



BRIEFING

SOCIAL SECURITY

Where will cuts to sickness and disability benefits fall hardest?

JRF analysis shows that more people receive social security for health issues and disabilities in Labour's heartlands.

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1. Introduction

New analysis by JRF highlights how cuts to sickness and disability benefits will fall most heavily on Labour's heartlands. Of the 100 constituencies with the highest proportion of working-age people in receipt of health-related social security, only 8 are not held by the Labour Party.

Exclusive research from More in Common also finds that voters – and particularly those who voted Labour in 2024 – are opposed to these cuts.

2. Deepest cuts to social security since Osborne was Chancellor

On 18 March, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Secretary of State laid out a package of reforms to sickness and disability benefits that included:

- tightening eligibility for Personal Independence Payments (PIP)
- scrapping the Work Capability Assessment and making PIP the gateway to receiving the Universal Credit (UC) health element
- halving the rate of the UC element (reducing it by £47 a week) for new claimants and freezing it for existing claimants until 2029/30
- increasing the UC standard allowance by almost £5 a week above inflation for a single person over 25 by 2029/30
- consulting on raising the age someone can receive the health element of UC to 22.

A week later, when the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) did not score the same savings as the DWP, the Chancellor also froze the reduced rate of the UC health element for new claimants until 2029/30.

According to OBR and DWP documents, these measures represent almost £7 billion a year of cuts to the benefits received by sick or disabled people or their carers. However, due to a lack of policy detail provided by the Government, even this does not include losses resulting from scrapping the Work Capability Assessment.

If these reforms go ahead, they will represent the biggest cuts to disability benefits since at least when the OBR was created in 2010. They would also be the largest social security cut since summer 2015, when George Osborne was Chancellor.

When smaller cuts to disability benefits were proposed by Osborne in 2016, they led Iain Duncan Smith to resign as Work and Pensions Secretary, before the cuts were ultimately reversed.

3. Polling by More in Common shows clear opposition to cuts

News of these reforms has cut through with the public and been met with clear opposition, with 83% of the public having heard of the planned cuts, 3 in 5 (58%) saying they are a bad idea and just 32% saying they are a good idea.¹

Using More in Common's approach to segmenting the population into values-based groups (their '7 segments'), it is clear that opposition to these reforms is particularly high for groups who were important for Labour's victory in 2024, cutting across both the party's progressive base and more socially conservative voters who were crucial to winning back the 'red wall'.²

- Of Labour's progressive base – both the 'progressive activist' and 'civic pragmatist' segments – who made up 32% of their overall vote share in 2024, 76% and 72% respectively say the reforms are a bad idea.
- These reforms are also unpopular amongst the 'loyal national' segment of the population, who made up nearly a quarter (24%) of Labour's vote share in 2024 (their largest single voting bloc), with 67% of this group opposed to the reforms.

In your view, do you think the cut to disability benefits is a good idea or a bad idea?

■ This would be a very good idea
 ■ This would be a somewhat good idea
 ■ Don't know
 ■ This would be a somewhat bad idea
 ■ This would be a very bad idea



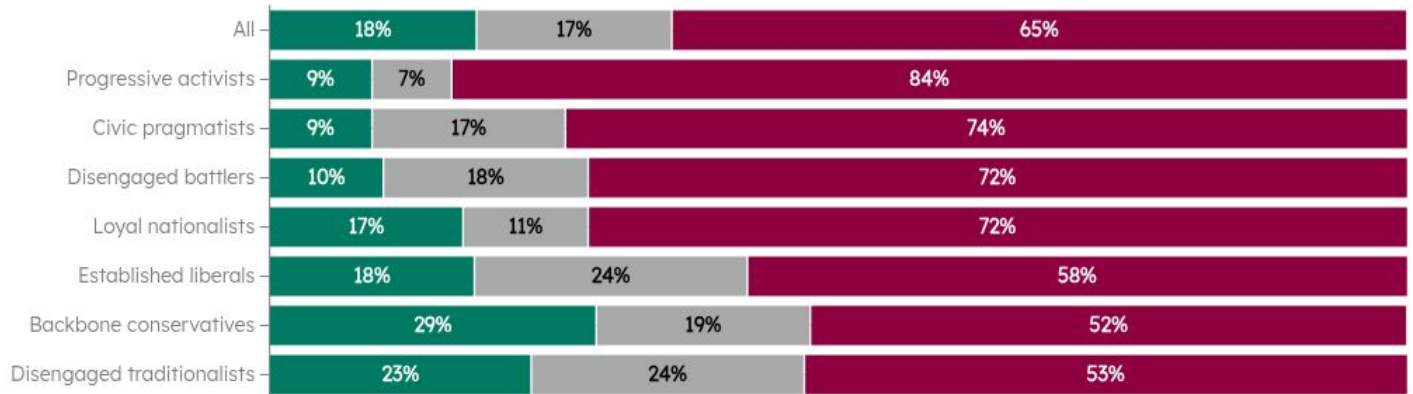
Source: More in Common, March 2025

Note: The fieldwork for this survey was conducted from 22 to 27 March 2025.

When the public are asked for their view if this meant that some people with long-term mental health conditions losing out on support, this opposition increases to 64%.

If the changes meant that some people with long-term mental health conditions were no longer able to claim disability benefits, which comes closest to your view?

■ This would be a good idea ■ Don't know ■ This would be a bad idea



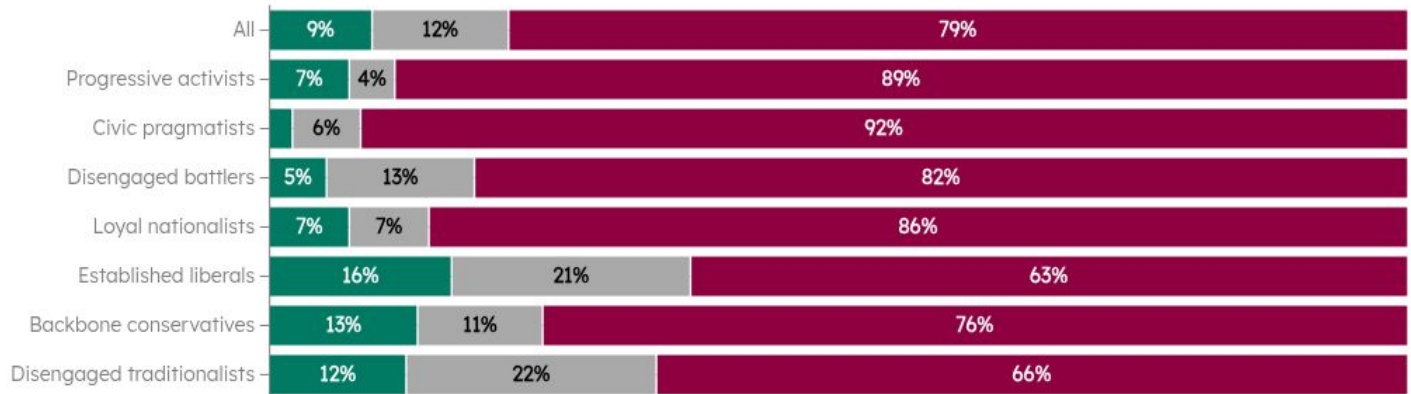
Source: More in Common, March 2025

Note: The fieldwork for this survey was conducted from 22 to 27 March 2025.

When asked for their view if this meant that some people who need help to feed themselves, wash themselves, or go to the toilet losing out on support, public opposition increases to 79%.

If the changes meant that some people who need help to feed themselves, wash themselves or go to the toilet would no longer be able to claim disability benefits, which comes closest to your view?

■ This would be a good idea ■ Don't know ■ This would be a bad idea



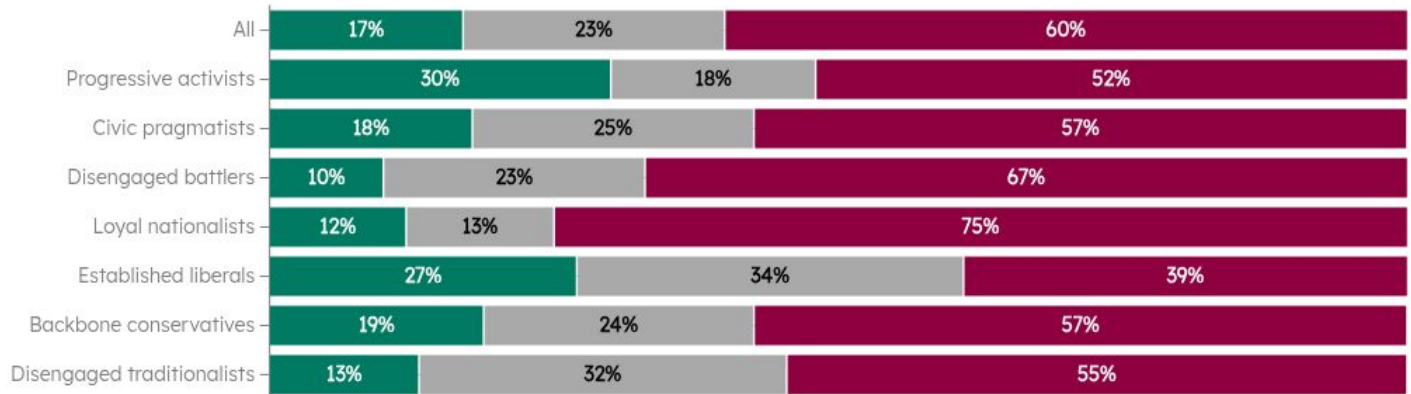
Source: More in Common, March 2025

Note: The fieldwork for this survey was conducted from 22 to 27 March 2025.

Tackling hardship and the cost-of-living crisis is a unifying issue for the party's diverse coalition – without action to improve living standards they will be deeply disappointed. So far, however, the public are deeply concerned about the Government's record, with 3 in 5 (60%) saying it is going in the wrong direction on tackling hardship and the cost-of-living crisis.

Would you say that the Government is going in the right direction or the wrong direction on tackling the cost of living crisis and hardship?

■ Right direction ■ Don't know ■ Wrong direction



Source: More in Common, March 2025

Note: The fieldwork for this survey was conducted from 22 to 27 March 2025.

All this has a political cost. If Labour does not successfully reduce the cost of living and tackle hardship by the time of the next election, they risk seeing voters leave the party on their progressive flanks and across the red wall. 73% of Labour voters would consider not voting for the party again if progress isn't made on this agenda.

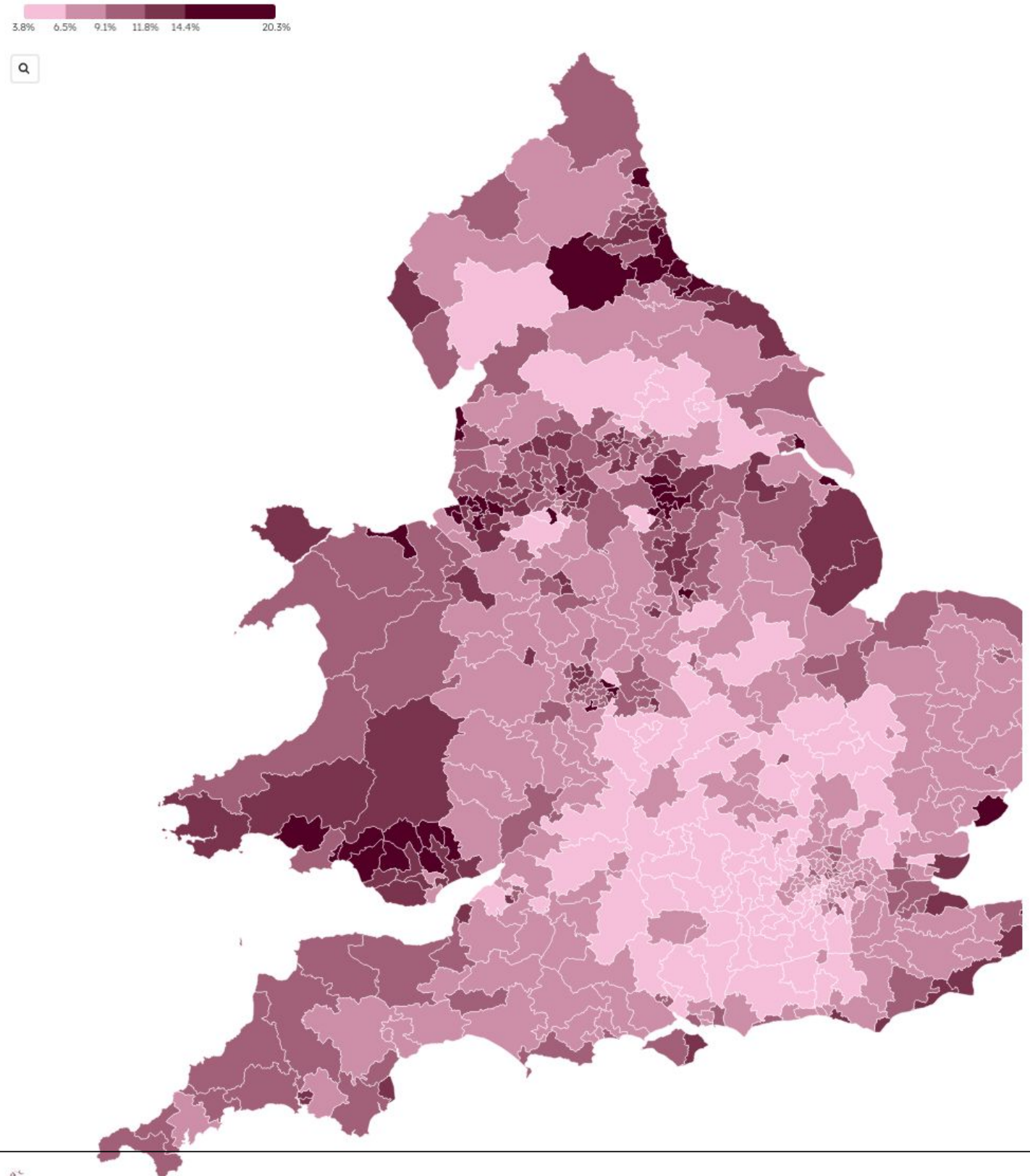
4. Labour's heartlands affected most

More social security is claimed for health issues and disabilities in Labour's heartlands. Of the top 100 constituencies with the highest proportion of working-age people in receipt of health-related social security, only 8 are not held by the Labour Party.



More people receive social security for health issues and disabilities in Labour heartlands

Proportion of working-age population in receipt of health-related social security, coloured by quintile of constituency



5. Over 3 million families affected, by up to £12,000 per year

The Government's proposed cuts to sickness and disability benefits will lead to some people who struggle to wash or feed themselves, or who have long-term mental health conditions, facing unprecedented reductions in their income. By 2029/30, these will include:

- 370,000 current recipients (when they have an award review) and 430,000 future recipients of PIP losing their entitlement to the daily living component, losing an average of £4,500 per year.³
- 2.25 million current recipients of UC Health losing an average of £500 per year from the incoming freeze (slightly offset by the £5pw standard allowance increase) and 730,000 future recipients of UC Health affected by the cut and freeze, losing on average £3,000 per year.⁴

Because PIP is a 'passporting benefit', losing access to it will have further knock-on effects for some families, pushing them further into hardship. For example, the Government has estimated that these reforms will take out £500 million from carers' benefits and lead to 150,000 households losing out on Carer's Allowance or the UC carer element.⁵

Cuts to sickness and disability benefits will affect families in different ways depending on how the multiple cuts interact with each other. We estimate that:⁶

- A single person over 25 losing PIP and Limited Capability for Work and Work-Related Activity (LCWRA) could lose £795 per month – 57% of their income after housing costs.
- Disposable income could fall the furthest for families where one person cares for another if they lose eligibility for PIP and LCWRA, and consequently Carer's Allowance – by £1,005 per month or 54% of their income after housing costs.

6. Cuts will drive up poverty

Disabled people face a much higher risk of poverty. This is driven partly by the additional costs associated with disability and ill health, and partly by the barriers to work that disabled people face.

Official data shows 6.3 million people in poverty were in a family with a disabled family member – close to half of all people in poverty.⁷ From JRF's most recent cost of living tracker, before the cuts were announced, we also know that 88% of low-income families in receipt of disability benefits went without the essentials in the 6 months to October 2024.⁸

The Government's own impact analysis shows that cuts to sickness and disability benefits will make this worse, pushing 250,000 people into poverty, including at least 50,000 children.⁹

However, JRF analysis shows that the true full impact could be closer to 400,000 more people in poverty. This is because the Government's analysis nets off the impact of the previous Government's announced plans to restrict eligibility to the health element of UC, which the new Government said would never go ahead. The Government's new package of cuts replaces the previous Government's plans, so to understand the full impact of these cuts, the impact of the previous plans should not be deducted.

7. Cuts won't move people into work

A key part of the Government's rationale for these cuts is that they will support more disabled people into work. However, the Government did not provide the OBR with enough information or analysis to enable it to estimate the employment impacts of the package. This seriously undermines the Government's case that its proposals are about helping people into work.

The OBR did estimate the employment impact of recent proposals by the previous Government (since scrapped) to cut benefits for disabled people by tightening eligibility for the UC health element via changes to the Work Capability Assessment criteria. Despite cutting benefit income by around £5,000 each for 424,000 disabled people (alongside increased conditionality), this was projected to increase employment by just 13,900 (3%).¹⁰

Separately, the Government's package includes an additional £1 billion for employment support by 2029/30. The OBR was not able to estimate an employment impact for this due to insufficient policy detail from the Government. However, based on a range of similar previous programmes, we might expect employment increases in the tens of thousands.¹¹

The public are also sceptical about the Government's rationale that these reforms are primarily designed to help people into work. From our work with More in Common, nearly half say (47%) these measures have been taken to fill a gap in the budget, rather than to support

people into work (33%).

Whatever the size of the positive employment support investment effect, these gains should not be conflated with any possible employment gains from the benefit cuts. Cutting disabled people's incomes, particularly when many are already unable to afford the essentials, will just make it harder to manage health conditions or move towards work.

8. Conclusion

The Government came into office pledging to end the moral scar of food bank use – these reforms will leave many disabled people at greater risk of needing to use one.

By cutting almost £7 billion from the disability benefits bill, limiting eligibility for PIP, and cutting and freezing the UC health element, the Government risks pushing more people further into hardship and needing to use a food bank.

Notes

1. More in Common survey of 3,981 GB adults – excluding NI – aged 18+, conducted on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation between 22–27 March. Respondents have been weighted according to age/sex, 2024 General Election (GE) vote, ethnicity, and education level.
2. For more information about More in Common’s ‘7 segments’, see <https://www.britainschoice.uk/segments/> (<https://www.britainschoice.uk/segments/>).
3. [Spring Statement 2025, health and disability benefit reforms – Impacts](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/pathways-to-work-reforming-benefits-and-support-to-get-britain-working-green-paper) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/pathways-to-work-reforming-benefits-and-support-to-get-britain-working-green-paper>).
4. [Spring Statement 2025, health and disability benefit reforms – Impacts](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/pathways-to-work-reforming-benefits-and-support-to-get-britain-working-green-paper) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/pathways-to-work-reforming-benefits-and-support-to-get-britain-working-green-paper>).
5. [Spring Statement 2025, health and disability benefit reforms – Impacts](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/pathways-to-work-reforming-benefits-and-support-to-get-britain-working-green-paper) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/pathways-to-work-reforming-benefits-and-support-to-get-britain-working-green-paper>).
6. Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2025) [How health-related benefit cuts add up](https://www.jrf.org.uk/social-security/how-health-related-benefit-cuts-add-up) (<https://www.jrf.org.uk/social-security/how-health-related-benefit-cuts-add-up>).

7. Department for Work and Pensions (2025) Households below average income, 2023/24 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/households-below-average-income-hbai--2>)(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/households-below-average-income-hbai--2>).
8. Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2024), Cost of Living Tracker 2024 (<https://www.jrf.org.uk/cost-of-living/jrfs-cost-of-living-tracker-winter-2024>). From survey of 4,065 UK adults aged 18+ from households in the lowest 40% of equivalised household income. Data was weighted to be representative by age, gender, region, ethnicity, and housing tenure.
9. Spring Statement 2025, health and disability benefit reforms – Impacts (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/pathways-to-work-reforming-benefits-and-support-to-get-britain-working-green-paper>).
10. Department for Work and Pensions (2024) Work capability assessment reform: Estimated number of claimants affected (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/work-capability-assessment-reform-estimated-number-of-claimants-affected>); and Office for Budget Responsibility (2024) Supplementary forecast information on work capability assessment reform (<https://obr.uk/supplementary-forecast-information-on-work-capability-assessment-reform/>).
11. Institute for Fiscal Studies (2025) Spring Statement 2025: IFS analysis (Reforms to working-age benefits) (<https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025->

03/Reforms_to_working_age_benefits_TW_0.pdf).

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