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Ireland

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European Disability Expertise (EDE) provides independent scientific support to the Commission's policy Unit responsible for disability issues. It aims to mainstream disability equality in EU policy processes, including implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

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¹ For an introduction to the Semester process, see <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-semester/how-european-semester-works/>.

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1 Executive summary and recommendations

1.1 Key points and main challenges for the European Semester in 2021

While Ireland has made some important strides in the areas of employment and activation measures for disabled people in the previous European Semester cycle (and to some extent in access to education) the global pandemic presents significant challenges in ensuring that this progress is maintained into 2021. Furthermore, in anti-poverty measures and tackling social exclusion of disabled people, there is a need for more significant targeted investment to ensure greater disability equality.

In employment and activation, while the employment rate of disabled people is increasing overall, it remains below the European average. The Department of Employment and Social Protection's Ability Programme, funded by the European Structural and Investment Funds, has invested EUR 16 million in activation to support employment and upskilling of disabled people; however to date only half of the available funds have been spent. While the Make Work Pay initiative has provided clarity and flexibility on what welfare payments disabled people can retain while engaging in other paid work, some important supports identified in the final Make Work Pay report in 2017 have not yet been progressed. These relate to access to transport in order to access employment opportunities and access to aids and appliances.

In social policies and healthcare, the at risk of poverty rate for disabled people in Ireland is among the highest in Europe, even though Ireland has made strides in addressing the risk of poverty or exclusion of the general population, and is meeting its overall targets with respect to UN Sustainable Development Goal 1 'no poverty'. The main challenges are the need for more ambitious actions to address poverty and exclusion of disabled people – such as the introduction of a cost of disability payment in the social welfare system. Ireland's efforts to tackle poverty and social exclusion primarily through employment, activation and education measures, need to be supported by further action in the field of income support, and this will be particularly important in light of the inequalities exacerbated by the global pandemic.

In education, there has been a slight decline in the total numbers of disabled students in school, although the numbers of children in special classes within mainstream schools, and attending special schools is steadily increasing. This data represents a challenge for inclusive education as it indicates a trend towards more segregated settings. While new investments in disability supports in early years education have been made, there is a need for greater flexibility for example for parents of disabled children regarding the timeframe within which students can avail of their free preschool years. Further, in tertiary education, and in the transition from education to employment, more supports are needed to achieve disability equality.

1.2 Recommendations for Ireland

These recommendations are based on the evidence and analysis presented in the following chapters of our report.

- **Recommendation:** Progress the access to transport and access to aids and appliances actions under the Make Work Pay report, as part of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy and National Disability Inclusion Strategy.

Rationale: Access to transport and to assistive devices are two key areas which have been proven to improve disabled people's participation in employment. The government has already recognised this by including the actions in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy and National Disability Inclusion Strategy. However, the National Disability Authority reports that to date these actions have not been addressed. There is €8m remaining in the ESIF Ability Programme designed to facilitate activation and employment opportunities for disabled people in Ireland. These resources could be spent in part to support the implementation of the agreed actions on transport and assistive devices to enable further employment opportunities for disabled people in Ireland.

- **Recommendation:** Introduce a cost of disability payment as part of the social welfare income supports available to disabled people.

Rationale: Since the report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities in 1986, there has been a recognition of the need for a cost of disability payment to compensate for the additional costs faced by disabled people which are not covered in the existing social welfare system. While the government has committed only to further research into its feasibility, there is already significant evidence as to its effectiveness in tackling poverty and risk of social exclusion among disabled people.

- **Recommendation:** Extend the age eligibility for the two free preschool years to disabled students to ensure that these students can benefit from the full two years of early years education before commencing primary education.

Rationale: The upper age eligibility for access to the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme is capped at 5 years and 6 months, which does not account for the fact that some disabled children may not be ready to move to primary school at this stage and may benefit from more time in preschool before the transition to primary education.

2 Opportunities to mainstream disability equality in the Semester documents

2.1 [Country Report](#) for Ireland (Staff Working Document)

In 2020, the Country Report for Ireland included the following direct references to disability issues:

- 'p. 5 the employment rate for people with disabilities remains below the EU average;
- p. 10 gains from the economic upturn have not trickled down to all population groups, such as the low skilled or those with disabilities;
- p. 38 self-reported disability in Ireland is among the lowest in the EU;
- p. 40 while support schemes for people with disabilities have been launched, their integration to the labour market remains challenging;
- p. 45 people with disabilities are more likely to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion than on average in the EU.'

The main focus of the 2020 Country Report for Ireland in relation to disability equality is on activation and employment. While access to employment (especially on the open labour market) is important, there are several other disability equality issues which could be better integrated into the Semester documents. For example, the 2020 Country Report indicates the need for greater investment in social and affordable housing – and it could specify that any such investments should be based on universal design principles and consider the housing needs of disabled people as a priority. Furthermore, the 2020 Report recognises that Ireland has made important investments in early years education and childcare – but does not recognise the unique barriers faced by disabled children in accessing these mainstream services (for more on this issue, see chapter 5.2 below). Finally, the report acknowledges that Ireland plans to expand the provision of home care, while recognising that more work is required to improve accessibility and fiscal sustainability. However, the report does not comment on Ireland's assumption that the support needs of older adults and disabled people will primarily be met through long-term care, nor discuss how the transition from institutional to community settings could be facilitated as part of this plan (including through deploying resources from the European Structural and Investment Funds for this purpose)

2.2 [Country Specific Recommendation](#) for Ireland (CSR)

In 2020, the Country Specific Recommendation for Ireland included the following direct references to disability issues:

- '18. The challenges facing Ireland in regard to poverty and employment quality and support, including for people with disabilities, remain and they are likely to be exacerbated by the pandemic.'

In developing the documents for the next policy cycle, the Commission staff could consider adding a disability equality perspective to country specific recommendations in the field of social and affordable housing, access to inclusive education (including early years education) long term care.

3 Disability and the labour market - analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies

Ireland ratified the UN CRPD on the 20 March 2018. The first State Party report was submitted in April 2020 and the UN Committee has not yet responded.

[Article 27 UN CRPD](#) addresses Work and Employment.

Employment was one of the pillars of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 (Theme 4), which included commitment to develop a Comprehensive Employment Strategy for Persons with Disabilities, with relative employment rates envisaged among its outcome measures.² It also recommended examining the recommendations of the Make Work Pay Report 2017, to introduce meaningful reforms that would make it financially worthwhile for a person with a disability to take up employment.³

3.1 Summary of the labour market situation of persons with disabilities

Data from EU-SILC indicate an employment rate for persons with disabilities in Ireland of 37.3 % in 2018, compared to 77.6 % for other persons and approximately -13.5 points below the EU27 average - resulting in an estimated disability employment gap of approximately 40 percentage points (EU27 average gap 24.2, see Tables 2-4).

The same data indicate unemployment rates of 22.1 % and 7.0 %, respectively in 2018 (see Tables 5-7) and the economic activity rate for persons with disabilities in Ireland was 47.9 %, compared to 83.5 % for other persons (see Tables 8-10). These indications are broken down by gender and age in the respective tables in annex.

Persons with disabilities experience a lower rate of employment compared to their non-disabled counterparts. Census 2016 indicates that there were 130,067 persons with a disability of working age (15-64) at work, accounting for 22.3 % of the total disabled adult population of 584,045.⁴ This compares with 53.4 % for the overall population aged 15 and over. In 2017, the employment rate for persons with disabilities in Ireland stood at 32.2 %, an increase of 6pps from 2016, yet below the EU average of 50.6 %. The 2018 SILC data indicates a further rise of 5pps.

In 2018, according to EU-SILC, the employment rate differs somewhat between genders, with disabled men at 40.7 % and disabled women at 34.2 %. However, both remain well below the EU average of 54.3 % and 47.8 % respectively (Table 2). Similarly, the employment rate differs across the working lifespan with persons with disabilities aged between 25-34 years experiencing the highest rate of employment at 59.6 per cent, compared to the EU average of 81.3 % for non-disabled people of the same age (Table 3). This falls to 25.5 % for disabled people aged 55-64, compared with 72.2 for their non-disabled counterparts. Over a crucial 10 year period from the

² <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/dept-justice-ndi-inclusion-strategy-booklet.pdf/Files/dept-justice-ndi-inclusion-strategy-booklet.pdf>.

³ Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (2019), *Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities*. Report to government 2017. [Available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/10940/c4c20348897148eb9a50ac2755fd680f.pdf>].

⁴ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp9hdc/p8hdc/p9chs/>.

Great Recession of 2008 through the austerity years, we can see a steady decline in the employment rate of persons with disabilities from 33.1 % in 2008 to 26.2 % in 2016, which then increased in 2017 to 32.2 % and again in 2018 to 37.3 %. This compares to a steady increase evident in the employment rate of non-disabled people from 2013 onwards (Table 4).

Disabled women (aged 20-64) are more likely to be unemployed at 24.9 per cent, compared to disabled men at 19.4 per cent, both of which are above the EU 27 average of 18.3 % and 18.9 % respectively (Table 5). Unemployment rates for disabled people are particularly high in the 16-24 age bracket at 36.8 % as well as the 55-64 age bracket at 22.4 %. This compares with an unemployment rate of 15.4 % and 5.7 % respectively for their non-disabled counterparts of the corresponding age brackets (Table 6). The national unemployment rate from 2008-2018 indicates a decrease from a high of 35.1 % in 2013, to 22.1 % in 2018. A similar pattern is evident for non-disabled people beginning in 2012 at 19.4 per cent, decreasing to 7.0 % in 2018 (Table 7).

In 2018, 8,644 people who declared a disability were involved in Further Education and Training (FET).⁵ In 2019, the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) examined the inactive working population and found that a high proportion of people with a disability (75 per cent) who are inactive had previous work experience, with 48 % of them employed in the past 10 years.

3.2 Analysis of labour market policies relevant to the Semester

Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 sets a 3 % target for the employment of people with disabilities in the public sector. This target, according to the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) launched in October 2015, will be increased in phases from 3 % to 6 % by 2024.⁶ At the end of 2017, public bodies reported 3.5 % employment of persons with disabilities.⁷ The National Disability Inclusion Strategy (2017-2021) adheres to the employment strategy laid out in the CES. The CES has now entered into its second three-year action phase 2019-2021 focusing on six key strategic policy goals (SP 1-6) with an end of year review completed by the NDA for 2019.⁸

The six strategic policy goals include: SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence; SP2: Provide Bridges and Supports into work; SP3: Make Work Pay; SP4: Promote Job retention and re-entry to work; SP5: Provide co-ordinated and seamless support and SP6: Engage Employers. Each will be discussed briefly below.

⁵ National Disability Authority (2020), *Comprehensive Employment Strategy 2019: NDA Year-end Review*, pp. 7-12. [Available at: <http://nda.ie/Publications/Employment/Employment-Publications/Comprehensive-Employment-Strategy-2019-NDA-Year-End-Review1.pdf>].

⁶ Government of Ireland, *National Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024*. 22 (2015).

⁷ National Disability Authority (2017), *Report on Compliance with Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005*. [Available at: <http://nda.ie/nda-files/Part-5-Forms/Report-on-Compliance-with-Part-5-of-the-Disability-Act-2005-for-201711.pdf>].

⁸ National Disability Authority (2020), *Comprehensive Employment Strategy 2019: NDA Year-end Review*, pp. 7-12. [Available at: <http://nda.ie/Publications/Employment/Employment-Publications/Comprehensive-Employment-Strategy-2019-NDA-Year-End-Review1.pdf>].

SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence

The review assesses the progress of actions to date and offers more detail on actions or areas requiring additional focus including developing the education, skills, competence and independence of people with disabilities and fostering positive expectations of achievement.⁹ This coincides with the 2020 National Reform Programme for Ireland which suggests funding for education, training and employment supports for persons with disabilities taking into account the additional costs participating in the work force may accrue for them.¹⁰ Moreover, actions within this policy goal focus on improving expectations for employment including career guidance from an earlier age, access to transition year programmes and work experience. To date, the CES Review 2019 indicates that despite an independent review of career guidance conducted there has been limited progress on actions relating to the provision of career guidance support for students in special and mainstream schools, as well as limited evidence regarding the provision of guidance counsellors allocated to special schools or mainstream school for students with disabilities.¹¹ There was also a lack of availability of transition year as an option for students with a disability, and a lack of a national policy approach to ensure work experience options. Although the CES action plan 2015-2018 highlighted the critical importance of advancing the delivery of career guidance training and provision, the NDA once again recommend that this action commence as a matter of priority to address the NEET rate (although figure unknown for disabled people in Ireland) and those in FET, to ensure the greater potential for a smooth transition from education to employment or for those returning to education.

SP2: Provide Bridges and Supports into work

Critical also is the effective management of the transition into employment from education and the ongoing maintenance of in-work supports for people with disabilities to remain in work. The CES Review 2019 suggests collecting information on the numbers of students with disabilities accessing Transition Year and any associated work-experience to close gaps and provide guidance to best support students with disabilities to access and progress through TY. Transport plays a crucial role in connecting people with disabilities to employment. Although the CES Review 2019 indicates positive advances in accessibility of national transport infrastructure and accessible transport information, it highlights the ongoing need to consider how such measures assist persons with different disabilities to get to and from work, while also highlighting the lack of accessible transport links in rural areas, particularly accessible taxis. The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has commenced a public consultation on a review for a Sustainable Mobility Policy. The Pathways to Work strategy (2016-2020)¹² requires the role of the job coach or employment specialist within the network of Intreo offices to continue to support people with disabilities to find

⁹ National Disability Authority (2020), *Comprehensive Employment Strategy 2019: NDA Year-end Review*, pp. 7-12. [Available at: <http://nda.ie/Publications/Employment/Employment-Publications/Comprehensive-Employment-Strategy-2019-NDA-Year-End-Review1.pdf>].

¹⁰ European Commission (2020), *Semester Reports: Ireland*. [Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2020-european-semester-country-reports_en].

¹¹ Indecon (2019), *Independent Review of Career Guidance Tools and Information*. [Available at: <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/indecon-review-of-career-guidance.pdf>].

¹² Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (2016), *Pathways to Work*. [Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/5b410e-pathways-to-work-2016/>].

a job and remain in work. Additional programmes to support the employment of disabled people include the Wage Subsidy Scheme,¹³ Reasonable Accommodation Fund,¹⁴ Disability Awareness Support Scheme,¹⁵ and EmployAbility Service,¹⁶ all of which require continuous monitoring to ensure they are adequately delivering their desired outcomes. In light of this, IBEC is examining grant schemes around disability and employment to enable them to be more fit-for-purpose.¹⁷

SP3: Make Work Pay

A review of the Make Work Pay programme was completed in 2017 indicating the complex details of disincentives for people with disabilities to take up or remain in employment.¹⁸ While improvements to the programme have been made in light of this review, an early engagement process has yet to commence, as recommended, having implications for the NEET category in particular. To avoid long-term joblessness for young people the review suggests the benefits of evidence from the evaluation of the DEASP Ability Programme regarding the quantity and type of service models that are beneficial for effective pre activation for young people with disabilities and well as implementation of Action 5.1 which aims to deliver a seamless pathway to work for people with disabilities, including those with high support needs. Additionally, two specific recommendations have not been progressed. The first relates to funded and enhanced transport supports and mobility schemes for people with disabilities, and the second relates to access to or affordability of necessary aids / appliances / assistive technology that a person may require to enter, remain or return to work.

SP4: Promote Job retention and re-entry to work

This priority pertains to those who have acquired a disability and providing supportive interventions to ensure that returning to work is an integral part of the recovery process. The review notes there has been slow progress in this area to date. The NDA published a review paper of reasonable accommodations suggesting key learning and improvements that primarily relate to greater engagement and consultation between employer and employee as regards needs, facilities, procedures and timely implementation of any changes necessary.¹⁹ It also highlighted obstacles that related to a lack of awareness of the legal implications of reasonable accommodation requests, reluctance by employees to disclose their disability, lack of policies or procedures in place nor effected in a timely manner, low awareness of financial

¹³ Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (2019). *Wage Subsidy Scheme*. [available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/37c057-wage-subsidy-scheme/>].

¹⁴ Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (2019). *Reasonable Accommodation Fund*. [Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/62fd96-reasonable-accommodation-fund/>].

¹⁵ Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (2019). *Disability Awareness Support Scheme*. [Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/3970b5-disability-awareness-support-scheme/>].

¹⁶ Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (2019). *Access EmployAbility Service*. [Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/8578c4-access-the-employability-service/>].

¹⁷ European Commission (2020), *Semester Reports: Ireland*, p. 94, [Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2020-european-semester-country-reports_en].

¹⁸ Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (2019), *Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities*. Report to government 2017. [Available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/10940/c4c20348897148eb9a50ac2755fd680f.pdf>].

¹⁹ National Disability Authority (2019). *Reasonable Accommodations: Obstacles and Opportunities to the Employment of Persons with a Disability*. [Available at: <http://nda.ie/Publications/Employment/Employment-Publications/Reasonable-Accommodations-Obstacles-and-Opportunities-to-the-Employment-of-Persons-with-a-Disability1.pdf>].

supports available to employers and the limitations of these supports, and a lack of provision of monitoring and reviewing reasonable accommodations. A review by the DEASP is underway in relation to the reasonable accommodation fund and the Disability Awareness Support Scheme to ensure that it is effective and relevant for both employers and employees. A similar review is suggested by the DEASP for the Wage Subsidy Scheme. The NDA recommends that guidance and a code of practice concerning the provision of reasonable accommodation be developed. It suggests a dedicated national resource of peer advice and information for employers to build on the learning of the Employer Disability Information service pilot initiative; an information and awareness campaign to build awareness among people with disabilities of their right as well as highlighting the important contribution people with disabilities can bring to the workplace. It noted the absence of cases by persons with intellectual disabilities and autism and whether they were greater difficulties in accessing employment experienced by these persons.

SP5: Provide co-ordinated and seamless support

A cross-departmental working group continues to discuss the implementation, funding and governance mechanisms to support this policy goal. Meanwhile, the review suggests that progress has been achieved such as, the implementation of the Indecon recommendations of EmployAbility, closer referral mechanisms between Intreo and their local ETB offerings, and newly commenced HSE and NCSE work on transitions.

SP6: Engage Employers

The NDA, during 2020, will develop guidance for employers on the reasonable accommodation process while the IHREC intend to publish a Code of Practice. Although the Employer Disability Information (EDI) pilot service has ceased, the DJE are incorporating the evidence gleaned from the service to ensure the benefit of awareness raising and information is available for employers from a business perspective. A consortium has developed online learning employment awareness-raising materials that will be made available to employers. The materials cover all types of disability and can be delivered online or through face-to-face training. In addition to increasing the Part 5 statutory employment target, the review suggests concentrating on other methods of recruitment including civil service internships that could lead to permanent positions.

4 Disability, social policies and healthcare – analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies

Ireland ratified the UN CRPD on the 20 March 2018. Ireland ratified the UN CRPD on the 20 March 2018. The first State Party report was submitted in April 2020 and the UN Committee has not yet responded.

[Article 28 UN CRPD](#) addresses Adequate standard of living and social protection.

[Article 19 UN CRPD](#) addresses Living independently in the community.

[Article 25 UN CRPD](#) addresses Health.

The National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 included commitments to a range of relevant social policies, such as implementation of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for Persons with Disabilities, Health and well-being, Person-centred disability services, Housing, Transport and accessible places, Equality and choice, and Joined-up services.²⁰

4.1 Summary of the social situation of persons with disabilities

Data from EU-SILC indicate the poverty risk rate for working age persons with disabilities in Ireland was 31.7 % in 2018, compared to 11.4 % for other persons of similar age - an estimated disability poverty gap of approximately 20 percentage points (see Table 14). For people aged over 65, the disability poverty gap was 4.7 points (23.3 % for older persons with disabilities and 18.6 % for other persons of similar age). The tables in annex also indicate the respective rates of AROPE and break these down by gender as well age.

Disabled people are at significantly greater risk of poverty than their non-disabled peers in Ireland, and the rate in Ireland is also greater than the EU27 average, as demonstrated in Tables 11-13 in annex). Recent data also demonstrates that the risk of relative poverty after social transfers for disabled people aged 16-64 is increasing in Ireland in the data from 2017-2018 (Table 14) and this remains the highest rate in the EU at 31.7 % (71 % before social transfers).²¹ This indicates that Ireland continues to rely heavily on social protection measures to address the lack of income from employment for disabled people.

The Department of Social Protection published a technical paper in February 2019 on social inclusion and access to care services, which found that among those with a need for professional home care, the rate of unmet need is very high: 61 % for older adults and 83 % for others. The main reasons given for this unmet need by those surveyed were that the service was not available (29 % of householders) or that the service was of insufficient quality (18 % of householders).²²

²⁰ <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/dept-justice-ndi-inclusion-strategy-booklet.pdf/Files/dept-justice-ndi-inclusion-strategy-booklet.pdf>.

²¹ See, Eurostat health Database, [[hlth_dpe020](#)] and [[hlth_dpe030](#)], <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

²² <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/BKMNEXT371.pdf>, p. 60.

With regard to healthcare, no updated data has been published from the Health Research Board since the merger of the National Physical and Sensory Disability Database and the National Intellectual Disability Database to form the National Ability Supports System in 2018. A report published by the Economic and Social Research Institute in December 2019 which reviewed the data from 2006-2017 on the two separate databases noted that there had been a steady increase in demand for specialist disability services in the previous 10 years.²³ There is also evidence that disabled people in Ireland report higher levels of unmet need for medical examination when compared with the EU27 average (Table 15 reports a three year average, the rate in 2018 was 5.3 %).

4.2 Analysis of social policies relevant to the Semester

For reference, see also the 2020 [National Reform Programme](#) for Ireland.

Ireland's Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 contains some important targets to address social exclusion of disabled people. For example, on income poverty, one of the aims of the roadmap is to improve the AROPE rate for people with disabilities (aiming to reduce the rate from 36.9 % in 2018 to 28.7 % by 2025 and to no more than 22.7 % by 2030 (i.e. to become a top 5 country in the EU rankings).²⁴

In order to achieve this, the roadmap commits to reform the structure of disability related welfare payments. It notes that in the current system 'a person is considered to be either fully incapable of work or fully capable of work with no recognition that work capabilities can vary among different people with different types of disability. Similarly, the schemes adopt a 'one size fits all' approach to the issue of living costs, taking no account of the differing costs incurred by people living with different types of disability.' As a result, the Roadmap commits that the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection will develop and consult on a 'strawman' proposal for the restructuring of long-term disability payments to simplify the system and take account of the concerns expressed in the Make Work Pay report²⁵ by Q4 2020. It also makes a commitment on behalf of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to commission a study on the cost of disability and publish a final report with recommendations by Q1 2020. In June 2019, it was announced that Indecon International had successfully won a tender competition to develop this research,²⁶ but no report has yet been made publicly available at the time of writing. Indecon had also completed a previous study of the cost of disability for the National Disability Authority in 2011.²⁷

The Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 also aims to increase the employment level of people with a disability from 22.3 % in 2018 to 33 % by 2025²⁸ as one of the

²³ https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/WP644_1.pdf, p. 7 & p. 33.

²⁴ *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025*, Ambition, Goals, Commitments, p. 17.

²⁵ Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (2019). *Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities*. Report to government 2017. [Available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/10940/c4c20348897148eb9a50ac2755fd680f.pdf>].

²⁶ <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/fd13cd-indecon-international-consultants-commissioned-to-carry-out-cost-of-/>.

²⁷ <http://nda.ie/File-upload/Indecon-Report-on-the-Cost-of-Disability.pdf>.

²⁸ *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025*, Ambition, Goals, Commitments, p. 18.

measures to tackle poverty and social exclusion (see previous chapter). Ireland's Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018–2022 provides funding to tackle poverty and social exclusion through local engagement and partnerships between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies.²⁹ One of SICAPs target groups are people with disabilities who are disengaged from the labour market. The activation programmes aim to support activities around lifelong learning and preparation for employment, all of which can help to reduce exclusion and poverty. These are funded with support from the ESIF under the PEIL programme, discussed further below in Chapter 6.2.

The main actions to address social exclusion and poverty for disabled people specified in the 2020 Country Report and National Reform Programme are focused on increasing activation and employment and improving educational attainment. These sit alongside the government's commitment in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 to restructure disability-related welfare payments to better recognise a range of work capabilities and to conduct further research into the cost of disability. It is clear from the trends in data highlighted in the previous section that it will not be possible to fully address the risk of poverty and social exclusion among disabled people in Ireland through employment and educational initiatives alone. While it is important to address the additional costs faced by disabled people in any new plans, it is disappointing that the government's commitments in this respect are only to commission further research, when there are a number of existing studies demonstrating the cost of disability (including one completed by the same consultants who have been commissioned to produce the 2020 study on this topic), rather than a firm commitment to introduce a cost of disability payment as part of the suite of income supports available to disabled people in Ireland.

Ireland has met or is very close to its Europe 2020 strategy targets for reduction of poverty and social exclusion in general, having achieved or surpassed the EU average level on the UN Sustainable Development Goal 1 'no poverty'. In the National Reform Programme report, 25.7 % of the total ESF allocation has been directed to promoting social inclusion and combating poverty and discrimination, including activation initiatives specifically targeted at disabled people (see Chapter 6 below). However, it is important to acknowledge that Ireland continues to have significantly higher rates of disabled people at risk of poverty or exclusion than the other EU27 member states.

Ireland's efforts to improve social policies and healthcare would be improved by more targeted plans to address disability inequality in some of the general actions proposed in the areas of social and affordable housing, the introduction of legal recognition for entitlements to personal assistance and home care and more ambitious targets in social protection including the introduction of a dedicated cost of disability payment.

²⁹ Pobal, see: <https://www.pobal.ie/programmes/social-inclusion-and-community-activation-programme-sicap-2018-2022/>.

5 Disability, education and skills – analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies

Ireland ratified the UN CRPD on the 20 March 2018. Ireland ratified the UN CRPD on the 20 March 2018. The first State Party report was submitted in April 2020 and the UN Committee has not yet responded.

[Article 24 UN CRPD](#) addresses Education.

Education was one of the pillars of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 (Theme 3), which included commitment to develop a Comprehensive Employment Strategy for Persons with Disabilities, with relative employment rates envisaged among its outcome measures.³⁰

5.1 Summary of the educational situation of persons with disabilities

The EU-SILC estimates concerning educational attainment should be treated with some caution due to variable confidence levels but they consistently indicate disability quality gaps. Table 16 indicates early school leaving rates disaggregated by disability status. Youth with disabilities (aged 18-24) tend to leave school significantly more than non-disabled peers of the same age groups (and this is reinforced by widening the sample size to age 18-29). Table 17 shows completion rate of tertiary education disaggregated by disability and age group. Persons with disabilities (age 30-34) are less likely to complete tertiary education than their peers (and this is reinforced in the wider sample for age 30-39).

Overall, the early school leaving rate in Ireland is below the EU average, including the rate of disabled school leavers, although the data shows that disabled people are more likely to leave school early in Ireland than their non-disabled peers (Table 16). In 2018 11 % of all 18-24 year olds in the EU-28 member states were classified as early school leavers. The Irish equivalent rate was 5 % in the same period. This ranked the country fourth among EU member states.³¹ It ranks similarly on the disability indicators derived from EU-SILC.

A similar trend appears in the data on tertiary education, where Ireland has a high rate of completion of tertiary education, including for disabled students, when compared with the EU27 average, but disabled students are less likely to complete their tertiary education than their non-disabled peers (Table 17). Only 13 % of people with disabilities hold a degree or higher qualification compared to 25 % of their non-disabled counterparts. The Equal Access Survey collects data on full-time students in receipt of the Fund for Students with Disabilities. In 2016/2017, it recorded 667 students, which exceeded the NAP target of 2019 at 570. The data also indicated that 10 % of all new entrants to higher education in 2016/2017 were students with disabilities.³²

³⁰ <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/dept-justice-ndi-inclusion-strategy-booklet.pdf/Files/dept-justice-ndi-inclusion-strategy-booklet.pdf>.

³¹ CSO statistical release, Educational Attainment Thematic Report (2019). [Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/eda/educationalattainmentthematicreport2019/>].

³² <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2019/01/HEA-Progress-Review-2021-NAP.pdf>.

The number of full-time students in primary schools aided by the Department of Education and Skills in 2018/2019 was 567,772 reducing slightly to 567,716 in 2019/2020, of which special class pupils in mainstream schools was 6,229 rising to 6,822 in 2019/2020. The number of students in special schools in 2018/2019 totalled 8,224, increasing to 8,351 in 2019/2020.³³ CSO 2016 indicated that amongst disabled persons (age 15-50), 13.7 % had completed no higher than primary level education, compared with 4.2 % of the general population.³⁴

The NDA highlights that no comprehensive figures are available for the numbers of children with disabilities in early years education or the number of adults with disabilities attending local adult education centres.

5.2 Analysis of education policies relevant to the Semester

Early years

According to the National Disability Authority (assessment of progress under NDIS), there has been continued progress in 2019 and 2020 in implementing the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) Programme to support children with disabilities to access and benefit from early learning and care services. In 2019, a report into the functioning of the first year of AIM was published. It praised the development of consistent and uniform approach to supporting children with additional needs in Early Learning and Care settings. There was a high retention rate, and stakeholders were generally positive. The report suggests that AIM should be expanded. There were questions raised about the inclusion of children with 'very complex needs.' A more comprehensive three-year review was due to begin in 2019/2020. This has not yet been published.

Parents of disabled children have also raised concerns about the lack of flexibility within the current Early Childhood Care and Education programme. Children are eligible for two years of free preschool education under this programme between the ages of 3-5. Parents of disabled children have requested that flexibility be introduced so that children who are not ready to attend preschool at 3 could still benefit from 2 years of this funded programme, e.g. from ages 4-6.³⁵

The 'First 5, the Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families' (2019-2028) was published by the DYCA together with a First 5 Implementation Plan covering the period 2019-2021. Objective 9 of First 5 focuses on supporting the transition from early learning settings to primary education, offering an opportunity to improve transitions for children with disabilities by strengthening information exchange between ELC settings, children and parents, and primary

³³ <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Key-Statistics/key-statistics-2019-2020.pdf>.

³⁴ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp9hdc/p8hdc/p9chs/>.

³⁵ Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 'Minister Zappone welcomes the report of the National Disability Authority with regard to overage exemptions for the ECCE free preschool programme' (29 March 2019) available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/6c15b3-minister-zappone-welcomes-the-report-of-the-national-disability-auth/>.

schools; continuity of curriculum and pedagogy between ELC and primary; good practice as a foundation to ensure a seamless transition to further learning stages.³⁶

In 2018 and 2019, according to the National Disability Authority (assessment of progress under NDIS) investment has been made in training programmes in Lámh, Hanen and online training in sensory processing for early years educators. In 2019, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs published Universal Design Guidelines for Early Learning and Care settings, developed in collaboration with Centre for Excellence in Universal Design at the National Disability Authority. The NDA now seeks to understand how this guidance is being implemented, and its benefit.

Primary and secondary education

In line with the commitment to advance new policy, the Department of Education and Skills has piloted a new School Inclusion Model in 75 schools. This comprises a research-informed package of education and health supports which aim to build schools' capacity to include children with additional needs. Schools in the pilot will receive an upfront allocation of SNAs, support from speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and behavioural practitioners, and additional National Educational Psychological Service support. Total psychologist posts have increased from 162 whole-time equivalents in 2016 to 194 in 2018 with additional psychologist posts to NEPS announced as part of Budget 2019 with the overall set to increase to 204.³⁷

Budget 2020 did provide for 'over 150 new mainstream teaching posts in schools' which will benefit students with disabilities by keeping class sizes within range. There was also an 'investment of €1.9 billion in special education.' It was broken down into over 400 additional SEN teaching posts and 1,000 additional Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). It was noted that the total numbers of SNAs was brought to 17,000, increasing the numbers in successive budgets. This is against the background decision not to fully commence the Education of Persons with Special Education Needs Act 2004.³⁸

In relation to transitions for young persons with disabilities from school on to post-school education and training, work was commenced by NCSE and HSE in 2019 to consider transition arrangements. Further progress in this area was committed to in Action 1.3 of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy Phase Two Action Plan 2019-2021. The CES Review 2019 conducted by the NDA highlighted the lack of progress in career guidance support for students in special and mainstream schools, the availability of transition year as an option for students with disabilities, and the lack of a national policy approach to ensure work experience options.³⁹ It is important that work in relation to supporting transitions for children and young people with disabilities are progressed in 2020.

³⁶ National Disability Authority (2020), *Comprehensive Employment Strategy 2019: NDA Year-end Review*, p. 9. [Available at: <http://nda.ie/Publications/Employment/Employment-Publications/Comprehensive-Employment-Strategy-2019-NDA-Year-End-Review1.pdf>].

³⁷ National Disability Authority, *Independent Assessment of Progress under NDIS 2017-2018*, p. 18.

³⁸ Inclusion Ireland, Budget 2018, available at: <http://www.inclusionireland.ie/Budget2018>.

³⁹ National Disability Authority (2020), *Comprehensive Employment Strategy 2019: NDA Year-end Review*, p. 11. [Available at: <http://nda.ie/Publications/Employment/Employment-Publications/Comprehensive-Employment-Strategy-2019-NDA-Year-End-Review1.pdf>].

Tertiary education

The National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2015-2019 has been extended to 2021. The current Action Plan for Education 2019⁴⁰ prioritises equity of access across all levels of education to break cycles of disadvantage and increase education potential. A Progress Review of the National Access Plan and Priorities to 2021 was published in 2018. While the progress report highlights how previous targets were exceeded in relation to access for persons with disabilities it suggests that these targets should be realigned accordingly to reflect the potential increase of disabled students and provide supports beyond physically disabled, visually impaired or deaf students. It notes the progress by services such as AHEAD and DAWN on inclusive learning, and the drive to apply universal design principles and mainstream supports. However, the implementation of these is slow and the mainstreaming of supports is not a priority that is evident at the highest levels of planning among HEI's⁴¹ Additionally, a review of the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) has been completed with an implementation group coordinating implementing the recommendations. These include considering and new model of allocation and extending the FSD to part-time students.⁴²

There have been significant concerns that the education lockdown measures have had a disproportionate impact on students with disabilities.⁴³ There are significant concerns about the accessibility of distance learning, the provision of specialized, including assistive technology and devices, and parental support. It was noted that some impacts go beyond learning. Pandemic response measures may cause difficulties for some students Individual Education Plans, in particular those which focus on peer relations, social perception and social competence. There are also concerns that school closure will result in a lack of access to secondary services.

As states reopen, there is an obligation to ensure return to school programmes are inclusive, including development of plans for accelerated education, and catch-up programmes. Ireland's Health Service Executive, has made it clear that most children with disabilities should return to school, with some exceptions.⁴⁴ A survey carried out by Inclusion Ireland found that education support to disabled children from the school/teacher during the lockdown period has been inconsistent with 37 % of parents

⁴⁰ Department of Education and Skills, 2019. *Action Plan for Education 2019*. [available at: <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/action-plan-for-education-2019.pdf>].

⁴¹ Higher Education Authority. 2018. *Progress Review of the National Access Plan and Priorities to 2021*. p. 47. [available at: <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2019/01/HEA-Progress-Review-2021-NAP.pdf>].

⁴² Higher Education Authority. 2018. *Progress Review of the National Access Plan and Priorities to 2021*. p. 51. [available at: <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2019/01/HEA-Progress-Review-2021-NAP.pdf>].

⁴³ Inclusion Ireland, *Submission to the Oireachtas Special Committee on a Covid –19 Response Supporting Children to Learn*, 25 June 2020, available: <http://www.inclusionireland.ie/sites/default/files/attach/basic-page/1651/covid-committee-written-submission.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Irish Times, *Most Kids With Health Conditions Should Return To School*, (2 September 2020) <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/most-kids-with-health-conditions-should-return-to-school-hse-1.4344651>.

reporting a lack of access to suitable educational materials and 33 % reporting a lack of guidance as an issue.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Inclusion Ireland, Submission to the Oireachtas Special Committee on a COVID-19 Response Supporting Children to Learn (25 June 2020).

6 Investment priorities in relation to disability

6.1 Updates on use of existing EU funds (to 2020)

According to the ESF Ireland List of Operations from June 2020,⁴⁶ no new projects related to persons with disabilities have been funded since the 2018/2019 ANED European Semester Country Fiche on Disability (Ireland). The June 2020 update indicates that to date only 50 % of the budget has been spent, for example, on the Disability Project Ability Programme under Priority 2 (Promoting Social Inclusion and combating discrimination in the labour market) there is €16m available to promote employment prospects and meaningful social roles for young people with disabilities, and by June 2020, only €8m has been spent. Under that Ability programme, 27 projects have been funded in a range of geographic areas and targeting specific groups of young disabled people, including people with intellectual disabilities, autism and mental health conditions. While the 2014-2020 ESIF have the potential to support the transition from institutional to community based care (de-congregation), no funds have to date been allocated to projects which aim to achieve this goal, and deinstitutionalisation is not a specific priority enumerated by Ireland under the ESF. ESF in Ireland is not however being used to support de-congregation, despite this being vital to the social inclusion of children and adults with disabilities.

6.2 Priorities for future investment (after 2020)

In the priorities for future investment after 2020, the consolidation of three existing funds, ESF, Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD) into ESF+ could present some important opportunities for streamlining funding with regard to investments to benefit persons with disabilities. While the main benefit for persons with disabilities in Ireland within the current funds have been in the areas of employment and education, significant gaps remain which could benefit from future investment, including the transition from institutional to community-based care. With the introduction of simplified reporting and guidelines for future investment after 2020, close attention will have to be paid to ensure that there are no additional disadvantages for persons with disabilities, for example in ensuring that accessibility measures are included in any proposed new infrastructure and that climate action measures (e.g. any proposed bans on single use plastics) do not adversely impact on persons with disabilities.

CSR1 mentions the need to ‘Improve accessibility of the health system’, where the unmet needs of disabled people should be considered in investments. CRS2 refers to employment skills, the digital divide, and affordable housing – it is important to acknowledge the specific needs of disabled people’s needs in these respects. CSR3 refers to investment in sustainable transport, where accessibility for disabled persons must be built-in, in accordance with CRPD Article 9 and EU rules on the structural funds and public procurement.

⁴⁶ European Social Fund in Ireland, 2014-2020, *List of Operations*, June 2020, available at: <https://www.esf.ie/en/information-centre/list-of-operations/>.

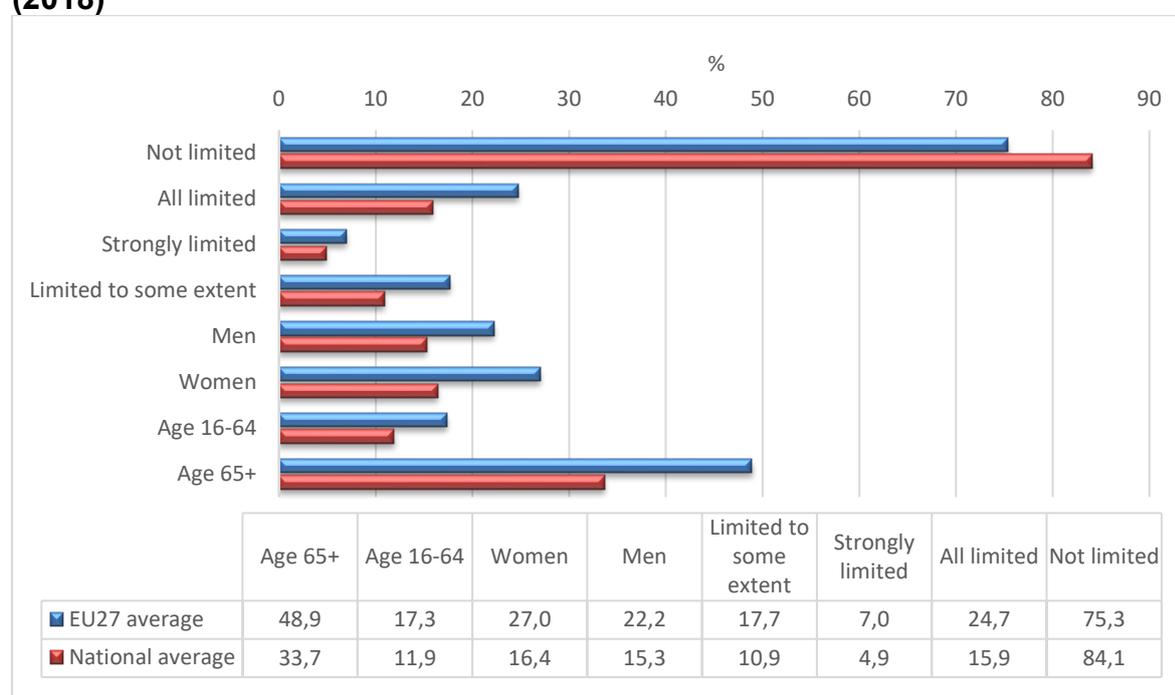
7 Annex: disability data relevant to the Semester

See also disability data published in the Eurostat database⁴⁷ and statistical reports.⁴⁸

Unless specified, the summary statistics are drawn from the most recent EU-SILC data available to researchers from Eurostat. The EU-SILC sample includes people living in private households and does not include people living in institutions (congregative households). The sampling methods vary somewhat in each country.

The proxy used to identify people with disabilities (impairments) is whether ‘for at least the past six months’ the respondent reports that they have been ‘limited because of a health problem in activities people usually do’.⁴⁹

Table 1: Self-reported ‘activity limitations’ as a proxy for impairment/disability (2018)



Source: EU-SILC 2018 Release 2020 version 1

In subsequent tables, these data are used to indicate ‘disability’ equality gaps and trends relevant to the analytical chapters – for the labour market, social policies and healthcare, and education – by comparing outcomes for persons who report and do

⁴⁷ Eurostat health Database, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

⁴⁸ Eurostat (2019) *Disability Statistics* https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Disability_statistics.

⁴⁹ The SILC survey questions are contained in the Minimum European Health Module (MEHM) [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Special:WhatLinksHere/Glossary:Minimum_European_Health_Module_\(MEHM\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Special:WhatLinksHere/Glossary:Minimum_European_Health_Module_(MEHM)).

not report 'activity limitations'.⁵⁰ National estimates for Ireland are compared with EU27 mean averages for the most recent year.⁵¹

7.1 EU data relevant to disability and the labour market (2018)

Table 2: Employment rates, by disability and gender (aged 20-64)

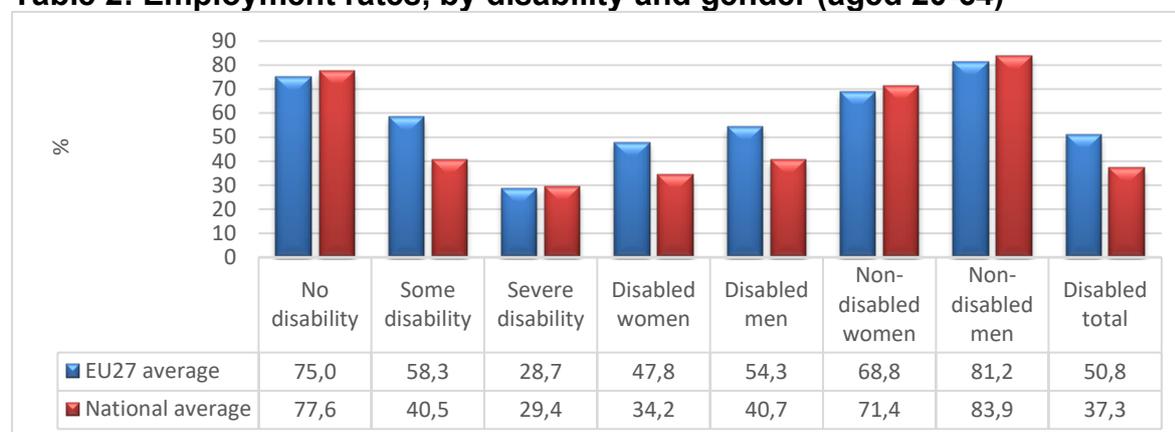
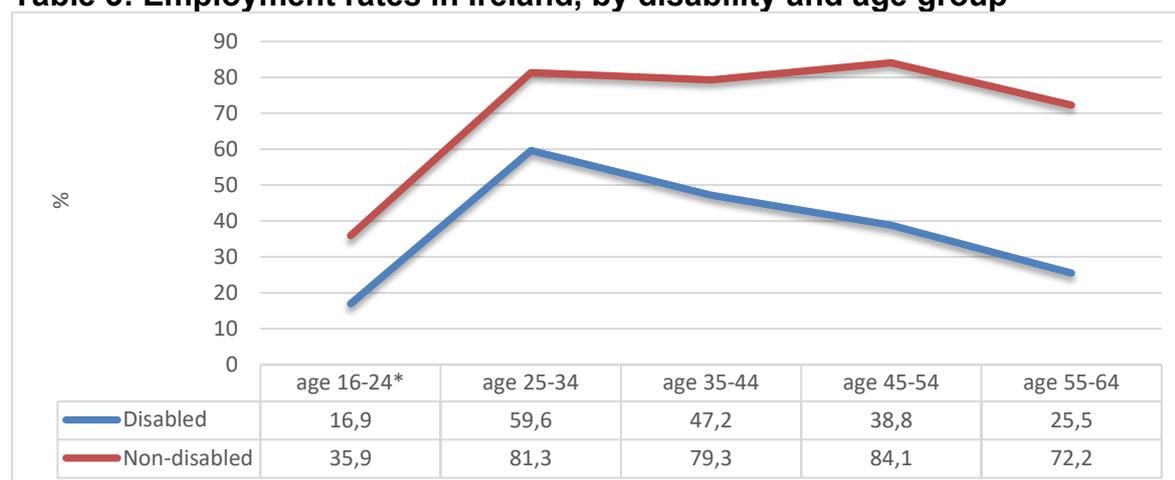


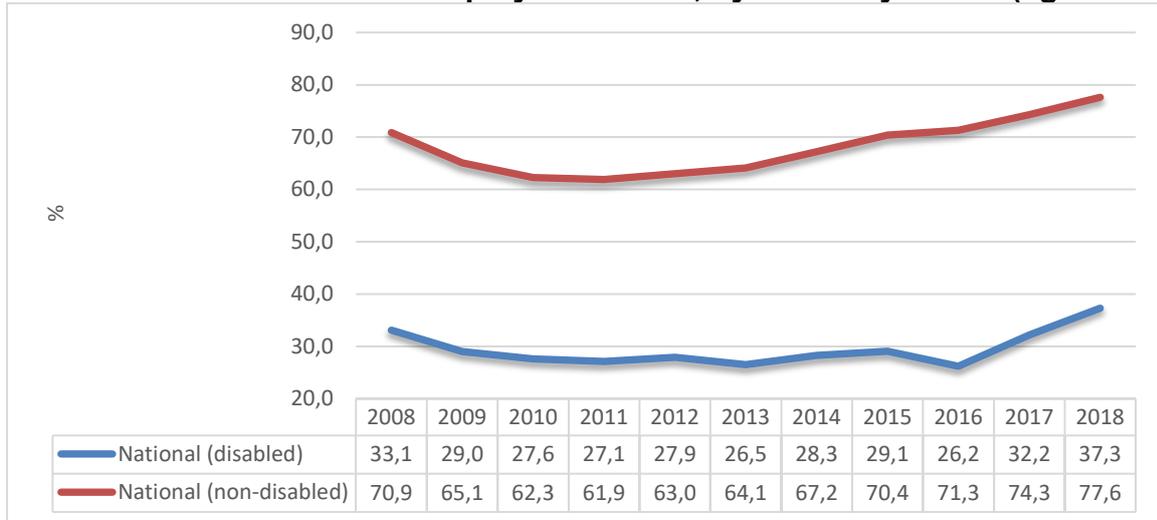
Table 3: Employment rates in Ireland, by disability and age group



⁵⁰ This methodology was developed in the annual statistical reports of ANED, available at <http://www.disability-europe.net/theme/statistical-indicators>.

⁵¹ The exit of the United Kingdom from the EU changes the EU average. Averages were also affected in 2015 by a discontinuity in the German disability data due to a definitional change.

Table 4: National trends in employment rates, by disability status (aged 20-64)



Source: EU-SILC 2018 Release 2020 version 1 (and preceding UDBs)

7.1.1 Unemployment (2018)

Table 5: Unemployment rates by disability and gender (aged 20-64)

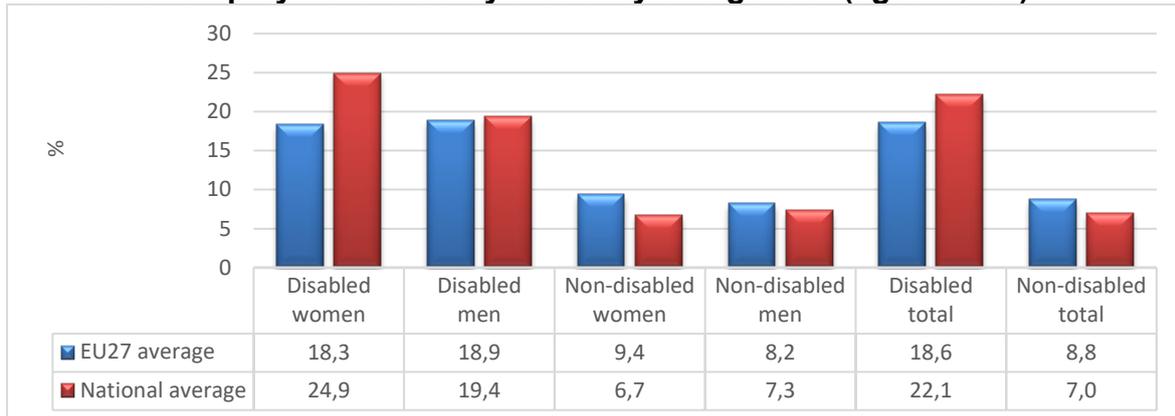


Table 6: Unemployment rates in Ireland, by disability and age group

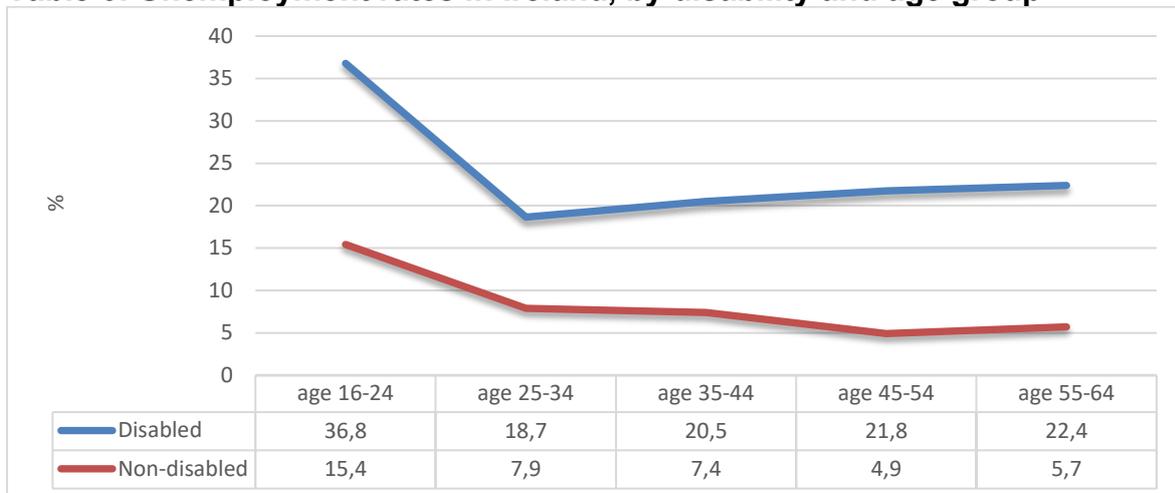
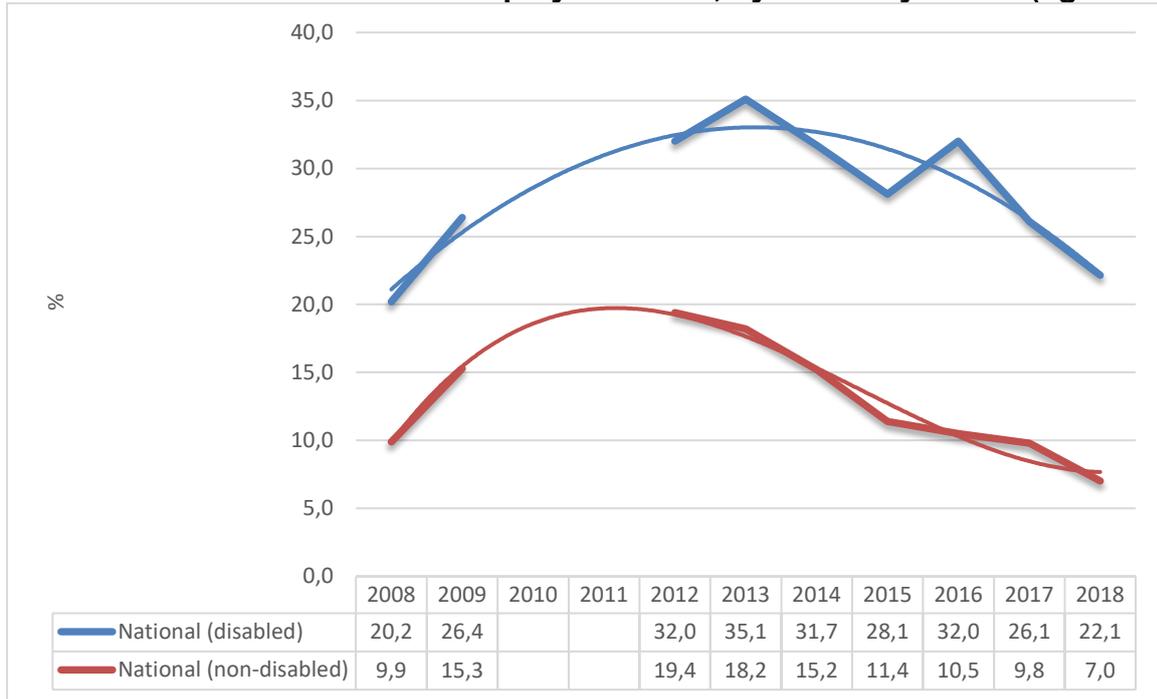


Table 7: National trends in unemployment rate, by disability status (aged 20-64)



Source: EU-SILC 2018 Release 2020 version 1 (and preceding UDBs)

7.1.2 Economic activity

Table 8: Economic activity rates, by disability and gender (aged 20-64)

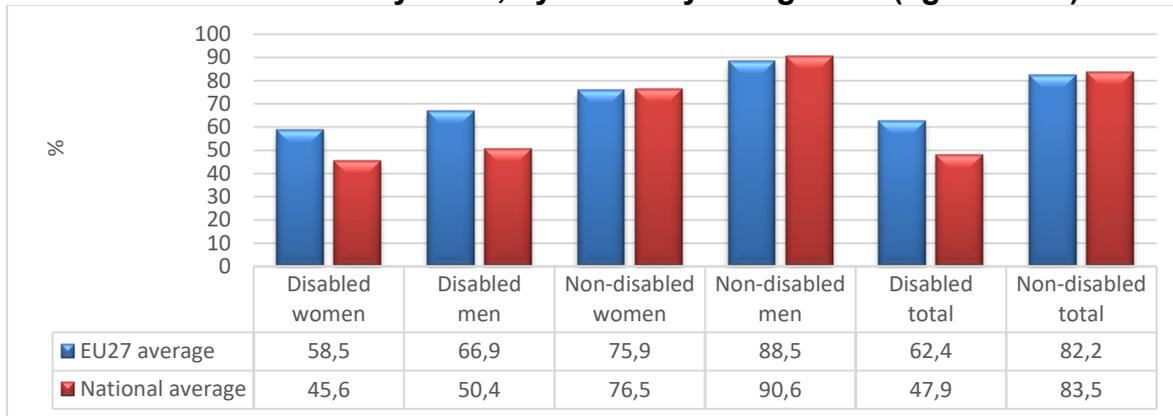
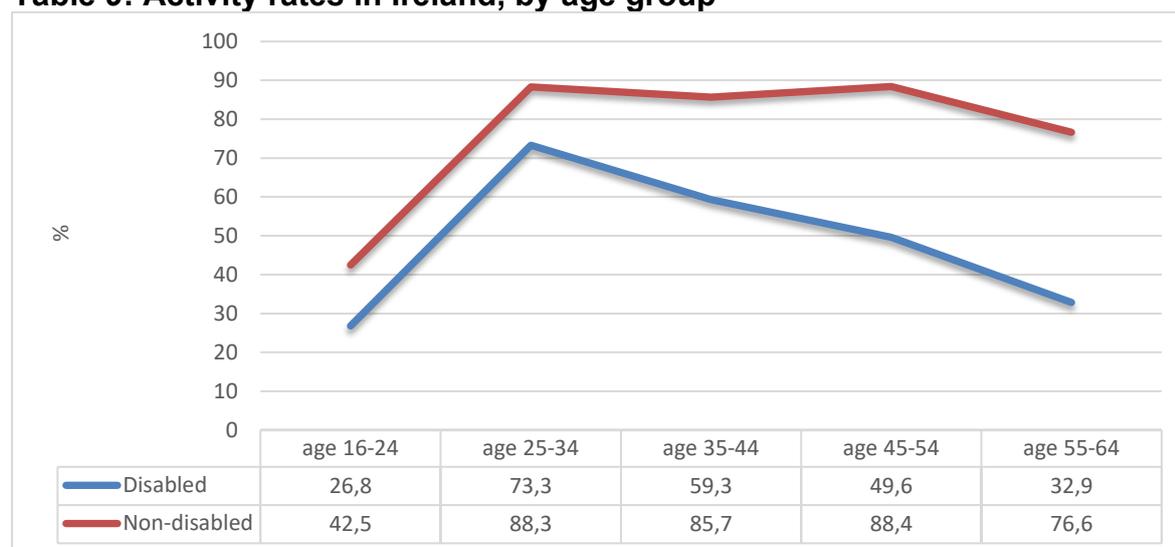
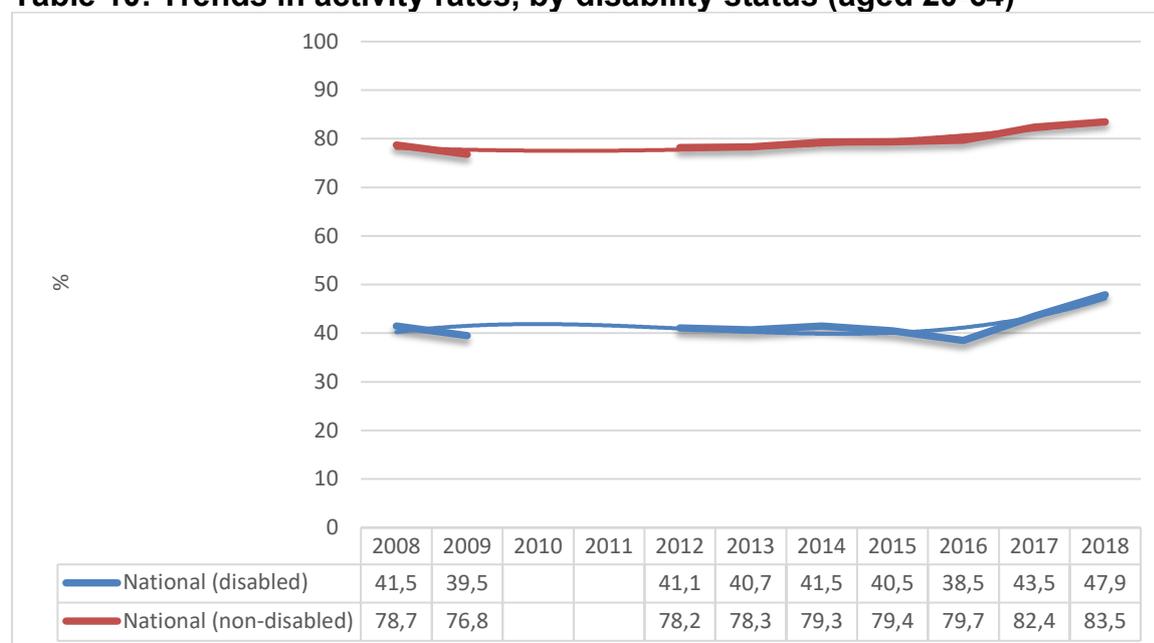


Table 9: Activity rates in Ireland, by age group**Table 10: Trends in activity rates, by disability status (aged 20-64)**

Source: EU-SILC 2018 Release 2020 version 1 (and preceding UDBs)

7.1.3 Alternative sources of labour market data in Ireland

Disability data is not included in the core European Labour Force Survey but labour market indicators for Ireland were disaggregated from ad modules conducted in 2001 and 2011. These can be found in the Eurostat disability database.⁵²

The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is a large-scale, nationwide survey of households in Ireland.⁵³ It is designed to produce quarterly labour force estimates that include the official measure of employment and unemployment in the state (ILO basis). The QNHS also conducts special modules on different social topics each

⁵² Eurostat Health Database, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

⁵³ Quarterly National Household Survey <http://www.cso.ie/en/qnhs/abouttheqnhs/whatistheqnhs/>.

quarter. In the QNHS (as in the National Census) disability is measured through self-identification but employment data is not generally disaggregated in labour market statistical reports. The most recent QNHS does not give data for persons with disabilities therefore the most recent data on disability and labour force participation is from the National Census in 2016 which showed that there were 176,445 persons with a disability in the labour force, giving a labour force participation rate of 30.2 % compared with 61.4 % for the population overall.⁵⁴

7.2 EU data relevant to disability, social policies and healthcare (2018)

Table 11: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by disability and risk (aged 16-59)

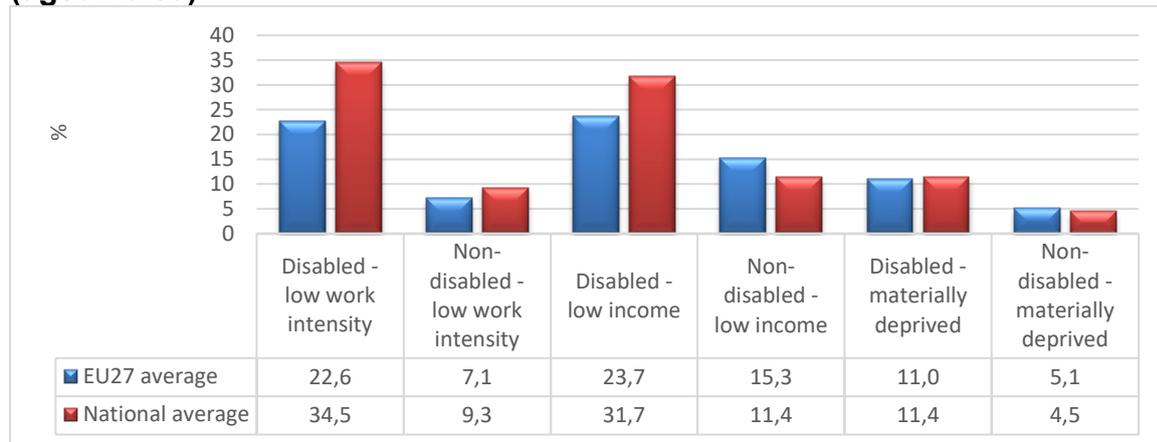
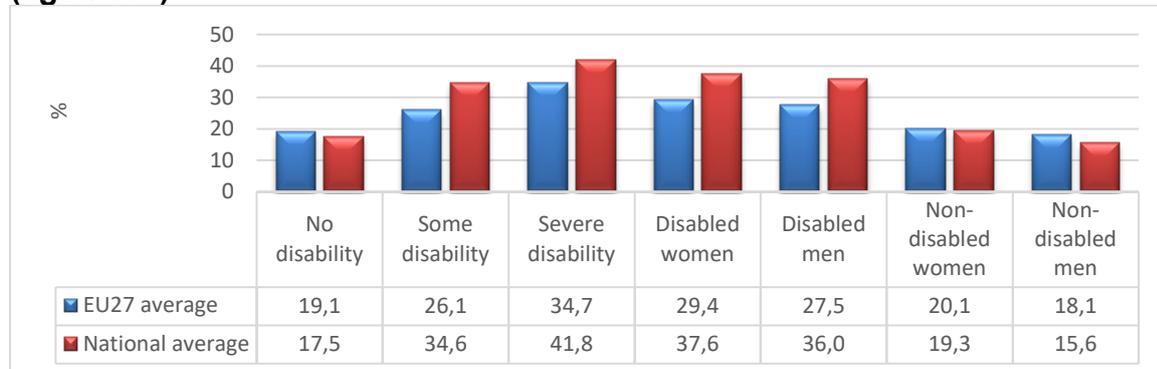
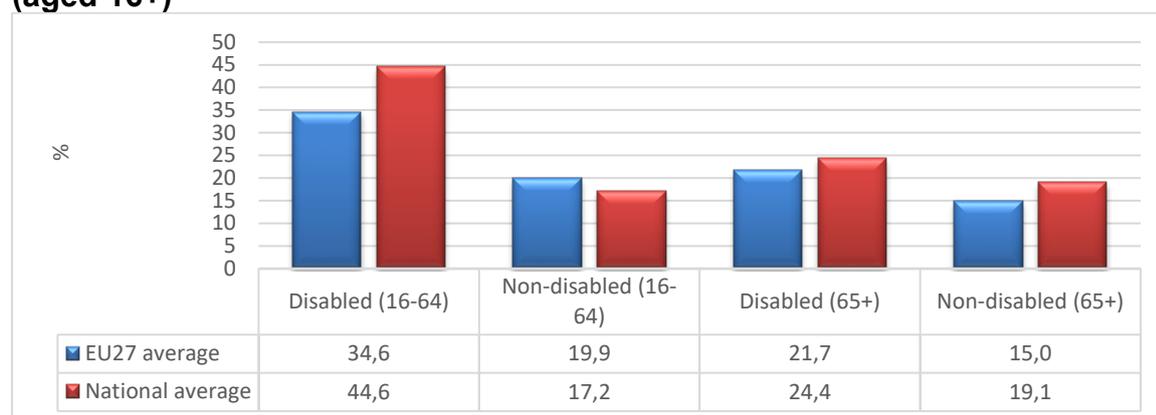


Table 12: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by disability and gender (aged 16+)

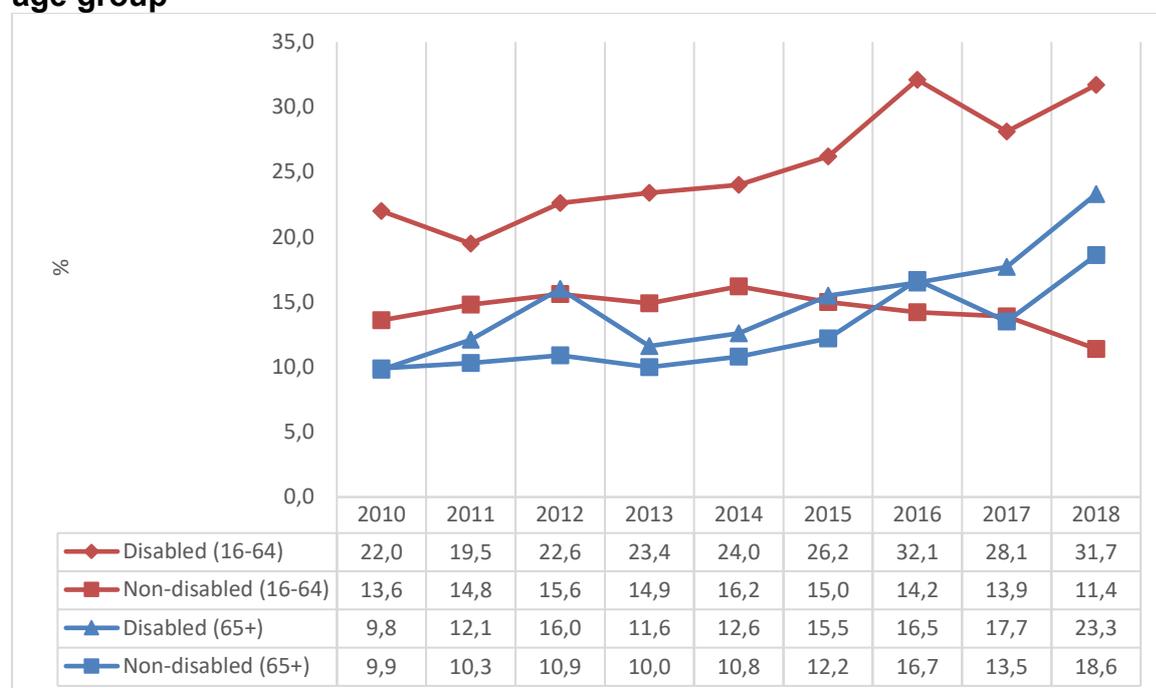


⁵⁴ Census Data 2016

<http://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2017pressreleases/pressstatementcensus2016resultsprofile9-healthdisabilityandcarers/>.

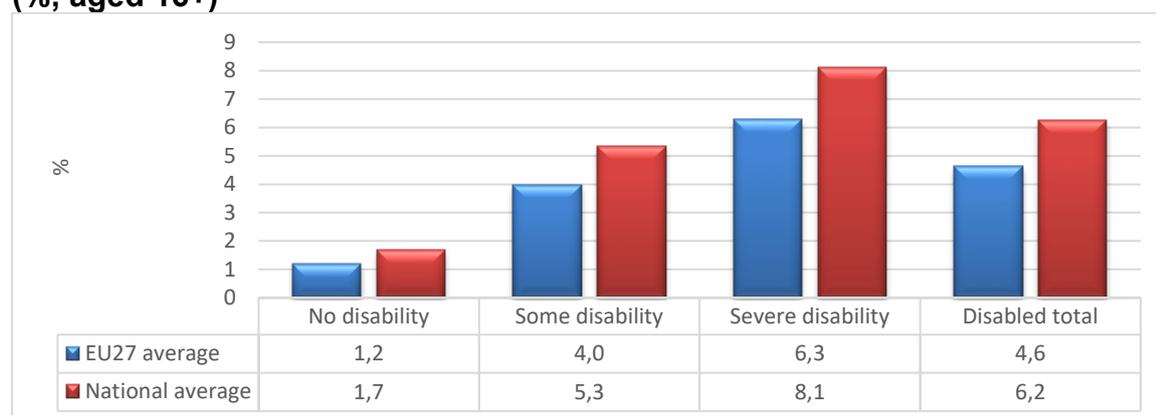
Table 13: Overall risk of household poverty or exclusion by disability and age (aged 16+)

Source: EU-SILC 2018 Release 2020 version 1 (and previous UDB)

Table 14: Trends in the risk of poverty after social transfers, by disability and age group

Source: Eurostat Health Database [hlth_dpe020] - People at risk of poverty

Note: this table shows national trends in financial poverty risk, rather than the general AROPE indicator (which is not as comparable between age groups due to the effect of paid employment); the survey does not distinguish 'activity limitation' for children under 16.

Table 15: Self-reported unmet needs for medical examination, 3-year average (% , aged 16+)

Source: Eurostat Health Database [[hlth_dh030](#)] – ‘Too expensive or too far to travel or waiting list’

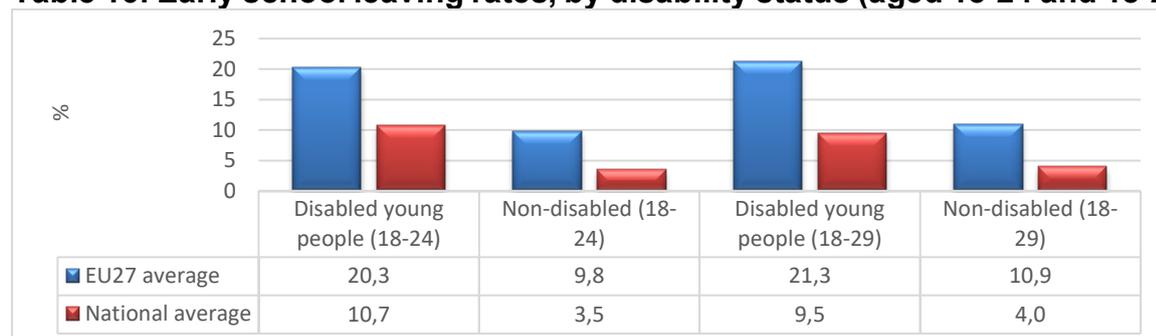
Note: due to large variations an average of three years is indicated. EU mean averages are also skewed by high values in a minority of countries within disability groups but median averages for the total disability and no disability groups in 2018 are consistent with the 3-year mean values.

7.2.1 Alternative sources of poverty or health care data in Ireland

The EU-SILC data provides a comprehensive and reliable source concerning poverty or social exclusion rates. In addition to the summary tables presented so far, the Eurostat disability database also contains breakdowns concerning disability and poverty before and after social transfers, as well as in-work-poverty.⁵⁵

Healthy Ireland Survey offers additional information in relation to disability and activity, everyday limitations and caring responsibilities.⁵⁶

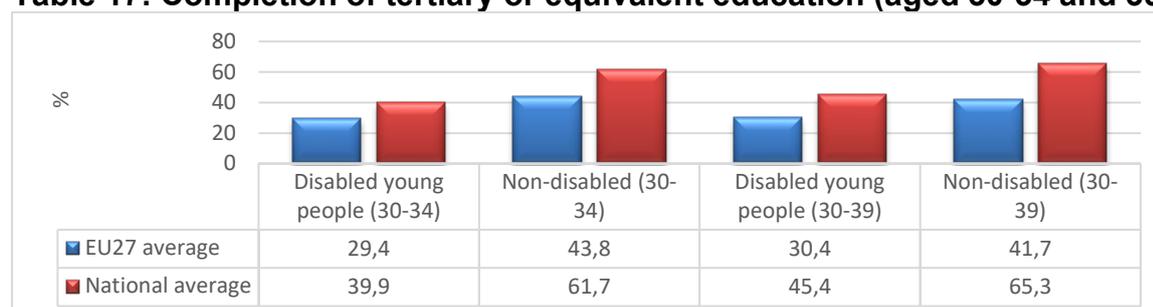
7.3 EU data relevant to disability and education

Table 16: Early school leaving rates, by disability status (aged 18-24 and 18-29)⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Eurostat Health Database, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

⁵⁶ Department of Health (2019) Healthy Ireland Summary Report, available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/41141/e5d6fea3a59a4720b081893e11fe299e.pdf>.

⁵⁷ There was a change from ISCED 1997 to ISCED 2011 qualification definitions in 2014 although some Member States continued to use the older definition after this time.

Table 17: Completion of tertiary or equivalent education (aged 30-34 and 30-39)

Source: EU-SILC 2018 Release 2020 version 1 (and preceding UDBs)

Note: Confidence intervals for the disability group are large and reliability low (due to the small sample size in the target age group). An average of several years may be needed to establish trends or to compare breakdowns by gender.

7.3.1 Alternative sources of education data in Ireland

Disability data is not included in the core European Labour Force Survey, but education and training indicators were disaggregated from ad hoc modules conducted in 2001 and 2011. These can be found in the Eurostat disability database.⁵⁸ Similar caution is needed with this data.

Some administrative data is also provided in the European Agency's Statistics on Inclusive Education (EASIE), concerning the population of enrolled students identified with special educational needs in Ireland.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Eurostat Health Database, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

⁵⁹ European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, *Statistics on Inclusive Education*, <https://www.european-agency.org/data/data-tables-background-information>.

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