

Statistical bulletin

Disability and employment, UK: 2019

Employment outcomes for disabled adults, with analysis by age, sex, impairment type, country and working patterns using Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Annual Population Survey (APS) data.

Contact:
Catherine Putz
life.course@ons.gov.uk
+44 (0)1633 651953

Release date:
2 December 2019

Next release:
To be announced

Correction

10 February 2021 11:00

A small correction has been made to the text in section 3. A sentence incorrectly indicated that the unemployment rate of disabled people was more than twice the employment rate of non-disabled people in 2019. While the estimates were correct, the description has now been updated. We apologise for any inconvenience.

Notice

24 February 2021

This is not the latest release. Please see [Outcomes for disabled people in the UK: 2020](#) for the latest estimates.

Table of contents

1. [Other pages in this release](#)
2. [Main points](#)
3. [Employment by disability](#)
4. [Sex](#)
5. [Age](#)
6. [Impairment](#)
7. [Working patterns](#)
8. [Disability and employment data](#)
9. [Glossary](#)
10. [Measuring the data](#)
11. [Strengths and limitations](#)
12. [Related links](#)

1 . Other pages in this release

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has explored outcomes for disabled people across a number of areas of life, through a series of bulletins. Other pages in this release include:

- [Improving disability data in the UK](#)
- [Disability and education](#)
- [Disability and housing](#)
- [Disability and crime](#)
- [Disability, well-being and loneliness](#)
- [Disability and social participation](#)

Aims of this work

This work aims to present comparable information that uses the Government Statistical Service's (GSS's) harmonised definition of "disability", and as far as possible presents UK analysis, alongside intersections with other protected characteristics.

Definition of disability

For the purposes of this analysis, a person is considered to have a disability if they have a self-reported long-standing illness, condition or impairment, which causes difficulty with day-to-day activities. This definition is consistent with the Equality Act 2010 and the GSS harmonised definition. For further information on disability and impairment definitions see the [Glossary](#).

Article scope

This article seeks to provide more in-depth analysis to the figures currently published about employment of disabled people ([ONS, 2019](#)), which uses the Labour Force Survey (LFS) to provide overall comparisons between disabled and non-disabled people and breakdowns by sex covering the period 2013 to 2019. A larger sample facilitates analysis for age, specific impairment types, working patterns and the four nations of the UK, in these instances Annual Population Survey (APS) data are used. The analysis provided covers a range of periods, with the most recent data related to year ending June 2019. More information on the periods covered can be found in the [Measuring the data](#) section.

2 . Main points

- Between 2013 and 2019, the disability employment gap has reduced; with the latest data showing roughly half of disabled people were in employment (53.2%) compared with just over four out of five non-disabled people (81.8%) (Labour Force Survey, LFS).
- The employment gap was larger for disabled men than disabled women, with a 31.7 percentage point difference between disabled and non-disabled men, compared with a 25.0 percentage point difference for women; this was driven by the higher employment rate for non-disabled men (LFS, 2019).
- Working disabled men were more likely to be self-employed (20.6%) than non-disabled men (17.5%); no significant difference was seen between disabled and non-disabled women (Annual Population Survey, APS, 2019).
- Working disabled people were more likely to work part-time than non-disabled people, with 34.1% of disabled people working part-time in comparison with 23.1% of non-disabled people (APS, 2019).
- The employment rate for disabled people with severe or specific learning difficulties was the lowest rate of any impairment (17.6%, APS, 2019).

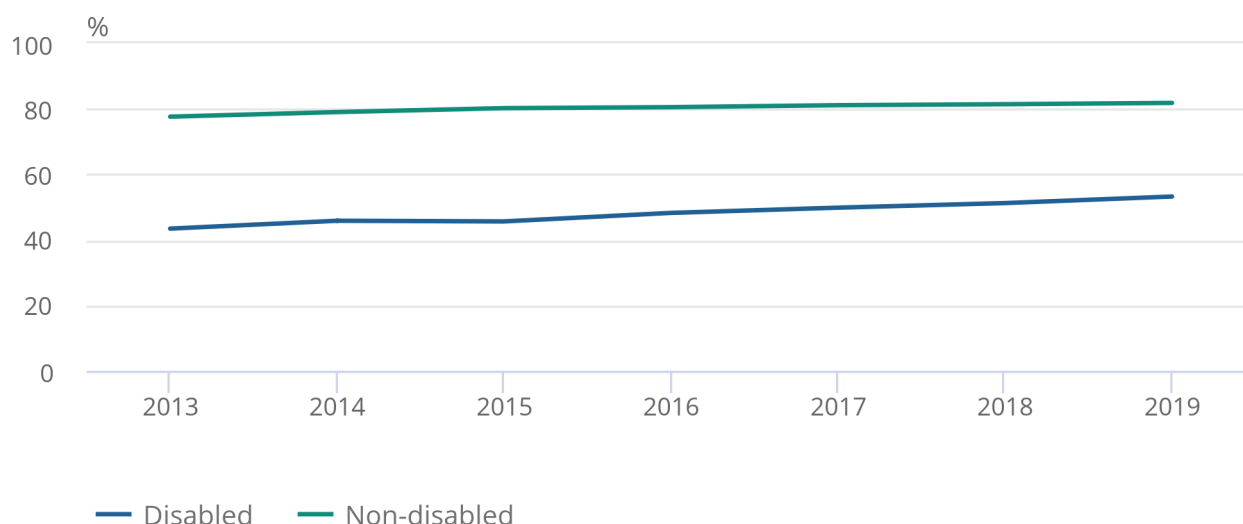
3 . Employment by disability

Figure 1: Disabled people are 28.6 percentage points less likely to be in employment than non-disabled people

Employment rate for disabled and non-disabled people aged 16 to 64 years, UK, 2013 to 2019

Figure 1: Disabled people are 28.6 percentage points less likely to be in employment than non-disabled people

Employment rate for disabled and non-disabled people aged 16 to 64 years, UK, 2013 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour market A08 dataset, Labour Force Survey

Labour Force Survey (LFS) data revealed that disabled people were over a third less likely to be employed than non-disabled people, with an employment rate for disabled people (aged 16 to 64 years) of 53.2% in 2019, compared with 81.8% for non-disabled people.

The difference in the employment rate between disabled and non-disabled people has reduced from 34.2 percentage points in 2013 to 28.6 percentage points in 2019. The reduction in the gap was driven by a faster increase in the employment rate for disabled people, by 9.8 percentage points over the six years, compared with non-disabled people, where the employment rate increased by only 4.2 percentage points during the same period.

Of the four countries in the UK, there were no significant differences in overall employment rate for non-disabled people. However, Northern Ireland had the lowest employment rate for disabled people (37.8% in 2019) and with a rate for non-disabled people of 80.1% had the largest disparity (42.3 percentage points). The employment rate for disabled people was higher in England (53.7%), than other countries (Scotland, 46.9%, Wales, 48.6%).

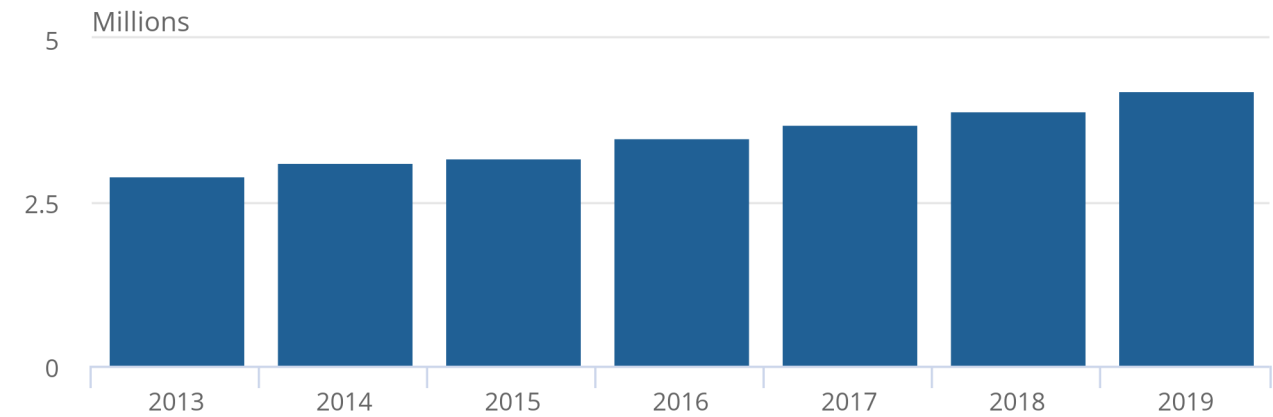
See the Disability and employment dataset [Table 6](#) for further information on the analysis of economic activity by disability and country.

Figure 2: The number of disabled people in employment has increased by over 1.3 million since 2013

Number of disabled people in employment aged 16 to 64 years, UK, 2013 to 2019

Figure 2: The number of disabled people in employment has increased by over 1.3 million since 2013

Number of disabled people in employment aged 16 to 64 years, UK, 2013 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour market A08 dataset, Labour Force Survey

Over 4.2 million disabled people were employed in 2019; an increase from 2013, where the number employed was nearly 2.9 million. In contrast, the number of non-disabled people in employment increased more slowly, by just under 1 million during the same period, a 3.8 percentage point increase.

The unemployment rate (calculated as a proportion of the economically active population) was 6.7% for disabled people and 3.7% for non-disabled people in 2019. This equated to just over 300,000 unemployed disabled people in 2019.

The unemployment rate has roughly halved for both disabled people and non-disabled people between 2013 and 2019. The unemployment rate in 2013 was 14.5% for disabled people and 7.2% for non-disabled people. The large drop in the unemployment rate for disabled people is mainly because of the increase in employment. The numbers of disabled people who are employed have increased by 46.5% since 2013, with the number who are economically inactive only increasing by 4.3%.

However, although the number of disabled people inactive has increased, the rate of inactivity has decreased faster for disabled people than non-disabled people; decreasing from 49.2% in 2013 to 43.0% in 2019, a reduction of 6.2 percentage points. In comparison, the inactivity rate for non-disabled people has only reduced by 1.3 percentage points during this period.

See the [A08: Labour market status of disabled people](#) dataset for further information on economic activity by disability.

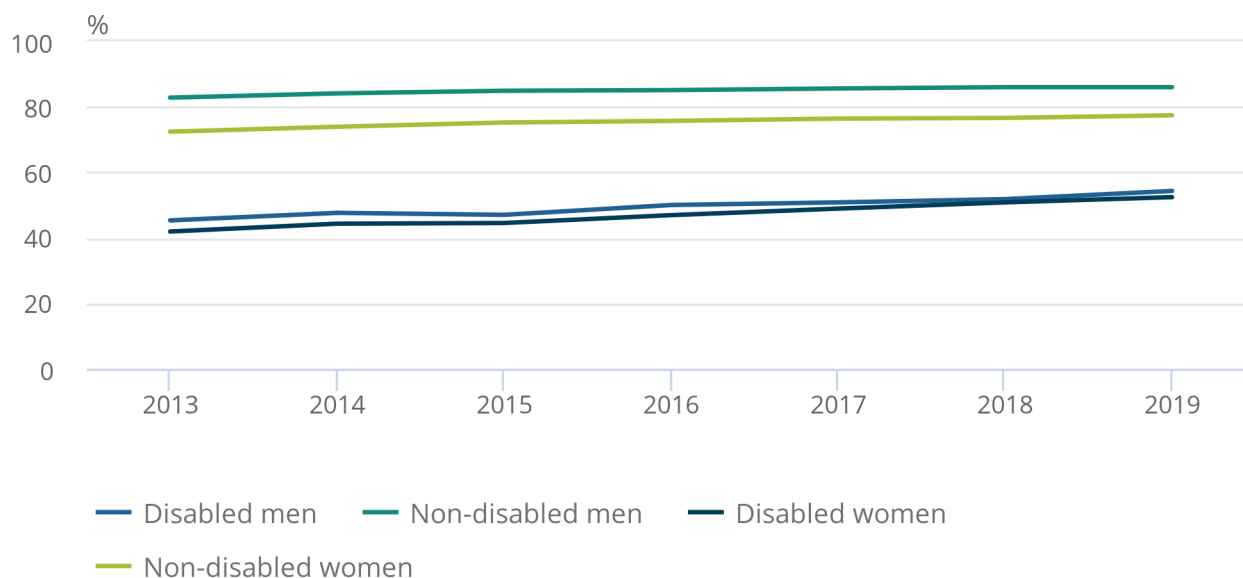
4 . Sex

Figure 3: Employment rates for disabled men and women are similar, but the greatest gap in employment is between disabled and non-disabled men

Employment rate for disabled and non-disabled people aged 16 to 64 years, by sex, UK, 2013 to 2019

Figure 3: Employment rates for disabled men and women are similar, but the greatest gap in employment is between disabled and non-disabled men

Employment rate for disabled and non-disabled people aged 16 to 64 years, by sex, UK, 2013 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour market A08 dataset, Labour Force Survey

Employment rates have converged for disabled men and women between 2013 and 2019, while the largest employment gap has consistently been between disabled and non-disabled men. In 2019, the disability employment gap was 31.7 percentage points for men and 25.0 percentage points for women. This larger difference for men was driven by the higher employment rate for non-disabled men.

The employment rate has risen more rapidly for disabled women between 2013 and 2019, increasing by 10.5 percentage points, compared with a 9.0 percentage point increase for disabled men. Smaller increases (when compared with their disabled counterparts) have also been seen for non-disabled women and men in this period, mirroring the disabled population. Non-disabled women showed bigger increases at 5.0 percentage points than non-disabled men at 3.2 percentage points.

See the [A08: Labour market status of disabled people](#) dataset for further information on economic activity by disability and sex.

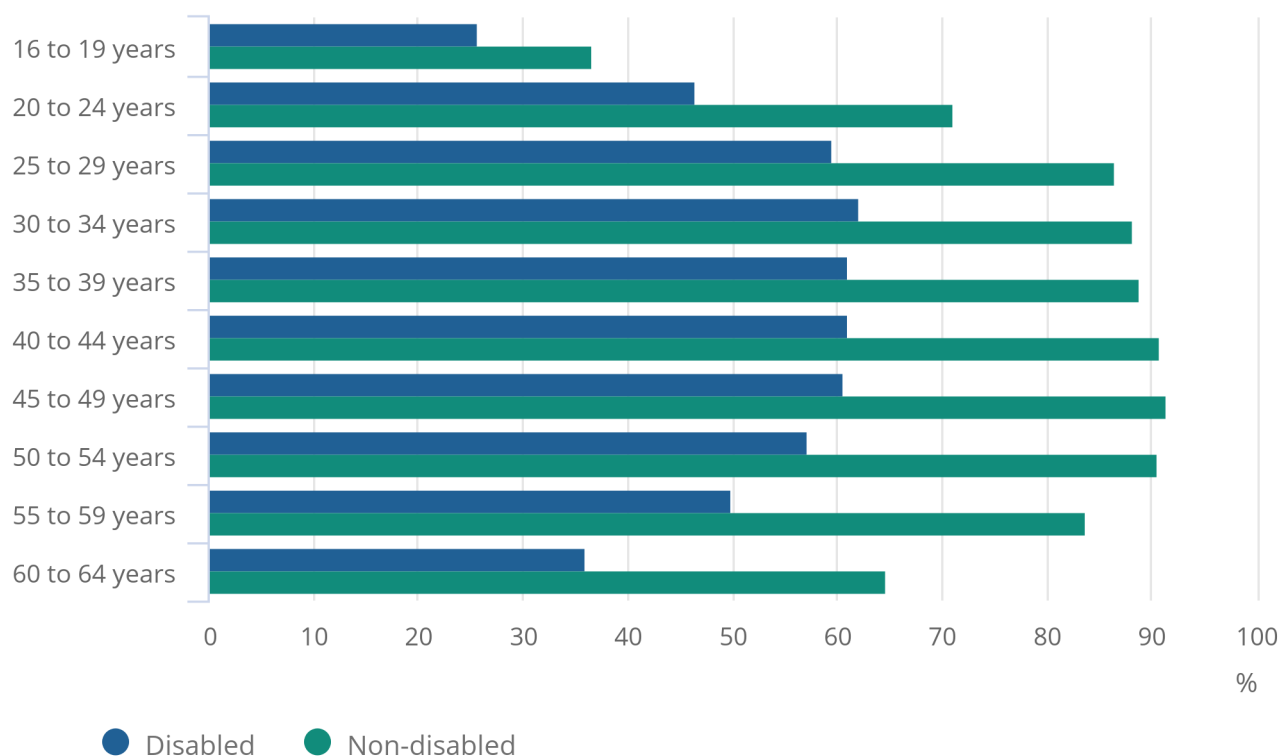
5 . Age

Figure 4: The disability employment gap increases for older age groups, from 50 years and over

Employment rate for disabled and non-disabled people aged 16 to 64 years, by age, UK, 2019

Figure 4: The disability employment gap increases for older age groups, from 50 years and over

Employment rate for disabled and non-disabled people aged 16 to 64 years, by age, UK, 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Annual Population Survey (APS) data facilitate analysis of smaller groups than Labour Force Survey (LFS) data. Across all age groups, the employment rate was lower for disabled than non-disabled people, with the greatest employment gaps seen for those aged 50 years and over. The employment gap for disabled people aged 50 to 54 years is 33.4 percentage points, and the gap for those aged 55 to 59 years is 33.8 percentage points. This increasing gap coincides with a greater proportion of people being disabled in the 50 to 64 years age group when compared with younger working age population ([Family Resources Survey, 2017 to 2018](#)).

The employment gap reduces to 28.8 percentage points for those aged 60 to 64 years and over because of the employment rate for non-disabled people also reducing. These relative patterns by age have been consistent between 2014 and 2019.

See the Disability and employment dataset [Table 1](#) for further information on the analysis of economic activity by disability and age.

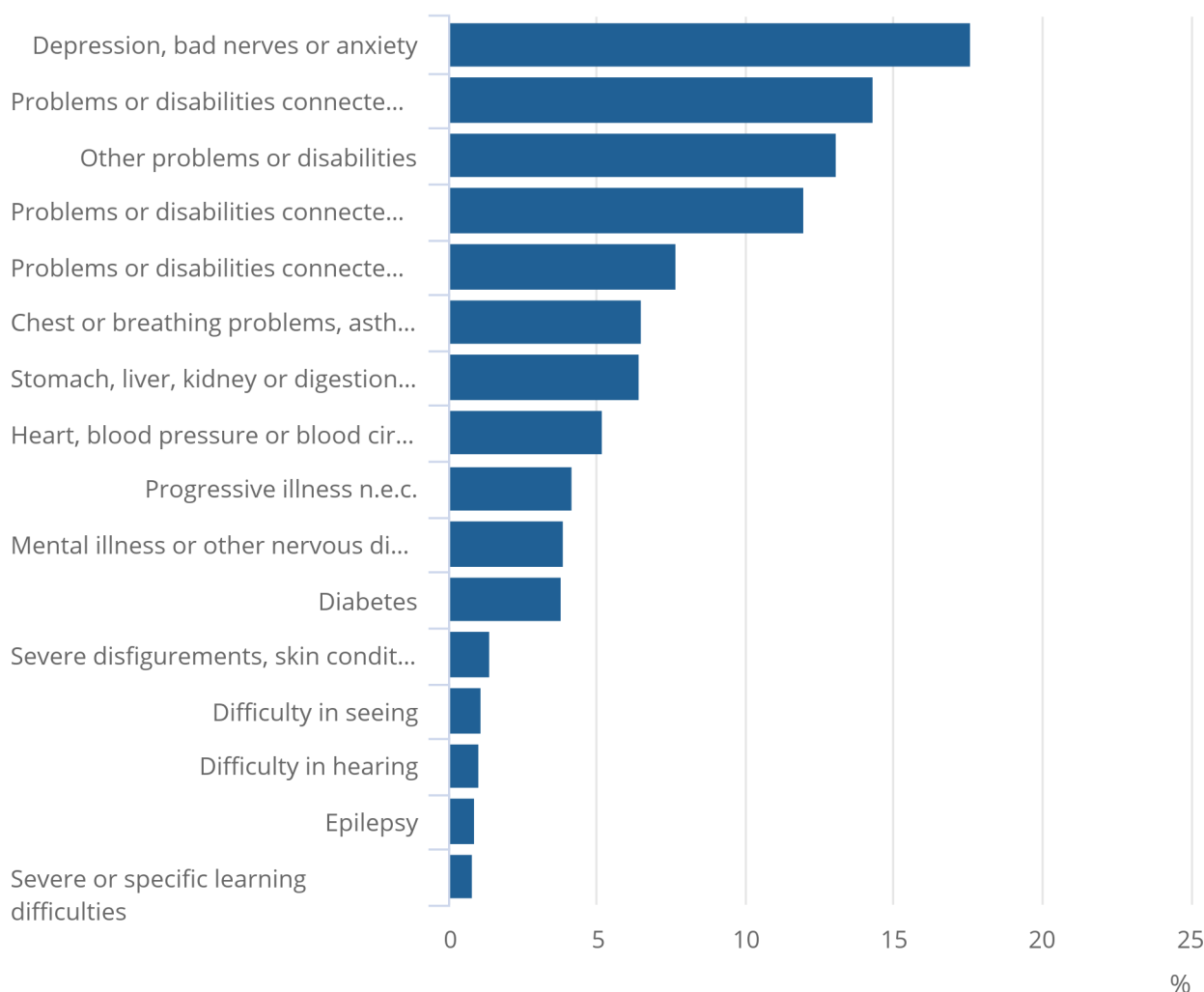
6 . Impairment

Figure 5: More than half of working disabled people had musculoskeletal or mental health conditions as their main impairment

Composition of disabled people in work aged 16 to 64 years, by main impairment, UK, 2019

Figure 5: More than half of working disabled people had musculoskeletal or mental health conditions as their main impairment

Composition of disabled people in work aged 16 to 64 years, by main impairment, UK, 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Notes:

1. Main impairment includes only disabled adults aged 16 to 64 years.

Looking only at disabled people in work in 2019, more than a third cited their main impairment as an impairment affecting the musculoskeletal system, including 14.3% with back or neck issues, 12.0% with leg or foot issues and 7.7% with problems with their arms or hands.

More than one in five working disabled people cited a mental health condition as the main cause of their disability, consisting of 17.6% with depression, bad nerves or anxiety and 3.9% having mental illness or other nervous disorders. Depression, bad nerves or anxiety was the single most common type of impairment mentioned.

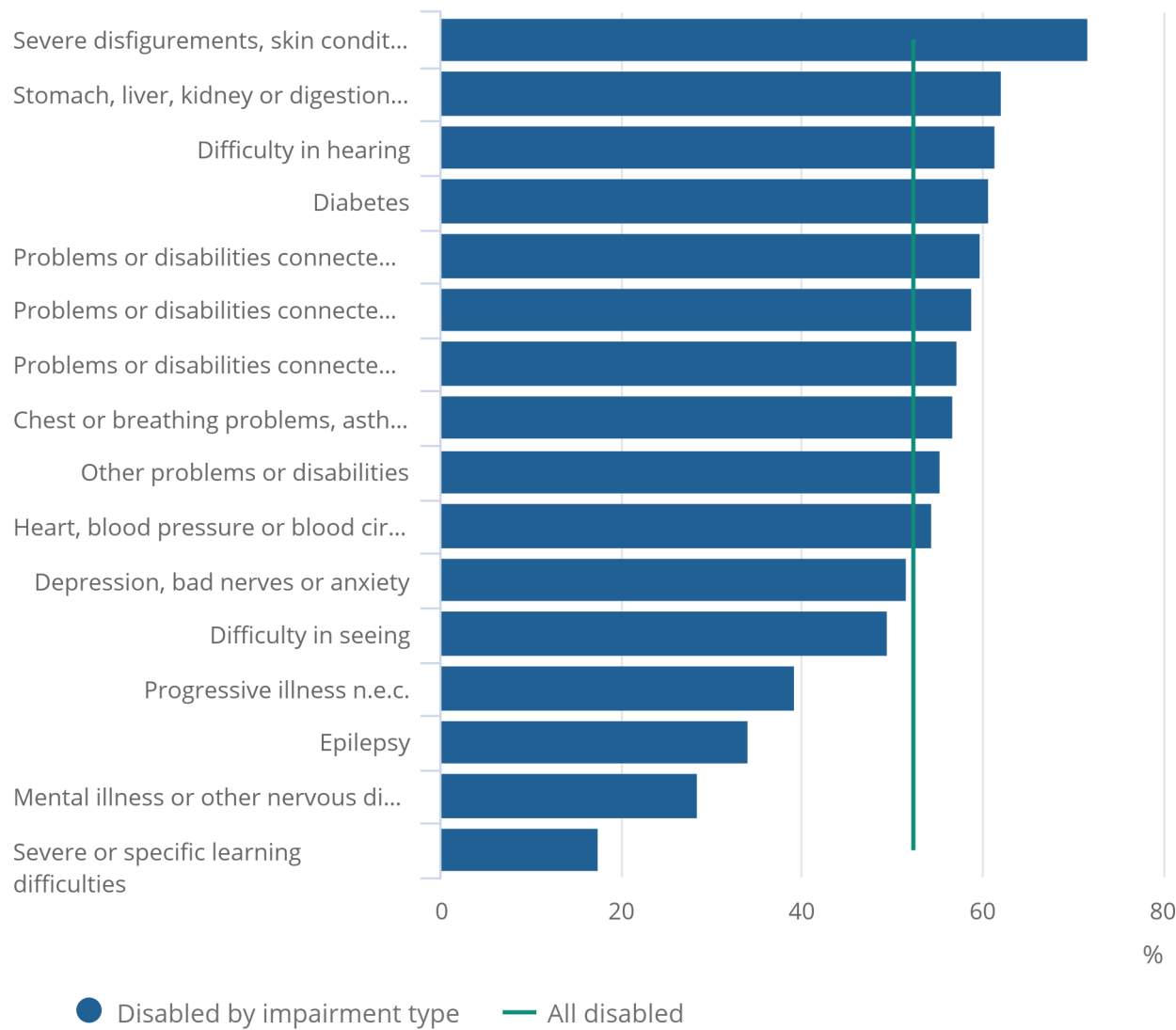
See the Disability and employment dataset [Table 2](#) for further information on the analysis of the composition of disabled people in employment by main impairment.

Figure 6: Disabled people who have disfigurements, skin conditions or allergies as their main impairment are the most likely to be in work

Employment rate for disabled people aged 16 to 64 years, by main impairment, UK, 2019

Figure 6: Disabled people who have disfigurements, skin conditions or allergies as their main impairment are the most likely to be in work

Employment rate for disabled people aged 16 to 64 years, by main impairment, UK, 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Notes:

1. Main impairment includes only disabled adults aged 16 to 64 years.
2. Differences depicted in the chart may not be significant, please refer to the confidence intervals in the Disability and employment dataset Table 17.

Using Annual Population Survey (APS) data, the employment rate for disabled people with severe disfigurements, skin conditions or allergies (71.7%) as their main impairment, was higher than the employment rate of the disabled population as a whole aged 16 to 64 years (52.3%). The employment rate for disabled people using APS (52.3%) data was slightly lower than the rate using LFS data (53.2%, see Figure 1), because of different sampling methods and periods.

Disabled people with an impairment affecting the musculoskeletal system are among the most common impairment groups, with above-average employment rates compared with the whole disabled population. The employment rate for those with issues affecting the legs or feet is highest at 59.8%, followed by back or neck at 59.0% and arms or hands at 57.2%.

The employment rate for disabled people with severe or specific learning difficulties was the lowest rate of any impairment group (17.6%). Disabled people with mental illness or other nervous disorders had the second-lowest employment rate (28.5%). This was significantly lower than all other conditions with the exception of epilepsy (34.2%).

The employment rate for people with depression, bad nerves or anxiety was similar at 51.8% to the employment rate for the disabled population as a whole (52.3%).

See the Disability and employment dataset [Table 3](#) for further information on the analysis of economic activity of disabled people by main impairment.

Patterns of employment rates appeared to vary by main impairment type and sex, however, small sample sizes make it difficult to draw robust conclusions (see Disability and employment dataset, [Table 4](#) and [Table 5](#)).

7 . Working patterns

Disabled people in work were more likely to work part-time than non-disabled people in employment

Disabled people in work (aged 16 to 64 years) were more likely to work part-time when compared with non-disabled people; 34.1% of disabled people worked part-time compared with 23.1% of non-disabled people; a difference of 11 percentage points.

The differences in part-time working varied between the age groups. The largest difference between disabled and non-disabled people in work was among the 25- to 29-year age group; 27.0% of disabled people in work in that age group, worked part-time, compared with 13.7% of working non-disabled people.

Patterns of part-time working appeared to vary by main impairment type, however, small sample sizes make it difficult to draw robust conclusions (see Disability and employment dataset, [Table 10](#)).

See the [Disability and employment dataset](#) for further information on the analysis of full-time and part-time by disability, sex, age and country.

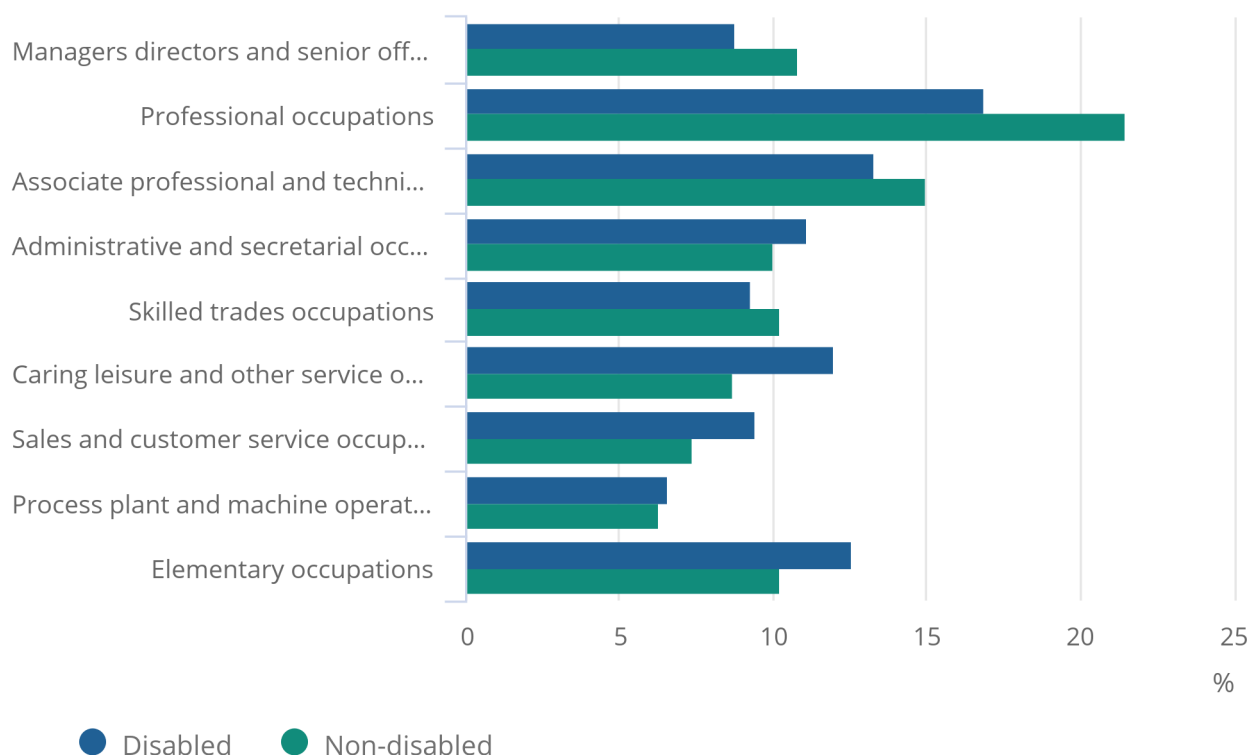
It is not possible to understand the reasons behind part-time working from this analysis.

Figure 7: Working disabled people less likely to work in higher managerial positions

Occupation of working disabled and non-disabled people aged 16 to 64 years, UK, 2018

Figure 7: Working disabled people less likely to work in higher managerial positions

Occupation of working disabled and non-disabled people aged 16 to 64 years, UK, 2018



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Disabled people in work were less likely to be employed as managers, directors or senior officials, or to be employed in professional occupations. Just over one-quarter (25.7%) of employed disabled people held these positions in comparison with just under one-third (32.3%) of employed non-disabled people.

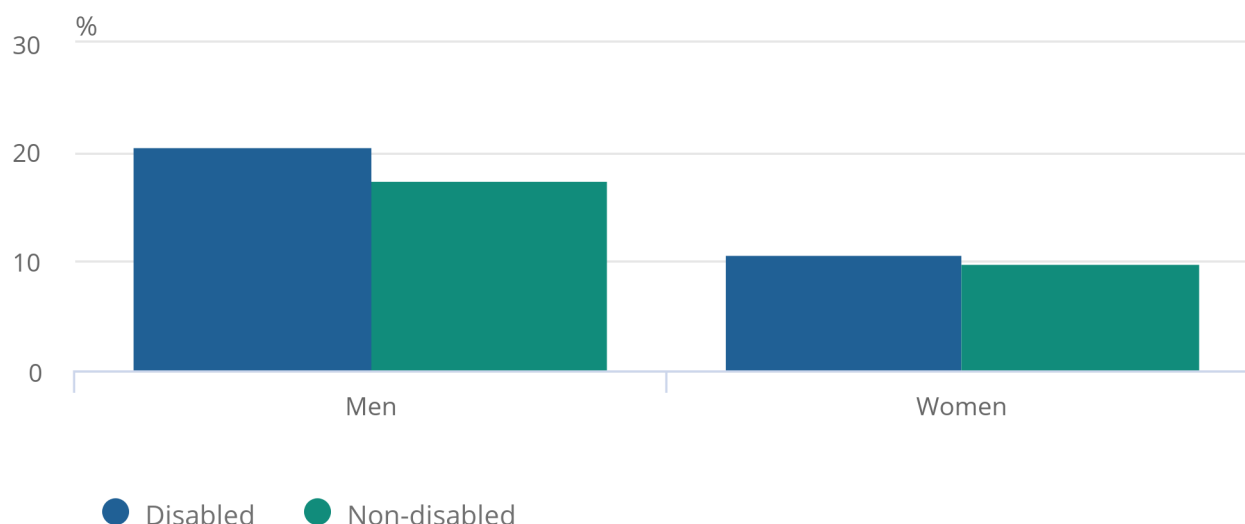
Disabled people in work were more likely to hold elementary positions at 12.6% compared with 10.2% of working non-disabled people. The disparity in occupation and wider exploration of disability pay gaps is explored further in [Disability pay gaps in the UK, 2018](#).

Figure 8: Disabled men in work were more likely to be self-employed than working non-disabled men

Proportions of working disabled and non-disabled people in self-employment aged 16 to 64 years, UK, 2019

Figure 8: Disabled men in work were more likely to be self-employed than working non-disabled men

Proportions of working disabled and non-disabled people in self-employment aged 16 to 64 years, UK, 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

On average, working disabled people had similar proportions of people in self-employment, when compared with non-disabled people; 15.0% of working disabled people were self-employed compared with 14.0% of non-disabled people.

However, working disabled men were more likely to be self-employed, with 20.6% of those in work being self-employed. This compares with 17.5% of non-disabled men; a difference of 3.1 percentage points.

Patterns of self-employment appeared to vary by main impairment type, however, small sample sizes make it difficult to draw robust conclusions (see Disability and employment dataset, [Table 15](#)).

See the [Disability and employment dataset](#) for further information on the analysis of employment type by disability, sex, age and country.

8 . Disability and employment data

[Disability and employment](#)

Dataset | Released 2 December 2019

Employment outcomes for disabled adults, with analysis by age, sex, impairment type, country and working patterns using Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Annual Population Survey (APS) data.

9 . Glossary

Disability

To define disability in this publication we refer to the [Government Statistical Service \(GSS\) harmonised “core” definition](#): this identifies “disabled” as a person who has a physical or mental health condition or illness that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or more, that reduces their ability to carry-out day-to-day activities.

The GSS definition is designed to reflect the definitions that appear in legal terms in the [Disability Discrimination Act 1995](#) (DDA) and the subsequent [Equality Act 2010](#).

The GSS harmonised questions are asked of the respondent in the survey, meaning that disability status is self-reported.

Employment

Employment measures the number of people in paid work and differs from the number of jobs because some people have more than one job. The employment rate is the proportion of people aged from 16 to 64 years who are in paid work.

The [Guide to labour market statistics](#) contains a glossary of other terms used in this bulletin.

Standard Occupational Classification 2010

For details of the general nature of qualifications, training and experience for occupations, see Table 2 of [SOC 2010 Volume 1: structure and descriptions of unit groups](#).

Impairment

An impairment is defined as any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more. Respondents were presented with a list of impairments and then asked to select all and subsequently their “main health problem”. The commentary in this bulletin refers to the main health problem. Analysis is limited to those who are also defined as disabled and does not explore where disabled people experienced more than one impairment. For further details see [Volume 3: Detail of Labour Force Survey variables](#).

The impairments or condition categories compared in this bulletin relate to the categories within the question in the survey, the exception is speech impediment, which has been grouped with the “other” category because of low sample size.

Statistical significance

Any changes or differences mentioned in this bulletin are “statistically significant”. The statistical significance of differences noted within the release are determined based on non-overlapping confidence intervals.

10 . Measuring the data

The Labour Force Survey (LFS)

The overall and by sex employment estimates are based on data collected from the [Labour Force Survey](#) (LFS). The LFS data referred to in this publication relate to the July to September quarter analysis provided in the [A08: Labour market status of disabled people](#) dataset as this provides the most up-to-date information.

The LFS is a UK quarterly household survey of approximately 90,000 individuals each quarter. The survey does not cover communal establishments, except for NHS staff accommodation. Those living in student halls of residence or boarding school are included as part of their family household.

All yearly comparisons presented use the July to September quarter, so the data have not been seasonally adjusted. The year 2013 is the earliest available using the current definition of disability.

The Annual Population Survey (APS)

The age, country and impairment employment estimates and all the working pattern estimates are based on data collected from the [Annual Population Survey](#) (APS).

The APS is an annual survey based on data collected in wave 1 and wave 5 on the Labour Force Survey (LFS), combined with an annual local area boost sample run in England, Wales, and Scotland.

The survey does not cover communal establishments, except for NHS staff accommodation. Those living in student halls of residence or boarding school are included as part of their family household. The APS dataset contains approximately 300,000 individuals.

The APS datasets are produced for four different overlapping 12-month periods: January to December, April to March, July to June and October to September. Analysis for this publication was conducted on the July 2018 to June 2019 period as it provides the most up-to-date information. The earliest available data are from 2014. Data relating to occupation are taken from [Disability pay gaps in the UK: 2018](#), covering the year ending December 2018.

The [Labour Force Survey performance and quality monitoring](#) reports provide data on response rates and other quality-related issues for the Labour Force Survey (LFS), including breakdowns of response by LFS wave, region and by question-specific response issues.

The [Labour Force Survey Quality and Methodology Information](#) (QMI) report provides qualitative information on the various dimensions of data quality, as well as providing a summary of the methods used to compile the output. All the analysis using the LFS and APS in this bulletin looks at the working age population only (16 to 64 years).

11 . Strengths and limitations

Causality

The analysis conducted is for the purpose of comparing the outcomes of disabled and non-disabled people. The analysis describes differences in these two populations but does not explore the cause of this difference. Further analysis, which is outside the scope of this article, is required to make judgements on causality. Please see the [Improving disability statistics in the UK](#) article for details of our future workplan.

Coverage and population

This analysis has been restricted to 16- to 64-year-olds because the Labour Force Survey and Annual Population Survey do not collect data for under 16 years and the disability variable is not robust for those aged over 64 years. Disability status is only collected for people aged 65 years or older at their first contact resulting in less data for this population. The weighting used does not account for the reduced sample size for this age group, making the data not fully representative of the population.

For our analysis, this means we are not capturing the working status of those aged 65 years or over, although we captured the majority of the working population. The survey's sampling method excludes communal establishments. Therefore, the findings of this analysis are not representative of disabled people who reside in medical or residential care establishments.

Uncertainty and quality

The results in this bulletin are survey-based estimates, so they are subject to a level of uncertainty as they are based on a sample rather than the whole population. Confidence intervals are provided around every estimate and give an indication of the range in which the true population value is likely to fall. The estimates in this bulletin are supported with confidence intervals at the 95% level. This means that, if we repeated the sample, we would expect the true population value to fall within the lower and upper bounds of the interval 95% of the time (that is, 19 times out of 20).

Impairments

Analysis by impairment is based on the "main impairment" as reported by the respondent. People often experience more than one impairment, but this analysis does not account for co-morbidities or the cumulative impact of living with more than one impairment simultaneously.

12 . Related links

[Work, health and disability green paper: data pack](#)

Official statistics | Released 31 October 2016

The technical annex to Improving lives: the work, health and disability green paper. Department for Work and Pensions and Department of Health and Social Care.

[Characteristics of disabled people in employment: April to June 2017](#)

Official statistics | Released 1 November 2018

Employment of disabled and non-disabled people broken down by main characteristics. Department for Work and Pensions and Department of Health and Social Care.

[Health in the workplace: patterns of sickness absence, employer support and employment retention](#)

Official statistics | Released 15 July 2019

Statistics that contribute to the evidence base supporting the work and health consultation “Health is everyone’s business: proposals to reduce ill-health related job loss”. Department for Work and Pensions and Department of Health and Social Care.

[Regional employment patterns in Scotland: statistics from the Annual Population Survey 2018](#)

Statistical bulletin | Released 21 May 2019

Summary publication of results from the Annual Population Survey 2018, presenting analysis on the labour market, education and training. Scottish Government.

[Scotland's Labour Market Tables and Charts](#)

Data | Monthly

Labour market tables and charts from the Scottish Government.

[Closing disability gaps at work \(PDF, 5.1MB\)](#)

Article | November 2016

Data and analysis on how the UK government’s aim of halving the disability employment gap can be achieved where past and existing policies and approaches have failed. Cardiff University.

[NISRA quarterly Labour Force tables](#)

Data | Quarterly

Labour market status in Northern Ireland, including education and training, disability and the labour market, graduates, not in education employment or training and households. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

[Disability pay gaps in the UK: 2018](#)

Article | Released 2 December 2019

Earnings and employment for disabled and non-disabled people in the UK, raw disability pay gaps and factors that affect pay for disabled people.