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TUC press office: 020 7467 1248

New report: 2 in 3 people with Long Covid say they are treated unfairly at work

- **More than 3,000 people with Long Covid responded to new TUC and Long Covid Support Employment Group survey**
- **Majority of respondents say they have experienced unfair treatment at work because of Long Covid – and one in seven lost their jobs because of the condition**
- **TUC and Long Covid Support Employment Group call on ministers to act now and ensure everyone with Long Covid is protected by law**

Two in three (66%) people with Long Covid who took part in a survey have experienced unfair treatment at work, according to a new TUC and Long Covid Support Employment Group report published today (Monday).

More than 3,000 people with Long Covid responded to a recent survey – published today around the third anniversary of lockdown.

Two-thirds of those who responded report being unfairly treated at work – up from half (52%) who responded to a similar survey in 2021.

Treatment at work

The TUC and Long Covid Support Employment Group report reveals that many people with Long Covid say the condition has had an impact on how they are treated at work:

- **Almost a quarter** (23%) of respondents say their employer has questioned whether they have Long Covid or the impact of their symptoms
- **One in seven** (14%) say they lost their job because of reasons connected to Long Covid – nearly triple the percentage (5%) of people who said that in 2021.
- Nearly **three in 10** (28%) say they are concerned Long Covid has affected their chances of a promotion at work.
- And around **one in six** (16%) report experiencing bullying and harassment at work.

Accessing support at work

The report reveals the difficulties working people with Long Covid are facing accessing the support they need to be able to return to work and carry on working if they wish to:

- **Almost half** (48%) say they were not given any or all of the reasonable adjustments – like flexibility to manage fluctuating symptoms or longer or more frequent breaks – that they needed to come back to work.

- And **one in two** (50%) report not being given any or all of the reasonable adjustments required – like permanent home working or physical changes to the workplace – to manage their job.

Different types of flexible working are essential to people with Long Covid to be able to stay in work, says the union body, but the TUC and Long Covid Support Employment Group report shows they are often the hardest adjustment to get from employers.

Around half (49%) of the respondents to the TUC and Long Covid Support Employment Group survey say they believed they contracted Covid-19 at work.

But **one in eight** (12%) say they haven't told their employer that they have Long Covid – for fear their boss won't do anything or of being seen in a negative light.

Financial impact of Long Covid

The TUC and Long Covid Support Employment Group report also exposes the financial impact on workers experiencing Long Covid:

- **One in two** (50%) of those who responded to the survey say they are having to use their savings to support themselves.
- **Around one in 16** (6%) report taking out a private loan or using a debt service.
- **And one in 16** (6%) say they are using food banks.

Government action needed

The TUC and Long Covid Support Employment Group are calling for the government to urgently introduce a range of measures including:

- **Ensure everyone with Long Covid is recognised as disabled under the Equality Act.** Many people with Long Covid will already get the protections under the Act but extending Equality Act 2010 protections would ensure everyone is protected by law and entitled to reasonable adjustments that remove, reduce or prevent any disadvantages workers with Long Covid face. This would be decisive action from government to protect those facing the long-term health consequences of the pandemic.
- **Recognising Covid-19 as an occupational disease.** This would entitle employees and their dependents to protection and compensation if they contracted the virus while working.
- **Greater flexibility in all jobs.** There should be a duty on employers to list the possible flexible working options for each job when it is advertised. And all workers should have a day one right to work flexibly – not just the right to ask – unless the employer can properly justify why this is not possible. Workers should have the right to appeal any rejections. And there shouldn't be a limit on how many times a worker can ask for flexible working arrangements in a single year.
- **Guidance for employers.** The Equality and Human Rights Commission should urgently produce detailed guidance for employers on Long Covid and the types of reasonable adjustments people may need.

TUC General Secretary **Paul Nowak** said: "Workers with Long Covid have been badly let down.

"Many of these are the key workers who carried us through the pandemic – yet now some are being forced out of their jobs and too many are relying on food banks just to get by.

"Ministers must make sure all workers with Long Covid have the legal right to reasonable adjustments at work so they can stay in their jobs.

"Covid-19 should be designated as an occupational disease. That would allow workers who contracted Covid-19 at work and are living with the consequences to claim the compensation they are due.

"And employers must play their part, by making sure their staff with Long Covid get the reasonable adjustments they need.

"That is how we make sure workers with Long Covid can manage their condition and stay in the workplace."

Lesley Macniven, a founding member of Long Covid Support and Chair of the Long Covid Support Employment Group that worked with the TUC on this report, said: "This report confirms the scale of personal cost and loss of skilled talent Long Covid Support volunteers witness every day in our confidential peer support Facebook group.

"One in seven respondents losing their jobs as a result of their condition is shocking, but not surprising. This huge rise confirms what the Long Covid Support Employment Group has been warning about since 2021.

"Long Covid is devastating the health of a significant percentage of our workforce and urgently requires a more strategic response.

"How much individual pain, misery and financial loss could have been saved if targeted intervention had been taken to prevent these hundreds of thousands of job losses?

"And once lost, the effort and cost to rehire can be eye watering. The OBR estimates that the government's 'back to work' budget will attract 110,000 returners, back to work, over five years, at a cost of £7billion. We need to stop Long Covid related attrition now.

"Lack of support when needed has left a vast pool of people devastated to be jobless and disabled by Long Covid. Some may not now return to the workforce, so our recommendations extend to the support they too deserve.

"Those still fighting to stay in work face discrimination and a lack of understanding. Without action around retention of these workers, not least in sectors facing skills shortages, the numbers, and costs, will continue to rise as they too reluctantly exit the workforce."

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- FOR ADDITIONAL QUOTES AND WRITTEN CASE STUDIES PLEASE CONTACT THE PRESS OFFICE.

- **Worker's experience of Long Covid:** The TUC and Long Covid Support Employment Group's report into long Covid can be found here:

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/Long%20Covid%20at%20Work%20report%20-%20FINAL%20COLOUR%202.pdf>

The TUC and Long Covid Support Employment Group conducted research using a self-selecting online survey to better understand the experiences of workers who have, or have had, ongoing symptoms after having Covid-19 – commonly known as 'Long Covid'. The survey was open between September and October 2022 and was promoted on social media, through affiliated unions and Long Covid support groups. We received 3,097 responses from people who self-reported that they had Long Covid. Of those who replied, 56% are in full-time employment, 24% are in part-time employment and 8% are unemployed.

- **Long Covid Support Facebook group:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/longcovid>

- **Equality Act:** The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as a "physical or mental impairment...[that] has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on [their] ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities". Government guidance makes clear that 'long-term' means the effect of an impairment has lasted 12 months or is likely to last 12 months. The TUC says that many who have Long Covid already meet this criteria and should therefore be protected under the law but too many are not receiving support because of gaps in the law, stigma, disbelief, lack of understanding about Long Covid and other barriers in workplaces.

- **EHRC:** The EHRC have clarified that people with Long Covid do not need to take a case to an employment tribunal to receive disability protections under the Equality Act 2010. People with Long Covid should be protected under the Act and receive reasonable adjustments if they meet the definition of disabled: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-work/news/ehrc-statement-%E2%80%98long-covid%E2%80%99-disability-and-equality-act>

- **2021 Long Covid report:** The TUC conducted a similar survey in 2021 and the results can be found here: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/tuc-calls-long-covid-be-urgently-recognised-disability-prevent-massive-discrimination>

- **About the TUC:** The Trades Union Congress (TUC) exists to make the working world a better place for everyone. We bring together the 5.5 million working people who make up our 48 member unions. We support unions to grow and thrive, and we stand up for everyone who works for a living.

- **About Long Covid Support:** Recognition of Long Covid was accelerated through people-led advocacy by groups such as [Long Covid Support](#) which is now a charity based in England and Wales. Since 2021 their Employment Group have advocated for better support to stay in, return to or leave work well and co-produced guidance with the TUC and other partners that is included within resources collated on www.longcovidwork.co.uk

Contacts:

TUC press office

media@tuc.org.uk

020 7467 1248

Long Covid Support comms team

Info@longcovid.org

07789 650472