

*More than one million Britons
over 50 unable to work due to
long-term sickness*



Workers pass by a salesperson as they walk towards the City of London financial district, during the morning rush hour in London, Britain.

London, January 31 (RHC)-- More than 1.6 million people aged 50 and above in the United Kingdom are unable to work owing to long-term sickness as the country's healthcare system is teetering on the brink of collapse, a new study reveals.

The Guardian in a report cited the Office for National Statistics figures by Rest Less, a digital community and advocate for people above the age of 50, as saying that the number has increased by 20 percent, or 270,000, in three years.

“Not only is this a national health issue with thousands of people suffering silently but it’s increasingly an economic issue too – not least because many of these people would like to work in some capacity, if the right opportunities were available to them,” Stuart Lewis, the chief executive of Rest Less, said.

The data compared reasons for economic inactivity by this age group in July-September 2019 and July-September 2022. It showed that nearly 60 percent of the 2.8 million people currently out of work due to long-term sickness are aged 50 and above. In total, about 40 percent of economically inactive 50 to 64-year-olds are out of work due to long-term sickness.

A surge in long-term illness has significantly decreased the size of the country's workforce across all ages since the COVID-19 pandemic. But it is a particularly large driver of the reduction in available workers in their 50s and 60s, with the number of 50- to 64-year-olds economically inactive – neither working nor looking for a job – up by 375,000 since the start of the pandemic, the study notes.

In total, 27.6 percent of people in this age group are inactive, marking an increase of 2.4 percentage points since the period before the pandemic. This is significantly more than the 1.5 percentage point rise in the working-age population as a whole.

Bee Boileau, a research economist at the Institute for Fiscal Studies, described the findings as troubling. “This rise in long-term sickness for economically inactive people is very concerning,” she said. “It adds to growing evidence that the UK’s health is worsening.”

Since the coronavirus pandemic, the UK's publicly-funded National Health Service (NHS) has struggled to cope with the demand, with waiting lists for operations have soared, hitting a record 7.2 million people in October in England.

Kim Chaplain, a specialist adviser at the Center for Ageing Better charity, said the statistics "make clear that long-term sickness is part of the challenge that the government needs to find solutions to." “Among the thousands highlighted, many are currently stuck within, or outside, an employment support system that does not work for them,” she asserted.

During the past several months, the UK has been grappling with its biggest industrial action in decades, with nurses and ambulance workers walking off their jobs to demand higher pay and better working conditions.

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