

Letter on ESA to UC Migration issues

17 March 2026

To Minister Stephen Timms

Copied to Debbie Abrahams MP, Chair of Work and Pensions Committee

Dear Minister Stephen Timms,

You have been made aware of how worried claimants and organisations have been about the stop to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) payments by 31st March/1st April 2026. We note that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) announced on 12 February¹, apparently extending the Move to Universal Credit (UC) migration deadline:

“The DWP has confirmed it is operating an open extension period with no fixed end date for the final stages of migration to Universal Credit, to allow safe transfer of the remaining 4,000 complex legacy benefit cases. The extension is being reviewed weekly by the Minister, and while the aim is still to move as many cases as possible by 31 March 2026, some migration notice deadlines may now fall beyond that date.

Timelines

- DWP aims to move as many remaining cases as possible by 31 March 2026.
- A temporary open-ended extension period is in place for complex cases.
- Weekly ministerial review will determine when 3-month migration notices will resume.
- Priority remains a “safe and secure” transition rather than hitting rigid deadlines.”

¹ <https://www.rightsnet.org.uk/welfare-rights/news/item/dwp-confirms-that-it-is-currently-maintaining-an-open-extension-period-without-a-fixed-end-date-in-respect-of-migration-to-universal-credit>

BUT these safeguards are not being followed, and ESA claimants who are terminally ill, sick, disabled and with mental distress are suffering intensely, being threatened with destitution if they don't claim UC.

Many claimants are unable to start a UC claim by phone or online: due to illness, being unable to cope, hospitalisation, domestic violence, not being online or having no smart phone, combined with other access barriers such as speech impairment, literacy and other reasons. DWP staff are chasing up claimants but don't offer actual help to claim. Staff are leaving phone messages without full information leaving people in panic, claimants who have told them they are in the middle of treatment, are getting reminder calls during medical appointments/procedures, and being given inflexible deadlines that ignore people's capacity to deal with it.

- WinVisible reports that DWP staff from the Move to Universal Credit (M2UC) complex cases team are harassing a disabled woman with terminal cancer to start a UC claim, despite their intensive advocacy. The DWP has revoked all previous cancellations of migration notices, which means that terminally ill claimants still surviving, have to start a UC claim or be cut off ESA. The DWP knows she has advanced cancer because they cancelled the previous migration notice on the basis of her being on the end-of-life care register, but now they say she didn't mention terminal cancer when they phoned her while she was in hospital in January, only that she had had a stroke. They have labelled her "unco-operative" because her health has now deteriorated to the point where she is unable now to take on making a phone claim for UC, even if supported. They are granting only 15-day extensions at a time, even after her MP has intervened.
- Fightback 4 Justice reports: "We have been liaising directly with a Universal Credit claims manager by telephone on a claimant's behalf. Last week we were informed that his claim is due to be closed because the Department cannot safely conduct a home visit to complete the identity check, and he does not answer his telephone on demand. On the occasions when calls were made, he was in hospital under section of the Mental Health Act due to crisis triggered by stress. He is sixty two years old, has been sectioned dozens of times, is known to the local authority

as a hoarder, and frequently refuses entry to professionals attempting to assist him. These behaviours are part of his diagnosed condition. We are based hundreds of miles away but have attempted to coordinate support locally, including engagement with a Community Psychiatric Nurse. Unfortunately, due to the nature of his illness, he does not trust her. Although we have supported him through the migration process with a Universal Credit adviser, he cannot complete the final identity steps required. If his Universal Credit is terminated next month, there is a very real risk that he will deteriorate rapidly and require further hospitalisation.”

The recent tragic deaths of mum Tamara Logan² and of Paul Kilminster³ after their benefits were stopped, shows how devastating being cut off benefits is for claimants, already known from the earlier tragedies of Errol Graham who starved to death after being cut off ESA, death of mum Elaine Morrell, suicide of Jodey Whiting, and many more, highlighted by bereaved relatives campaigning for justice.

- Completing a UC claim is already stressful as claimants have to satisfy multiple elements to complete their UC claim successfully: give bank balance and bank account information, verify their identity, complete their claimant commitment, additional questions on immigration status, couple claims are even more complicated. Many disabled people don't have a passport or driver's licence to prove their ID online.
- Phone claims are extremely demanding to complete, take at least 45 minutes (sometimes two hours via Citizens Advice Help to Claim support) and require information to be given over the phone by the claimant, even when supported by another person.
- You are allowed to verify ID via a phone interview instead of going to the Jobcentre, but if you go blank due to stress, you are not allowed to have a second phone interview – you must go to the Jobcentre to verify your ID,

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cz0p2jp5d77o>

³ <https://winvisible.org/2026/01/05/frightened-to-death-after-losing-benefits/>

which many people, with physical/invisible disabilities and/or with mental distress, cannot manage.

- Male DWP staff have been sent out unaccompanied to visit women alone at home. This is not acceptable and can be threatening. Women in our networks are too worried about not sorting out payment of benefit, to refuse to let them in.
- Refugee women moving from ESA to UC face the added residence and recourse to public funds test, sometimes resulting in a short-term award tied to our Leave to Remain, and retesting, which is stressful. It's also much harder if English is not your first language.
- Due to the DWP refusal to at least move ESA claimants over automatically, community organisations and advice services are overwhelmed and aren't able to give the level of support required to everyone needing to migrate who requires support.

This repeated failure of safeguarding people is systematic and a recurrent factor that stops people making a successful UC claim. At the same time, starting a UC claim throws up a number of issues which the claimant then has to sort out.

- Fightback 4 Justice says: "80% of claimants we helped migrate were not granted the health element of UC and had to remind DWP staff of Regulation 19 which is that they had the Limited Capability for Work-Related Activity (LCWRA) status already."
- "Another issue we are seeing a rise in, is where DWP has actively encouraged carers to claim LCWRA due to their own disabilities and to save them coming in for interviews, only to find as they migrated with transitional protection (TP – added amount to compensate for the loss of ESA disability premiums) it erodes the TP as an increase since the migration." (Under Universal Credit, a claimant can't get both disability payment and carer element, only the one which is the higher amount.)
"Not only taking transitional protection off that but actively reducing it and

removing the LCWRA too. . . It's causing so many complications, and our organisation is fighting with Jobcentre Plus staff who are looking very narrowly at the rules and taking no responsibility for encouraging the claimant to claim something they must know cannot be paid and that will erode TP. JCP staff have no idea of the rules.”

- Depending on which local authority we are under, thousands of disabled people are seeing large increases in our Council Tax which we cannot afford as Councils reassess contributions under Universal Credit. Then people are being told to fill in a lengthy financial hardship form if they can't afford the Council Tax (Somerset and others).
- Also overpayment deductions by DWP because rent has been paid twice to the landlord (by Council and by DWP). Money which has gone to the landlord is recovered from the UC claimant, who then has to apply to the landlord.

As well as the 4,000 'complex' cases which the DWP says it is still handling, our organisations are aware of many people whose claims were closed because they were unable to engage in the migration process due to being in hospital or unable to cope in other ways⁴. Benefits and Work has estimates of up to 26,000 ESA claimants not completing a UC claim. For this cohort we are asking the DWP to look again at closed claims of former ESA claimants with LCWRA who failed to make a UC claim or complete it. These claimants should get assistance to revive their claim and reinstate their continuity of claim and full entitlement, including transitional protection. WinVisible has been contacted by women who have lost both TP and LCWRA through no fault of their own, as by the time they were able to deal with Universal Credit, they were out of time. Or people have been helped to claim by others who don't know the entitlements, ending up with standard UC at basic rate, which leaves them impoverished and without money for disability costs.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/move-to-universal-credit-july-2022-to-end-december-2025/completing-the-move-to-universal-credit-statistics-related-to-the-move-of-households-claiming-tax-credits-and-dwp-benefits-to-universal-credit-data>

In January 2025, WinVisible submitted evidence⁵ to the Work and Pensions Committee raising the alarm about what is happening to claimants.

We urge you to review this information immediately and reply with what actions the DWP will be taking to protect vulnerable claimants, to review previously closed ESA claims where no successful UC claim was made and why that claim closed, find out if it was because they could not engage with the migration for impairment or health related reasons, for them to be supported to reactivate their migration. A small proportion of ESA claimants will have passed away or moved onto retirement pension.

We ask that the DWP urgently enhance their safeguarding approach based on the issues we've raised and the current discussion that Disabled People's Organisations are having with Chief Medical Officer Dr. Gail Allsop and recommendations in reports by organisations such as Amnesty International and Turn2Us. And that no deadline is imposed on people who still need to migrate their claim from ESA to UC.

Yours Sincerely

WinVisible - Women with Visible and Invisible Disabilities
GM Coalition of Disabled People
Disability Rights UK
Disability Poverty Campaign Group
Disabled People Against Cuts
Fightback 4 Justice
Inclusion London

All African Women's Group
Amnesty International UK
Black Triangle Campaign
Bristol Reclaiming Independent Living
Bury/Bolton ME/CFS & Fibromyalgia Support Group
Decrim Now
Difference North East

⁵ [Committees - Written evidence submitted by WinVisible \(SVC0095\)](#)

Disability North
Disability Stockport
Disabled Mothers' Rights Campaign
Disabled People Against Cuts Cymru
East London Unite Community
Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty
End Social Care Disgrace
English Collective of Prostitutes
Harrow Association of Disabled People
Joy Dove, mother of Jodey Whiting
Just Fair
Kilburn Unemployed Workers Group
London Unemployed Strategies
Payday Men's Network
Project Resist
Queer Strike
Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance
Salford Disability Forum
Single Mothers' Self-Defence
Touretteshero CIC
VOICES ADFOCAD
Welfare Rights Group Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project
West Dunbartonshire Kinship Care
Women Against Rape