TUC – number of people in insecure work reaches record 4.1 million

2 years ago

The number of people in insecure work has reached a record high of 4.1 million, according to new TUC analysis published last week.

The analysis of official statistics shows the number of people in precarious employment – such as zero-hours-contracts, low-paid self-employment and casual/seasonal work – increased by nearly one million between 2011 and 2023.

Over that period insecure work rose nearly three times faster than secure forms of employment. While the numbers in insecure work increased by 31%, those in secure employment increased by just 11%.

The TUC estimates that 1 in 8 workers in the UK are now employed in precarious employment.

However, in some parts of the country, such as the West Midlands and the South West, this number has risen to 1 in 7.

Low-paid industries have fuelled most of the growth

The growth in insecure work since 2011 has been fuelled mainly by lower-paid sectors of the economy.

In care, leisure, service occupations and elementary occupations the number of people in precarious employment has rocketed by over 600,000 (+70%) since 2011.

Insecure work pay penalty

Today's analysis also shows that people in insecure work face a severe pay penalty compared to other workers.

People on zero-hours contracts earn over a third (35%) less an hour, on average, than workers on median pay.

And the pay gap between workers in seasonal (-33%) and casual (-37%) work and median earners is also stark.

New Deal "urgently needed"

The TUC says the huge rise in insecure and low-paid work highlights the need for boosting workers' rights and making work pay.

The union body says Labour's New Deal for Working People would be a "game changer" if delivered in full – with the biggest upgrade in workers' rights in a generation.

In April the Chartered Management Institute polling of managers revealed strong support for key New Deal policies:

- More than 4 in 5 (82%) managers said granting workers fundamental day one rights was important.
- 3 in 4 (74%) managers said a ban on zero-hours contracts was important, and
- 3 in 4 (74%) managers said the publication of ethnicity and disability pay gaps was important.

The polling also revealed that 80% managers believe workers' rights should be a top priority in national policies, while 83% said such changes can positively impact workplace productivity.

TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak said:

"We need a government that will make work pay.

"But over the last 14 years we have seen an explosion in insecure, low-paid work.

"The UK's long experiment with a low-rights, low-wage economy has been terrible for growth, productivity and living standards.

"Real wages are still worth less than in 2008, and across the country people are trapped in jobs that offer little or no security."

On the need for change, Paul added:

"We must end the Conservatives' race to the bottom on employment standards.

"The New Deal is an opportunity for a reset. Delivered in full – it would be a game changer for millions of working people.

"As well as preventing workers from being treated like throw-away labour it would stop good employers from being undercut by the bad."

If delivered in full Labour's New Deal will:

- Strengthen collective bargaining by introducing fair pay agreements to boost pay and conditions –

starting in social care.

- Introduce ethnicity pay gap reporting and disability pay gap reporting.
- Ban zero-hours contracts to help end the scourge of insecure work.
- Give all workers day one rights on the job. Labour will scrap qualifying time for basic rights, such as unfair dismissal, sick pay, and parental leave.
- Ensure all workers get reasonable notice of any change in shifts or working time, with compensation that is proportionate to the notice given for any shifts cancelled or curtailed.
- Beef up enforcement by making sure the labour market enforcement bodies have the powers they need to undertake targeted and proactive enforcement work and bring civil proceedings upholding employment rights.