

The Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms

By email only

From: Baroness Kishwer Falkner,
Chairwoman

Our ref: 2121Timms

Thursday 16 November 2023

Dear Sir Stephen Timms,

Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023

I am writing to bring to your attention our landmark report into the state of equality and human rights in Britain in 2023, which we have published and sent to Parliament today (16 November 2023).

The Equality and Human Rights Monitor outlines extensive findings in relation to areas of progress, areas for improvement and areas that have stayed the same, in addition to wide-ranging recommendations to improve equality and human rights in Britain. The report is available in full on our website.

In this letter, I am bringing to your attention matters of particular interest to the Work and Pensions Committee.

Following on from our last *Is Britain Fairer?* report in 2018, the Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023 draws on the comprehensive data outlined in our [Measurement Framework](#) to assess progress on equality and human rights over the last five years across Britain.

Overall, we have found that there have been significant challenges to equality and human rights in this period, including:

- the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- the UK's departure from the European Union
- the period of high inflation as well as the economic impact of the war in Ukraine.

These events have exacerbated some persistent, long-term inequalities. For example, the data shows that whilst more young people have been reporting mental health conditions since 2010, the numbers rose further during the pandemic and remain high.

These events have also been a catalyst for new trends. For example, the increase in home working has benefitted parents, older and disabled people, and those with caring responsibilities.

I would particularly like to draw your attention to our findings on work and welfare where we have seen that:

- Child poverty among children aged five and over has risen in the past decade in Britain, and the number of children affected by the two-child limit on Universal Credit and Child Tax Credit is growing each year.
- Focusing disability benefits on more severe conditions may have pushed less severely disabled people into employment that doesn't offset their loss of income.

- Disabled people in England and Wales have higher rates of suicide than non-disabled people. These trends may be linked to changes in benefits paid to disabled people.
- The benefits system may particularly affect the mental health of people with pre-existing mental health conditions.
- Pay gaps between men and women have persisted, and the earnings gap for disabled people has risen in the last five years.

Our report also sets out recommendations to address these findings, including:

- Central and local government should take, and report on, action to reduce rates of child poverty.
- Government and health providers should take, and report on, action to understand and reverse the larger increase in poor mental health experienced by disabled people compared with non-disabled people.
- The UK government should review the Disability Confident scheme to ensure that it improves employment outcomes for disabled people.
- Government and local government, in collaboration with disabled people in line with Article 4(3) of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), should take, and report on, action to narrow the earnings and employment gaps between disabled and non-disabled people.
- Central and local government should take, monitor and report on, action to address occupational segregation and narrow the pay gap between men and women, for example by improving the availability of childcare, expanding the right to statutory carer's leave and promoting access to flexible working.

As you will be aware, public authorities are required under the [Public Sector Equality Duty \(PSED\)](#) to publish specific and measurable equality objectives. Our recommendations are designed to support the development of these objectives and help ensure that this legal obligation can be performed in a way that is strategic and focused on the most significant equality challenges identified by the data. Objectives must be revised and published at least every four years, but this can be more frequent.

We hope that our recommendations will help you to target action to where it is needed most to continue to build a fairer society.

We would be keen to discuss these findings and recommendations in more detail and would be delighted to offer you a meeting at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,



Baroness Kishwer Falkner

Chairwoman

Equality and Human Rights Commission

[CC: Work and Pensions Committee Secretariat]

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equalityhumanrights.com