



European comparative data on persons with disabilities

Statistics

Data 2020

Summary and Conclusions

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INTRODUCTION

European Disability Expertise (EDE) provides independent scientific support to the Commission's Disability Policy Unit. The aim of Task 2.1 is to collect, provide and analyse independent data and information on the situation of persons with disabilities.

In this report, disability is proxied by health-related limitations in the activities people have usually performed for at least the past six months (EU-SILC survey). The data refer to 2020 and occasionally to 2019 (notably for Germany and Italy). We have used the April 2022 release of EU-SILC 2020 microdata. We have to note that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the organisation and timing of the survey. Additional data covering 26 Member States (excluding Ireland) were provided by SHARE Corona survey 2. The data below stem from the EU-SILC survey unless otherwise indicated.

It is important to note that statistical indicators are extracted from the EU-SILC survey. However, for the monitoring of Europe 2020 and latter Europe 2030, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) is used. Since the goals of the two surveys are different, the questions included and the nomenclatures used are not the same in both surveys. Consequently, the statistical indicators drawn from the two surveys are not identical. The full report analyses in depth these differences, notably for training, employment, and unemployment indicators. The LFS included GALI (Global Activity Limitation Indicator) in its 2022 round and future reports ought to include more precise indicators for labour market issues in the future.

This report presents statistical indicators for 2020 which is the last year of Europe 2020 Strategy. The new Europe 2030 strategy redefined a certain number of indicators (e.g., low work intensity, material deprivation and consequently people at risk of poverty and social exclusion). The following data help to assess realisations in 2020 given Europe 2020 targets. Data according to the new definitions, adopted by Europe 2030, were not available at the time of elaborating this report.

PART I: POPULATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

In the EU 27, about 24.9 % of persons aged 16 and over declared a disability (activity limitation) in 2020. The figure was 24.1 % in 2019. This represents about 92 million people with disabilities aged 16 and over living in private households. About 7.2 % of persons aged 16 and over declared a severe disability (with severe limitations) and 17.7 % declared a moderate disability. Disability prevalence is higher among persons with a lower education and among persons with low income/wealth. Concerning education, in the EU 27 in 2020, disability prevalence was 36.1 % among persons with less than a primary or lower secondary education. For comparison, disability prevalence was 15.8 % among persons with a tertiary education. Concerning wealth, in the EU 27 in 2020, among the 20 % of the population with the lowest incomes, about 32.1 % consisted of persons with disabilities. In the fifth quintile, which includes persons with the highest incomes, only 17.3 % were persons with disabilities.

PART II: EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

1. ADULT PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING

As noted, we use the EU-SILC survey for the elaboration of the following indicator. This indicator is not comparable to the one used by Eurostat based on the LFS survey. The nomenclatures used by both surveys are not identical and the EU SILC data are not seasonally adjusted. Consequently, the following indicators are indicative. In 2020, about 3.3 % of persons aged 25-64 in the EU 27 declared that they were participating in an education programme, including formal courses or had recently attained their highest education level. The equivalent rate for persons without disabilities was 5.4 %, and the overall rate was 5.0%.

2. EARLY LEAVERS FROM EDUCATION AND TRAINING

In 2020, at the EU 27 level, about 22.9 % of young persons with disabilities aged 18-24 were early leavers from education, compared with 9.3 % of young persons without disabilities. The EU total average rate was 10.3 %, as against a target of less than 10 %. As noted, the source of the above indicators is the EU-SILC survey. However, for the monitoring of EU targets, the LFS survey is used. Despite an effort to harmonise education nomenclatures a certain number of differences persist across surveys. Also, EU-SILC data are not annual averages.

The gap between young persons with and without disabilities remains high. The new EU initiatives (including the establishment of a European Education Area by 2025) stress the need to enrich the quality, inclusiveness and digital dimension of Member States' education systems. Young persons with disabilities may face barriers (such as the poor accessibility of programmes, lack of technical equipment and low levels of preparatory digital skills) which can prevent them from participating in these new educational programmes.

3. YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGED NEITHER IN EMPLOYMENT NOR IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

As noted, we use the EU-SILC survey for the elaboration of the following indicator. This indicator is not comparable to the one used by Eurostat based on the LFS survey. The nomenclatures used by both surveys are not identical and the EU SILC data are not seasonally adjusted. Consequently, the following indicators are indicative. They aim to identify any gap between persons with and without disabilities. In the EU 27, about 30.6 % of young people with disabilities aged 15-29 were neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET) in 2020. This rate was 12.6 % for young persons without disabilities in the same age group. The total was 14.1 % in the EU 27. Since 2008, the tertiary education gap between persons with and without disabilities has remained high.

4. PERSONS WHO HAVE COMPLETED TERTIARY OR EQUIVALENT EDUCATION

In the EU 27, the rate of persons with disabilities aged 30-34 who completed tertiary or equivalent education in 2020 was 33.5 %. This rate was 45.3 % for persons without disabilities. The rate for all persons aged 30-34 was 44.1 %. The target for Europe in

2020 was 40 %. The new target is to increase further the rate of persons who have completed tertiary education. As noted above, the data are extracted from the EU-SILC survey. However, LFS is the base for monitoring EU strategies.

5. DISABILITY PAY GAP

The age-adjusted disability pay gap in the EU 27 was 9.6 % in 2019, for which we have data for all Member States. This figure covers all employees aged 15-74 working in firms with 10 or more employees, without restrictions for hours worked (public administration excluded). A higher gap can be found among managers, with the lowest gap among elementary occupations. A significant difference may be observed between men and women with disabilities.

PART III: FAIR WORKING CONDITIONS

6. EMPLOYMENT

In the EU 27, about 50.7 % of persons with disabilities aged 20-64 were employed in 2020, compared with 75.1 % of persons without disabilities. The employment rate for all persons aged 20-64 was 70.8 %. The target for 2030 is 78 %. At the EU 27 level, about 22.2 million persons with disabilities aged 20-64 are employed out of a total of 43.7 million persons with disabilities in the same age group. The data are indicative. In fact, as noted, available data, at the moment of elaborating this report, did not include Germany and Italy. Consequently, we had to proceed at some estimations for these countries.

Concerning gender, about 48.1 % of women with disabilities aged 20-64 were employed, compared with 53.7 % of men with disabilities in the same age group.

Concerning the degree of disability, the employment rates of persons aged 20-64 in the EU were 29.6 % for persons with severe disabilities, 58.3 % for persons with moderate disabilities and 75.7 % for persons without disabilities.

Extensive policy interventions have significantly reduced the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is some indication that the percentage of persons with disabilities aged 50-64 who received financial help from employers due to the coronavirus crisis was slightly higher compared with persons without disabilities (SHARE survey data). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the rate of employed persons with disabilities aged 50-64 who were declared unsafe at work from a health perspective was higher in comparison with the equivalent population of persons without disabilities (SHARE).

7. UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

In the EU 27, the unemployment rate of persons with disabilities aged 20-64 was 17.7 % in 2020, compared with 8.6 % of persons without disabilities in the same age group. The total unemployment rate was 9.9 %. These estimations are based on self-declarations. For the monitoring of EU policies, the ILO definition is used but EU-SILC does not provide sufficient information in order to provide a similar indicator. About 17.9 % of women with disabilities aged 20-64 were unemployed, compared with 17.4 % of men with disabilities. Unemployment increases with the degree of disability.

The increase in the total unemployment rate is relatively small, notably due to active policies to preserve jobs (e.g. SURE) and a reduction of hours worked during the pandemic.

Youth unemployment rate

In the EU 27, about 31.3 % of persons with disabilities aged 16-24 were unemployed in 2020, in comparison with 21.2 % of persons without disabilities. The overall level of youth unemployment in 2020 was 21.5 % (20.0 % in 2019). These indicators are based on self-declarations. For the monitoring of EU policies, the ILO definition is used but EU-SILC does not provide sufficient information in order to provide a similar indicator.

Long-term unemployment rate

As noted above, the unemployment rate of persons with disabilities aged 20-64 was 17.7 % of the labour force in the EU 27 in 2020. This rate includes 3.7 % short-term unemployed, 10.9 % long-term unemployed and 3.0 % excluded from the ILO definition of unemployment. The percentages all refer to the total labour force. The respective rates for persons without disabilities are 2.8 % (unemployed for less than 12 months), 4.6 % (long-term) and 1.3 % (excluded from the ILO definition).

The long-term unemployment rate increases with the degree of disability. It was 4.6 % in 2020 for persons without disabilities, 9.2 % for persons with moderate disabilities and 19.3 % for persons with severe disabilities.

8. ACTIVITY RATE

In the EU 27, about 61.6 % of persons with disabilities participated in the labour market in 2020 (whether employed or unemployed), compared with 82.2 % of persons without disabilities. The total rate is 78.6 %. This implies that about 26.9 million persons with disabilities (aged 20-64) are economically active out of 43.7 million persons with disabilities in the same age group. The upward trend in activity rates was reversed in 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic. Preliminary data indicate that the pandemic has pushed older workers to take early retirement, notably older workers with disabilities.

PART IV: SOCIAL PROTECTION AND INCLUSION

9. DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT GAP

The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan proposed a renewed list of headline indicators in the areas of employment, training and reducing poverty.¹ The revised Social Scoreboard includes the disability employment gap (in percentage points) as a headline indicator measuring progress in social protection and inclusion.

We observe a significant employment gap in all Member States. In the EU 27, the disability employment gap for the 20-64 age group was 24.4 percentage points in 2020 (relative gap: 32.5 %) (see above: employment rates).

The disability employment gap follows a cyclical evolution. Generally, it decreases during recession periods and increases during upward periods. However, during recent years, the absolute gap has been stabilised at around 24 percentage points.

10. PEOPLE LIVING IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH VERY LOW WORK INTENSITY

In the EU 27, about 22.4 % of persons with disabilities were living in households with a low work intensity in 2020, compared with 6.6 % of persons without disabilities. This represents a difference of about 15.8 percentage points. Similar differences were observed in previous years. The total rate is 9.0 %. The data cover persons aged 16-59 and in accordance with Europe 2020 definitions.

During recent years we have observed an improvement of the situation among persons without disabilities, but a slight deterioration among persons with severe disabilities. This trend seems to have been reversed in 2020, but it is too early to form a firm conclusion.

11. PEOPLE AT RISK OF POVERTY AFTER SOCIAL TRANSFERS

The data reveal that people with disabilities face a higher risk of poverty after social transfers compared with people without disabilities. At the EU level, about 20.9 % of persons with disabilities aged 16 and over faced a risk of poverty in 2020, compared with 14.8 % of persons without disabilities. The percentage for all persons aged 16 and over was 16.4 %.

About 22.0 % of women with disabilities (aged 16 and over) faced a risk of financial poverty, compared with 19.5 % of men with disabilities.

An analysis by age indicates that the differences between persons with and without disabilities are much stronger, in absolute values, than differences across ages within each group. The disability impact is more significant, in absolute terms, than the age impact. Disability seems to be one dominant factor leading to poverty.

Generally, retirement pensions and social transfers dampen any negative impact of an economic crisis and the ensuing reduction of income.

¹ [The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-operations/infographic-116226.pdf).

In the EU 26 (Ireland is missing from the available SHARE survey microdata), about 6.1 % of persons with disabilities aged 50 and over received government support in 2021 due to the coronavirus crisis, compared with 7.7 % of persons without disabilities (SHARE). The overall level was 7.0 %.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the current rise in energy prices raise the question of the ability of certain persons to face unexpected shocks. Wealth may dampen the cost of such unforeseen events. In 2016, the mean household (age standardised) total net wealth of persons with disabilities in the EU 28 was 74.4 % of the equivalent wealth held by persons without disabilities. The equivalent proportion for persons with severe disabilities was 67.9 %. These rates reveal the financial fragility of persons with disabilities in facing unexpected shocks in comparison with persons without disabilities.

12. SEVERELY MATERIALLY DEPRIVED PEOPLE

In the EU 27, about 8.6 % of people with disabilities aged 16 and over were severely materially deprived in 2020, compared with 4.8 % of people without disabilities. The overall level is 5.8 %. There is a wide diversity of situations in the Member States. The share of severely materially deprived persons varies from a low of 2.2 % to a high of 33.1 %. The indicators follow the Europe 2020 definitions.

Ability to keep home warm

The exceptional rise in global energy prices raises questions regarding the ability of households to pay their energy bills. The ability to keep the home warm is a component of material deprivation. Fragile persons are more vulnerable to unfavourable domestic heating conditions. In the EU 27, about 10.6 % of persons with disabilities aged 16 and over declared that they were unable to keep their home adequately warm in 2020. This rate is 6.5 % for persons without disabilities. The overall rate was 7.5 %.

13. PEOPLE AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION (COMBINATION OF THE THREE INDICATORS ABOVE)

In the EU 27, about 28.6 % of people with disabilities aged 16 and over were living in households at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2020, compared with 18.8 % of persons without a disability. The percentage for all persons aged 16 and over is 21.2 %. About 29.5 % of women with disabilities (aged 16 and over) are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared with 27.4 % of disabled men.

We observed a decrease in poverty in recent years, but this trend was reversed in 2020, the first year of COVID-19.

The percentage of persons with disabilities who received financial support from their Government due to the coronavirus pandemic was high in the 55-59 age group (SHARE).

PART V: HEALTH AND MEDICAL CARE INDICATORS

14. GENERAL HEALTH AND UNMET MEDICAL NEEDS

In the EU 27, about 4.1 % of persons with disabilities aged 16 and over reported unmet medical care needs in 2020 due to 'financial reasons', a 'waiting list' or having 'too far to travel', compared with 0.9 % among persons without disabilities. The overall level was 1.7 %.

Our indicator includes only 'financial reasons', 'waiting list' or 'too far to travel'. If we consider all reasons, in the 25 Member States for which we have available data, about 5.2 % of persons aged 16 and over declared unmet needs (for any reason) in 2020. The equivalent rate for 2019 was 3.9 %. This represents an increase of 33.0 %. The increase was 3.2 percentage points for persons with disabilities (41.3 %) and 0.6 percentage points for persons without disabilities (23.6 %).

Table 1: Synopsis of main statistical indicators for the EU¹

The table presents figures for persons with disabilities (Dis.) and total numbers (Tot.).

	2012	2013	2014	2015 ²	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Disability prevalence (Age: 16+), %									
Dis.	26.1	26.9	27.1	25.3	24.1	24.4	24.7	24.1	24.9
Adult participation in learning (Age: 25-64), %									
Dis.									3.3
Tot.									5.0
Early leavers from education (Age: 18-24), %									
Dis.	21.8	21.5	22.5	22.0	23.6	21.8	20.3	21.8	22.9
Tot.	11.2	10.7	12.2	12.5	12.0	10.7	10.6	10.6	10.3
Young people engaged neither in employment nor in education and training									
Dis.									30.6
Tot.									14.1
Tertiary education: (Age: 30-34), %									
Dis.	27.8	28.0	29.7	29.4	30.3	31.7	29.4	32.5	33.5
Tot.	38.1	39.3	41.2	41.6	42.2	40.8	42.3	42.5	44.1
Disability pay gap (Age: 15-74), age adjusted; gap as % of non-disabled person's pay									
								9.6	
Employment rate (Age: 20-64). Target: 78 % of the population.									
Dis.	47.9	48.5	48.7	47.4	48.1	50.2	50.8	51.3	50.7
Tot.	67.0	66.9	67.8	68.4	69.3	69.5	70.7	71.5	70.8
Unemployment rate (Age: 20-64), % of labour force									
Dis.	18.1	19.0	19.6	20.2	19.6	18.4	18.6	17.3	17.7
Tot.	12.2	12.9	12.6	12.1	11.4	11.1	10.1	9.5	9.9
Youth unemployment rate (Age: 16-24), % of labour force									
Dis.									31.3
Tot.									21.5
Long-term unemployment (Age: 20-64), % of labour force									
Dis.									10.9
Tot.									5.4
Activity rate (Age: 20-64), % of labour force									

Dis.	58.5	59.8	60.6	59.5	59.7	61.5	62.4	62.0	61.6
Tot.	76.3	76.8	77.5	77.8	78.2	78.1	78.7	79.0	78.6
Disability employment gap (Age: 20-64) in percentage points									
Dis.									24.4
Very low work intensity (Age: 16-59), %									
Dis.	23.9	24.1	25.1	25.6	25.8	23.2	22.6	22.8	22.4
Tot.	10.8	11.2	11.	11.1	11.0	10.1	9.5	8.9	9.0
At risk of poverty after social transfers (Age: 16+), %									
Dis.	19.1	18.7	19.7	20.0	20.2	20.1	20.9	21.1	20.9
Tot.	16.1	15.9	16.5	16.6	16.7	16.5	16.5	16.2	16.4
Severely materially deprived (Age: 16+), %									
Dis.	12.8	12.6	12.1	11.3	10.8	10.4	9.0	8.9	8.6
Tot.	9.5	9.	8.6	7.7	7.3	6.9	5.8	5.5	5.8
At risk of poverty or exclusion (Age: 16+), %									
Dis.	30.3	30.1	30.1	30.2	30.1	28.9	28.6	28.4	28.6
Tot.	24.1	23.8	23.8	23.2	23.1	22.4	21.3	20.8	21.2
General health and unmet medical needs (Age: 16+)									
General health: good or very good, %									
Dis.	19.7	20.2	20.2	19.3	18.9	21.0	20.5	20.5	22.3
Tot.	67.3	66.5	67.2	66.8	67.5	68.9	68.6	68.5	69.5
Self-reported unmet needs for medical examination, %									
Dis.	8.2	8.4	8.2	7.5	6.0	3.9	4.0	4.0	4.1
Tot.	3.7	3.9	3.8	3.2	2.7	1.6	1.8	1.7	1.7

- 1: EU 28 until 2016. EU 27 for 2017 and later. Health & unmet medical needs cover EU 27.
- 2: The data are not strictly comparable with those of 2014 due to a change in the definition of 'activity limitations'. A change in definitions concerning education took place in 2014.

Source of data: Eurostat & EU-SILC UDB. See the full report for more information.

