

MPs call for workers' rights watchdog amid weak enforcement of labour protections

A cross party group of MPs has called on the government to create a workers rights watchdog after finding labour protections are poorly enforced.

The Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) committee heard evidence firms were only inspected by the national minimum wage team, on average, once every 500 years.

Following evidence gathering sessions with bosses of companies including P&O and Amazon, trades unions and business representatives the multi-party committee has published its report on the UK labour market.

In it, MPs call for the creation of a single workers' rights enforcement body to address poor enforcement which the report said is leaving workers vulnerable to "unscrupulous" employers.

Such a body had already been promised by the government in 2019 but BEIS committee chair and Labour MP Darren Jones said the government "really must get a move on".

"A one stop shop for workers and businesses would provide the clarity, security and effective oversight that is needed," he said.

Evidence to the inquiry, provided by UK charity, Unchecked, said that the UK had less than half the number of labour inspectors needed to reach international benchmarks.

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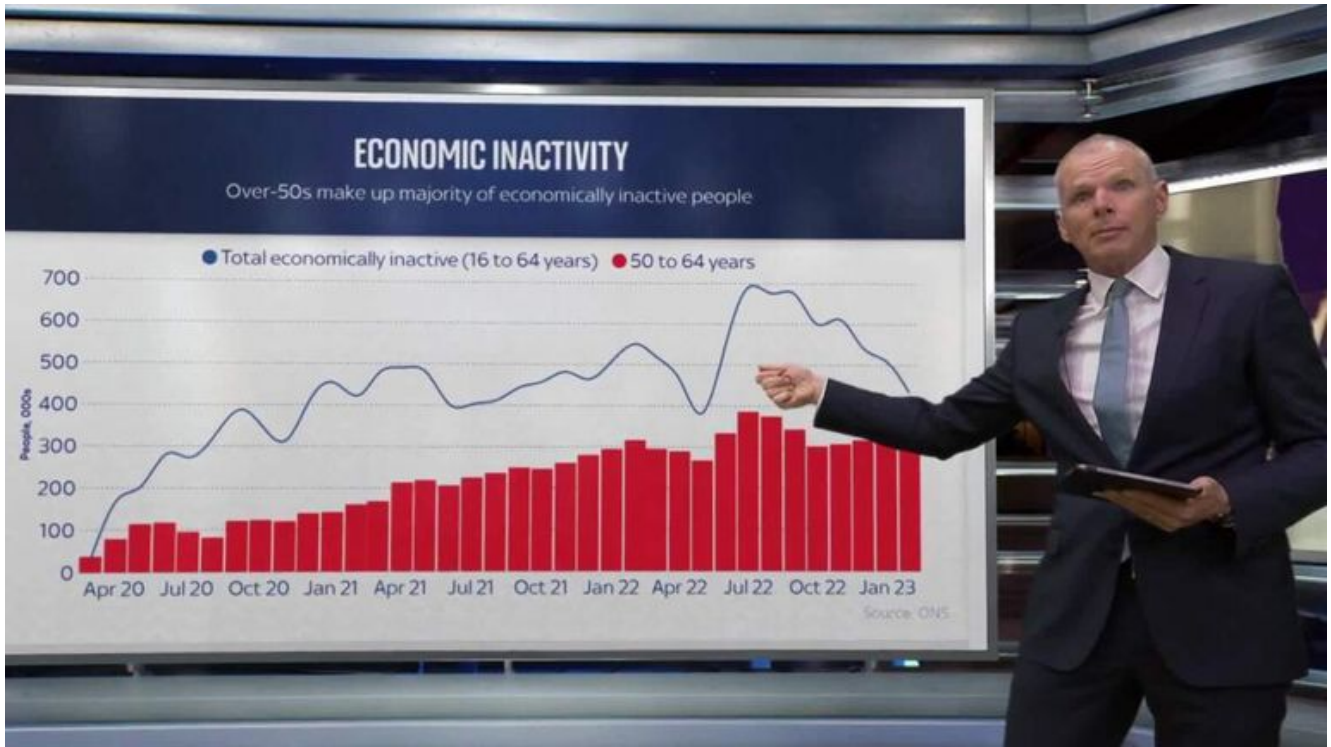
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Labour market rules enforcement is under-resourced and fragmented across a number of small agencies, the report also says.

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Uptick in unemployment rate

Similarly, ministerial ownership of labour policy was found to be fragmented across many departments. The committee has called for the government to consider either setting up a new Ministry for Labour, appointing a new Minister for Labour in the Cabinet Office or establishing a new cabinet committee to coordinate labour market policy across Whitehall.

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Another area of concern for the committee was the area of night-time working.

Damaging effects of night-time work, including increased risk of serious physical and mental health conditions, were highlighted in the report. Evidence had been given to the committee of higher divorce rates among night workers and, from Liminal Space consultancy that the economic cost of a lack of sleep is £50bn a year.

The government was called on to launch an investigation into the health and safety implications of night working, the report says.

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The report was conducted partly in an effort to address tightness in the UK labour market, as unemployment has remained low and job vacancies have remained relatively high. At the same time the UK has a higher rate of so-called [economic inactivity](#) – when someone is neither in work nor looking for work – following the pandemic.

During the pandemic, some workers took [early retirement](#). A poll of 1,031 people aged 45-60 commissioned by the committee found that although many of them took early retirement, others would return to work if suitably flexible roles with adequate protections allowed them to continue semi-retirement or their caring responsibilities.

But lack of protections around flexible working, compared with

full or part-time work, acts as a barrier to re-entering the workforce, the report says.

The enquiry was launched in March 2022 and took in sessions between July 2022 and February 2023 where evidence was heard from the Office for National Statistics, business representatives, trades unions, trade bodies, recruitment specialists and career development experts.