

What you need to know about managed migration to universal credit

A briefing for newly elected MPs

September 2024

Between now and the end of 2025, thousands of your constituents will have their existing benefit payments switched off and replaced with universal credit. The process involves several hurdles; in the worst-case scenario, a family could be left without any income at all. This briefing explains how the process works, issues your constituents are likely to face, and how you can carry out effective casework on this topic.

- You are likely to be asked for help from constituents who have been sent a ‘migration notice’ by the DWP. The letter will tell the constituent that they have to move from older benefits (commonly referred to as ‘legacy benefits’) to universal credit (UC). It will state that the constituent has three months to claim for UC, after which their existing benefit payments will be terminated.
- These letters are being sent to people as part of the ongoing process of moving people from legacy benefits to UC called ‘managed migration’, which is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2025.
- Around 1 million lead carers and disabled people are scheduled to receive this letter by the end of 2025. No one will be moved to UC automatically. Claimants who do not respond to their migration notice will have their existing benefit payments terminated with no UC income to substitute it.
- CPAG has seen cases of the UC awards of people going through managed migration being calculated incorrectly, and evidence that safeguards are not being applied comprehensively. We often hear from claimants struggling to find out the information they need to plan for the move to UC, struggling to make ends meet while they wait for their first UC payment, and struggling to adjust to the demands of managing a UC claim.
- To help your constituents facing difficulties with managed migration to UC:
 - Urge your constituents to get a deadline extension.
 - Call our advice line on 020 7812 5231 or email us at advice@cpag.org.uk for free expert advice on specific managed migration cases. Please note this is not an advice line for claimants.
 - Support CPAG’s calls for the DWP to slow down the process of managed migration and to strengthen the safeguards for vulnerable claimants.

Background

What is managed migration to universal credit?

Managed migration is the final stage of the roll out of UC, which replaces six legacy benefits (working tax credit, child tax credit, housing benefit (HB) jobseeker's allowance (JSA) employment and support allowance (ESA), and income support). It is a major programme of work within the DWP. The stakes are high for the millions of families affected – most will have a very low income and many will be vulnerable, eg, because they are sick or disabled, have poor mental health or learning disabilities.

How does the process work?

Since 2023 the DWP has been gradually sending legacy benefit claimants a 'migration notice'. It informs claimants that they have three months to make a claim for UC (their 'deadline date') at which point their legacy benefit payments will be terminated. For a claimant's benefit payments to continue, they must make a new claim for UC (the move is not automatic nor is the system prepopulated with the information that the DWP already holds on the claimant).

If a claimant is worse off on UC than they were on legacy benefits they may get 'transitional protection', a temporary top-up to their UC award intended to maintain the claimant's benefit income at its previous level. Not everyone qualifies for transitional protection (for example, parents of a disabled child in residential care) and some people are worse off on UC despite it (for example, if they have a deduction made from their UC award for a previous tax credit overpayment).

When did managed migration start?

The roll out of managed migration began to scale in 2023/24. The DWP initially focused on tax credit-only claimants, a lower-risk group who are less likely to be vulnerable and more likely to have other sources of income. The department took a geographical approach to roll out, bringing new areas into scope month by month until it was operating nationwide. Since October 2023, the DWP has been sending 100,000 migration notices each month.

When will managed migration be complete?

From April 2024, the DWP began sending migration notices to claimants of income support and housing benefit. Benefits are likely to compose the vast majority, if not all, of these families' incomes, so the financial consequences of managed migration will be much greater.

In June, the DWP started sending migration notices to claimants of ESA. As ESA is a benefit for the long-term sick and disabled, these claimants are more likely to face barriers to claiming UC. All legacy benefit claimants are expected to receive their migration notice by the end of 2025.

Planned dates when claimants of DWP-legacy benefits will be sent their migration notice

Benefit received	No. of claimants	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	→	Dec-25
HB & tax credits only	120,000	█								
Income support	110,000	█								
HB only	100,000			█						
ESA & tax credits	90,000			█						
JSA	20,000						█			
ESA without tax credits	800,000								→	

What is at stake for my constituents?

Around 1 million lead carers and disabled people across Britain are scheduled to receive a migration notice by the end of 2025. Claimants who do not respond to their migration notice will have their legacy benefit payments terminated with no UC income to substitute it. Some people will find themselves destitute, at risk of rapidly falling into arrears.

The problems your constituents will face

A third of people aren't moving and are losing out on £300 a month

To date, 34 per cent of people who have been sent a migration notice have not moved to UC and had their legacy benefit payments terminated (284,000 people)¹ (considerably higher than the 26 per cent the DWP expected of tax-credit only claimants in November 2023²). People who are not moving to UC are losing on average £300 a month.³ Both the National Audit Office⁴ and Public Accounts Committee⁵ have raised concerns about the lack of evidence explaining why people with a strong financial incentive to claim UC are not doing so.

In response to public criticism, the DWP has commissioned research to understand why people have not moved to UC, with the results expected to be published this autumn. If the DWP proceeds with managed migration as scheduled, the findings of this research will come too late for the lessons to be learned and to avoid more people missing out on the financial support they need.

People are being paid the incorrect amount

People who move to UC through managed migration are assessed for 'transitional protection', a temporary top-up to a claimant's UC award to prevent them from being worse off on UC than they were on legacy benefits. CPAG has seen cases where the transitional element calculation has been incorrect, leaving claimants out of pocket. For example, we've seen cases where the claimant's earnings were not taken into account when they should have been. The calculations were defended by multiple DWP staff members at different levels of seniority before CPAG

¹ Department for Work and Pensions, [Move to Universal Credit statistics, July 2022 to June 2024](#), 13 August 2024
² Public Accounts Committee, [Twenty-Ninth Report of Session 2023–24, Progress in implementing Universal Credit](#), 24 April 2024
³ CPAG, [The limits of test and learn](#), 15 November 2023
⁴ National Audit Office, [Progress in implementing Universal Credit](#), 27 February 2024
⁵ Public Accounts Committee, [Twenty-Ninth Report of Session 2023–24, Progress in implementing Universal Credit](#), 24 April 2024



helped to get them corrected. Errors such as this are likely to become more common as the circumstances of claimants being sent migration notices become more complex.

The DWP does not provide claimants with information about how their entitlement to transitional protection has been calculated in their UC statement, forcing claimants to assume that it is correct. When it is incorrect, claimants will be out-of-pocket (as in the cases above) or will accrue large overpayments which the DWP has the right to claim back even if the claimant is not at fault, akin to the ongoing carer's allowance scandal.

[CPAG's website](#) contains resources that can help you deal with the transitional protection concerns of constituents.

People are not being caught by the safeguards in place

The DWP has the power to extend a claimant's deadline (the point at which their legacy benefit payments are terminated).⁶ It is inevitable that some claimants will need an extension of this deadline, for example if their life is in flux, if they haven't grasped the implications of the migration notice and/or if they need more time to access support. Claimants who need more time can call a helpline to request a deadline extension and DWP staff are provided with guidance on when such a request should be granted. But less than 1 per cent of claimants sent a migration notice are granted an extension,⁷ and CPAG has seen evidence of staff refusing to grant an extension in cases where the guidance states that it would be appropriate to do so.

Some vulnerable claimants are placed on an 'enhanced support journey' where they get a phone call from the DWP to check that they understand the need to make a claim for UC and to offer help. Many claimants in need of support fear the DWP and will tell the DWP that they do not need help. They will then be removed from the enhanced support journey and, if they do not claim UC before their deadline, their benefit payments will be terminated.

People may struggle to adjust to universal credit

Moving from legacy benefits to UC requires claimants to make significant adjustments to how they manage their time and their day-to-day finances. You may interact with claimants who fall into difficulties as they struggle to cope with the change.

- UC is paid to claimants once a month, unlike income support, ESA or JSA which are paid once every two weeks. Your constituents who are moving to UC will have to spread their income over a much longer period than they are used to, to avoid running out of money before their next payment date.
- Most people manage their UC claim online. People who have questions about their claim are expected to communicate these to the DWP by writing in UC's online 'journal'. When there is an update to someone's claim, they will receive a text message instructing them to log on to the system to find out what they need to do. Your constituents who lack digital confidence or access will find it harder to manage their UC claim and may miss out on important information that could lead to a sanction.

⁶ For example, when asked about the DWP's plans for the roll out of managed migration at the Public Accounts Committee, Peter Schofield, permanent secretary at the DWP, said: "At the end of the day... we can always extend a migration notice if we have not been able to provide the support." Public Accounts Committee, [Oral evidence: Progress in implementing Universal Credit, HC 458](#), 11 March 2024.

⁷ Question for Department for Work and Pensions, UIN 15120, tabled on 21 February 2024, questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-21/15120

- UC payments are more volatile than tax credits. Tax credit payments would typically be revised annually (or mid-year if a claimant experienced a notable change in their income) so tax credits offered a predictable and stable source of income. UC payments go up and down each month depending on how much the claimant was paid that month. It means that someone who is paid four-weekly and happens to receive two pay cheques in one month, will likely see their UC payment drop to nothing. Some claimants prefer UC's responsiveness, but many struggle to cope with the uncertainty of not knowing how much support they are due to receive month-to-month, especially if their payment suddenly drops to zero because of the specific date their employer paid them.
- Unlike tax credits, UC requires some people who are in work to look for more work. On UC, many parents who are juggling childcare, work and school drop-offs will then be required to provide evidence to the DWP that they are looking for more work and attend appointments at the job centre. If they do not comply with these requirements, they may be sanctioned.

The most vulnerable claimants could have their benefits cut off in April 2025

HMRC is planning to close the tax credit system in April 2025. Before then, 110,000 lead carers who get income support with tax credits, and 90,000 disabled or terminally ill people who get ESA with tax credits, will need to move to UC. It is inevitable that some of these claimants will face considerable difficulties which will prevent them from successfully moving to UC before April 2025. It is not clear what safeguards, if any, the DWP is putting in place to make sure that benefit payments can still be made to the most vulnerable tax credit recipients from April 2025. Plans for this eventuality need to be made immediately to avoid potentially catastrophic consequences for families with complex needs.

How can I support my constituents struggling with managed migration?

- Urge your constituents to get a deadline extension and to seek independent advice if it is not available through your staff.
- Use [CPAG's managed migration resources](#) to offer advice. Some resources are only available via subscription and can be accessed via a [one month free trial](#).
- CPAG can provide free expert advice on specific managed migration cases to MPs and caseworkers – call our advice line on 020 7812 5231 or email us at advice@cpag.org.uk. Hearing from you also informs our policy work and helps us produce better tools and resources.
- Support CPAG's calls for the DWP to slow down the process of managed migration and to strengthen the safeguards for vulnerable claimants. Contact Hannah Aldridge (haldridge@cpag.org.uk) for more information about how the process of managed migration to UC can be improved.

About Child Poverty Action Group

Child Poverty Action Group works on behalf of the more than one in four children in the UK growing up in poverty. It doesn't have to be like this. Our vision is of a society free of child poverty, where all children can enjoy a childhood free of financial hardship and have a fair chance in life to reach their full potential. We use our understanding of what causes poverty and the impact it has on children's lives to campaign for policies that will prevent and end poverty – for good. We provide training, advice and information to make sure hard-up families get the financial support they need.