

Article

Disabled people's access to products and services, Great Britain: February to March 2022

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) on disabled people's experiences of accessing products and services in person in Great Britain. This release uses three waves of survey results covering dates between 16 February and 27 March 2022.

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1 . Main points

- Disabled people were more likely to report finding access to products in person difficult compared with non-disabled people (41.6% compared with 15.8%); this includes products such as groceries, medicine and clothes.
- Disabled people were more likely to report finding access to services in person difficult compared with non-disabled people (51.5% compared with 25.2%); this includes services such as banks and building societies, restaurants and bars, hairdressers, sports and exercise facilities, and cinemas.
- Among disabled people, those aged 75 years and over reported most difficulties accessing products (53.9%) compared with all other age groups; this ranged between 34.7% for those aged 25 to 44 years, and 42.5% for those aged 45 to 64 years.
- Disabled people of all ages reported more difficulties accessing services than non-disabled people; this disparity was greatest for those aged 75 years and over (58.8% of disabled people and 22.1% of non-disabled people aged 75 years and over).
- Disabled people were most likely to report having difficulty accessing “medicine, for example, prescriptions or over the counter medications” and “banks or building societies” in comparison with non-disabled people (with a 15.0 and 10.7 percentage point difference respectively).
- Disabled people were more likely to identify barriers to accessing products and services than non-disabled people; difficulty using transport was the barrier with the largest difference between disabled (22.9%) and non-disabled people (6.1%), a 16.8 percentage point difference.
- The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic was the most common barrier reported by both disabled (85.6%) and non-disabled (90.7%) people who had difficulty accessing products or services.

2 . Access to products

This article explores the experiences of disabled and non-disabled people accessing products and services in person in the last 12 months. This is the first time that data on this topic have been captured, based on new survey questions from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) collected between 16 February 2022 to 27 March 2022 in Great Britain. Data are available by sex, age group, disability status and impairment type in the [accompanying data tables](#).

The 12-month reference period for the survey questions used for this analysis includes periods of time where public health restrictions across different countries in Great Britain were in place because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. These restrictions would have impacted access to products and services in person. For more information, please see [Section 7: Data sources and quality](#).

Levels of ease or difficulty in accessing products in person

In February to March 2022, 23.0% of all adults aged 16 years and over reported that access to [products](#) in person was difficult (either very or somewhat difficult) in the last 12 months. This percentage was made up of 19.8% of people reporting that accessing products was somewhat difficult, and 3.2% reporting accessing products was very difficult.

Disabled people were more likely to report finding access to products difficult than non-disabled people (41.6% compared with 15.8%). This percentage was comprised of 33.0% of disabled people who found accessing products somewhat difficult, and 8.6% who found access very difficult. For non-disabled people, 14.5% found accessing products somewhat difficult, while 1.2% found access very difficult (percentages may not sum to the total of the difficult category because of rounding).

Figure 1: Disabled people were more likely to find accessing products in person somewhat or very difficult compared with non-disabled people

Percentage of disabled and non-disabled adults aged 16 years and over who reported levels of ease or difficulty accessing products in person in the last 12 months, Great Britain, 16 February to 27 March 2022

Notes:

1. Question: "In the past 12 months, how easy or difficult have you found accessing products in person?" This question was asked of all respondents aged 16 years and over.
2. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Across all age groups, disabled people were more likely to report finding access to products (very or somewhat) difficult than non-disabled people (Figure 2).

The data also indicates that age can add to the difficulties experienced by disabled people in accessing products in person. Adults aged 75 years and over saw the largest difference in reported difficulty accessing products between disabled and non-disabled people, with a percentage point difference of 37.3. The smallest difference was between disabled and non-disabled people aged 25 to 44 years (18.3 percentage point difference).

Age does not have the same effect on non-disabled people's experiences of difficulty accessing products. There was no significant difference between non-disabled people aged 75 years and over (16.6%) and other age groups (which ranged from 10.5% to 17.1%). However, for disabled people, those aged 75 years and over were significantly more likely to find accessing products difficult than disabled people in younger age groups (53.9%).

Figure 2: Disabled people were more likely than non-disabled people to report finding access to products difficult among all age groups

Percentage of adults aged 16 years and over by disability status and age group who found it difficult to access products in person in the last 12 months, Great Britain, 16 February to 27 March 2022

Notes:

1. Question: "In the past 12 months, how easy or difficult have you found accessing products in person?" This question was asked of all respondents aged 16 years and over.
2. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
3. The breakdown of "difficult" was derived from grouping the response options "somewhat difficult" and "very difficult".

Download the data

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The estimates for access to products by impairment type are available in the data tables. These data should be treated with caution because of some small sample sizes, which make it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions between these groups.

Products that are difficult to access in person

Disabled people were more likely than non-disabled people to indicate difficulty accessing particular products in the past 12 months (Figure 3), this includes:

- “medicine, for example, prescriptions or over the counter medications” (21.2% for disabled people, 6.2% for non-disabled people, a 15.0 percentage point difference)
- “groceries, for example, food, drink or toiletries” (25.0% for disabled people, 10.5% for non-disabled people, a 14.5 percentage point difference)
- “clothes and accessories” (12.9% for disabled people, 3.1% for non-disabled people, a 9.8 percentage point difference)
- “other goods, for example, books, electronics or sports equipment” (10.8% for disabled people, 4.6% for non-disabled people, a 6.2 percentage point difference)

Figure 3: Disabled people were more likely to have difficulty accessing “medicine, for example, prescriptions or over the counter medications” compared with non-disabled people

Percentage of disabled and non-disabled adults aged 16 years and over who found it difficult to access different product types in person in the last 12 months, Great Britain, 16 February to 27 March 2022

Notes:

1. Question: "In the past 12 months, have you had difficulty accessing any of these products in person?" This was asked of all respondents aged 16 years and over.
2. Respondents were asked to select all that apply unless selecting “I have not had difficulty accessing any products”.
3. This graph is ordered by the highest to lowest percentage point difference between disabled and non-disabled people.

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From this survey question, non-disabled people (81.1%) were more likely than disabled people (63.5%) to indicate they experienced no difficulty accessing any products when considering the list in Figure 3. This is a different estimate from those who reported access to products was somewhat or very easy in response to the question “In the past 12 months, how easy or difficult have you found accessing products in person?”. A comparison of these estimates is available in [Section 7: Data sources and quality](#).

3 . Access to services

Levels of ease or difficulty in accessing services in person

In the past 12 months, 32.5% of all adults aged 16 years and over reported difficulty accessing [services](#) in person, with 27.4% of people finding it somewhat difficult and 5.1% finding it very difficult.

Disabled people were more likely than non-disabled people to report that accessing services was somewhat difficult (40.1% disabled and 22.5% non-disabled) and very difficult (11.4% and 2.7%, respectively).

Figure 4: Disabled people were more likely to find accessing services somewhat or very difficult compared with non-disabled people

Percentage of disabled and non-disabled adults aged 16 years and over who reported levels of ease or difficulty accessing services in person in the last 12 months, Great Britain, 16 February to 27 March 2022

Notes:

1. Question: "In the past 12 months, how easy or difficult have you found accessing services in person?" This was asked of all respondents aged 16 years and over.
2. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

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Across all age groups, disabled people were more likely than non-disabled people to report difficulty accessing services (Figure 5).

The relationship between age and disabled people's experience of accessing services compared with non-disabled people was similar to the pattern for products reported in Section 2. The disparity between disabled and non-disabled people in accessing both products and services was largest for those aged 75 years and over (a 37.3 percentage point difference for products, and a 36.7 percentage point difference for services). The age group with the second largest disparity was for those aged 16 to 24 years.

Figure 5: Across all age groups, disabled people were more likely than non-disabled people to find it difficult to access services; the disparity was greatest for adults aged 75 years and over

Percentage of adults aged 16 years and over by disability status and age who found it difficult to access services in person in the last 12 months, Great Britain, 16 February to 27 March 2022

Notes:

1. Question: "In the past 12 months, how easy or difficult have you found accessing services in person?" This question was asked of all respondents aged 16 years and over.
2. Percentages may not sum because of rounding.
3. The breakdown of "difficult" was derived from the grouping of the response options "somewhat difficult" and "very difficult".

Download the data

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It is difficult to assess the impact of impairment type on access to services for disabled people because of small sample sizes, which make it difficult to understand differences between groups.

Services that are difficult to access in person

Disabled people were more likely than non-disabled people to indicate difficulty accessing particular services in the past 12 months (Figure 6), this includes:

- "banks or building societies" (24.8% compared with 14.1%, a 10.7 percentage point difference)
- "restaurants, cafés, nightclubs, bars or pubs" (34.0% for disabled people, 24.6% for non-disabled people, a 9.4 percentage point difference)
- "hairdressers, barbers or beauty salons" (27.8% for disabled people, 20.2% for non-disabled people, a 7.6 percentage point difference)
- "cinemas, sporting events or music venues" (26.6% for disabled people, 21.5% for non-disabled people, a 5.1 percentage point difference)

Figure 6: Disabled people were more likely to have difficulty accessing “banks or building societies” compared with non-disabled people

Percentage of disabled and non-disabled adults aged 16 years and over who found it difficult to access different service types in person in the last 12 months, Great Britain, 16 February to 27 March 2022

Notes:

1. Question: "In the past 12 months, have you had difficulty accessing any of these services in person?" This was asked of all respondents aged 16 years and over.
2. Respondents were asked to select all that apply unless selecting "I have not had difficulty accessing any services".
3. This graph is ordered by the highest to lowest percentage point difference between disabled and non-disabled people.

Download the data

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Non-disabled people (57.7%) were more likely than disabled people (47.3%) to indicate experiencing no difficulty accessing any services when considering the list of services in Figure 6. This is a different estimate from those who reported access to services was somewhat or very easy in response to the question "In the past 12 months, how easy or difficult have you found accessing services in person?". A comparison of these estimates is available in [Section 7: Data sources and quality](#).

4 . Barriers to accessing products and services

The majority of adults who said they found one or more products or services difficult to access in the last 12 months reported the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic as a barrier (89.2%). The coronavirus pandemic was the most common barrier to accessing products and services reported across all ages. Adults aged 75 years and over were less likely to report this barrier than other age groups (80.8% in comparison with a range of 88.5% to 93.0% for other age groups).

Following this pattern, both disabled and non-disabled people reported the coronavirus pandemic as the most common barrier to accessing products and services. However, non-disabled people (90.7%) were more likely to report the coronavirus pandemic as a barrier compared with disabled people (85.6%).

Disabled people who experienced difficulty accessing products or services were more likely than non-disabled people to report other barriers, including:

- “it was difficult using transport” (22.9% for disabled people, 6.1% for non-disabled people, a 16.8 percentage point difference)
- “there were not enough places to rest” (15.3% compared with 0.8%, a 14.5 percentage point difference)
- “it was difficult using pavements, crossings or footpaths” (13.9% compared with 0.9%, a 13.0 percentage point difference)
- “it was difficult getting into or moving around buildings” (12.5% compared with 1.2%, an 11.3 percentage point difference)
- “it was difficult accessing toilets” (13.1% compared with 2.2%, a 10.9 percentage point difference)
- “other people’s attitudes towards me” (9.0% compared with 1.6%, a 7.4 percentage point difference)

Figure 7: The coronavirus pandemic was the most common barrier reported by disabled and non-disabled people who had difficulty accessing products or services

Percentage of disabled and non-disabled adults aged 16 years and over who experienced different types of barriers to accessing products and services in the last 12 months, Great Britain, 16 February to 27 March 2022

Notes:

1. Question: "In the past 12 months, what made it difficult to access those products or services?" This was asked of respondents who said that they found it difficult to access one or more products or services.
2. Respondents could select multiple options.
3. This graph is ordered by the highest to lowest percentage point difference between disabled and non-disabled people.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

5 . Disabled people's access to products and services data

[Disabled people's access to products and services, Great Britain: February to March 2022](#)

Dataset | Released 29 June 2022

Access to products and services, and barriers to products and services by sex, age group, disability status, disability status and age group, and impairment type for disabled people, using Opinions and Lifestyles Survey (OPN) data.

6 . Glossary

Disability

To define disability in this publication, we refer to the [Government Statistical Service \(GSS\) harmonised "core" definition](#). This identifies a person as disabled when they have a physical or mental health condition or illness that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or more, which reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

The GSS definition is designed to reflect the definitions that appear in legal terms in the [Disability Discrimination Act \(DDA\) 1995](#) and the subsequent [Equality Act 2010](#).

The GSS harmonised questions are asked of the respondent in the survey, which means that disability status is self-reported.

This definition of disability has been criticised by the [Inclusive Data Task Force \(IDTF\)](#) for reflecting the medical model of disability. The Government Statistical Service (GSS) harmonisation team are undertaking a [programme of work](#) to review and update the current harmonised standard, following recommendations from the IDTF.

Impairment

To define an impairment in this publication, we refer to the [GSS harmonised definition](#); this identifies impairments as activities a person cannot perform or has difficulty performing because of their health condition or illnesses.

The GSS harmonised questions are asked of the respondent in the survey, meaning that impairment status is self-reported. Respondents are asked if any of their reported illnesses or conditions affect them in the following areas:

- vision (for example blindness or partial sight)
- hearing (for example deafness or partial hearing)
- mobility (for example walking short distances or climbing stairs)
- dexterity (for example lifting or carrying objects, using a keyboard)
- learning or understanding or concentrating
- memory
- mental health
- stamina or breathing or fatigue
- socially or behaviourally (for example associated with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), which includes Asperger's, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD))
- other

Respondents can select all impairments that apply. If a respondent has multiple impairments, they are represented in each of those impairment categories in this analysis; this may dilute the differences found between impairment types within the analysis undertaken.

Age is associated with an increasing [prevalence of disability and of particular impairment types](#) (for example, mobility or hearing). However, the sample size for data presented in this article is insufficient to explore the influence of age and impairments on access to products and services independently.

We are exploring [new methods to identify impairments](#) from medical conditions using linked data. This could enable us to improve data about the experiences of disabled people by impairment type which is commonly limited by sample size in survey data.

Data provided in the article and data tables broken down by impairment type only include respondents who have a disability.

Statistical significance

Any changes or differences mentioned in this publication are “statistically significant”. The [statistical significance](#) of differences noted within the release are determined based on non-overlapping [confidence intervals](#).

7 . Data sources and quality

Feedback

We welcome feedback on any part of this article and its [accompanying data tables](#). Please send feedback to life.course@ons.gov.uk.

Data collection for access to products

Two questions on access to products in person were asked. The first was, in the past 12 months, have you had difficulty accessing any of these products in person:

- groceries, for example, food, drink or toiletries
- medicine, for example, prescriptions or over the counter medications
- clothes and accessories
- other goods, for example books, electronics and sports equipment
- other, please specify
- I have not had difficulty accessing any products

This question was asked of all respondents and has multiple response options. Respondents could select all that apply, unless selecting "I have not had difficulty accessing any products". This was the first question asked about products. Cognitive testing showed that ordering this question first enabled respondents to use the examples provided to understand the context of the second question on products. Respondents were not provided with a definition of products.

The second question asked was, in the past 12 months, how easy or difficult have you found accessing products in person:

- very easy
- somewhat easy
- somewhat difficult
- very difficult

This question was asked of all respondents and is a single response option question. It is not routed from the previous question.

Data collection for access to services

Two questions on access to services in person were asked. The first was, in the past 12 months, have you had difficulty accessing any of these services in person:

- banks or building societies
- hairdressers, barbers or beauty salons
- sports and exercise facilities, for example gyms, tennis courts or swimming pools
- restaurants, cafés, nightclubs, bars or pubs
- cinemas, sporting events or music venues
- other, please specify
- I have not had difficulty accessing any services

This question was asked of all respondents and has multiple response options. Respondents could select all that apply, unless selecting "I have not had difficulty accessing any services". This was the first question asked about services. Cognitive testing showed that ordering this question first enabled respondents to use the examples provided to understand the context of the second question on services. Respondents were not provided with a definition of services.

The second question asked was, in the past 12 months, how easy or difficult have you found accessing services in person:

- very easy
- somewhat easy
- somewhat difficult
- very difficult

This question was asked of all respondents and is a single response option question. It is not routed from the previous question.

Data collection for barriers

If respondents selected that they found one or more products or services difficult to access in the last 12 months, they were asked a question about the barriers to accessing products or services. The question on barriers was, in the past 12 months, what made it difficult to access those products or services:

- the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic
- the cost of the product or service
- it was difficult using transport
- it was difficult using pavements, crossings or footpaths
- it was difficult getting into or moving around buildings
- it was difficult accessing toilets
- there were not enough places to rest
- other people's attitudes towards me
- other, please specify

This question has multiple response options; respondents could select all that apply.

Measuring the data

This article contains data from a module undertaken through the Office for National Statistics' (ONS') Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) to understand access to products and services among disabled and non-disabled people in Great Britain. These are new questions which have been added to three waves of the OPN, to capture experiences of access to products and services for the first time. These questions were developed to provide new insights and inform policy for disabled people.

The questions in this module ask about experiences of access to products and services in person in the last 12 months. The waves included in this survey were conducted from 16 to 27 February 2022, 2 to 13 March 2022 and 16 to 27 March 2022. This means that the 12-month reference period for the survey questions include periods of time in 2021 where countries in Great Britain were under coronavirus restrictions. This is likely to have influenced the survey results.

From 17 April 2020 onwards, the OPN has been collecting data online and via the telephone, prior to this it was online only.

Sampling and weighting

Unless otherwise specified, the analysis in this article is based on adults aged 16 years and over in Great Britain. To enable more detailed analysis, such as the impairments breakdowns included in the datasets, three waves of OPN data have been pooled together and reweighted to create a larger dataset. By pooling data, we increase the sample size available, allowing us to explore experiences of access to products and services for more specific groups of the population.

The pooled dataset contains 9,313 individual responses. Survey responses were collected using an online self-completion questionnaire, with the option to take part over the phone.

Survey weights were applied to make estimates representative of the population (based on June 2021 population estimates). Further information on the survey design and quality can be found in our [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\)](#).

Quality and coherence

The OPN is an opinions survey and therefore all respondents were invited to answer both questions relating to their experiences accessing products and services. We did not exclude those who responded, "I have not had difficulty accessing any [products or services]" from the next question "In the past 12 months, how easy or difficult have you found accessing [products or services] in person?". This enabled us to capture people's subjective experiences and maximise the sample available for each question.

However, it is possible to draw conclusions from both questions of how easy or difficult it was to access a product or service. For instance, from the proportion of people who said, "I have not had difficulty accessing any [products or services]" and the proportion who said they have found it "very easy" or "somewhat easy" to access products or services.

A comparison of estimates from the two questions revealed that, for access to products, there was a small and significant difference between estimates from these questions among both disabled and non-disabled people with overall trends remaining similar. The estimates for the two measures provided in Section 2 were 63.5% (I have not had difficulty) and 58.4% (I found it easy) for disabled people, and 81.1% and 84.2% respectively for non-disabled people.

For access to services, the estimates from these questions provided in Section 3 among disabled people were statistically similar; 47.3% (I have not had difficulty) and 48.5% (I found it easy). However, for non-disabled people there was a large statistically significant difference (57.7% and 74.8% respectively, a 17.1 percentage point difference).

This indicates that the two measures have a reasonable degree of coherence for disabled people. Coherence for non-disabled people in relation to services is poorer, although conclusions from the data remain the same.

8 . Future developments

This article on access to products and services for disabled people can be set in the context of the [Inclusive Data Taskforce \(IDTF\)](#) which highlights the importance of disabled people's lived experiences being fully reflected in UK data and evidence. The IDTF was established in October 2020 and aims to improve the inclusivity of UK data through key commitments and recommendations. For more information, see the [UK Statistics Authority's IDTF recommendations report](#).

In addition to the IDTF, the need for addressing the evidence gap relating to disabled people's experiences of access and barriers to products and services was identified and addressed in collaboration with the Cabinet Office's Equality Hub and will be complemented by forthcoming findings from qualitative research. The qualitative publication, due to be published in July 2022, uses data from qualitative interviews to report on disabled adults' lived experiences of accessing and engaging with activities, goods and services across the UK.

9 . Related links

[Improving disability data to understand the effects of coronavirus \(COVID-19\) on people with different impairment types](#)

Article | Released 7 June 2022

A report exploring different strategies such as the use of predictive modelling and use of administrative health data to provide more detail on the effects of coronavirus (COVID-19) on disabled people by impairment type. Part of the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Working paper series.

[Updated estimates of coronavirus \(COVID-19\) related deaths by disability status, England: 24 January 2020 to 9 March 2022](#)

Article | Released 9 May 2022

Estimates of differences in coronavirus (COVID-19) mortality risk by self-reported disability status for deaths occurring up to 9 March 2022, using linked data from the Office for National Statistics' Public Health Data Asset.

[Disability pay gaps in the UK: 2021](#)

Article | Released 25 April 2022

Earnings statistics for disabled and non-disabled employees in the UK, using regression analysis to provide more insight into factors that affect pay.

[Outcomes for disabled people in the UK: 2021](#)

Article | Released 10 February 2022

A report looking at the outcomes for disabled people across areas of life including education, employment, social participation, housing, well-being, loneliness and crime. Analysis by disability status and by age, sex, impairment type and severity, and country and region, based on survey data.

[Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain: March 2020 to December 2021](#)

Article | Released 2 February 2022

A report looking at the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on disabled people in Great Britain during periods throughout the pandemic from March 2020 to December 2021. Based on estimates from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey.