Labour Force Survey*, Spring 2005, for people of working age only.

- Nearly **one in five** people of working age (6.9 million, or 19%) in Great Britain are disabled
- There has been an **increase** in the number of working age people reporting a disability; from 6.2 million in Spring 1998 to 7 million in Spring 2005
- Only about **half of disabled people of working age are in work** (50%), compared with 80% of non disabled people of working age
- Almost half (45%) of the disabled population of working age in Britain are **economically inactive** i.e. outside of the labour force. Only 16% of non-disabled people of working age are economically inactive
- Nearly one third of disabled people who are economically inactive say they **would like to work** (28%), compared with less than one quarter (24%) of non disabled economically inactive people
- Employment rates vary greatly according to the **type of impairment** a person has. Disabled people with **mental health problems** have the lowest employment rates of all impairment categories at only 21%. The employment rate for people with learning disabilities is 26%.
- Disabled people are more than twice as likely as non-disabled people to have **no qualifications** (26% as opposed to 10%)
- The average gross hourly pay for disabled employees is £10.31 compared to £11.39 for non disabled employees.

	Non-disabled people	Disabled people
Total	29,710,306	6,941,935
In employment	23,871,969	3,450,982
ILO unemployed	1,257,765	332,437
Economically inactive	4,580,572	3,158,516
Economically inactive who 'would like to work'	1,118,308	906,424

Main impairment	% in employment
Diabetes	67
Difficulty in hearing	59
Skin conditions, allergies	63.3
Chest/breathing problems	62.8

Heart, blood pressure/circulation problems	58.7
Difficulty in seeing	48.5
Stomach, liver, kidney or digestive problems	59.7
Other health problems or disabilities	53.5
Arms or hands	52
Back or neck	48.7
Legs or feet	45.4
Epilepsy	43.6
Speech impediment	19.2
Progressive illness not included elsewhere	42.1
Learning difficulties	25.7
Depression, bad nerves or anxiety	25.8
Mental illness, phobias, panics or other nervous disorders	13.3

Definitions:

Labour Force Survey: The LFS is the largest regular household survey in the UK. In any three month period, a nationally representative sample of approximately 120,000 people aged 16 or over in around 61,000 households are interviewed. Interviews are carried out continuously throughout the year and results are published monthly or quarterly. The LFS uses concepts and definitions agreed by the ILO.

ILO unemployed: The International Labour Organisation definition of unemployment covers people who are: out of work, want a job, have actively sought work in the previous four weeks and are available to start work within the next fortnight; or out of work and have accepted a job that they are waiting to start in the next fortnight.

Available for and want to work: This includes those who are ILO unemployed and those who are economically inactive and would like to work. The percentage totals are a % of the inactive population, not the total working age population.

Source; <http://www.shaw-trust.org.uk/page/6/89/>