

# Making Work Pay: Strengthening Statutory Sick Pay Consultation



Department for Work and Pensions

## Response by the Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)

November 2024

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### About the Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)

LAWRS is a human rights, feminist organisation run by and for Latin American migrant women living in the UK. We support women who are exposed to violations of their fundamental human rights, facing violence against women and girls, exploitation in low-paid sectors, trafficking, or enduring severe poverty and deprivation.

We also advocate for women's rights, migrants' rights and the rights of ethnic minorities at local, national and EU levels, working with sister organisations in the women, anti-trafficking, immigration and racial justice sectors, to tackle the vulnerabilities faced by Latin American women who are affected by intersectional layers of discrimination.

For further information, please visit our website: [www.lawrs.org.uk](http://www.lawrs.org.uk)

#### Contact:

Carolina Caicedo, Policy and Communications Manager on Labour Exploitation -  
[carolinac@lawrs.org.uk](mailto:carolinac@lawrs.org.uk)

Dolores Modern, Policy and Communications Manager on Labour Exploitation -  
[dolores@lawrs.org.uk](mailto:dolores@lawrs.org.uk)

# 1. Rate of Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)

**Thinking about employees earning below the current weekly rate of Statutory Sick Pay (£116.75 per week), what percentage of their average weekly earnings should they receive through the Statutory Sick Pay system?**

Workers should receive 100% of their earnings.

## **Why do you think the percentage rate of earnings should be set to this level?**

Whilst 80 percent of high earners (over £50,000 a year) get full pay when off sick, only a third of low earners (less than £15,000) do. This means around 8 million mostly low-paid employees are reliant on SSP when they are off sick, and around 2.8 million do not receive any sick pay at all.<sup>1</sup>

Workers in low-paid jobs face unique challenges that make it especially necessary for them to receive 100% of their salary when they are ill. Here are some key reasons:

### **Economic vulnerability**

LAWRS supports Latin American migrant women living in the UK and employed mainly in three key feminised and low paid areas of the UK's labour sectors: cleaning, hospitality and domestic work. These are sectors characterised by high levels of exploitation and abuse.<sup>2</sup>

Workers in low-paid employment tend to live paycheck to paycheck, spending a large share of their earnings on basic necessities.<sup>3</sup> This means that they are also unable to accrue savings, and having their income reduced due to illness can leave them and their families unable to make ends meet, and at risk of destitution.

### **Health impacts and wellbeing**

In these conditions, workers tend to continue working even when they are ill to ensure they

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<sup>1</sup> A nationally representative survey conducted by BritainThinks on behalf of the TUC in May 2022: [Sick Pay and Debt](#).

<sup>2</sup> For more information, please see our reports [The Unheard Workforce: Experiences of Latin American migrant women in cleaning, hospitality and domestic work](#) and [Behind Closed Doors: Experiences of Latin American domestic workers in the UK](#).

<sup>3</sup> [ONS Family spending in the UK: April 2022 to March 2023](#).

will still receive full pay<sup>4</sup>. Being able to take the necessary time to recover can have a positive result not just on the worker, but also on the employer and the general economy, as further deterioration of health can lead to more serious health issues and potential longer absences and higher healthcare costs.

## **Gender inequality**

Offering full sick pay is a vital step toward reducing income disparities by providing much-needed support to workers in low-paid employment, who typically have fewer financial protections.

Almost 2.2 million women in the UK are earning less than the real Living Wage compared to almost 1.5 million men, and 60% of low-paid jobs are held by women<sup>5</sup>. Consequently, a reduced income due to illness can have a more significant impact on women's finances, mental health and quality of life.

Women -and in particular migrant women, who are disproportionately represented in low-paid, insecure jobs such as cleaning, social care, retail, and hospitality-, face unique challenges. These roles often come with stricter attendance policies and fewer benefits, making it harder for women to prioritise their health. Full sick pay would protect them from having to choose between their health and their income, especially in precarious roles.

Single mothers, who make up 90% of single-parent households, are particularly vulnerable to income loss during illness. For these families, any reduction in pay can have severe consequences for household finances.<sup>6</sup> Full sick pay ensures they can maintain stability while focusing on recovery.

A higher percentage of women work part-time due to having to balance work and their role as primary caregivers, leading to lower earnings and more financial pressure.<sup>7</sup> These disproportionate pressures that women face, coupled with their caregiving responsibilities, lower job quality and insufficient workplace support, are making it harder for them to stay employed when health challenges arise.<sup>8</sup>

Women's physical and mental health are also being impacted by low-paid, insecure work. The

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<sup>4</sup> The importance of taking time off to recover when one is ill became more evident than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many migrant and other low-paid workers felt pressured to continue working despite presenting symptoms. Low-paid workers are overrepresented in roles that involve manual labour, physical presence and close contact with others, which increases the risk of spreading illness to co-workers and the public when working during illness. Full sick pay would encourage workers to recover at home and avoid spreading illness, contributing to a healthier community.

<sup>5</sup> Employee jobs paid below the Living Wage: 2023, Living Wage Foundation, February 2024

<sup>6</sup> [UK Poverty 2024: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, January 2024.](#)

<sup>7</sup> 72% of people who work part-time are women as quoted in [The Feminist Future of Work: The Employment Rights Bill and the impact on women's working lives, Women's Budget Group, September 2024.](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Long-term sickness becomes top reason for women being out of the labour market, TUC, May 2024.](#)

Health and Safety Executive's 2022 Labour Force Survey showed that 918,000 (5.8%) women are estimated to have had their health made worse by work compared to 778,000 (4.7%) men. In 2021, women experienced more sickness absence than men. The highest rates (3.7%) were in the female-dominated cleaning, health and social care sectors, where workers are exposed to physical, chemical, and biological hazards and risks.<sup>9</sup> Full sick pay would help address these disparities, providing financial relief and supporting gender equity in health and work.

Being in low paid and/or insecure work can also exacerbate hardship and poverty, which is known to have a significant impact on health outcomes.<sup>10</sup> In recent years, LAWRS has seen an increase in anxiety and depression amongst Latin American women, as the cost of living crisis compounds the stress of balancing work, caregiving and managing a household on low-wages. Full pay during illness can mitigate financial strain and support better mental health outcomes, as women would not need to worry about a reduced income while ill.

## **Conclusion**

Offering full sick pay from the first day of illness could greatly improve the lives of migrant workers and address the many disparities that migrant women are experiencing. It would allow a better quality of life, as workers would be able to recover without added financial and psychological strain, which could lead to better health and productivity outcomes in the long term.

Providing 100% pay to low-paid workers during illness would protect their financial stability, encourage better health outcomes, and reduce the spread of illness, benefiting both workers and society. This policy would not only address some of the systemic issues faced by low-income workers but would also contribute to a more equitable and healthier workforce.

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<sup>9</sup> [Uncovering the UK's Hidden Crisis in Women's Workplace Health, British Occupational Hygiene Society, August 2023.](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Health at a price: Reducing the impact of poverty, British Medical Association, July 2017.](#)