

# Protected Characteristics Profile: Disability

## Purpose

This profile is one of nine, presenting quantitative (mainly through the Census) and qualitative (through locally run focus groups) data alongside desktop research. The purpose is to inform discussions about our local community.

## Background

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination and unfair treatment in Britain; this is because of the Protected Characteristics they have. The Protected Characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

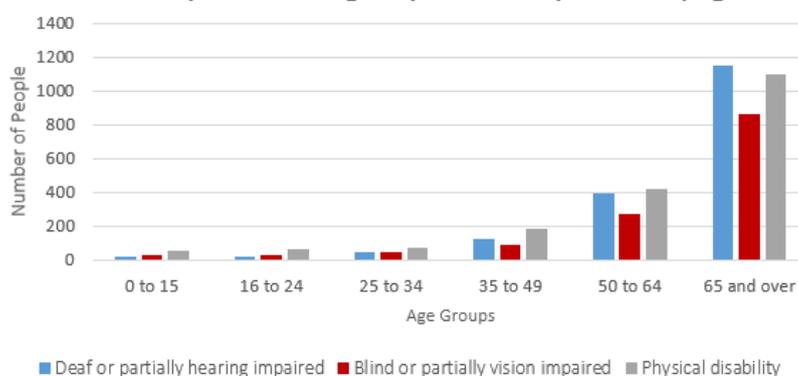
It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of a Protected Characteristic. Disability discrimination is when a person is treated less well compared to others or is put at a disadvantage for a reason that relates to their disability in one of the situations covered by the Equality Act.<sup>1</sup>

## Key Points

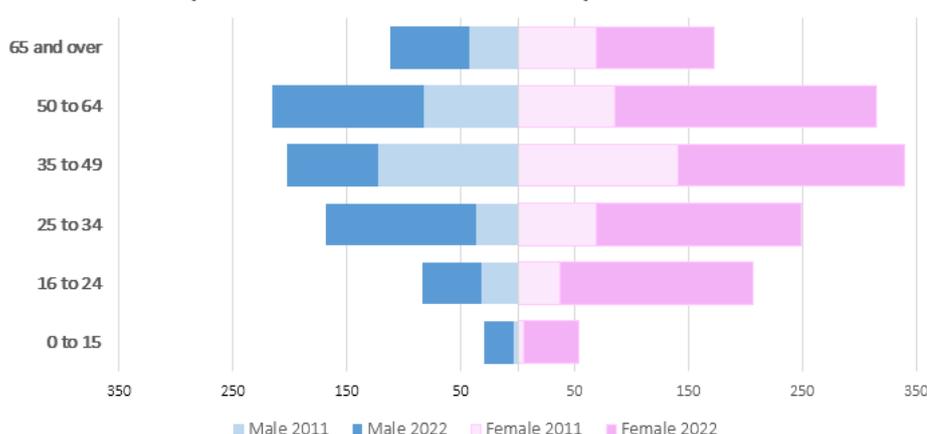
1

In 2022, the majority of those who responded to the Census as having a long-term health condition (Deaf or partially hearing impaired, Blind or partially vision impaired or having a physical disability) were aged 65 and over. This trend is similar to Scotland, the Highlands, the Western Isles and Orkney.

Number of people in Shetland who reported in the Census as being Deaf or Partially Hearing Impaired, Blind or Partially Vision Impaired or having a Physical Disability, in 2022, by Age



Number of people in Shetland who reported in the Census that they had a Mental Health Condition, by Gender in 2022 vs 2011



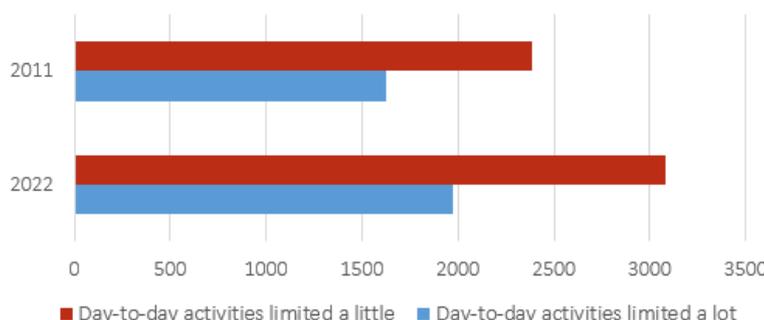
2

In 2022, Shetland, like Scotland, had more females (62%) than males (38%) respond to the Census, that they had a mental health condition, compared to 2011 when the figures were 56% for females and 44% for males. Whereas Orkney, the Western Isles, and Highland had more males in 2011; this trend changed to more females in 2022.

3

Since 2011, there has been an increase in the number of people reporting their day-to-day activities are limited due to a health problem or disability lasting 12 months or more. Additionally, the number of people reporting their day-to-day activities are not limited has decreased. This trend is consistent across Scotland and the Highlands; however, the opposite is true for Orkney.

Number of people who reported in the Census that their day-to-day activities are limited due to a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months



<sup>1</sup> [Disability discrimination | EHRC](#)

## Summary of Other Publications

Desk-top research of discrimination faced by individuals who have disabilities highlights several key findings:

### Disability Employment Gap

Disabled adults are significantly less likely to be in work compared to adults without disabilities. Statistics from the Office for National Statistics, reveals that 82.5% of working aged adults without disabilities had jobs in 2022, compared to just over 50% of adults with disabilities. This employment gap is larger in Scotland compared to the rest of the UK.

### Economic Disparities

A rapid evidence review by the Scottish Centre for Social Research states that compared to non-disabled people, disabled people are more likely to live on low incomes and nearly one-half of people in poverty live in a household where someone is disabled. Deep poverty, defined as a household income 40% below the national median, is nearly twice as prevalent among working-age disabled people compared with non-disabled working-age people.

### Population

Nearly one in four of the working-age population in the UK, in 22/23, are classed as disabled based on an analysis from the Department for Work and Pensions' family resources survey. Amongst disabled working-age adults, the most prevalent impairment type reported was mental health impairments at 47%.

### Disability Hate Crimes

In 2023/24, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service Report details 903 disability aggravated charges in Scotland, an increase of 22% from the previous year. This is the highest annual number of charges in relation to this crime reported since the legislation (creating this aggravation) came into force in 2010. Since then, it has been an almost unbroken upward trend.

### Employment

Statistics from the DWP: Employment of Disabled People 2022 reveals that one in five working-age individuals are classified as disabled, with the number steadily rising, driven by increased reporting of mental health conditions. Nearly one-third of those classified as disabled in one year are no longer classified as such the following year. There has been a strong growth in the number and rate of disabled people in employment and a narrowing of the gap between the rate of disabled and non-disabled people in employment (the disability employment gap). The disability employment gap is notably wider among disabled men, older disabled individuals (aged 50–64), those with no qualifications, White people, and disabled individuals in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and the North West and North East of England.

### Mental Wellbeing

Scotland's Wellbeing – Measuring the National Outcomes for Disabled People research report, from 2019, states that disabled people have lower average mental wellbeing scores than non-disabled people (45 compared to 52 on a scale of 14 to 72).

### Lack of Data and Understanding

Frontline staff from local authorities report that disabled victims often lack access to advocacy and consequently do not receive necessary support in dealing with and reporting discrimination and hate crime. Being Disabled in Britain: a Journey Less Equal, 2017 Report, also emphasises the lack of data available to monitor, such as for disabled employees and employers to recruit disabled staff.

### Discrimination & Harassment in Scotland

The Scottish Household Survey 2023 states that 11% of disabled adults in Shetland have experienced discrimination and/or harassment in the last 12 months. This places it as 15<sup>th</sup> of 32 Local Authorities in Scotland, with the Scottish national average of 11.37%.

## Summary of Feedback from Local Focus Groups

The following summary highlights the main findings from two disability groups run by local services.

### Access to Services

Many of those who responded rely on transport services. This means that information about services, links between different services, punctuality and easy access to public transport, is important. There is a desire for more public transport, including links to work, education, health appointments and leisure and particularly where there are unsafe walking routes in rural areas, so that people with a disability can be more independent.

Respondents highlighted the cost of external travel, particularly as cheaper options, such as the pods on Northlink, are not an option for many of those with a disability. The challenges and stresses of external travel mean that some would prefer healthcare appointments to be in Shetland.

Other suggestions for improvement are:

- Better designed ramps and access to buildings and shops for wheelchair users, along with ensuring pavements are wheelchair friendly;
- More disabled parking across Shetland;
- Better provision and accessibility of public toilets;
- More opportunities to retain independent living whilst having more activities at Supported Living and Outreach;
- Greater choice of communication methods to contact services, such as BSL and Makaton;
- Services open out with current normal office hours, including Eric Gray Centre;
- More compassion and understanding from bus drivers of blue buses and public buses towards bus users; and
- More local amenities to support those with specific disabilities.

### Health and Care

Some respondents shared information about facing discrimination accessing health services, requesting that NHS staff have training in disability awareness, negative language and being more sensitive.

There was a request to make healthcare appointments less scary and quieter.

### Employment

It is important to feel independent in the working environment, but there is acknowledgement of the need for support in certain areas. Support staff are valued, but some participants would like to earn more by working in mainstream employment.

Discrimination when applying for jobs is experienced, with employers stating they cannot employ because of the participant's disability.

Suggestions for improvement are:

- Opportunities for skills development and support to move into mainstream employment opportunities; and
- More opportunities to learn to drive.

### Community and Society

Most participants feel they are treated well in the community and are understood. However, there was mention of stigma, as a result of disability.

Suggestions include:

- More opportunities for volunteering such as at polycrubs;
- More outreach from support groups, for example, in halls, and more information about what community groups are already doing;
- Increased awareness and protection from discrimination in Shetland;
- More promotion of advocacy services; and
- Share resources to support those with a disability, within the community.

Data Sources: [Hate Crime in Scotland 2023-24 | COPFS](#); [Scotland's Wellbeing – Measuring the National Outcomes for Disabled People 2019](#); [Understanding the drivers of food insecurity among disabled people: A rapid evidence review \(natcen.ac.uk\) 2023](#); [Employment of disabled people 2022 - GOV.UK](#); [Supporting documents - Discrimination and Harassment in Scotland, results from the 2023 Scottish Household Survey - gov.scot](#); [12. Poverty - Scotland's Wellbeing: national outcomes for disabled people - gov.scot](#); [Being disabled in Britain: a journey less equal | EHRC 2017](#); [Office for National Statistics, 2023](#).

## Safe Places

Most participants feel safe in Shetland, but additional street lighting along the main roads in Lerwick would help to feel safer at night. Improved road safety measures at the junction near COPE would support greater independence for those commuting to and from work.

## Active and Sociable Life

Participants would like to walk more often and be able to walk to work but cannot, as it is too far away.

Suggestions include:

- More social activities such as discos, karaoke, dance lessons and gigs in Shetland;
- More physical activities such as more boccia sessions, ability sports sessions, more walking and joining a football club and female football team; and
- More walking paths in local villages and planting of trees for people to enjoy.

## Cost of Living

There is a lack of financial support for homeowners with disabilities, preventing adaptations to these properties, which in turn disqualifies them from receiving housing-related financial assistance.

Financial resources to assist with off-island travel and availability, particularly in emergencies, would be beneficial; those with a disability are responsible to cover all costs for a support worker when attending personal activities, such as a music gig; including their time, ticket, and travel expenses. However, for NHS appointments, if the individual cannot travel alone, the NHS covers the support worker's travel.

