

Disability statistics - population with difficulties in basic activities

Statistics Explained

Data extracted in: November 2024.
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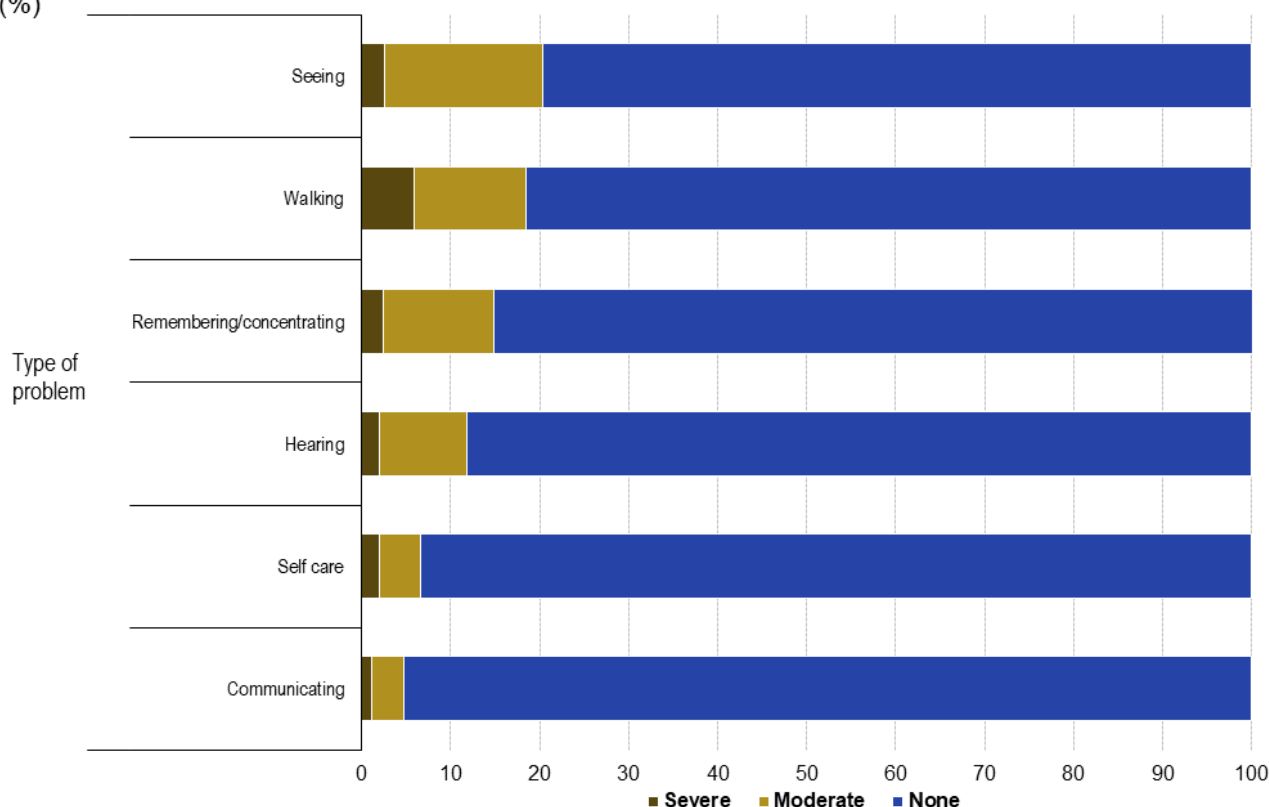
Highlights

In 2022, more than 1 in 3 (37.0%) people aged 16 years or over in the EU reported difficulties in one or more basic activities.

The most common difficulties were in seeing (20.3%), walking (18.5%) and remembering/concentrating (14.8%).

Share of people aged 16 years or over reporting difficulties in basic activities, EU, 2022

(%)



Note: estimates.

Source: Eurostat (online data codes: ilc_hch19)

eurostat

Share of people aged 16 years or over reporting difficulties in basic activities, EU, 2022 (%) Source: Eurostat (ilc_hch17), (ilc_hch16) and (ilc_hch19)

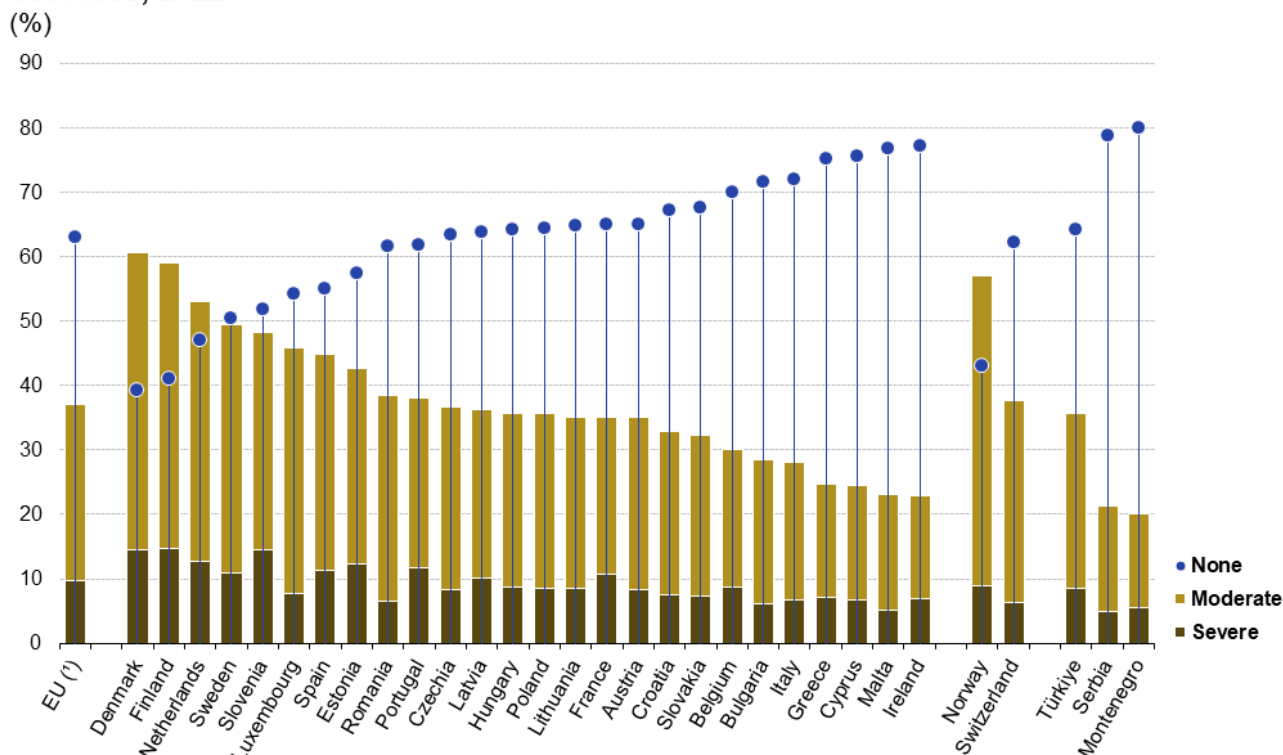
Disability can be measured in various ways. This article uses a measure of disability that is based on the level of difficulty in basic activities (such as seeing, hearing or self-care), rather than the one related to an [activity limitation](#) (for instance, difficulty reading or listening to radio, jogging), which is more commonly used by Eurostat.

The findings presented in this article are based on the [European Union's \(EU's\) statistics on income and living conditions \(EU-SILC\)](#).

This article is part of a [set of articles on disability](#) which presents various aspects of the life of people with a disability.

Share of people reporting difficulties in basic activities

Share of people aged 16 years or over reporting difficulties in basic activities, 2022 (%)



Note: Germany, not available.

(*) Estimates.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_hch17)

eurostat

Figure 1: Share of people aged 16 years or over reporting difficulties in basic activities, 2022 (%) Source: Eurostat (ilc_hch17)

In 2022, more than 1 in 3 (37.0%) people aged 16 years or over in the EU reported moderate or severe difficulties in one or more basic activities (see Figure 1). Among the EU countries, more than half of the population aged 16 years or over in Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands reported a moderate or severe difficulty for at least one basic activity. By contrast, less than a quarter of the population reported such difficulties in Ireland, Malta, Cyprus and Greece.

In the EU, most people aged 16 years or over who reported one or more difficulties in basic activities in 2022 had moderate rather than severe difficulties. Whereas 9.7% of all people aged 16 years or over reported severe

difficulties, this share was 2.8 times as high (at 27.3%) for moderate difficulties. In other words, among the subpopulation of people who reported difficulties in one or more basic activities, just over 1 in 4 reported severe difficulties.

Among the EU countries, Luxembourg and Romania had the largest relative differences between the share of people aged 16 years or over reporting moderate difficulties and those reporting severe difficulties: in 2022, 1 in 5 people reporting difficulties in these countries reported severe difficulties. By contrast, the share of people reporting severe difficulties among all people reporting difficulties was close to 1 in 3 in Portugal and France.

Types of difficulties

Seeing and walking were the most common types of difficulties

In the EU, the most common types of difficulties in basic activities in 2022 were in seeing (20.3% of people aged 16 years or over) and in walking (18.5%); the least common difficulties among the 6 types of basic activity that were surveyed were in communicating (4.7%) and in self care (6.7%). It should be noted that it was common for some people to have a difficulty in more than one of these basic activities: the shares of people with difficulties in each of the 6 types of basic activities sum to 76.8%, compared with the 37.0% share of people with difficulties in at least one basic activity. As such, people reporting difficulty in one or more basic activities had a difficulty in an average of 2.1 types of activities.

Share of people aged 16 years or over reporting difficulties in basic activities, 2022
(%)

	Seeing		Hearing		Walking		Remembering or concentrating		Communicating		Self care	
	None	Moderate or severe	None	Moderate or severe	None	Moderate or severe	None	Moderate or severe	None	Moderate or severe	None	Moderate or severe
EU (*)	79.7	20.3	88.2	11.8	81.5	18.5	85.2	14.8	95.3	4.7	93.3	6.7
Belgium	89.2	10.8	91.6	8.4	83.9	16.1	88.4	11.6	96.4	3.6	94.8	5.2
Bulgaria	81.5	18.5	90.9	9.1	79.3	20.7	92.1	7.9	96.5	3.5	93.1	6.9
Czechia	73.8	26.2	88.5	11.5	81.9	18.1	88.1	11.9	96.5	3.5	93.4	6.6
Denmark	71.8	28.2	76.9	23.1	74.7	25.3	73.3	26.7	93.9	6.1	93.5	6.5
Germany	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Estonia	86.0	14.0	90.1	9.9	76.0	24.0	75.1	24.9	95.6	4.4	92.4	7.6
Ireland	92.0	8.0	93.9	6.1	86.6	13.4	92.7	7.3	97.1	2.9	95.7	4.3
Greece	86.4	13.6	88.9	11.1	84.1	15.9	88.3	11.7	95.3	4.7	92.0	8.0
Spain	75.1	24.9	85.8	14.2	79.2	20.8	80.4	19.6	96.1	3.9	93.1	6.9
France	84.3	15.7	87.5	12.5	84.6	15.4	86.8	13.2	96.5	3.5	95.0	5.0
Croatia	78.0	22.0	92.1	7.9	79.4	20.6	79.4	20.6	97.2	2.8	94.0	6.0
Italy	82.1	17.9	90.8	9.2	84.5	15.5	90.4	9.6	95.1	4.9	92.7	7.3
Cyprus	89.0	11.0	95.4	4.6	84.2	15.8	94.3	5.7	97.7	2.3	94.3	5.7
Latvia	79.5	20.5	92.8	7.2	77.2	22.8	84.3	15.7	94.6	5.4	91.0	9.0
Lithuania	80.9	19.1	92.3	7.7	76.5	23.5	84.4	15.6	94.2	5.8	91.4	8.6
Luxembourg	69.9	30.1	88.5	11.5	82.3	17.7	81.7	18.3	98.3	1.7	97.0	3.0
Hungary	75.0	25.0	91.5	8.5	82.2	17.8	92.0	8.0	96.7	3.3	95.0	5.0
Malta	91.2	8.8	94.0	6.0	87.5	12.5	93.5	6.5	98.1	1.9	96.8	3.2
Netherlands	80.5	19.5	82.0	18.0	81.1	18.9	74.0	26.0	89.7	10.3	92.2	7.8
Austria	87.5	12.5	88.8	11.2	83.0	17.0	87.3	12.7	94.3	5.7	95.2	4.8
Poland	76.4	23.6	89.9	10.1	82.4	17.6	87.2	12.8	95.5	4.5	92.9	7.1
Portugal	79.5	20.5	87.6	12.4	90.8	9.2	81.6	18.4	98.2	1.8	93.7	6.3
Romania	70.5	29.5	88.9	11.1	74.8	25.2	84.3	15.7	93.5	6.5	91.1	8.9
Slovenia	73.7	26.3	86.1	13.9	76.1	23.9	83.1	16.9	95.7	4.3	95.8	4.2
Slovakia	76.9	23.1	88.8	11.2	79.5	20.5	88.4	11.6	94.1	5.9	91.9	8.1
Finland	74.3	25.7	84.2	15.8	74.7	25.3	66.4	33.6	96.3	3.7	93.4	6.6
Sweden	80.6	19.4	85.8	14.2	81.5	18.5	74.8	25.2	93.7	6.3	94.7	5.3
Norway	80.2	19.8	78.7	21.3	84.7	15.3	66.5	33.5	93.2	6.8	97.6	2.4
Switzerland	86.2	13.8	91.0	9.0	84.2	15.8	83.8	16.2	96.6	3.4	97.5	2.5
Montenegro	88.2	11.8	93.9	6.1	87.9	12.1	94.3	5.7	97.9	2.1	96.1	3.9
Serbia	87.6	12.4	92.2	7.8	86.1	13.9	93.0	7.0	96.4	3.6	94.5	5.5
Türkiye	79.9	20.1	90.5	9.5	80.4	19.6	84.5	15.5	97.3	2.7	96.2	3.8

(*) Estimates.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_hch19)

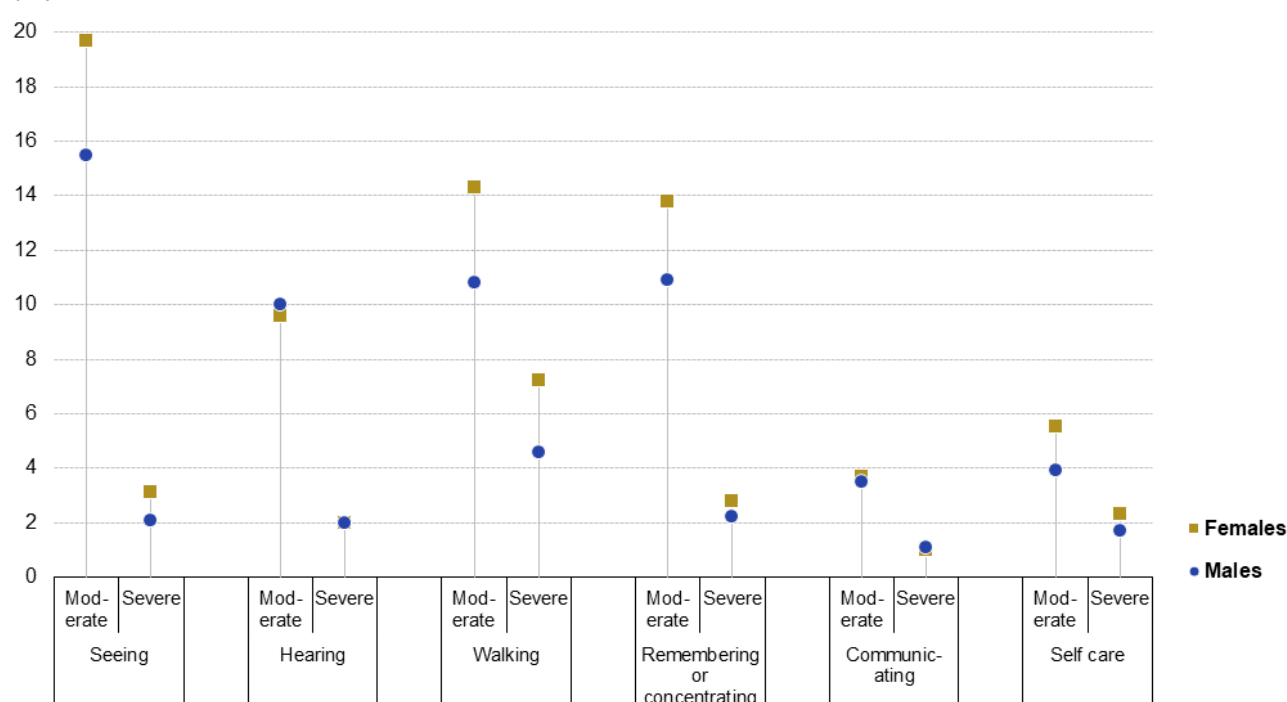
Table 1: Share of people aged 16 years or over reporting difficulties in basic activities, 2022 (%) Source: Eurostat (ilc_hch19)

Among the EU countries (data not available for Germany)

- 13 countries recorded 'seeing' as the most common basic activity with which people reported a difficulty,
- difficulty in 'walking' was recorded as the most common difficulty in Belgium, Bulgaria, Ireland, Greece, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Austria,
- difficulty in 'remembering or concentrating' was the most common difficulty in Estonia, the Netherlands, Finland and Sweden,
- 22 countries recorded 'communicating' as the least common basic activity with which people reported a difficulty,
- 'self-care' was the least common difficulty in the Netherlands, Austria, Slovenia and Sweden.

Share of people aged 16 years or over reporting difficulties in basic activities, by basic activity and sex, EU, 2022

(%)



Note: estimates.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_hch19)

eurostat

Figure 2: Share of people aged 16 years or over reporting difficulties in basic activities, by basic activity and sex, EU, 2022 (%) Source: Eurostat (ilc_hch19)

In 2022 in the EU, for 5 of the 6 types of basic activities, women were more likely than men to report moderate difficulties; the exception being hearing, for which men were marginally more likely than women to report moderate difficulties. Women were also more likely to report severe difficulties for 4 of the 6 types of basic activities: for hearing, the shares of people reporting severe difficulties were the same for women and for men; for communicating, men were marginally more likely than women to report severe difficulties.

Analyses of severe difficulties by sex, age, educational attainment, poverty status and income

Women were more likely than men to report difficulties

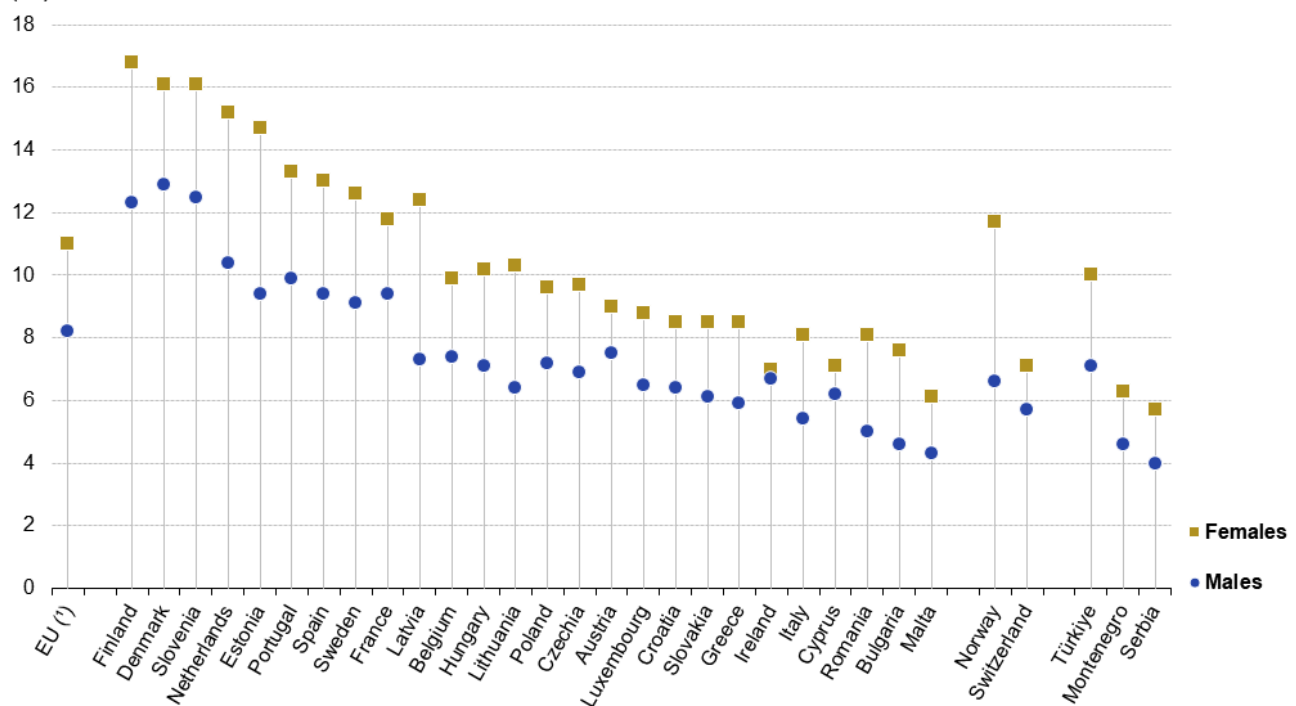
In 2022, women were more likely than men to report one or more severe difficulties in basic activities; see Figure 3. In the EU, 11.0% of women aged 16 years or over reported severe difficulties with basic activities, compared with 8.2% of men. This pattern was repeated in all of the EU countries.

- The widest gender health gaps were recorded in Estonia (5.3 percentage points, pp), Latvia (5.1 pp), the Netherlands (4.8 pp) and Finland (4.5 pp).
- Ireland (0.3 pp) and Cyprus (0.9 pp) had the smallest differences between the sexes.

In this context, it should be noted that the data are not age-standardised and that a greater share of women than men are in older age groups where difficulties in basic activities are more common.

Share of people aged 16 years or over reporting severe difficulties in basic activities, by sex, 2022

(%)



Note: Germany, not available. Ranked on the share for both sexes (combined).

(*) Estimates.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_hch17)

eurostat

Figure 3: Share of people aged 16 years or over reporting severe difficulties in basic activities, by sex, 2022 (%) Source: Eurostat (ilc_hch17)

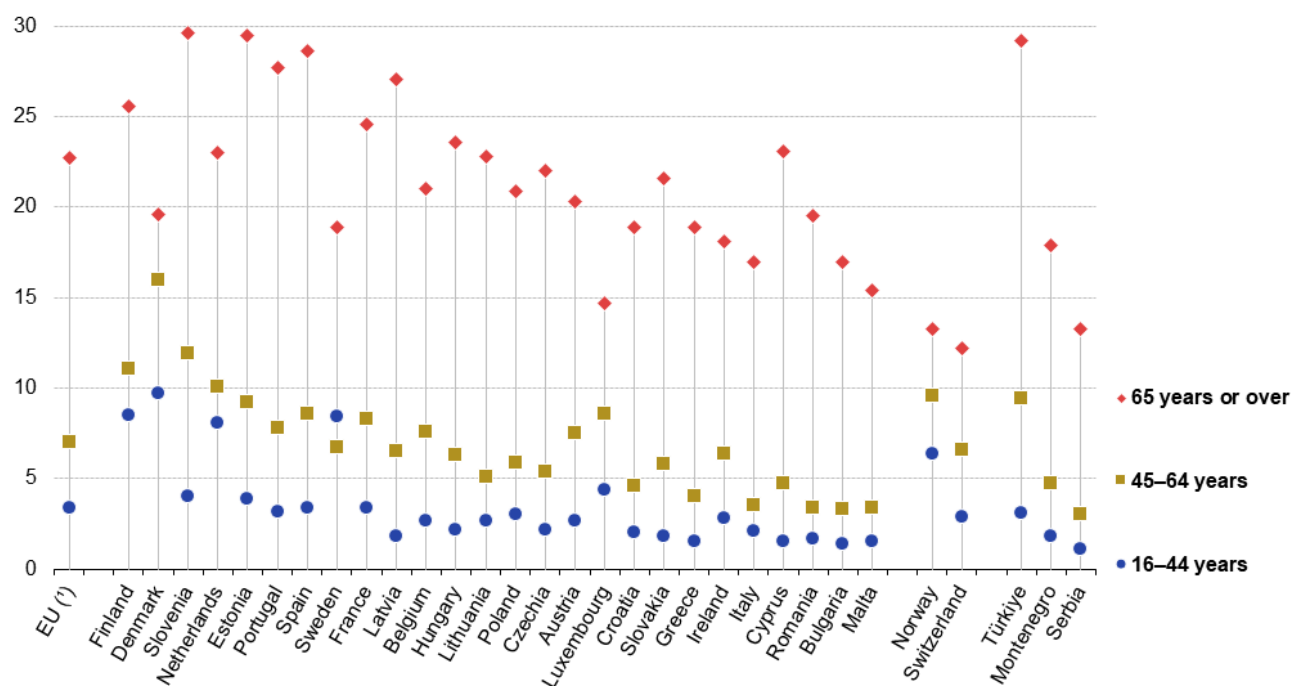
Older people were more likely than younger people to report severe difficulties

The share of people reporting one or more severe difficulties with basic activities has a distinct age pattern, as people in higher age groups are more likely than people in lower age groups to report severe difficulties in basic activities (see Figure 4). In 2022, the share of people aged 16 to 44 years who reported severe difficulties was 3.4% in the EU; the highest share was recorded among people aged 65 years or over, at 22.7%.

An age gap concerning difficulties in basic activities could be observed for all countries in 2022.

- With one exception, the smallest share of people reporting severe difficulties was observed among people aged 16 to 44 years. The exception was Sweden, where this share was the lowest among people aged 45 to 64 years.
- In all countries, the highest share reporting severe difficulties was recorded for persons aged 65 years or over.
- The widest gaps between the shares reporting severe difficulties among people aged 65 years or over and among people aged 16 to 44 years were observed in Estonia, Slovenia, Latvia, Spain and Portugal, all with gaps of at least 24.5 pp.
- The narrowest age gaps concerning severe difficulties in basic activities were observed in Denmark (9.9 pp), Luxembourg (10.3 pp) and Sweden (10.5 pp).

Share of people reporting severe difficulties in basic activities, by age, 2022 (%)



Note: Germany, not available. Ranked on the share for people aged 16 years or over.

(*) Estimates.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_hch17)

eurostat

Figure 4: Share of people reporting severe difficulties in basic activities, by age, 2022 (%) Source: Eurostat (ilc_hch17)

People with a low level of educational attainment were more likely to report severe difficulties

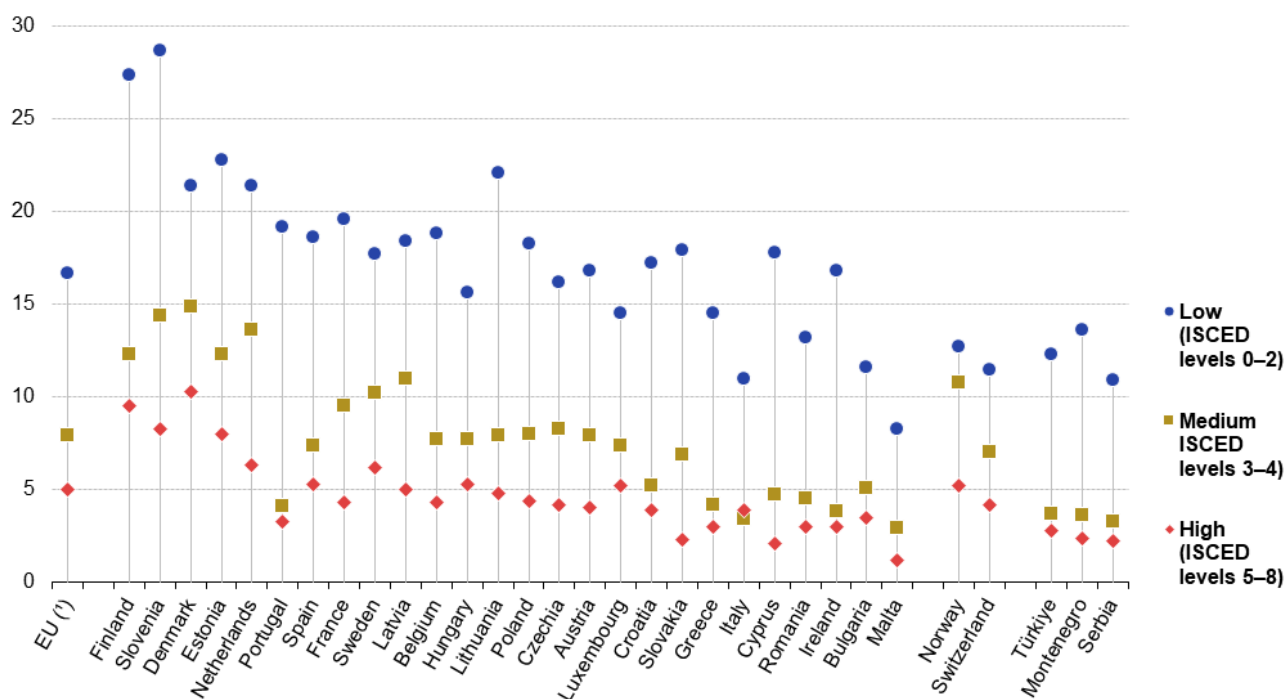
There are also clear differences when looking at the relationship between severe difficulties in basic activities and [educational attainment levels](#) (see Figure 5). In the EU, 16.7% of people aged 16 years or over having completed, at most, lower secondary education reported severe difficulties in basic activities in 2022. This can be compared with 7.9% among people having completed upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education and 5.0% among people with a tertiary level of educational attainment.

This gap between educational attainment levels was apparent in all EU countries. The pattern observed for the EU was repeated in all but one EU countries. The one exception was Italy, where the share was slightly higher for people with a tertiary level of educational attainment than for those having completed upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education.

The widest gap in the share of people reporting severe difficulties in basic activities between people with the highest and the lowest educational attainment levels was observed in Slovenia (20.4 pp), followed by Finland (17.9 pp) and Lithuania (17.3 pp). The narrowest educational gaps among the EU countries were observed in Italy and Malta (both with gaps close to 7.0 pp).

Share of people aged 16 years or over reporting severe difficulties in basic activities, by level of educational attainment, 2022

(%)



Note: Germany, not available. Ranked on the share for all levels of educational attainment.

(*) Estimates.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_hch16)

eurostat

Figure 5: Share of people aged 16 years or over reporting severe difficulties in basic activities, by level of educational attainment, 2022 (%) Source: Eurostat (ilc_hch16)

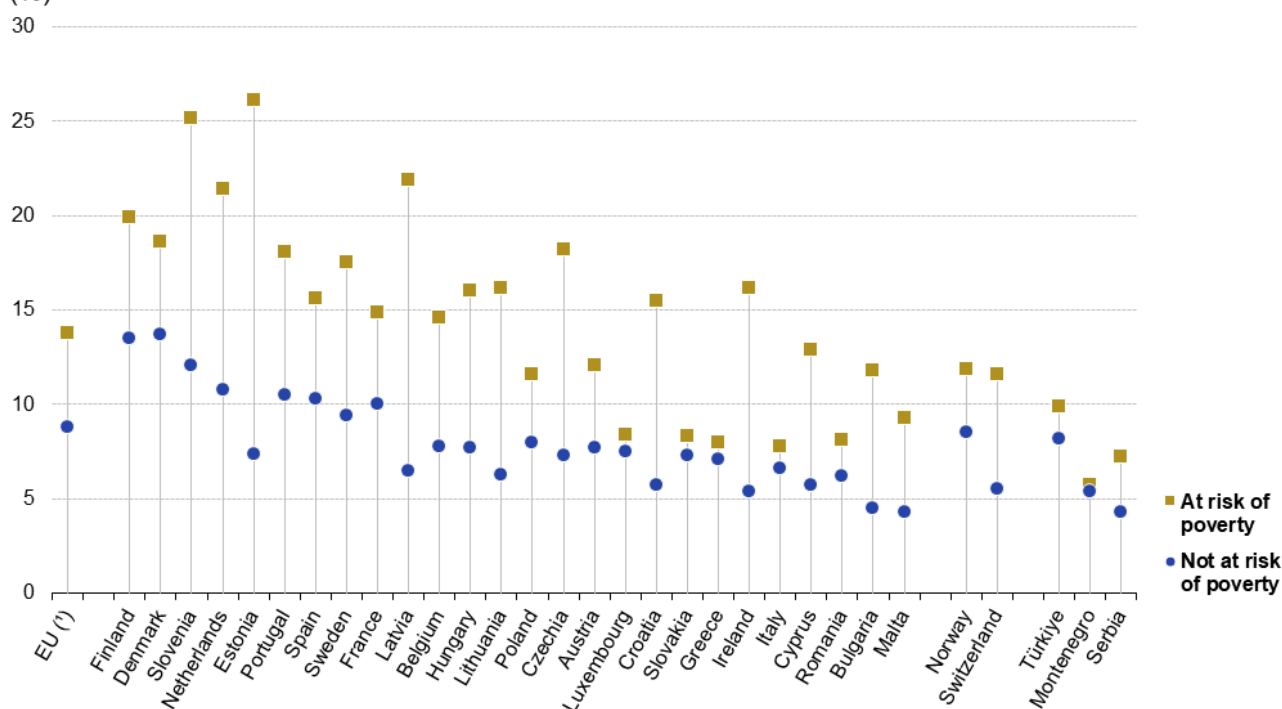
People not at risk of poverty were less likely to report severe difficulties

There is also a clear pattern when looking at the relationship between severe difficulties in basic activities and [poverty status](#) (see Figure 6). In the EU, 8.8% of people aged 16 years or over who were not at risk of poverty reported difficulties in basic activities in 2022, compared with 13.8% among people who were at risk of poverty.

This poverty gap was apparent in all EU countries, although it varied in size considerably, with all countries reporting a higher share among people at risk of poverty. The widest gaps in the share of people reporting severe difficulties in basic activities between people at risk or not at risk of poverty were observed in Estonia (18.7 pp), Latvia (15.4 pp) and Slovenia (13.1 pp). The narrowest gaps among the EU countries were observed in Greece, Luxembourg (both 0.9 pp), Slovakia (1.0 pp), Italy (1.2 pp) and Romania (1.9 pp).

Share of people aged 16 years or over reporting severe difficulties in basic activities, by poverty status, 2022

(%)



Note: Germany, not available. Ranked on the share for both poverty status combined.

(*) Estimates.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_hch19)

eurostat

Figure 6: Share of people aged 16 years or over reporting severe difficulties in basic activities, by poverty status, 2022 (%) Source: Eurostat (ilc_hch19)

People with lower income levels were more likely to report severe difficulties

In the EU, 14.5% of people aged 16 years or over in the 1st **income quintile** (the 20% of people with the lowest income) reported severe difficulties in basic activities in 2022. This share could be compared with 12.4% for the 2nd quintile, 9.3% for the 3rd (middle) quintile, 7.3% for the 4th quintile and 5.1% for the 5th (top) income quintile (the 20% of people with the highest income). In other words, the prevalence of self-reported severe difficulties in basic activities was highest in the bottom income quintile and was progressively lower in higher income quintiles with the lowest share among the top income quintile.

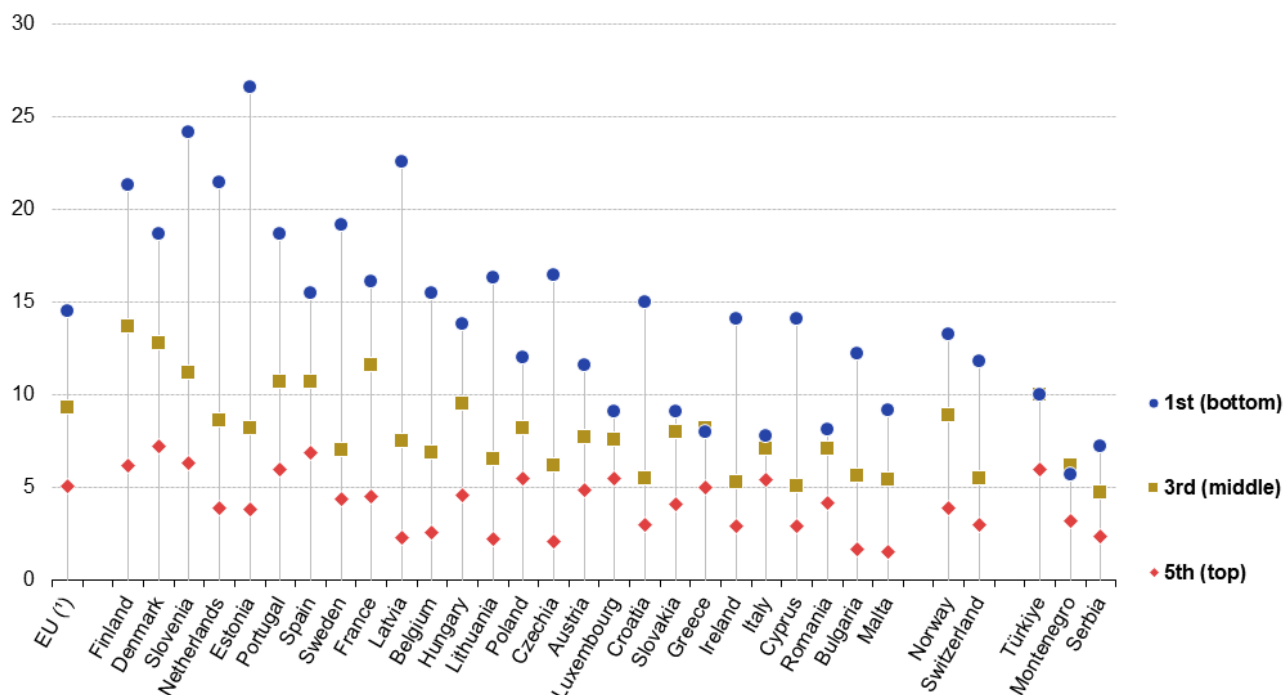
Figure 7 shows the share of people who reported severe difficulties in basic activities and its relation to income; for reasons of readability, the figure only shows the shares for the bottom, middle and top income quintiles.

In 2022, most EU countries showed a similar pattern to that observed for the EU: higher shares of people who reported severe difficulties in basic activities were recorded for the 1st (bottom) income quintile and lower shares for the 5th (top) income quintile, while the shares for the 3rd (middle) income quintile were between these 2 values (see Figure 7). The only exception among the EU countries was Greece, where a higher share of people reported severe difficulties in basic activities within the middle income quintile than within the bottom income quintile.

The largest differences in the share of people with severe difficulties in basic activities between people in the bottom and top income quintiles in 2022 were observed in Estonia (22.8 pp) and Latvia (20.3 pp). By contrast, there was relatively minor difference observed between the shares for the bottom and top income quintiles in Italy (2.4 pp), Greece (3.0 pp), Luxembourg (3.6 pp) and Romania (3.9 pp).

Share of people aged 16 years or over reporting severe difficulties in basic activities, by income quintile, 2022

(%)



Note: Germany, not available. Ranked on the share for all income quintiles.

(*) Estimates.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_hch17)

eurostat 

Figure 7: Share of people aged 16 years or over reporting severe difficulties in basic activities, by income quintile, 2022 (%) Source: Eurostat (ilc_hch17)

Source data for tables and graphs

Disability statistics – population with difficulties in basic activities: tables and figures

Data sources and availability

The EU-SILC is the source of comparative statistics on income distribution and social inclusion in the EU. It provides annual data for the EU countries as well as most [EFTA](#) and [enlargement](#) countries on income, poverty, social exclusion and other aspects of living conditions.

The reference population for the EU-SILC is limited to private [households](#) and their current members residing in the territory of the surveying country at the time of data collection. People living in collective households and institutions are excluded from the reference population; this constitutes a limitation for disability statistics. All household members are surveyed, but only those aged 16 years or over are interviewed.

The source is documented in more detail in this [background article](#), which provides information on the scope of the data, its legal basis, the methodology employed, as well as related concepts and definitions.

In EU statistics, disability is usually approximated according to the concept of global activity limitation, which is defined as a limitation – because of health problems – in carrying out usual activities (for at least the previous 6 months). However, this article concerns people reporting difficulties in basic activities as defined by the Washington Group short set of questions on functioning.

Washington Group Short Set of questions on Functioning (WG-SS)

The [Washington Group on Disability Statistics](#) promotes and coordinates international cooperation in the area of health statistics focusing on the development of disability measures suitable for statistics. In particular, the focus is on developing methodology which can be used in a valid, reliable and internationally/cross-culturally comparable manner. A short set of functioning questions provide the basis for the data presented in this article. The 6 basic activities covered are seeing, hearing, walking, remembering or concentrating, communicating and self-care.

The short set on functioning identifies 6 commonly occurring limitations which aim to represent the majority of (but not all) people with limitations in basic activities. They aim to identify people with similar types and degrees of limitations in basic actions regardless of nationality or culture. The questions are the following:

- Do you have difficulty seeing even if wearing glasses?
- Do you have difficulty hearing even if using a hearing aid?
- Do you have difficulty walking or climbing steps?
- Do you have difficulty remembering or concentrating?
- Do you have difficulty with (self-care such as) washing all over or dressing?
- Using your usual language, do you have difficulty communicating (for example understanding or being understood by others)?

Response categories are 'no difficulty', 'some difficulty', 'a lot of difficulty' or 'cannot do at all'. For the statistics published in this article, the responses *a lot of difficulty* and *cannot do at all* have been aggregated as 'severe difficulties'.

Educational levels – ISCED

Educational attainment is an important factor for individuals, in society as a whole, and in the labour market. Higher levels of education usually lead to higher rates of employment, higher productivity and higher lifetime earnings for individuals, alongside greater life satisfaction.

In this article, 3 aggregated levels of educational attainment are presented

- less than primary, primary or lower secondary level of education ([ISCED](#) 2011 levels 0 to 2; referred to as a low level of education)

- upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 3 and 4; referred to as a medium level of education)
- tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 5 to 8; referred to as a high level of education).

Poverty status

People who are at risk of poverty have an [equivalised disposable income](#) after [social transfers](#) which is below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. The latter is set at 60% of the national [median](#) equivalised disposable income after social transfers.

Context

Disability statistics are used to measure the impact and effectiveness of EU policy aimed at ensuring equal rights for people with disabilities. The EU has adopted several strategies aimed at improving the lives of people with disabilities

- by reducing discrimination and inequalities, and
- by providing support to enjoy fully their human rights, fundamental freedoms and EU rights on an equal basis with others.

In light of this, the [2021–2030 EU Strategy for the rights of people with disabilities](#) sets EU objectives and priority actions in several areas, such as accessibility, citizens' rights, the quality of life, equal access and non-discrimination, and the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities. To find out more, please visit the [webpage on the monitoring framework for the objectives and actions of this strategy](#) .

To ensure sound monitoring and reporting of this topic, the European Commission is reinforcing the collection of data on the situation of people with disabilities in areas where knowledge gaps have been identified, for example in relation to access to the labour market.

The EU is also a signatory of the [United Nations \(UN\) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD).

Explore further

Other articles

Online publications

- [Disability statistics](#)
- [Health in the European Union – facts and figures](#)

Related articles

- [Population with disability](#)
- [Disability statistics - elderly needs for help or assistance](#)

Database

- [Disability \(dsb\)](#) , see:

Disability prevalence (dsb_p)

Difficulties in functioning in basic actions (dsb_pba)

Thematic section

- [Disability](#)
- [Income and living conditions](#)

Publications

- [Key figures on European living conditions – 2024 edition](#)

Methodology

- [Disability statistics introduced](#)
- [Income and living conditions \(ilc\) \(metadata file\)](#)
- [EU statistics on income and living conditions \(EU-SILC\) methodology](#)
- [Health variables in SILC - methodology](#)

External links

- [European Commission – Persons with disabilities](#) , see:
 - [European disability expertise](#)
 - [European disability strategy 2010–2020](#)
 - [Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021–2030](#)
- [United Nations – Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#)
- [Washington Group on Disability Statistics](#)
- [World Health Organization – International classification of functioning, disability and health \(ICF\)](#)

Legislation

- [Legal framework from 2021: EU statistics on income and living conditions](#)