




The nation's invisible bank

UK edition

Conferma Insight Report 2025






UK employees are acting as an invisible bank for their workplaces – to the tune of £6bn every month.

Out-of-pocket business costs have more than tripled since 2019, with the average employee spending £238 a month from their own pocket. Return-to-office mandates have amplified the burden, leaving 68% of staff facing cash flow problems and millions relying on credit or borrowing to get by.

This is no longer a minor administrative issue – it is a systemic financial and operational crisis for UK businesses.



Jason Lalor, CEO, Conferma

Key findings

In 2019, employees were already lending their own money to keep businesses running. Six years on, the problem has exploded. What was once a quiet inconvenience is now a full-blown cost-of-working crisis.



82%

of employees now front business costs themselves – more than double 2019 levels.

The total hidden bill carried by the UK workforce is

£6billion every month.



74%

say return-to-office mandates have increased their costs even further.



▲
231%
higher than
2019

How this compares to average personal monthly outgoings

Energy bills **£143**
Insurance **£49**
Broadband **£26**



**PAYMENT
DECLINED**

68%

of employees suffer cashflow problems while waiting for reimbursement.



The numbers are staggering – but the reality is simple: millions of employees are acting as unpaid, interest-free lenders to their employers. This is no longer an HR issue. **It's a financial and operational crisis for UK business.**



From £321m to £6bn

The hidden cost-of-working crisis

In just six years, out-of-pocket business expenses have exploded. What was once an inconvenience has become a full-blown financial burden, for employees and for UK businesses alike.

In six years...

2019

2025

The average employee's monthly spend has **more than tripled**.
Adjusted for inflation, that's still a **168% real-terms rise**.

£72



£238

Participation has **doubled**, with the majority of employees now paying company costs themselves.

36%



82%

Cash flow strain on employees has **more than doubled**.

30%



68%

The total national bill carried by the UK workforce has **skyrocketed by 1,764%**.

£321m



£6bn

Behind these numbers lies a stark reality: millions of employees are now acting as interest-free lenders to their employers. **And the scale of the crisis is accelerating.**

Return-to-office (RTO)

A hidden pay cut for UK employees

Return-to-office mandates were meant to rebuild culture and productivity. Instead, they've handed employees new costs – and new career risks.



76%

say RTO has directly increased their business expenses.

53%

fear that refusing business travel will damage their career.

42%

are now less willing to travel for work because of the upfront costs.

For many, RTO has become a financial trap: pay out of pocket to stay visible, or step back and risk being overlooked.

When employees stop spending, businesses stop moving

The cost-of-working crisis is hitting employees, and dragging down entire organisations. Faced with the choice of paying out of pocket or going without, many employees are quietly cutting corners.

47%

avoid essential work purchases to dodge personal costs.



71%

lose nearly a full working day each year to clunky expense admin.



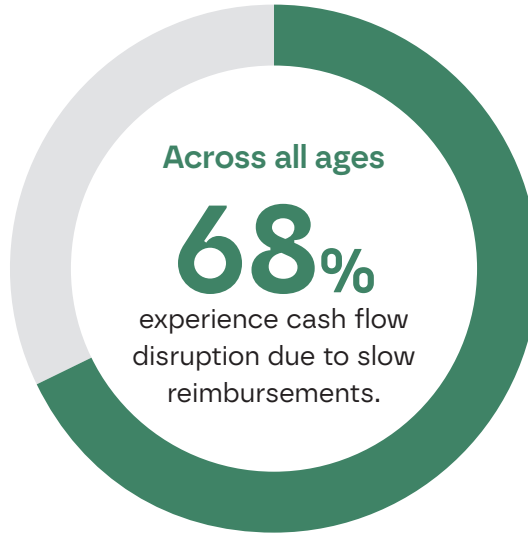
22%

say fronting costs adds stress before a trip.

The result? Delayed projects, missed opportunities, and drained morale. What seems like minor admin quietly undermines productivity and competitiveness.

The younger you are, the harder you're hit

The expense crisis doesn't fall equally. Younger employees, often with the least savings, are carrying the heaviest financial strain. Mid-career staff, meanwhile, feel forced to spend in order to protect their progression.



1 in 5

employees borrow from friends or family to cover company costs.



18-28 year-olds

72%

face cash flow problems while waiting for reimbursement.

74%

say work expenses leave them with less for essentials like rent, bills, or food.



35-44 year-olds

58%

fear career setbacks if they decline travel.

82%

report rising costs since RTO.

2.5 weeks for reimbursement

A breaking point for millions.

What once seemed like a small delay has now become a systemic threat. Expense reimbursement cycles are stretching employees' finances to the limit, forcing many into debt and draining morale across entire organisations.

64%

say slow reimbursements directly increase their stress.

The average wait time for reimbursement is

2.5 weeks

Far too long for those living month-to-month.

27.9
million employees

are now claiming expenses

Up from
6.5 million
in 2019

45%

would resort to credit cards when they lack funds, taking on interest to cover company costs.



This is no longer about admin efficiency. It's about whether employees can afford to keep working under the current system – **and whether businesses can afford the cost of ignoring it.**



The end of the employee lending crisis

There's no reason for UK employees to keep acting as unpaid lenders to their employers. Modern payment solutions – led by virtual cards – remove this burden. The results are faster processes, healthier employees, stronger businesses, and increased productivity.

For businesses



Faster operations

Employees never hesitate to make essential purchases.



Reduced risk

Expenses are policy-compliant from the start.



Happier, more productive teams

Morale rises when financial stress disappears.

For employees



No more out-of-pocket costs

Company payments happen seamlessly.




Real-time approvals

Travel and expenses are covered without delay.




Less admin, less stress

Significantly reduces time wasted on claims.



Virtual cards don't just fix expense management. They reset the relationship between employees and employers – putting businesses back in control, reducing the burden of admin, and ensuring employees' financial freedom.



Jason Lalor, CEO, Conferma

Methodology

This report is based on independent fieldwork carried out in June 2025.

Sample size

1,000 UK adults (18+) in full-time or part-time employment.

Exclusions

Sole traders and the self-employed.

Method

Online survey, nationally representative across age, gender, and region.

The findings are designed to provide a clear and accurate picture of how expense management practices are impacting employees across the UK workforce.

