

Proposed Right to Reintegration Aims to Support Disabled Workers

July 24, 2025

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A new proposal from the Resolution Foundation highlights the need for a legal “right to reintegration” for individuals with disabilities returning to work after long-term illness, modelled on the statutory protections granted to women returning from maternity leave.

The think tank argues that existing legal duties under the Equality Act are not being effectively enforced, as many employers fail to accommodate disabled workers. According to the report, only around half of disabled employees who request reasonable adjustments such as modified duties, adapted equipment, or flexible working hours receive them in full.

These gaps in workplace support contribute to higher rates of job loss among disabled individuals, who are 1.5 times more likely to leave employment compared to their non-disabled counterparts.

Each year, an estimated 304,000 people leave the workforce due to health-related issues, more than twice the number who return to work following similar conditions. The Resolution Foundation warns that unless employers are incentivised to retain and reintegrate existing workers, national employment goals could be missed entirely.

Louise Murphy, senior economist at the Foundation, stated: “A right to reintegration could offer disabled workers the same kind of employment stability that maternity rights once provided for women.”

The proposed legal right would require employers to demonstrate reasonable efforts to support a returning employee, preventing dismissal unless reintegration has been actively pursued. The Foundation suggests enforcement could be implemented through employment tribunals, a strengthened role for the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), or a new system of caseworkers, potentially to be proposed in the forthcoming Mayfield Review.

The Mayfield Review, led by former John Lewis chairman Sir Charlie Mayfield, is expected to present its findings later this year on how businesses and government can better support individuals with long-term health conditions or disabilities in returning to the workforce.

The report also notes that workplace discrimination remains a significant concern. In 2022, 15% of disabled workers reported experiencing discrimination directly related to their disability. This reinforces the need for stronger employer accountability, especially as disability-related employment remains a persistent challenge.

While reforming health and welfare systems is part of the broader solution, the Resolution Foundation emphasises that employers must be held to higher standards when it comes to retaining experienced workers who face health setbacks. The proposed right to reintegration, they argue, would send a clear message about the value of inclusion, fairness, and long-term employment investment.