**UN Committee slams government failure to address disability rights violations**

[A report published yesterday](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=4&DocTypeCategoryID=7) by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Disabled People concludes that the UK Government has made “no significant progress” in addressing the grave and systematic violations of Deaf and Disabled people’s rights that it highlighted more than seven years ago.

Instead, the report notes areas of further regression and numerous issues of “deep concern”.

The report states that:

“The Committee finds that the State party has failed to take all appropriate measures to address grave and systematic violations of the human rights of persons with disabilities and has failed to eliminate the root causes of inequality and discrimination.”

The report is the outcome of a follow up to the Committee’s [unprecedented special inquiry](https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPRiCAqhKb7yhsiyzad2BHQUYM%2BKTqPgx5eVu2P%2FYaJzQh0U0fI4xU0xk1yCCvlUkgZiZWmc7pZcXSd7P93LB3RLHLT28BaHRLKhnJV8ctxPtONZLnKKA%2Blup) which in 2016 found evidence of grave and systematic violations of Deaf and Disabled People’s rights due to welfare reform and austerity measures.

The inquiry focused on three specific areas: equal chances to live and participate in the community; right to good work; and, adequate social protections and standard of living.

On publication of the 2016 report the then government [dismissed its findings](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/nov/08/damian-green-dismisses-offensive-un-report-on-uk-disability-rights#:~:text=Green%20said%3A%20%E2%80%9CAt%20the%20heart,health%20outcomes%20for%20disabled%20people.).

Andy Greene from the National Steering Group of Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC), who triggered the special inquiry said:

“The process of evidence gathering, taking witness testimony and objective scrutiny of policy and its impact, is one that’s very difficult to ridicule or dismiss. The facts speak for themselves. As such, the inquiry vindicates the experiences of Deaf and Disabled people whose voices are too often ignored.”

John Kelly, musician and campaigner who also sits on the DPAC National Steering Group said the report is:

“…damning on the lack of this government listening to our real lived experiences as Disabled people and doing anything to support what we really need which is to live and contribute in our community as equal citizens along with our peers.”

Deaf and Disabled People’s Organisations (DDPOs) across the UK, who took part in reporting to the Committee, along with DPAC, through the UK DDPO Coalition, have welcomed the report.

Svetlana Kotova, Director of Campaigns and Justice, [Inclusion London](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/), said:

“This report is a damning verdict on the government’s track record in upholding our human rights…

“It is shocking that our country that positions itself as a world leader is yet again found to breach our rights on a systematic level.

“It is also shocking that the government has failed to listen to the UN in the past and has actively dismissed the previous recommendations….

“Inclusion London welcomes the report and urge the government and the opposition to take it seriously and develop policies on welfare reform, employment and independent living that comply with the UK’s obligations under the UNCRDP.

“The report shows that the current system is not fit for purpose and the government cannot carry on punishing Disabled people.”

Dermot Devlin, spokesperson for [DPAC Northern Ireland](https://twitter.com/DPACni) said:

“ DPAC NI thank the UN Committee for their work and due diligence on our behalf and call on the Westminster Government to properly implement the recommendations of the 2016 inquiry and the current report.

“The absence of Government in Northern Ireland has failed Disabled people here. With the Executive now restored, bringing forward a Disability Strategy that addresses the Committee’s recommendations must be an absolute priority.”

The report documents how the UK government requested postponement of the session at which they were due to give evidence to the Committee in August.

Their request for postponement was just six days before the deadline for written evidence submissions to the inquiry was due and after many cash-strapped DDPOs had already booked their flights and accommodation to attend and give evidence.

The result was that the Committee, which is made up of Deaf ad Disabled members from around the world, had to split the oral evidence section of the inquiry into two separate sessions.

Rhian Davies, CEO for [Disability Wales](https://www.disabilitywales.org/), said:

“The UK Government’s approach to this review has been utterly disrespectful and matches the contempt shown to Disabled people for over a decade. We deserve better and we demand better.”

Ellen Clifford, UK Coalition Co-ordinator, said;

“The government's attitude towards the UN special inquiry is evidence that their treatment of Deaf and Disabled people is wilful and calculated. This is reflected in the damning findings of the report.

“The limitations of the inquiry process are that there are just too many deliberate rights violations to include in one report.

“However, the report validates the experiences of Deaf and Disabled people across the UK and is a much-needed counter to government rhetoric claiming they are "protecting the most vulnerable" when they are doing the exact opposite.”

The report highlights numerous areas of government policy that are not only failing Deaf and Disabled people, but that are causing serious rights violations.

Among the many areas where the Committee is “deeply concerned” are: the social care recruitment crisis follow EU withdrawal; the inadequacies of social care support provision to cover anything more than “bare subsistence”; incarceration of Disabled people “in secure psychiatric facilities due to a lack of community-based support”; “disabled people who are housebound due to inadequate support to access the community”; “abuse, mistreatment and the increasing use of restraints, restrictive practices and… unexpected deaths in the mental health care system”.

Dorothy Gould, founder of [Liberation](https://liberationrights.org.uk/), a grass-roots organisation led by people with personal experience of mental distress/trauma, said:

“…it is an utter disgrace that many of us are forced into institutions, continue to be locked up against our will in places such as psychiatric hospitals and continue to be forcibly treated and abused, in complete breach of human rights which other citizens hold.”

The Committee’s recognition of the increasing barriers to employment have been welcomed by Deaf and Disabled trade unionists.

Natalie Amber, Co-chair, Deaf and Disabled Members Committee, [Equity Trade Union](https://www.equity.org.uk/), said:

“Ill-thought through cuts, particularly as a result of welfare reform, are making it impossible to work in the creative industries unless you have independent wealth. This is directly and negatively impacting who we see on our stages and screens.”

The report acknowledges the devastating impact of previous welfare “reform” measures.

The report states that:

“The Committee is appalled by reports of “benefit deaths” referring to fatalities among disabled people in the State party, subsequent to their engagement with the process for determining eligibility for benefits…

“Testimonies have also been received regarding the minimal, unsuitable, and/or abusive responses to individuals' mental health emergencies that are frequently precipitated by the benefits assessment procedure.”

It recommends that the UK government:

“Take comprehensive measures to ensure that persons with disabilities are adequately supported through social security payments, benefits and allowances,… ascertain the additional costs of living with disabilities and adjusting benefit amounts accordingly to reflect these costs;”

Alison Turner, daughter-in-law of [Errol Graham](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-65577541), who starved to death after his benefits were stopped, said:

“I am pleased that the report highlighted the need for proper review and monitoring of the deaths of benefit claimants… It shows that this government has learned nothing and cares not for its direct actions to cause harm.”

The report comes less than a week after [the Prime Minister announced a new round of cuts to disability social security payments](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-ministers-speech-on-welfare-19-april-2024) and amidst political and media rhetoric that directly contravenes the 2016 findings and recommendations by demonising disabled benefit claimants.

The report states that:

“There is a pervasive framework and rhetoric that devalues disabled people and undermines their human dignity. Reforms within social welfare benefits are premised on a notion that disabled people are undeserving and wilfully avoiding employment (“skiving off”) and defrauding the system. This has resulted in hate speech and hostility towards disabled people.”

Kamran Mallick, CEO of [Disability Rights UK](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/), said:

“Under this Government, the UK has lost its status as a nation that leads in disability rights to one that is actively attacking Disabled people.

“In just the last week we have seen an onslaught of new policy proposals and legislation which will not only harm us but also lead to avoidable deaths…

“At a time when we’re all struggling to make ends meet and cannot access the healthcare and support that we need, the Government are scapegoating Disabled people for a failing economy.

“We are not at fault for simply existing. The Government are at fault for their complete disregard for international treaties and contempt for Disabled people’s rights.”

John McArdle, spokesperson for the [Black Triangle](https://blacktrianglecampaign.org/) campaign in Scotland, said:

“To proceed with the plans announced by Conservative Prine Minister Sunak last Friday will definitely lead to a surge in deaths by suicide and other avoidable harm which falls short of death but is nonetheless catastrophic.

“The U.K. has abrogated the Convention on the Rights of Disabled People by its treatment of Deaf and Disabled people in the UK.”

Disabled President of the [National union of Journalists (NUJ),](https://www.nuj.org.uk/) Natasha Hirst, made a call to all journalists to reflect the evidence as reflected in the report rather than unquestioningly repeating inaccurate and harmful government rhetoric:

“There has never been a more important time for journalists and the wider media industry to tackle harmful negative rhetoric against disabled people.

“I call on journalists to take time to understand the concerns raised by the UN Committee and scrutinise why the Government is so keen to dismiss their failure to uphold disabled people’s human rights.

“Deaf and Disabled People’s Organisations have thoroughly evidenced the harm caused by policy changes and cuts to services and yet the UK Government is intent on pushing this even further.

“Disabled people’s voices need to be heard and not drowned out and demonised by people who have never experienced the sharp end of the social security system.

“As journalists, we should report ethically to hold power to account, and not be complicit in the scapegoating of disabled people.”

ENDS

**Notes for Editors**

1. The special inquiry was triggered under Article 6 of the Optional Protocol of the [Convention on the Rights of Disabled People (CRDP).](https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities) This was the first time an investigation into allegations of “grave and systematic violations” of CRDP rights had even taken place. Since then, following the precedent set by UK DDPOs, inquiries have taken place into allegations of breaches by Hungary and the EU and by the Spanish State.
2. The three articles of the CRDP which the special inquiry focused on are articles 19, 27 and 28.
3. The UK DDPO CRPD Monitoring Coalition co-ordinates written and oral evidence from UK DDPOs for examinations and inquiries by the UN Committee on the Rights of Disabled People.
4. The UK DDPO written submission to the inquiry can be found here: https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/UK-DDPO-CRDP-Special-Inquiry-Shadow-Report-final.docx
5. The deadline for written submissions to the inquiry was midnight on 1 August 2023. The report states that the UK government asked for postponement on 26 July 2023.
6. The special inquiry oral evidence session in August which heard from UK DDPOs as well as representatives from the equality and human rights commissions of the four nations can be seen here: https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1o/k1o8b7239p
7. The UK government’s evidence to the Committee can be seen here: <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1s/k1svtljvtr>
8. Media reporting linked to the government’s welfare reforms plans has been found to be inaccurate and to incite hostility against disabled benefit claimants. For example: the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) ruled that it has [upheld a complaint](https://www.rightsnet.org.uk/welfare-rights/news/item/ico-upholds-complaint-in-relation-to-media-reports-that-appeared-to-be-aimed-at-stirring-up-hostility-towards-disabled-people-claiming-benefit#:~:text=11%20March%2C%202024-,ICO%20upholds%20complaint%20against%20the%20DWP%20in%20relation%20to%20media,towards%20disabled%20people%20claiming%20benefit) against the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in relation to media reports that appeared to be aimed at ‘stirring up hostility’ towards disabled people claiming benefit; the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) recently [upheld complaints](https://www.ipso.co.uk/rulings-and-resolution-statements/ruling/?id=19985-23) against *The Telegraph* for inaccurate and misleading articles about disability benefit entitlements that gave a false impression about eligibility and the generosity of the social security system.