

UK workers put in £26 billion worth of unpaid overtime during the last year - TUC analysis

2 years ago



UK employers claimed £26 billion of free labour last year because of workers doing unpaid overtime, according to new analysis published by the [TUC](#).

Today is the TUC's 20th annual Work Your Proper Hours Day. On this day, workers are encouraged to take the breaks they are entitled to and finish their shifts on time. And managers are encouraged to support staff by setting reasonable workloads and putting in place workplace policies to protect against burnout.

Main findings

- Unpaid overtime is a problem for millions of workers: 3.8 million people did unpaid overtime in 2023, putting in an average of 7.2 unpaid hours a week. For those workers, that's equivalent on average to £7,200 a year of wages going unpaid for work done.
- Occupations with most unpaid overtime in 2023: This year teachers top the list for both the proportion of staff doing unpaid overtime (40%) and the average weekly overtime across all employees (4.4 hours). Chief executives, managers and directors feature strongly, suggesting that the additional responsibilities of senior staff are not properly managed by employers. (See table 3 in notes)
- Unpaid overtime is more common in the public sector: 1 in 6 public sector workers (16.7%) did unpaid overtime in 2023, compared to 1 in 9 (11.9%) in the private sector. Public sector staff gave £11 billion worth of unpaid overtime to meet the needs of service users. That is an average of more than 10 million hours each week of unpaid overtime in our public services.

- Regional variation: In 2023, London had the highest proportion of workers doing unpaid overtime, at 18.8%, compared to 13.2% nationally. (See table 2 in notes)

Rules for employer recording of working hours need to be strengthened

In a 2019 the European Court of Justice ruled that employers should establish an “objective, reliable and accessible system” for recording hours.

This ruling was binding on the UK. But when the Conservative government had the opportunity to strengthen requirements on employers with the Retained EU Law Act, ministers retained the UK’s far weaker UK rules.

Employers are only required to keep “adequate” records of hours worked.

TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak said:

“We’re encouraging every worker to take their lunchbreak and finish on time today. And we know that the best employers will support them doing that.

“Most workers don’t mind putting in extra hours from time to time, but they should be paid for it.

“Part of the problem is that some employers fail to record the overtime staff do. And when they don’t record it, they don’t pay it.

“Conservative ministers know about this problem, but they refuse to tighten the rules on employers’ records. That’s not good enough. Working people deserve a government that is on their side.”

On public sector overtime, Paul added:

“We all depend on public services. But they’ve been run down by Conservative cuts and mismanagement.

“That’s why public sector workers do so much unpaid overtime. They are going flat out to provide the services families rely on. But burnout and staff retention are big problems.

“None of us can afford to go on like this. The government must fix pay and conditions for public sector staff, instead of relying on the goodwill of workers who are burning out. That’s the only way we can rebuild our public services to the decent standard that we all need.”