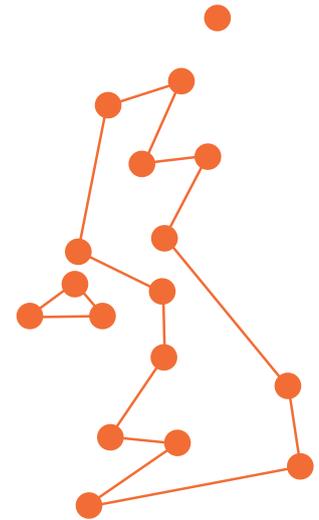




COUNTRY MONITOR



THE UNITED KINGDOM

Social Rights Monitor 2019



The United Kingdom employment rate has been steadily growing in the past years returning to the pre-crisis level however challenges persist in form of underemployment, slow wage growth, low quality jobs, poor working conditions with raising level of precariousness, inequalities and in work poverty. Moreover, the UK is currently facing uncertainties, and in case of a no deal Brexit¹ its economy, living conditions and living standards are most likely to decrease in the next five years. The country shows low labour productivity and investment and there is a need to invest more in infrastructure and housing. In terms of integration of third country nationals, the UK does not have a national strategy on integration. The Civicus monitor classifies the UK as narrowed in terms of civic space, and in the recent years there have been changes that have partly restricted civic space.



Gini Index: 33.1 (2017)

Gender equality index: 72.2

Employment rate: 78.7%

Youth unemployment: 11.3%

AROPE: 22% (2017)

Social welfare spending (as % of GDP): 15.2%

Tax on labour as share of total taxes: 38.1%

In work poverty: 8.9%

CIVICUS civic space monitor: Narrowed

Equal opportunities and fair working conditions

In the UK the employment rate in 2018 is 78.7%, whereas the youth employment rate (age 15-24) is at 50.6%. In recent years the employment rate has steadily grown showing that the country is returning to pre-crisis levels². As underlined also in the European Commission Country Report of the European Semester 2019, the employment level in the country is high and unemployment rates have been generally falling for the last five years, if regional differences are not considered, but challenges persist in the form of underemployment, low quality jobs, poor contract conditions and disadvantages for women and people with disabilities³. Concerns are also raised by the increase of zero-hour contracts, platform jobs and other forms of precarious work. Data⁴ from the UK Office for National Statistics shows that the number of employment contracts without a minimum number of guaranteed hours increased to 1.8m in the year 2018 to November, up from 1.7m in 2016. The UK National Strategic Group has highlighted that these forms of work, as well as a lack of trade union membership⁵, have created a generalised precariousness in the country. Over the past three decades there has been a dramatic flexibilization of the labour market through a combination of deregulation, the normalisation of atypical

working patterns and an explosion in self-employment. This has contributed to the increase of precarious working conditions in a number of sectors, in particular in the 'gig economy', and for people working in hospitality, online retailing, childcare and care sectors generally. A report made by the trade union SIPTU exploring precarious work in a range of sectors highlights that these types of workers face issues such as uncertain hours, no holiday pay, lack of trade union representation and short term contracts⁶.

The precariousness of work affects mainly young people. According to a research published by CIPD⁷, a higher proportion of gig workers are aged 18-29, with nearly four in ten falling into this category.

Moreover, there is a lack of government support for transition from education to employment, which is left to good practices promoted from schools/universities and non-governmental organisations.

Good practice ProjectScotland

In Scotland, the Government and some local authorities fund ProjectScotland⁸, an organisation that provides full time volunteering opportunities over a period of three months for young people furthest from the labour market. As part of the volunteering experience they also have access to a mentor and results show that after the volunteering experience they are more likely to access the labour market.

In the UK (Westminster Government) context, there have been no specific new policies or resources introduced in the recent years to tackle youth unemployment, in particular to support NEETS, and there is a particular under-resourcing for young people with special educational needs (SEN). Several studies have shown that young people from certain



race, ethnicity and disability groups face barriers to progressing in the labour market⁹. In Scotland, a report from the government has indicated that a significant number of young people are locked in low-paid work¹⁰. In Scotland, the flagship “No one left behind” policy laid out the need for person-centred approaches. However, the UK National Strategic Group has underlined that the funds made available to the third sector for the delivery of this initiative are sparse.

A practice used in the UK to support the transition from education to employment as well as supporting early school leavers are apprenticeships¹¹. However, data has shown that the government will miss the target of creating 3 million new apprenticeships between 2017 and 2020¹². According to Department for Education statistics, there were only 285,000 apprenticeship starts between August 2018 and March 2019, compared with 362,400 in 2016/17 and 346,300 in 2015/16. Moreover, the government’s apprenticeships programme has been widely criticised, as evidence shown that apprenticeship funds were being used to pay for professional training or management courses employers would otherwise have paid for themselves.

In Scotland, in February 2015 the Government has launched the “*National Improvement Framework, Curriculum for Excellence and Getting it Right for Every Child*”¹³, to achieve equity in education, focusing in providing support for literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing in specific areas of Scotland to close the poverty-related attainment gap. The £750 million Attainment Scotland Fund is a targeted initiative focused on supporting pupils in the local authorities of Scotland with the highest concentrations of deprivation. As part of this fund the Government has set the *Pupil Equity Funding* (PEF) that is allocated directly to schools and targeted at closing the poverty related attainment gap.

Worsening living conditions, housing crisis and fear of no-deal Brexit

The National Strategic Group has indicated that the UK is currently facing uncertainties, and in case of a no deal Brexit¹⁴ its economy, living conditions and living standards are most likely to decrease in the next five years. Moreover, as highlighted also in the European Commission country profile, labour productivity and investment are low and the UK faces a need to invest more in infrastructure and housing. Social welfare spending in 2017 represented only 15.2 per cent of GDP with an increase from 2008 to 2017 of 0.3 per cent. The UK National Strategic Group has also called to pay attention to a lack of social housing. The number of social housing for rent fell from a peak of around five million in the early 1980s to just under four million in the mid-2000s, but it has been slowly rising since. In 2017 over four million homes were rented from councils or housing associations. Of these, 1.6 million were council homes and 2.4 million were from housing associations. This has mainly been driven by an increase in housing association homes. The proportion of all social housing provided by councils has generally been falling since the 1980s. Having said that, the number is still insufficient. A report¹⁵ by the housing charity Shelter says that solving the housing crisis in England alone would require building 3 million new social homes in a major 20-year housebuilding programme, which would offer a social home to millions who fail to qualify under the current system. This would include:

- 1.27 million homes for those with the greatest housing need – homeless households, those living with a disability or long-term illness, or living in very poor conditions.
- 1.17 million homes for ‘trapped renters’ - younger families who cannot afford to buy and face a lifetime in expensive and insecure private renting.
- 690,000 homes for older private renters – people over 55 struggling with high housing costs and insecurity beyond retirement.



In the current situation young people have no chance of ever buying a home, private renters on lower incomes spend an average of 67% of their earnings on rent, and almost 280,000 people in England are homeless.

Moreover, private consumption has been constrained by weak real disposable income, a low household saving ratio and a rise of household debt.

While unemployment has dropped to the lowest levels since the mid-1970s, average pay remains below the financial crisis peak, after inflation¹⁶. A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)¹⁷ shows that over the past five years more than 500,000 working people in Britain have been swept into working poverty. This means that one in eight workers are now classified as working poor. Nearly all of the increase comes as growing numbers of working parents find it harder to earn enough money to pay for food, clothing and accommodation due to weak wage growth, an erosion of welfare support and tax credits and the rising cost of living. In addition to this the Social Metric Commission¹⁸ has estimated that in the UK in 2016/2017 there were 14.2 million people living in poverty, including 4.5 million children and 8.4 million working-age adults. A notable change is that far fewer pensioners are defined as living in poverty – 1.4 million. Poverty rates fell in the years after 2010, as the UK recovered from the financial crisis, but are now showing clear signs of rising again.

Gender Pay Gap

Since spring 2017¹⁹, employers with 250 or more employees in England, Wales and Scotland are legally required to report annually on the gender pay gap within their organisation. The new measure has exposed some organisations that have been forced to reconsider their salary policies including the BBC²⁰.

Figures submitted by 10,428 employers show that the median pay gap in 2018 was 11.9 per cent, compared to 11.8 per cent last year²¹. There are still no sectors in the UK economy where women are paid the same as men.

In 2017 with the introduction of this new policy the government has produced guidance on how to produce an action plan to narrow the gender pay gap, “*Reducing the gender pay gap and improving gender equality in organisations: Evidence-based actions for employers.*”²². The new measure only shows the top of the iceberg as it applies only to organisations with 250 employees.

Integration of migrants, asylum seekers, minorities and vulnerable groups in your country

In terms of integration of third country nationals, the UK does not have a national strategy on integration. Since the Localism Act²³ of 2011, the country has moved away from a top-down approach and encourages local authorities and devolved administrations to determine their own priorities. Wales for example set up its first Refugee Inclusion Strategy²⁴ in 2008, Scotland published a 4-year strategy *The New Scots: Integrating Refugees into Scotland’s Communities*²⁵, while Northern Ireland does not have any integration strategy. In 2017, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration published a report²⁶ calling on the government to establish a national government strategy for the integration of immigrants and on local governments to set up integration action plans. In 2018, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government published the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper²⁷ followed by a public consultation. The Green Paper sets out the programme of actions the Government proposes to take across government departments and levels. These include: supporting new migrants and resident communities; boosting English language and increasing economic opportunities for all.



Where relevant, integration dovetails with outcomes of other government strategies such as the Public Health Outcomes framework and the 'UK Digital Strategy'²⁸ and is complemented by the Indicators of Integration framework²⁹.

In the UK the responsibility for migrant integration is shared among the Home Office; the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (former Department for Communities and Local Government); the Department for Education; and local Authorities and Devolved Administrations.

According to the Office for National Statistics, in January 2017 there were 2,465,098 non-EU foreigners living in the United Kingdom, representing 4% of the total population. Most came from India, Pakistan and the US.

There are more than 150 programmes³⁰ across the UK that are available to assist refugees.

Non-profit organisations and local authorities can apply for financing through several funds. The EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) is the most important one in terms of budget. Coordinated by the Home Office, the national allocation for the UK under AMIF is € 370,000,000 euros. 20% of this amount is allocated to integration. National integration priorities include language learning, basic life skills and increased employability.

In addition, national and private funds are made available for service providers and other stakeholders to carry out projects aiming for a better integration of the migrant population.

Launched in November 2016, the Government's Controlling Immigration Fund³¹ accepts applications from Local Authorities, including for activities to build community cohesion and to encourage integration.

The National Strategic Group highlighted that there are no incentives for employers to employ migrants,

as there is with young people (for example a SERI or ERI fund is available to employers of young people between 16-24 and in Scotland SCVO CJS for the same age range). In 2018 the number of asylum applications in the UK was 27,044, one per cent lower than the previous year. The UK issued 14,308 grants of asylum and alternative forms of protection and resettlement, down 12 per cent compared with 16,215 in the previous year.

Good practice

Partnership approach to migrants

A good practice example is the partnership approach to migrants coming into the country, with Council teams (Social, Housing Employability), Police, the NHS, the Refugee Council and local employers working in partnership with a common goal of employment within migrant populations. This usually takes the form of an 8 week course on employability which encompasses: ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) lessons aimed at non-native English speakers; Traveling around your city; What is employment and who are your local employers; CV and interview skills; IT for work; Volunteering; What is a payslip and tax in the UK; How do you sign off benefits; How can your benefits be affected by not signing off when working.

Glasgow City Council has proposed to introduce a pilot scheme, currently under revision of the Home Office, to allow asylum seekers in Glasgow to work from six months after their asylum claim, thus enabling them to work while awaiting the decision on their asylum claim.

Social protection and inclusion

While there is a well-developed welfare system in the UK, austerity measures begun in 2008 have meant that there have been severe reductions.



Since the Spending Review in 2010 the UK Government has undertaken extensive reform to the welfare system, cutting the social security budget by reducing or removing a wide range of welfare benefits, figures suggest up to 25% reductions in welfare benefits for the poorest families. Since 2010 the reductions already set in motion have resulted in cuts to British social welfare programs exceeding £27bn a year – equivalent to £690 a year for every working-age person in the country, according to a report from the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University³². The study underlines also that the new reforms impact unevenly across the country. Older industrial areas, less prosperous seaside towns, some London boroughs and a number of other towns are hit the hardest. By contrast, much of southern England and London escape partly³³.

In addition, access to unemployment benefit has been severely restricted particularly for people with disabilities³⁴. Research suggests that the reforms will disproportionately affect disabled people through reductions in income and services, while the transition from Disability Living Allowance to the Personal Independence Payment could result in a reduced income for many disabled people.

The Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 reduced the benefit cap to £20,000, except for £23,000 in Greater London. The Act froze most working-age benefits for four years while the Welfare Benefits Up-rating Act 2013 limited increases in benefit levels to 1% a year for three years, below inflation level. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has estimated that the cumulative effect of these limits and the freeze will be an 8% cut in real terms between 2012 and 2019³⁵. Some of the greatest cuts have been in disability benefits – Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) – which together have shrunk by nearly £5bn, or by 10%, since 2010 according to the Guardian newspaper³⁶.

Furthermore, in England, the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was cut in 2010. It is still however available in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In England, young people aged 16-19 can get a “16-19 Bursary Fund” to help with their studying costs.

In 2010 the UK Government brought in a reform of the welfare system, the Universal Credit, with the aim to simplify the social security system. The new system aims at replacing and combining six means-tested benefits: income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance, and Income Support; Housing Benefit; and Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit³⁷. The reform was set out in the Welfare Reform Act 2012, and has been applied since 2013 starting from new claimants and then rolled out across the country. The UK National Strategic Group, led by the charity Volunteering Matters, stated that when introduced the Universal Credit system should have been a policy which reduced inequality, by providing a basket of benefits which while means tested should have provided benefits across the board. However, the National Strategic Group has underlined that way in which it has been implemented has meant that it has not had the impact promised. A 2018 report from the Trussell Trust shows that the number of people using food banks has increased disproportionately in areas where Universal Credit has been rolled out³⁸.

The National Strategic Group has identified the problem in the fact that the reform is modelled on a ‘workfare’ with sanctions. This reform also introduces additional gender inequalities because the calculation is at household level and the payment is made to one member of the family.

In April 2016 the UK introduced the National Living Wage, which employers are required to pay to any staff aged 25 or older, initially set at £7.20 – a rise of



50p relative to the current National Minimum Wage (NMW) rate, that continued to apply for those aged below 25³⁹.

London's Living Wage is the same as the national average, despite the **cost of living** in London being significantly higher than in many other parts of the UK. This has led to criticism that the UK Living Wage (NLW) still isn't high enough, especially for workers in London, as well as in southeast England.

The Living Wage Foundation calculates what it considers the 'real' cost of living each year; it also partners with a group of businesses who agree to pay what they consider the UK's and London's 'Real Living Wage', although it is paid on a voluntary basis.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD's) employment protection index is a widely used indicator for labour market flexibility. According to this index, the UK has much lighter protections in place for individuals in the labour market relative to countries such as France or Germany. The UK's regulation of temporary work is also less strict than in countries such as France and Spain.

Moreover, access to public services has been limited by austerity with non-statutory services such as youth work completely cut in some local authorities.

Civic space

The CIVICUS monitor classifies the UK as narrowed in terms of civic space, and in the recent years there have been changes that have partly restricted civic space. A recent regulatory change is the Lobbying Act⁴⁰ which requires charities to register with the

Electoral Commission if they spend more than £20K influencing voters in the months prior to a general election. This regulation, as shown in the last snap general election, has had a significant chilling effect on legitimate charity sector campaigning in the pre-election period. A number of charities have altered or reduced campaigning activities before the election as a result of the Act⁴¹.

The UK's Charity Commission has made changes to the Annual Return by invoking anti-terrorism measures, now making it compulsory for UK charities to declare the overseas funding they receive⁴². However, in spite of these changes the UK remains a free and open society and while such restrictions will curb some potentially valuable work, they will not impede civil society's ability to function altogether.

Volunteering

The UK has a long history of voluntarism. Every year NCVO⁴³ produces an almanac of statistics about voluntary activity. Nearly four in ten (38%) people volunteered formally (i.e. with a group, club or organisation) at least once in 2017/18. This gives an estimate of 20.1 million people who formally volunteered during the year. Over one in five (22%) people formally volunteered regularly (at least once a month), around 11.9 million people. Informal volunteering includes a wider range of activities and is defined as giving unpaid help to someone who is not a relative. In 2017/18, 53% of people informally volunteered at least once, and 27% of people took part in informal volunteering regularly. The sector is very well developed and supported by the work of several charities such as Volunteering Matters whose volunteering programmes work across four strategic pillars: young people, older people, people with disabilities, families.





Comparison to Country Specific Recommendations

The Country Report and the recommendations for the UK reflect several of the same points as highlighted by the SOLIDAR UK National Strategic Group, such as underemployment, precariousness of working conditions, increased risk of in work poverty, social exclusion, slow wage growth and the urgency of investment in particular for the provision of affordable housing. The country specific recommendations for 2019 include expenditure but at the same time ‘focus on investment-related economic policy on research and innovation, housing, training and improving skills, sustainable transport and low carbon and energy transition, taking into account regional diversity’.



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SOLIDAR is a European Network of membership based Civil Society organisations who gather several millions of citizens throughout Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR voices the values of its member organisations to the EU and international institutions across the three main policy sectors: social affairs, lifelong learning and international cooperation.



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