

## “Pervasive” insecure work bad for workers and bad for the economy- TUC

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The TUC has warned that insecure work is “pervasive” in every corner of the country, and that it is holding back workers and the economy.

The union body said the government’s flagship workers’ rights bill will tackle Britain’s insecure work epidemic.

The Employment Rights Bill, which is currently making its way through parliament, will ban exploitative zero hours contracts by giving workers a right to a contract which reflects their regular hours. It will also give workers the right to compensation from cancelled shifts.

The statement comes as the annual TUC Congress begins today in Brighton and as the union body publishes new analysis which reveals 4 million people are in insecure work in the UK, or 1 in 8 (11.7%) of the workforce.

The TUC defines insecure work as those on zero-hours contracts, agency, casual and seasonal workers (but not those on fixed-term contracts) and the low-paid self-employed who miss out on key rights and protections.

Insecure work exploded on the Conservatives’ watch, increasing by 800,000 from 2011 to 2024. The proportion of the wider workforce in insecure work also went up from 10.7% to 11.7% in the same period.

Low-paid jobs in care, leisure, service and the elementary sector account for three quarters (77%) of the net increase in insecure jobs. The care sector in particular is made up overwhelmingly of women.

In addition, black and minority ethnic (BME) workers have been disproportionately affected by the growth of insecure work. Between 2011 and 2024, the proportion of BME workers in insecure employment has risen from 12.2% to 16.3%, and BME workers account for 70% of the explosion in insecure work

The TUC says this underlines why tackling the scourge of insecure work will help advance gender and race equality at work.

The analysis reveals the South West and Yorkshire and Humber are particular insecure work hotspots – but the TUC says insecure work is a nationwide problem, with all UK regions having well over 10% of the workforce in precarity.

#### Complete control for bosses

The TUC says zero-hours contracts give employers complete control over workers' hours – and therefore pay – meaning workers often don't know how much they will earn each week.

The union body argues that this makes it hard for workers to plan their lives, budget and look after their children.

Previously unpublished TUC polling shows:

- Over half (62%) of insecure workers are offered shifts with less than 24 hours' notice.
- Four in five (79%) workers on ZHCs report frequent last-minute scheduling, rising to 85% among carers on ZHCs.
- Two-thirds (66%) of ZHC workers received no compensation the last time their hours were cancelled, with mothers and carers the most likely to lose out.

Most insecure workers say they would prefer stable hours, with over 80% of zero hours workers wanting consistent schedules with optional overtime. Yet one third (33%) of zero hours contract workers said that their employer had denied their request for guaranteed hours.

Meanwhile, 1 in 5 (22%) workers on zero hours contracts cannot refuse hours. Of those who have refused hours previously, a fifth (20%) get penalised for doing so, while a further fifth (20%) face bullying from managers as a result.

The TUC says this makes it harder for workers to challenge unacceptable behaviour by bosses because of concerns about whether they will be penalised by not being allocated hours in future.

Unpredictable hours and cancelled shifts have real consequences for workers' financial wellbeing too:

- Nearly two-thirds (63%) of those in insecure work said they often or sometimes struggled to meet their basic living costs due to not being offered enough hours.
- This figure rose to three quarters (75%) for workers on zero-hours contracts.

The TUC says financial precarity means less money in workers' pockets and therefore less spend on our

high streets – stifling economic growth.

The research underlines the importance that the government delivers the Employment Rights Bill, according to the union body.

The TUC is urging the government to “stand firm” in the face of cynical attacks on the Employment Rights Bill, with the Bill set for parliamentary ping pong after Conservative and Lib Dem Peers tried to dilute key workers’ rights in the Lords.

TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak said:

“This insecure work epidemic isn’t just holding back workers, it’s holding back our economy too.

“When workers don’t have security at work, they tend to earn less, and that means they spend less too.

“The Tory experiment with low-paid, insecure work has been tested to destruction.

“That’s why the Employment Rights Bill is so badly needed. It will help to tackle the scourge of insecure work with a ban on exploitative zero hours contracts, which includes agency workers, and provide workers with a host of vital other protections like day one sick pay and protection from unfair dismissal and harassment.

“The government must stand firm in the face of cynical attacks from Conservatives and Lib Dems – who are trying to block rights for millions of workers.”