Final Review of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2015-2024

**February 2025**



# Acknowledgements

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# Statement on language

In this report, we use the terms ‘people/persons with disabilities’ and ‘disabled people’ interchangeably. Many people within the disability rights movement in Ireland prefer the term ‘disabled people’ because it is considered to acknowledge the fact that people are disabled by barriers in the environment and society, and this aligns with the social and human rights models of disability. However, we also recognise that others prefer the term ‘people/persons with disabilities’, because of the inherent understanding in this phrasing that they are first and foremost human beings entitled to human rights. Person-first language is used in the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). We recognise that many people with an intellectual disability and people with a mental health difficulty or psycho-social disability prefer person-first language. We also acknowledge that some people to which information in this report may apply do not identify with either term.

The term ‘Disabled Persons’ Organisation (DPO)’ is used in this report to refer to organisations that are rooted in the principles and rights of the UNCRPD and are led by people with disabilities; however, we acknowledge that some organisations may prefer the term ‘Disabled Persons’ Representative Organisation (DPRO)’.

# Table of Contents

[Acknowledgements 2](#_Toc182555688)

[Statement on language 2](#_Toc182555689)

[List of tables 6](#_Toc182555690)

[List of figures 7](#_Toc182555691)

[List of abbreviations 8](#_Toc182555692)

[Executive Summary 10](#_Toc182555693)

[Introduction 10](#_Toc182555694)

[Methodology 11](#_Toc182555695)

[Progress and achievements 12](#_Toc182555696)

[Gaps and challenges 14](#_Toc182555697)

[Conclusion 16](#_Toc182555698)

[Introduction 18](#_Toc182555699)

[Contextual factors 19](#_Toc182555700)

[Structure of the report 21](#_Toc182555701)

[Methodology 21](#_Toc182555702)

[Collecting views of stakeholders involved in CES delivery and monitoring 21](#_Toc182555703)

[Capturing lived experience of people with disabilities 22](#_Toc182555704)

[Examining indicators of progress 23](#_Toc182555705)

[Primary indicators of progress under the CES 26](#_Toc182555706)

[Primary indicator A 26](#_Toc182555707)

[Primary Indicator B 29](#_Toc182555708)

[Strategic Priority 1: Building skills, capacity and independence. 31](#_Toc182555709)

[1.1 Number of children receiving targeted pre-school support (levels 4-7 of the Access and Inclusion Model) (Process) 31](#_Toc182555710)

[1.2 Proportion of people with and without disabilities achieving each educational attainment level (primary, secondary, tertiary, FET) by disability type (Process) 32](#_Toc182555711)

[1.3 Proportion of all people accessing higher education, further education and training who have a disability (Process) 38](#_Toc182555712)

[1.4 Improved transition planning for children and young people with disabilities (Process) 42](#_Toc182555713)

[1.5 Destination of persons exiting Rehabilitative Training – i.e. to work, further education and training, or other (Outcome) 46](#_Toc182555714)

[1.6 Proportion of Disability Allowance recipients aged 16-19 (Process) 49](#_Toc182555715)

[1.7 Numbers of Back to Education Allowance recipients with disabilities (Process) 49](#_Toc182555716)

[1.8 The proportion of persons with disabilities who are early school leavers compared to persons without disabilities (Outcome) 50](#_Toc182555717)

[Overview of SP1 51](#_Toc182555718)

[Strategic Priority 2: Provide bridges and supports into work 53](#_Toc182555719)

[2.2 Numbers of persons with disabilities in work placements, internships, work learning programmes, and apprenticeships (Process) 53](#_Toc182555720)

[2.4 Proportion of EmployAbility participants exiting into employment (Outcome) 57](#_Toc182555721)

[2.5 Number of persons with mental health difficulties receiving support under the IPS model of supported employment (Process) 58](#_Toc182555722)

[2.6 Percentage of persons with disabilities using public transport services for their journey to work vs non-disabled counterparts (Process) 59](#_Toc182555723)

[2.7 Numbers of persons with disabilities accessing Enterprise Ireland supports (Process) 61](#_Toc182555724)

[2.7.1 Percentage of persons with and without a disability who are self-employed (Outcome) 62](#_Toc182555725)

[2.8 Proportion of young persons with a disability who are NEET compared to young persons without a disability (Outcome) (N) 63](#_Toc182555726)

[Overview of SP2: Provide bridges and support into work: 64](#_Toc182555727)

[Strategic Priority 3: Make Work Pay 68](#_Toc182555728)

[3.2 Number of people receiving disability payments/benefits (Process) 68](#_Toc182555729)

[Overview of SP3: Make Work Pay 71](#_Toc182555730)

[Strategic Priority 4: Promote job retention and re-entry to work 74](#_Toc182555731)

[4.1 Number of persons in employment supported through the Wage Subsidy Scheme (Process) 74](#_Toc182555732)

[4.2 Number of successful applications to the Reasonable Accommodation Fund (Process) 76](#_Toc182555733)

[4.3 Number of people exiting disability payments/benefits into employment (Outcome) 79](#_Toc182555734)

[Overview of SP4: Promote job retention and re-entry to work 79](#_Toc182555735)

[Strategic Priority 5: Provide coordinated and seamless support 81](#_Toc182555736)

[5.1 Evaluation of Ability programmes to provide innovative pre-activation approaches for persons with disabilities (Process) 81](#_Toc182555737)

[5.2 Evaluation of pilot phase to provide complementary support services to persons with disabilities (5.1 implementation plan) (Outcome) 82](#_Toc182555738)

[5.3 Number of persons with mental health difficulties benefiting from IPS model of supported employment (Process) 83](#_Toc182555739)

[5.4 Development of protocols and MoUs for cross-departmental cooperation, at national and local level (Process) 83](#_Toc182555740)

[Overview of SP5 83](#_Toc182555741)

[Strategic Priority 6: Engage employers 85](#_Toc182555742)

[6.1 Number of persons in employment supported through the Wage Subsidy Scheme (Process) 85](#_Toc182555743)

[6.2 Number of applications for Reasonable Accommodation Fund (Process) 85](#_Toc182555744)

[6.3 Employer engagement with the Employer Disability Information service (Process) 85](#_Toc182555745)

[6.4 No. of employers in peer-to-peer networks (Process) 86](#_Toc182555746)

[Overview of SP6 87](#_Toc182555747)

[Conclusion 89](#_Toc182555748)

[References 92](#_Toc182555749)

[Appendix 1: Amendments to original indicator set for midterm report 103](#_Toc182555750)

[Appendix 2: New indicators added to original set 111](#_Toc182555751)

[Appendix 3: Amendments to midterm indicator set for final report 112](#_Toc182555752)

List of tables

[Table 1: Number of indicators relating to each CES strategic priority, by indicator type 21](#_Toc182219705)

[Table 2: Number of children supported per calendar year under AIM Levels 4, 5, 6 and 7, 2016 to 2022 29](#_Toc182219706)

[Table 3: Highest level of educational attainment for people grouped by limitation status, 2015-2023 32](#_Toc182219707)

[Table 4: Population aged 15 years and over with and without a disability by highest level of education completed 33](#_Toc182219708)

[Table 5: Highest level of education completed by people with disabilities aged fifteen and over, by disability type, 2022 35](#_Toc182219709)

[Table 6: Primary disability of students accessing disability support services in higher education institutions by Academic Year 2015-2021 (%) 39](#_Toc182219710)

[Table 7: Rehabilitative Training Outcomes 2015-2023 46](#_Toc182219711)

[Table 8: Back to Education Allowance recipients moving from disability payments 2015-2023 48](#_Toc182219712)

[Table 9: Data on EmployAbility participants 2014-2023 55](#_Toc182219713)

[Table 10: Number of persons in employment supported through the Wage Subsidy Scheme 2015-2023 72](#_Toc182219714)

[Table 11: Number of grant claims claimed through the Reasonable Accommodation Fund 2015-2023, by grant type 75](#_Toc182219715)

[Table 12: Yearly Reasonable Accommodation Fund expenditure 2015-2021, by grant type 76](#_Toc182219716)

# List of figures

[Figure 1: Principal economic status of people aged 20-64 in 2022, by disability status 26](#_Toc182219897)

[Figure 2: Disability employment gap for EU member states, 2022 27](#_Toc182219898)

[Figure 3: Disability employment gap in Ireland and in the EU overall, 2014-2022 27](#_Toc182219899)

[Figure 4: Percentage of public sector employees reporting a disability 2015-2022 29](#_Toc182219900)

[Figure 5: Percentage of new entrants to higher education registered with student disability services, 2015-2022 38](#_Toc182219901)

[Figure 6: Types of disabilities of those enrolled in FET, 2018 and 2022 41](#_Toc182219902)

[Figure 7: Means of public transport to work of persons with and without disabilities, 2022 59](#_Toc182219903)

[Figure 8: Population who are self-employed in 2022, by disability status and type 62](#_Toc182219904)

[Figure 9: Percentage of disabled persons aged 15-24 who were NEET in 2022, by disability type 63](#_Toc182219905)

[Figure 10: Total number of Disability Allowance recipients 2015-2022 67](#_Toc182219906)

[Figure 11: Recipients of Partial Capacity Benefit, Illness Benefit and Invalidity Pension 2015-2022 70](#_Toc182219907)

# List of abbreviations

AIM: Access and Inclusion Model

BTEA: Back to Education Allowance

CES: Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024

CESIG: Comprehensive Employment Strategy Implementation Group

CSO: Central Statistics Office

DA: Disability Allowance

DARE: Disability Access Route to Education

DASS: Disability Awareness Support Scheme

DCA: Domiciliary Care Allowance

DCEDIY: Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

DEG: Disability Employment Gap

DFHERIS: Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

DPER: Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

DPO: Disabled Persons’ Organisation

DSP: Department of Social Protection

ECCE: Early Childhood Care and Education Programme

EDI: Employer Disability Information service

EI: Enterprise Ireland

ELC: Early Learning and Care

ESRI: Economic and Social Research Institute

EPSEN Act: The Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act 2004

FET: Further Education and Training

HEA: Higher Education Authority

HEI: Higher Education Institution

HSE: Health Services Executive

IGEES: Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service

IHREC: Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

ILMI: Independent Living Movement of Ireland

IPS: Individual Placement and Support

LEO: Local Enterprise Office

NAO: National Apprenticeship Office

NAP: National Access Plan

NDA: National Disability Authority

NDS: National Disability Strategy

NDIS: National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2022

NEET: Not in Education, Employment or Training

NEPS: National Educational Psychological Service

NCSE: National Council for Special Education

NTA: National Transport Authority

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OWL: Oireachtas Work Learning Programme

PA: Personal Assistance

PATH: Programme for Access to Higher Education

PIAAC: Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies

RAF: Reasonable Accommodation Fund

RT: Rehabilitative Training

SAC: School-Aged Childcare

SEC: State Examinations Commission

SILC: Survey on Income and Living Conditions

UD: Universal Design

UNCRPD: United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

WAM: Willing Able Mentoring

WSS: Wage Subsidy Scheme

Executive Summary

Introduction

This final report on the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024 (CES) offers an in-depth analysis of Ireland’s efforts to enhance employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities over the past decade. The report evaluates progress, achievements, and gaps in implementing the CES.

The CES was introduced to tackle the significant employment rate gap between people with and without disabilities in Ireland, one of the largest such gaps across the European Union. Acknowledging the multi-dimensional nature of disability employment, the CES adopted a whole-of-government approach involving multiple departments, agencies, and stakeholders. Its overarching purpose was to ensure that every person with a disability who was able to and wanted to work was supported and facilitated to do so.

The six strategic priorities of the CES listed below aimed to create a structured pathway for employment opportunities for disabled people.

* **Build Skills, Capacity, and Independence**

This priority focused on educational and vocational skills development and the fostering of independence, from early childhood through to adulthood.

* **Provide Bridges and Supports into Work**

The focus of this priority was to provide individualised supports to enable disabled people to secure jobs in the open labour market.

* **Make Work Pay**

The primary intention under this strategic priority was that work would both pay and be seen to pay. There was also a focus on ensuring that disabled people who obtained employment and had to leave it would have a streamlined return to disability payments.

* **Promote job retention and re-entry to work**

The goal of this priority area was to support individuals who acquire a disability in their working lives to obtain, retain, or regain work.

* **Provide co-ordinated and seamless support**

The focus of this priority was to ensure that public services provided to disabled people to find and succeed in employment would be seamlessly coordinated.

* **Engage employers**

This strategic priority related to the provision of support and encouragement to employers to employ people with disabilities, to support job retention, and to facilitate return to work after the onset of a disability.

The key indicator of progress under the strategy was that the employment rate of people with disabilities would increase from 33% in 2011 to 38% by 2024.

An Implementation Group (the CESIG) was established to monitor progress relating to the six strategic priorities. It included relevant government departments and agencies, civil society groups, unions, and employer bodies. This group was chaired by Fergus Finlay, an independent chair. The secretariat for the strategy was housed in the Disability Policy Unit, initially in the Department of Justice and Equality and laterally in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

Methodology

To conduct the final review of progress under the CES, a number of methods were adopted:

* A suite of indicators developed to monitor progress under the CES was examined a final time. The indicator set comprised a mixture of process and outcome indicators and drew on a wide variety of data sources. Relevant data were obtained from published reports, the Central Statistics Office (CSO), through data analysis, and through requests to government departments and agencies.
* The series of annual, independent assessment reports on the CES developed by the NDA were reviewed.
* Views on the key achievements of the strategy and on areas requiring further focus and development were sought from:
	+ members of the CES Implementation Group and
	+ departments and agencies with responsibilities for delivery of actions under the strategy.
* Findings from previous NDA and DCEDIY engagement with disabled people that related to employment, including interviews, focus groups, and large-scale consultations (for example, on the National Disability Strategy and the Autism Innovation Strategy) held during the lifetime of the CES were drawn on when conducting the review.
* A draft of the report was shared with members of the CES Implementation Group, relevant government departments and agencies, Disabled Persons’ Organisations, and other relevant stakeholders. Their views and comments were taken on board as relevant and appropriate.

Progress and achievements

Over the lifetime of the CES, a number of positive developments were realised across a range of areas.

Educational and skill development

Increased access to and inclusion in education for young people with disabilities has been achieved over the past ten years. Positive outcomes have been identified of the targeted preschool supports offered under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), and there have been increases in the proportion of the further and higher education student populations reporting a disability. The introduction of significant funding under Strand 4 of the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) has also been an important development for increasing access to higher education for students with an intellectual disability and/or autism. The introduction of a pilot project allowing school leavers with a disability to defer access to a HSE-funded day service placement in order to try education or employment was very successful and is now a permanent offering to school leavers with a disability. The deferral period has recently been extended from three to five years. Expanding the post-school opportunities for young disabled learners has been associated with increased representation in further education and training and higher education, with some increase in representation in apprenticeships. Recent increases to the provision of part-time educational programmes with access to funding such as the Fund for Students with Disabilities should, over time, also prove beneficial to some students with disabilities.

Employment Supports

The numbers of individuals availing of employment supports under schemes such as the Wage Subsidy Scheme and the Reasonable Accommodation Fund (RAF) remained low, and in some cases decreased, over the lifetime of the CES. However, in recent years, comprehensive reviews of these schemes have been conducted to identify the reasons for low uptake, and actions have begun to be taken to make these supports more accessible, flexible, and fit for purpose. For example, the recent introduction of the Work and Access scheme to replace the RAF provides a broader range of supports and includes a workplace needs assessment.

The recommendations of the Make Work Pay Report (2017) were designed to ensure that people with disabilities who are able to and want to work are supported and enabled to do so. The actions in this report were integrated into the CES action plans. While challenges remain in creating comprehensive financial security for the population with a disability, there have been some strides towards making work more financially feasible. Key achievements include allowing people leaving the benefits system for employment to retain free travel for a period of five years (this was already in place for medical card holders) and a streamlined return to disability payments if employment does not work out in the first twelve months. Further, there were increases to the earnings disregard for people in receipt of Disability Allowance (DA) and some other allowances so that people could work and earn an income to a certain threshold before their social protection payment would be reduced. The requirement that this work be of a ‘rehabilitative nature’ was removed from the DA scheme and, in doing so, more disabled people began to consider work as an option.

Over the course of the CES, the employment landscape has shifted from one of high unemployment to one of full employment for the general population. Many employers and their representative organisations have demonstrated openness to approaches and connections with disability service providers and education colleges to recruit disabled staff. The AHEAD Willing Able and Mentoring (WAM) programme has increased the numbers of graduates that it supports in both the public and private sectors. The Oireachtas Work and Learning (OWL) programme has created an innovative and alternative recruitment approach for the Houses of the Oireachtas with the programme resulting in a direct route to permanent roles within the civil service.

Ibec and ICTU worked collaboratively during the lifetime of the CES to address the issue of reasonable accommodation. This resulted in the production of the reasonable accommodation passport, through which employees and employers have a mechanism to understand how a reasonable accommodation works for an individual employee. An employer information service called the Employer Disability Information (EDI) service ran from 2016 to 2020. It was managed by a consortium of employer organisations - Chambers Ireland, Ibec and ISME - and funded through the NDA. It was followed by the establishment of the Employers for Change service that operates through the Open Doors Initiative. Both services aimed to address the gap in information and support ‘to enable employers with all the information and advice needed to hire, employ, manage and retain staff with disabilities.’ In NDA and OECD research, the role of these services to answer questions posed by employers who want to support staff who acquire a disability and to recruit staff with disabilities has emerged as essential.

Collaborative working was a necessary key driver of some of the CES actions, and over the course of the strategy’s lifetime and this can be seen in the ongoing work on transitions involving the Department of Education and agencies under its remit. The work of CES Action 5.1 achieved a joint policy on elements of a seamless pathway into employment through inter-departmental working. However, this work did not progress any further.

## Gaps and challenges

Despite the advancements just described, several gaps and challenges remain.

Persistent disability education and employment gaps

The apparent increase in access to further and higher education over recent years has not yet translated into a significant narrowing of the educational attainment gap, with Census 2022 figures showing that disabled people are more likely to be early school leavers and less likely to have higher education qualifications.

A target was set in the CES to increase the proportion of people aged 20-64 years with disabilities who are in employment from 33% in Census 2011 to 38% by 2024. By Census 2016, the employment rate of disabled people increased to 36.5%, and the overall employment target for 2024 looked set to be achieved. Changes to the census questions from which data on disability are derived mean that a direct comparison between the employment levels of disabled people in 2022 and 2016 is not possible, and so it is not possible to say whether the headline CES target was achieved. However, other data sources show that the employment rate disparity between people with and without disabilities remains substantial in Ireland, and this is likely a better equality indicator to examine than the total proportion of disabled people in employment. Ireland’s disability employment gap (DEG) continues to be one of the largest across the European Union. In cross-country comparisons using data from the Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC), Ireland had the largest DEG of all 27 Member States in 2022, at 37 percentage points. The average disability employment gap across the EU was 21 percentage points. There has been no substantial reduction in the disability employment gap over the lifetime of the CES according to SILC data. While lower in 2022 than in 2015, year-on-year fluctuations mean this should not be considered as evidence of a sustained downward trend.

Unresolved issues in making work pay

While the changes made as a result of the Make Work Pay report and outlined above have likely made work more attractive to some people with disabilities, they did not translate to significant increases in the number of people transitioning from DA to work. In fact, the numbers in receipt of all disability-related social welfare payments increased substantially over the course of the CES. Some disincentives to work that were explored in the Make Work Pay report were never resolved. For example, issues regarding the provision and funding of personal assistants in work remains outstanding. There also remains a disparity in earnings potential between people with and without disabilities, and the additional costs of disability can mean that some disabled people would not be better off at work. Unfortunately, the requirement to provide an annual review of the implementation of Make Work Pay recommendations did not occur.

Limited provision of career guidance

Career guidance can help young people transition successfully from school to their chosen post-school paths. There remain substantial gaps with respect to the delivery of career guidance tailored to the individual needs of learners with disabilities at school, with very limited improvements made in the lifetime of the CES. While the development of a Strategic Action Plan for the National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance is to be welcomed, and a number of actions are being progressed under the Framework that should ensure high quality and consistency of guidance supports to meet the individual needs of learners with disabilities in schools, this will take several years to have an impact.

Gaps in supported employment

Despite agreement on a cross-departmental policy in relation to a coordinated programme of supported employment (Action 5.1), this was not progressed. The need for such support was highlighted as part of the consultations on the new National Disability Strategy, and so the NDA would strongly encourage that an appropriate objective and actions in relation to this are included in that strategy.

Progress has been very limited under the CES in the area of job retention and re-entry for individuals who acquire a disability while in employment. Gaps remain in relation to the provision of systematic vocational rehabilitation supports in Ireland. Evidence suggests that the longer someone with a disability is out of work, the less likely they are to return. There remains a clear need to improve return-to-work pathways and to ensure that employers have the resources and knowledge necessary to support employees with newly acquired disabilities to retain their jobs.

Issues with strategy coordination

For any cross-government strategy, strong coordination and effective communication are key drivers of effective implementation. Communication across the lifetime of the strategy was identified as a clear weakness by CES stakeholders. This was particularly acute during the final years of the strategy, when there was no communication relating to the resignation of the Chairperson or why there were no further meetings of the Implementation Group after Spring 2022. Other challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, overlap with other national strategies (e.g., the National Disability Inclusion Strategy), the handover of responsibility for the CES from one department to a new department, and a high level of turnover of personnel involved in the strategy’s coordination and implementation were highlighted as barriers. These ultimately led to a loss of momentum and a de facto disbanding of monitoring and oversight structures for the strategy in its latter stages.

While the first two phases of the CES were accompanied by comprehensive action plans, the action plan for the final phase (2022-2024) was never agreed, resulting in limited oversight and momentum in the strategy’s concluding years. Part of the reason for not reaching agreement was the siloed approach taken by Departments and the lack of clarity around where responsibility lay for supporting people into employment, particularly where they had high support needs. This gap in implementation and monitoring impeded the realisation of the full potential of the CES. Some structures such as annual reporting to Cabinet sub-committees did not take place. A key learning may be that actions that require involvement of multiple departments and their agencies require overt support to ensure that a coordinated approach is maintained.

Challenges in developing indicators

The indicators developed for this strategy were developed after the strategy was written. As a result, the majority of the indicators were process indicators rather than the more meaningful outcome indicators. Apart from the setting of a target in relation to the overall employment rate for people with disabilities, there were no other targets contained in the strategy. The absence of targets makes some of the indicators difficult to interpret. The change in how disability data were collected in Census 2022, which prevents meaningful comparison with previous censuses, was also a challenge. A key learning is to develop indicators and to set targets as a strategy is being developed. In anticipation of an employment pillar being part of the new National Disability Strategy, an employments target discussion paper was developed by the NDA. This paper recommended setting targets both for a reduction in the disability employment gap and for an increase in employment rates of disabled people, rather than a sole focus on increasing the proportion of disabled people employed. This approach is deemed to be preferable in terms of assessing equity in employment and also for accounting for fluctuations in the national employment landscape over time.

Conclusion

The CES laid some important groundwork in creating an inclusive employment landscape for disabled people in Ireland. However, significant challenges remain, as evidenced by the persistent disability employment gap and the continuing fragmentation in and inflexibility of support services frequently described by disabled people when consulted. A 10-year strategic plan which was envisaged to see benefits of early implementation may, in hindsight, have been too long to sustain momentum, and shorter strategies may be more effective. A key lesson from the CES is that with competing national strategies it is important to make sure that each is given adequate attention and resourcing to ensure it is fully implemented as intended. The new National Disability Strategy, currently under development and which will contain an employment pillar, must build on work under the CES to ensure cohesive and adaptable support mechanisms, to engage employers proactively, and to address the diverse needs of disabled individuals to achieve more equitable employment outcomes.

By embedding learnings from the CES into the forthcoming National Disability Strategy, Ireland can continue to progress towards a more inclusive workforce and society. The NDA recommends that developing a comprehensive supported employment system that meets the needs of people with higher support needs and people who acquire a disability during their working lives should be a priority for the new strategy. Another key learning is that that for a whole-of-government approach to reducing the disability employment gap to succeed, coordinated working with a structured monitoring and implementation process is crucial. This requires support, resources, and active engagement from all relevant government departments and their agencies. Distinguishing between what is delivered through mainstream provision and what is supported by targeted individualised provision lies at the heart of addressing the disability employment gap in Ireland.

# Introduction

The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2015-2024 (CES) has been the government’s approach to supporting persons with disabilities to obtain and retain employment over the past decade. (1) Developed as a whole-of-government strategy, the CES had six key priorities:

1. Build skills, capacity, and independence,
2. Provide bridges and support into work,
3. Make work pay,
4. Promote job retention and re-entry to work,
5. Provide coordinated and seamless support, and
6. Engage employers.

The initial three-year period of the CES was intended to be a foundation phase in which structures and processes could be put in place to support achievement of the strategy’s objectives. The second three-year action plan (2019-2021) aimed to build on these foundations and included both new and modified actions to ensure the vision of the strategy be realised in its lifetime. (2) An action plan for the final period of the strategy (2022-2024) was never finalised, and while some CES activities continued over the final period of the strategy’s lifetime, there was no monitoring or oversight of these.

The strategy was overseen by an implementation group made up of public officials and relevant stakeholders and was chaired by an independent chair. The National Disability Authority has had a role in monitoring progress towards achievement of the goals of the CES. To this end, the NDA has produced independent assessments of the implementation of the strategy each year from 2016 to 2023. (3) Additionally, at the halfway juncture of the strategy in 2020, the NDA produced a report to consider, where possible, the impact of the activities under the CES on the lives of persons with disabilities. (4) This was achieved using a suite of indicators developed by the NDA and approved by the CES Implementation Group (CESIG) in 2019. The midterm indicators report revealed a mixed picture in terms of the strategy’s impact. Progress was identified across several areas relating to the education, skills, and employment of disabled people. Positive developments were identified in relation to supports provided to persons with disabilities to facilitate them to obtain work, as well as to employer supports provided to promote the recruitment and retention of employees with disabilities. However, the report also highlighted that the gap in employment rates between persons with and without disabilities had widened, that there were areas in which progress had stalled, and that there were several areas in which there was room for improvement. (4)

 The purpose of this final CES report is:

* to present an independent assessment of the implementation of the CES over the past 10 years,
* to examine the suite of indicators a final time in order to assess progress over the lifetime of the strategy, and
* to identify areas that still need to be progressed, in order to inform the work on employment in the forthcoming National Disability Strategy (NDS). The NDS will be the government’s approach to improving employment outcomes of disabled people in Ireland over the coming years.

## Contextual factors

The disability employment policy environment has changed significantly over the 10-year lifetime of the CES. During this period, in 2018, Ireland ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Article 27 of this Convention recognises the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others. The global financial crisis had prolonged aftereffects in Ireland during the early years of the strategy. By 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted all levels of lived experience of disabled people. While employment was one domain affected, impacts relating to reduced service provision, increasing isolation, and more limited participation in society were also experienced widely. However, it is also a feature of this strategy’s timeline that innovations in further education provision, types of employment support, and approaches to remote working were initiated as a result of the pandemic. The right to request remote working became legislation in 2024, for example, and this provides an important new opportunity for disabled people who want to work remotely. Practical guidance for employers and employees on how to make and handle requests for remote and flexible working was prepared by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). (5)

Post-pandemic, Ireland is now experiencing full employment, meaning that most people who are willing and have capacity to work have jobs, with overall unemployment rates being very low. While increased demand for labour should theoretically provide increased employment opportunities for disabled people who wish to work, Ireland continues to have one of the largest disability employment gaps in the European Union. (6) Strong reaction from stakeholders to proposals contained in a Green Paper on reform of disability payments (published in 2023 and later withdrawn) (7) illustrated that the concept of ‘capacity to work’ is a complex issue in the context of disability, and one that requires further research centring on the experiences of disabled people. While having a job can provide an individual with economic independence, social inclusion, and personal fulfilment, it is also clear that access to employment is not a panacea for poverty among disabled people, particularly given the high additional costs associated with having a disability that exist in Ireland. A report on the costs of disability in Ireland by the consultants Indecon emphasised that employment was one potential means of reducing the impact of the cost of disability, but that it should not be the sole area of policy focus. (8)

While a central objective of the CES was to ensure that support systems which traverse departmental or agency boundaries ‘are mutually coherent and provide a joined-up system and joined-up pathways’ (1, p.4), disabled people have continued to experience fragmentation of services and supports to access employment over the lifetime of the CES. This has been reported frequently to the NDA by people with disabilities over a series of consultation activities in recent years.

While the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)[[1]](#footnote-1) has shown commitment to both the CES and the National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 (NDIS) with which it overlapped, managing the parallel monitoring systems of the strategies appears to have led to challenges in consistent engagement. An evaluation of the processes of implementation of three other national equality strategies[[2]](#footnote-2) for which DCEDIY had responsibility found that maintaining momentum and ensuring commitment and buy-in from government departments and state agencies assigned responsibility for actions across multiple strategies had been a major challenge. ‘Strategy fatigue’ was reported by officials who were committed to delivering multiple actions across multiple whole-of-government initiatives and this was reported to constrain their capacity to deliver. (9) This in turn made it difficult for DCEDIY to maintain strong coordination and momentum in implementation. In relation to the CES, a similar stall in momentum was clearly seen in the absence of CESIG meetings and ongoing communications from DCEDIY since 2022 and in the resignation of the independent Chairperson. More recently, work in DCEDIY on disability employment has focused on the development of a new National Disability Strategy, the design of which has had a focus on co-creation and capturing lived experience. From work currently underway, it is understood that the new strategy will continue to 2030 and will have a dedicated employment pillar.

Stakeholders of the CES have reported to the NDA that personnel changes across government departments and agencies impacted on the delivery of the CES. While turnover of this kind is a feature of any working environment, the manner in which handover was managed to ensure continuity of objectives and maintain corporate knowledge across the strategy goals was criticised. With the establishment of new departments in 2020 and the handover of responsibility for disability from the former Department of Justice and Equality to a new department with a much broader remit (DECEDIY), some stakeholders have felt that the disability agenda, including that of disability employment, has been diminished.

Each of these contextual factors have influenced the implementation of the CES and should be borne in mind when reading the remainder of this report.

## Structure of the report

In the next section, the methodological approach to this final review of progress under the CES is described. Next, two major outcome indicators relating to the strategy as a whole are examined, before each of the six strategic priority areas of the CES is considered in turn. For each priority area, data relating to core indicators of progress are presented, followed by an assessment of key achievements related to that strategic priority and an analysis of remaining gaps.

The report concludes with an account of the key lessons learned from the implementation and monitoring of the CES, as well as a series of recommendations for any future national strategies that include a focus on the employment of people with disabilities in Ireland.

# Methodology

## Collecting views of stakeholders involved in CES delivery and monitoring

For the purposes of producing this report, the NDA contacted senior officials in government departments and agencies whose remit contained specific and/or collaborative actions under the CES. Two major questions were posed to these officials:

* Question 1: What do you think were the main achievements of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024?
* Question 2: What areas do you think require further focus and development?

The perspectives of those who are not officials but sat on the CES Implementation Group (CESIG) were also collected on the two questions posed above. These include people with lived experience of disability, including a member of a Disabled Persons’ Organisation (DPO), those working to support people into employment, unions, and employer groups. They were invited to submit their views in written form or through a bilateral meeting with the NDA.

## Capturing lived experience of people with disabilities

The NDA and others have conducted a number of consultations over the course of the CES, and the findings of these have been drawn on for this report. During late 2023 and early 2024, the NDA engaged in a detailed consultation on behalf of DCEDIY to inform the new National Disability Strategy. This consultation consisted of:

* + 34 themed and targeted focus groups (211 participants),
	+ 18 interviews,
	+ 81 written and four video submissions,
	+ Four town hall events (n=166)
	+ ~ 500 responses to a national questionnaire

Employment was a specific focus of a number of the thematic focus groups, was included as a key topic in all the town hall events, and came up frequently in other groups.

Other specific engagement processes throughout the lifetime of the CES included:

* focus group discussions with young disabled school leavers on career guidance (10),
* consultation on wellbeing and social inclusion that included the topic of employment (11),
* case studies and individual discussions on role of vocational rehabilitation and return to work (12), and
* extensive consultations by the Department of Social Protection on the Green Paper on disability payments reforms.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The NDA is aware of the time and resources that are required for organisations and individuals to participate in consultations of this kind, and conducting another consultation so soon after the large-scale consultative exercise for the National Disability Strategy was not deemed to be appropriate. Therefore, a specific consultation with disabled people was not conducted as part of this review. However, as mentioned, the review draws on the findings of previous consultations. Also, a draft of this report was shared with Disabled Persons Organisations to identify whether anything significant was missed in the review. Any necessary changes were made in line with the feedback received.

## Examining indicators of progress

As mentioned above, a suite of indicators to monitor progress under the CES was developed by the NDA and then approved by the CESIG. The indicators were selected to align with the strategic priorities of the CES and are, by design, higher in level and fewer in number than strategy actions. As in the midterm CES indicators report, three indicator types are distinguished in this report, in line with the human rights indicators framework. (13) First, structural indicators represent the ratification and implementation of legal instruments, along with the establishment of fundamental institutional mechanisms essential for promoting and protecting human rights. These indicators help to gauge the State’s acceptance of and its intent and commitment to fulfilling its human rights obligations. Process indicators assess a state’s efforts by evaluating its implementation of policy measures and programmes aimed at translating human rights commitments into tangible results. Outcome indicators evaluate the extent to which individuals and groups enjoy human rights in a given setting, and these are helpful in determining how successful state efforts have been in promoting and protecting those rights. An outcome indicator can be thought of as a consolidation over time of the impact of various underlying processes (which can be measured by one or several process indicators). Outcome indicators are, therefore, typically more slow-moving indicators, less sensitive to capturing immediate changes than process indicators.

At the time of its initial development, it was recognised that the CES indicator set would need to be subject to change over time.Several amendments were then made to the indicators at the time of the midterm review. (4) These changes, and the rationale for these, are presented in Appendix 1. Appendix II provides information on any new indicators included since the set was originally developed and the rationale for their selection. Some further modifications to the indicator set have been made for this final report, and these are captured in Appendix III. In short, reasons for amending indicators have included a need to reduce duplication, unavailability of data originally intended for use for particular indicators, and the renaming or reorientation of indicators to match data which could be accessed instead.

One major reason why it was necessary to adapt indicators for this final monitoring report relates to changes in how disability was assessed in Census 2022. The Census of Population of Ireland was a major source of data for the indicator set as originally developed. The midterm indicators report presented data from Census 2016 with the intention that this final report could examine changes over time once the next round of census data[[4]](#footnote-4) was available. However, changes to the disability questions in Census 2022[[5]](#footnote-5) mean that it is not possible to meaningfully compare disability information from Census 2022 with that from previous censuses. Alternative data sources have been identified for some indicators; for others, it has not been possible to do so.

In this report, information is presented on 29 main indicators. Two of these are overarching indicators relating to the strategy as a whole, and the remaining 27 relate to the six strategic priorities of the CES (see Table 1). The indicators comprise a mix of process (72%, n = 21) and outcome indicators (28%; n = 8), and no structural indicators were identified for inclusion in the set. Several of the strategic priority indicators also contain sub-indicators. As first discussed in the midterm indicators report, the balance of indicator types would ideally be weighted more heavily in favour of outcome indicators. Data availability limitations have meant that this has not been possible, despite NDA efforts to influence data collection and research over the lifetime of the strategy

Table 1: Number of indicators relating to each CES strategic priority, by indicator type

|  | **Structural** | **Process** | **Outcome** | **Total** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Overarching CES indicators | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | 0 | 6 | 2 | 8 |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | 0 | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| SP3: Make work pay | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| SP4: Promote job retention and re-entry to work | 0 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| SP5: Provide coordinated and seamless support | 0 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| SP6: Engage employers | 0 | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| Total  | 0 | 21 | 6 | 29 |

In this report, the indicators are used to help to construct an overall understanding of Ireland’s current position with respect to the employment of disabled people and to ascertain what progress, if any, has been made under each of the strategic priority areas of the CES. It is acknowledged that a more comprehensive picture could be drawn were more high-quality quantitative data available and if there were a mechanism in the strategy for collecting direct data on the lived experience of persons with disabilities throughout its lifetime.

Data for indicators were obtained from annual reports and other published reports containing data, through specific requests to the CSO, through analysis of different databases, and through requests submitted to departments and agencies.

It should also be noted that apart from the percentage of disabled people in employment, no targets were set for the agreed indicators. While positive change in any given indicator may be interpreted as progress with respect to the employment situation of people with disabilities in Ireland, the extent to which this can be directly attributed to the CES is unclear. Other policy initiatives in Ireland, as well as developments at European and international levels also shape employment outcomes for given populations. Drawing direct causal links between trends reported here and the CES actions is challenging in some instances, particularly given the halted coordination and implementation of the strategy already described.

Finally, it should be noted that unavailability of some data has necessarily limited the conclusions that can be drawn from this report. Ideally, data for each indicator would be available from the start of the lifetime of the strategy (2015) and at the end of the strategy (2024). This is not the case for many indicators in the set, and the most recent data presented might relate to 2023, 2022, 2021 or, in some cases, even earlier. The decision was taken to proceed with this report at the end of 2024 rather than to delay by a period of years until 2024 data might be available for inclusion. It was deemed important that learnings from the CES be available to be incorporated into the development and early implementation of the National Disability Strategy and that delay in publishing this report might lessen its potential impact.

# Primary indicators of progress under the CES

Before examining indicators specific to each of the six CES strategic priority areas, what can be considered as two main or overarching outcomes indicators of progress under the strategy are examined. These relate to the employment rates of people with disabilities in Ireland which were targeted to increase over the course of the strategy.

## Primary indicator A

### Principal economic status of persons with and without disabilities age 20-64 (Outcome)

A target was set in the CES to increase the proportion of people aged 20-64 years with disabilities who are in employment from 33% in 2011 to 38% by 2024, a 15% or five percentage point increase. The proportion of people with disabilities aged 20-64 in employment rose from 33% in Census 2011 to 36.5% in Census 2016, and the overall employment target for 2024 looked set to be achieved. While Census 2022 theoretically offered the next opportunity to monitor progress towards this target, the changes to the census questions from which data on disability are derived mean that a direct comparison between the employment levels of people with disabilities in 2022 and 2016 is not possible.

What is clear is that there remains a substantial gap between the employment rates of people with and without disability (Figure 1). In 2022, 63.1% of people without disabilities aged 20-64 were at work, compared to 44.3% of people with a disability to some extent and just 17.1% of people with a disability to a great extent. Close to one third (32.3%) of people with a disability to a great extent were unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability, and a further 39.6% were outside the labour force for another reason (including retirement or taking care of home or family).

Figure 1: Principal economic status of people aged 20-64 in 2022, by disability status

Source: Census 2022

Information from the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) also allows us to examine trends in the disability employment gap (DEG) over the lifetime of the CES, i.e., the gap in employment rates between people with and without disabilities. The DEG in Ireland has been described as ‘exceptionally large’ (14). In SILC, disability status is defined as a longstanding health condition that limits daily activities, as self-reported by respondents. Employment data are collected from individuals aged 16 and over. (15) In cross-country comparisons using SILC data, Ireland had the largest DEG of all 27 Member States in 2022, at 37 percentage points (Figure 2). The average disability employment gap across the EU was 21 percentage points. There has been no substantial reduction in the disability employment gap over the lifetime of the CES. While lower in 2022 than in 2015, year-on-year fluctuations mean this should not be considered as evidence of a sustained downward trend. As an example, the gap was larger in 2021 than it was in 2014 (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Disability employment gap for EU member states, 2022

Source: EU-SILC

Figure 3: Disability employment gap in Ireland and in the EU overall, 2014-2022

Source: EU-SILC

The NDA advises that new targets need to be set relating to increasing the employment rate of disabled people in Ireland and to reducing the disability employment gap. A discussion paper relating to the establishment of these targets was published by the NDA in March 2024. (16) This paper recommended setting targets both for a reduction in the disability employment gap and for an increase in employment rates of disabled people, rather than a sole focus on increasing the proportion of disabled people employed. This approach is deemed to be preferable in terms of assessing equity in employment and also for accounting in fluctuations in the employment landscape over time.

## Primary Indicator B

### Percentage of people with a disability employed in the public sector (Outcome)

Since 2006, public bodies have pursued a positive action measure under the Disability Act Part 5 which set a 3% target for the employment of people with disabilities in the public service. Relevant public bodies[[6]](#footnote-6) are mandated to report annually to the NDA on their compliance with this target.

The percentage of employees in relevant bodies reporting a disability decreased between 2015 and 2018, before increasing in 2021 and again in 2022 (Figure 4). Overall, the proportion has increased from 3.6% in 2015 (n=7,245) to 4.1% (n=10,641) in 2022, the most recent year for which data are available. (17) The number of employees reporting a disability increased by 31.9%, or 3396 people, over this period. Additionally, the proportion of relevant public sector bodies meeting or exceeding the target increased over time, from 73.6% in 2015, to 90.6% in 2022. All five types of public bodies (Commercial Bodies, Government Departments, Local Government, Non-Commercial Bodies, and Public Bodies staffed by Civil Servants) achieved the minimum 3% target in 2022, as did employers in each of four size categories (0-99 employees, 100-999, 1000-4,999, and 5,000 employees or more). The HSE is the largest body in the public sector and has not achieved the target since monitoring began. However, the HSE stated that 2.3% of employees reported a disability in 2022, which is the highest percentage of employees with a disability reported by the HSE to date.

Figure 4: Percentage of public sector employees reporting a disability 2015-2022

Source: National Disability Authority

A commitment was also made in the CES to increase the 3% target on a phased basis over the lifetime of the strategy. The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) (Amendment) Act 2022 outlined that the statutory employment target would increase to 6% by 2025. Increasing the minimum statutory employment target to 6% was also a commitment under the Programme for Government 2020. The increase is happening on a phased basis, with the target increasing to 4.5% in 2024. In 2022, just under half (48.4%) of public bodies reported that a minimum of 6% of their employees were persons with disabilities.

The NDA has consistently emphasised that the Part 5 target is a statutory minimum compliance target and that it is important for public bodies to focus on exceeding it by creating inclusive workplaces. The NDA continues to work closely with and advise public bodies on measures they can implement to create work environments that promote and support the recruitment and retention of persons with disabilities and in which employees feel supported and comfortable in disclosing a disability. A review of the Part 5 monitoring system led to the development of new questions about the processes public sector organisations have in place to support the employment of disabled people, and these were first asked in relation to activities in 2023. These questions have generated new data and insights that will be used to provide guidance in reaching and exceeding the statutory minimum target. These data will be published in early 2025.

# Strategic Priority 1: Building skills, capacity and independence.

The statement of intent for the CES Strategic Priority 1 was that ‘Each person with a disability will have the education, skills, competence and independence to obtain employment’. (1) Eight indicators of progress were examined for this strategic priority.

## 1.1 Number of children receiving targeted pre-school support (levels 4-7 of the Access and Inclusion Model) (Process)

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is a programme designed to support the inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings. Launched in 2016 by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth (DCEDIY), AIM aims to ensure that all children, regardless of ability, can participate in and benefit from the ECCE programme. Through the model, both universal (Levels 1-3) and targeted supports (Levels 4-7) are provided to create inclusive preschool environments. (18)

In total, 42,821 children were supported under AIM Levels 4, 5, 6 and 7 between 2016 and 2022, with the number rising annually. Table 2 shows the total number of children supported in each calendar year, with the number of children receiving targeted pre-school support at levels 4, 5, 6 and 7 of AIM increasing from 1,558 in 2016 to 8,874 in 2022.

Table 2: Number of children supported under AIM Levels 4-7 by year

| **Year** | **Number of children** |
| --- | --- |
| 2016 | 1,558 |
| 2017 | 4,004 |
| 2018 | 6,399 |
| 2019 | 7,581 |
| 2020 | 7,205 |
| 2021 | 7,200 |
| 2022 | 8,874 |

Source: DCEDIY

In January 2024, a report on findings from an independent evaluation of AIM was published. (19) The evaluators concluded that AIM has been effective in achieving its intended outcomes of full inclusion and meaningful participation in preschool for most children it supports. A survey administered as part of the evaluation found that 82% of surveyed parents indicated that AIM had benefitted their child, with 69% reporting that AIM had supported a) their child’s interaction with their peers and b) their child’s meaningful participation in preschool. Also, nearly all service providers (approximately 95%) surveyed as part of the evaluation reported that AIM was having a positive impact on children with a disability and on their inclusion in the preschool setting.

However, parents and caregivers reported that the impacts of AIM are not experienced equally by all disabled children. Those with less visible disabilities (such as autism, emotional issues, and speech and language difficulties) and those with complex disabilities were perceived to benefit less from AIM than children with other types of disability. The evaluators emphasise that this indicates a need for ongoing vigilance in the development of AIM to ensure that it effectively supports all children. They also stress the importance of continuing to build parents' and caregivers' trust in AIM's ability to meet their child's needs and of collaborating with parents and caregivers to enhance AIM's impact on children's inclusion.

The evaluators ultimately recommend that AIM be expanded to include younger children, Early Learning and Care (ELC) outside of ECCE hours, and School-Aged Childcare (SAC). They advise that this expansion be carried out in a phased and careful manner and in such a way that takes account of the evaluation findings and other projects commissioned by the DCEDIY. Broad support for the expansion of AIM has been identified among stakeholders.

The NDA welcomes the broadly positive findings of the independent evaluation and echoes the recommendation for ongoing work to ensure that AIM adequately supports all children, regardless of disability type.

## 1.2 Proportion of people with and without disabilities achieving each educational attainment level (primary, secondary, tertiary, FET) by disability type (Process)

The planned data source for this indicator was the Census of Population. The midterm indicators report produced by the NDA presented the change in the educational attainment of people with and without disabilities from Census 2011 to Census 2016, with the intention that this final report would add trend data from the next census in the hope that the educational attainment gap had narrowed over the lifetime of the CES. As mentioned in the introduction to this report, however, changes to the disability questions in Census 2022 mean it is not possible to meaningfully compare disability data from 2022 with that from previous censuses.

Information on educational attainment and disability is also collected in household surveys administered by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), including through the Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC), and so these data can serve as an alternative for this indicator. It should be noted that there are limitations to these data, including that they use a less comprehensive definition of disability[[7]](#footnote-7) than the Census and that they are derived from a sample rather than a full enumeration of the population. Importantly, the sample was not intended to be representative of people with disabilities and so caution is advised when interpreting Table 3 below. Furthermore, the data do not allow for consideration of educational attainment by disability type, as originally intended for this indicator and which would have been possible with census data. Nonetheless, as the question formats in SILC have remained unchanged over time, these represent more appropriate data for examining trends in the overall educational attainment gap between people with and without disabilities over the lifetime of the CES.[[8]](#footnote-8)

As shown in Table 3, the gap between people ‘severely limited’ in activities as a result of a long-standing condition and who had completed tertiary education and those with no limitation who had done so was 21 percentage points in 2015 (27% of those with a severe limitation versus 48% of those with no limitation having completed tertiary education). In 2023, this gap was larger, at 28 percentage points. The gap between those who reported being ‘limited, but not severely’ was 18 percentage points in 2015 and 14 percentage points in 2023. Overall, there is little evidence from these data that the educational attainment gap between those with and without disabilities has closed in any meaningful way over the period of the CES.

Table 3: Highest level of educational attainment for people grouped by limitation status, 2015-2023

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **PH030** | **Primary****%** | **Secondary****%** | **Tertiary****%** | **Total****%** |
| 2015 | Severely limited | 33 | 40 | 27 | 100 |
|  | Limited, but not severely | 32 | 38 | 30 | 100 |
|  | Not Limited | 11 | 41 | 48 | 100 |
| 2016 | Severely limited | 35 | 42 | 23 | 100 |
|  | Limited, but not severely | 30 | 38 | 32 | 100 |
|  | Not Limited | 10 | 41 | 49 | 100% |
| 2017 | Severely limited | 34 | 37 | 29 | 100% |
|  | Limited, but not severely | 31 | 39 | 31 | 100% |
|  | Not Limited | 10 | 41 | 50 | 100% |
| 2018 | Severely limited | 37 | 34 | 29 | 100% |
|  | Limited, but not severely | 24 | 39 | 37 | 100% |
|  | Not Limited | 9 | 38 | 52 | 100% |
| 2019 | Severely limited | 31 | 39 | 30 | 100 |
|  | Limited, but not severely | 25 | 40 | 35 | 100 |
|  | Not Limited | 9 | 38 | 53 | 100 |
| 2020 | Severely limited | 28 | 38 | 34 | 100 |
|  | Limited, but not severely | 19 | 35 | 46 | 100 |
|  | Not Limited | 5 | 35 | 59 | 100 |
| 2021 | Severely limited | 30 | 41 | 29 | 100 |
|  | Limited, but not severely | 21 | 40 | 39 | 100 |
|  | Not Limited | 6 | 38 | 57 | 100 |
| 2022 | Severely limited | 38 | 38 | 24 | 100 |
|  | Limited, but not severely | 19 | 40 | 41 | 100 |
|  | Not Limited | 5 | 37 | 57 | 100 |
| 2023 | Severely limited | 32 | 39 | 29 | 100 |
|  | Limited, but not severely | 19 | 38 | 43 | 100 |
|  | Not Limited | 5 | 38 | 57 | 100 |

Source: Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC). Data provided by the CSO.

Table 4 shows educational attainment by disability status in Census 2022. Echoing the SILC data reported above, the latest Census shows that there remains a substantial educational attainment gap between people with and without disabilities in Ireland. In 2022, 6.5% of people without a disability (over the age of 15 and who had ceased education) had no formal education or had primary education as their highest level of education. This rises to 14.3% of people with a disability to some extent and to 27.8% of people with a disability to a great extent (19.3% of people with a disability to any extent).

Further, 28.5% of people without disabilities had an honours bachelor’s degree (or equivalent) or higher, compared to 22.3% of people with a disability to some extent, and just 10.3% of people with a disability to a great extent (17.7% of people with a disability to any extent).

Table 4: Population aged 15 years and over with and without a disability by highest level of education completed

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Highest level of education** | **People without disabilities %** | **People with disabilities to any extent %** | **People with disabilities to some extent %** | **People with disabilities to a great extent %** |
| No formal education | 1.5 | 4.9 | 2.9 | 8.4 |
| Primary | 5.0 | 14.4 | 11.4 | 19.4 |
| Lower secondary | 11.6 | 17.7 | 16.4 | 19.9 |
| Upper secondary | 18.3 | 17.5 | 17.9 | 16.7 |
| Technical/vocational | 7.3 | 8.2 | 8.5 | 7.7 |
| Advanced certificate/completed apprenticeship | 5.9 | 4.8 | 5.4 | 3.9 |
| Higher certificate | 5.7 | 5.0 | 5.6 | 4.0 |
| Ordinary bachelor degree/professional qualification or both | 8.4 | 6.9 | 8.1 | 5.1 |
| Honours bachelor degree/professional qualification or both | 14.7 | 9.4 | 11.6 | 5.7 |
| Postgraduate diploma or degree | 12.5 | 7.5 | 9.6 | 4.1 |
| Doctorate (Ph.D.) | 1.2 | 0.9 | 1.1 | 0.5 |
| Not stated | 7.8 | 2.6 | 1.4 | 4.6 |

Source: Census 2022

Table 5 below shows the highest level of education completed by persons with different types of disability in Census 2022. The highest share of people with no formal education (20.6%) was among those with an intellectual disability, who also had the lowest levels of FET (10.7%) and tertiary education (7.7%). While, for reasons already discussed, it is not possible to directly compare the proportions across censuses, the lowest levels of educational attainment were also seen for those with an intellectual disability in Census 2011 and Census 2016.

In 2022, the lowest proportion of people with no formal education was among those who were blind or had a vision impairment (4.5%), who also had the highest share of people with tertiary education (28.3%). Relatively high levels of educational attainment were also seen among those with an emotional or psychological condition or mental health issue and among those with a difficulty with pain, breathing, or another chronic illness or condition (see Table 5).

Table 5: Highest level of education completed by people with disabilities aged fifteen and over, by disability type, 2022

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Type of Disability | No formal education % | Primary % | Secondary % | FET % | Tertiary % |
| Blindness or vision impairment | 4.5 | 13.8 | 16.9 | 18.1 | 28.3 |
| Deafness or a hearing impairment | 5.8 | 21.1 | 15.3 | 16.5 | 18.8 |
| Difficulty with basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting or carrying | 7.7 | 22.0 | 16.5 | 15.2 | 13.1 |
| Intellectual disability | 20.6 | 21.8 | 14.0 | 10.7 | 7.7 |
| Difficulty with learning, remembering, or concentrating | 10.2 | 19.1 | 16.4 | 15.3 | 14.6 |
| Psychological or emotional condition or a mental health issue | 5.9 | 9.5 | 18.7 | 19.0 | 27.5 |
| Difficulty with pain or breathing or any other chronic illness or condition | 5.3 | 16.0 | 16.6 | 18.1 | 22.2 |

 Source: Census 2022

Research by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) commissioned by the NDA examined the skills and employment prospects of people with and without disabilities in Ireland, using data from a variety of sources, including SILC, the Census of Population, and the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) 2012. (20) The analyses revealed that adults with a permanent disability and neither in employment nor education/training had lower literacy and numeracy scores than those without a disability, that a much lower proportion of people with disabilities had a third-level qualification than working-aged people without disabilities, and that there was a substantial variation in educational attainment across disability types. The ESRI report also showed that while educational attainment had increased over time among people with disabilities, the educational attainment gap between people with and without disabilities had remained relatively stable.

In 2021, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published analyses linking disability status in Census 2016 with Leaving Certificate data from the State Examinations Commission (SEC) and data on further and higher education from the Higher Education Authority (HEA). (21) This analysis revealed that just over one in ten people (11%) with a disability who sat the Leaving Certificate did the Leaving Certificate Applied, compared to 4% of people without a disability who sat the Leaving Certificate. The proportion of people with disabilities taking the Leaving Certificate Applied varied by disability type, from 6% of those with ‘other disability, including chronic illness’ to 25% of those with an intellectual disability. The analysis also showed that the same proportion of those with and without a disability in Census 2016 who sat either the Leaving Certificate or the Leaving Certificate Applied continued to further or higher education (84%). However, when considering higher education specifically, 43% of those with a disability who sat the Leaving Certificate went on to higher education over the following three years, compared to 55% of those without a disability.

**1.3 Proportion of all people accessing higher education, further education and training who have a disability (Process)**

Data from the HEAshow that the majority of the higher education population is aged between 18 and 24. (22) Data from SOLAS also show that there are more enrolments in further education and training (FET) among under-25s than in older age brackets. (23) For reference when interpreting the data below, 19.2% of 18-24-year-olds were categorised as having a disability in Census 2022.

**1.3.1 Higher education**

The proportion of students registered with disability support/access services in higher education institutions increased from 5.2% in the 2015/16 academic year to 7.4% in the 2022/2023 academic year (24), with small but steady year-on-year increases (Figure 5). However, these figures are likely underestimates of the proportion of people accessing higher education who have a disability, as disabled people may choose not to engage with a student disability service at their higher education institution.

**Figure 5: Percentage of new entrants to higher education registered with student disability services, 2015-2022**

Source: AHEAD

The number of eligible applications to the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) scheme has also trended upwards over time, from 2538 in 2015 to 6473 in 2023. (12,13)

In recent years, the HEA has collected data on disability through its voluntary Equal Access Survey for first year undergraduate new entrants to higher education. In the academic year 2022/23, 19.4% of respondents to the survey disclosed a disability, up from 16.6% in 2019/2020 (the first year in which the survey was administered). (26) Since 19.2% of 18-24-year-olds have a disability, according to the Census, and most people in higher education are aged between 18 and 24, people with disabilities appear to be proportionately represented in higher education in Ireland. These data vary considerably from the AHEAD data, which show that 7.9% of all new entrant undergraduates disclosed a disability while accessing disability supports in 2022/2023. It should be noted that the disability questions in the Census and the Equal Access Survey are not identical, and that the response rate for the survey was 74.1% in 2022, while the Census has more complete population coverage. Nonetheless, AHEAD argues that this sizeable difference in participation rates statistics for this cohort suggests that a considerable number of students with disabilities refrain from formally disclosing their disability and accessing support services at their higher education institution. (24) The NDA recommends that monitoring of future strategies in which the proportion of higher education students with disabilities is of interest draw on both data sources.

As shown in Table 6, in each academic year since 2015/16 the most prevalent disability types among HEI students accessing student disability services were a specific learning disability, a mental health condition, and a significant ongoing illness. The least common disability types were blindness/visual impairment, deafness/hard of hearing and ‘other’. The biggest change over time has been the proportion of students with a mental health condition, which rose from 12.6% in 2015/16 to 16.6% in 2020/2021. From the academic year 2021/22, a methodological change means that disability category percentages from 2021/22 onwards cannot be meaningfully compared with those from previous years. This change involved a shift from collecting data on primary disability only to collecting data on primary and additional disabilities.

Table 6: Primary disability of students accessing disability support services in higher education institutions by Academic Year 2015-2021 (%)

| **Primary Disability** | **2015/16** | **2016/17** | **2017/18** | **2018/19** | **2019/20** | **2020/21** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Specific learning disability | 45.5 | 41.4 | 38.9 | 37.7 | 36.9 | 36.2 |
| Mental health condition | 12.6 | 13.9 | 15.1 | 16.1 | 16.7 | 16.6 |
| Significant ongoing illness | 10.6 | 11.2 | 11.6 | 11.6 | 11.8 | 11.3 |
| Physical disability | 6.5 | 6.3 | 6.3 | 6.3 | 6.3 | 5.9 |
| DCD - Dyspraxia | 6 | 6.1 | 6.2 | 6.5 | 6.3 | 6.5 |
| Aspergers/autism | 4.8 | 5.4 | 5.9 | 6.9 | 7.6 | 8.3 |
| Attention deficit disorder (ADD)/Attention deficit Hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) | 4.1 | 5.2 | 4.9 | 5.0 | 5.0 | 5.5 |
| Neurological/speech and language | 4.2 | 4.3 | 4.2 | 4.8 | 4.7 | 4.9 |
| Other disability | 1.1 | 1.8 | 2.6 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 0.9 |
| Deaf/hard of hearing | 2.8 | 2.6 | 2.5 | 2.6 | 2.4 | 2.4 |
| Blind/visually Impaired | 1.8 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 1.6 | 1.6 |

Source: AHEAD

The Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) is a dedicated funding programme to support the delivery of the objectives of the National Access Plan (NAP) by increasing the participation of under-represented groups in higher education. In June 2022, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) announced the fourth strand of PATH, to be implemented on a phased basis over four years. Phase 1 of PATH 4 was a one-off fund to support HEIs to embed Universal Design (UD) approaches and inclusive practices. This call for funding follows NDA advice on universal design[[9]](#footnote-9). Phase 2 has comprised funding for HEIs to include learners with intellectual disabilities in higher education. (27) In this phase of the programme, 11 HEIs were awarded funding. (28) Important features of these programmes include their wide regional reach and that they will strengthen the HEA’s capacity to collect data to inform future policy on the inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in higher education, for example through information on the cost of provision and on how best to support student outcomes.

Since March 2021, under what is known as ‘Catherine’s Law’[[10]](#footnote-10), PhD bursaries or scholarships up to a value of €20,000 per year for a maximum of four years are excluded from the means test for Disability Allowance, facilitating disabled PhD students to retain their DA payments while undertaking their doctoral studies. In 2022, Catherine’s Law was extended to the Blind Pension. (29)

**1.3.2 Further education and training**

In 2022, 12,704 people reporting a disability were enrolled in further education and training (FET), which was 6.8% of all people enrolled in FET that year. (30) This represents an increase from 2018 (the first year for which this information is available), when 8,644 people or 5% of the FET population reported a disability. (31) As these data rely on voluntary disclosure of a disability, it is important to note that the figures may be underestimates.

Among those reporting a disability, 57.8% were women and 62.5% were over the age of 25. The most commonly reported disabilities were difficulty with learning, remembering, or concentrating (36.6% of those with a disability in FET in 2022), intellectual disability (24.3%), and other disability including chronic illness (23.3%; Figure 2). The least common disability types were blindness/serious vision impairment and deafness/serious hearing impairment (5.5% and 6.5%, respectively).

The largest changes since 2018 have been an increase in the proportion of the FET population with a difficulty learning, remembering, or concentrating (from 32.4% in 2018 to 36.6% in 2022) and a reduction in the proportion identifying in the ‘other’ category, including those with chronic illness (from 29.3% in 2018 to 23.3% in 2022; Figure 2).

Figure 6: Types of disabilities of those enrolled in FET, 2018 and 2022

Source: SOLAS

These data do not include information on apprenticeships. A review of pathways into apprenticeships published by SOLAS in 2018 showed that 2.8% of the Irish apprentice population had a disability, meaning that disabled people were significantly underrepresented in the apprenticeship population. (32) Apprenticeships are covered in more detail in the section on Indicator 2.2.4 in this report.

**1.4 Improved transition planning for children and young people with disabilities (Process)**

**1.4.1 Transition supports for young children**

A number of resources have been developed over the lifetime of the CES to support smooth educational transitions of young children with disabilities.

In 2020, speech and language therapists and occupational therapists working with the Demonstration Project on In-School and Early Years Therapy Support[[11]](#footnote-11) developed a resource on preparing children to transition smoothly from ECCE to primary school. (34) The resource was created for use by parents, ELC practitioners, and teachers of early primary school classes to prepare children to transition smoothly from the ECCE years into Junior Infants. In addition to this written resource, a video for parents on the transition to primary school was also published in 2021 by the National Council for Special Education. (35)

Further, in 2023, the NCSE published a revision of their 2016 guidelines for parents of children with special educational needs starting primary school. (36) The pamphlet contains guidance relating to four steps on the transition journey: gathering information, enrolling in a school, planning with the school, and preparing for school. The resource also includes a list of useful contacts for parents.

**1.4.2 Transition supports from primary to post-primary school**

Several resources have been developed or revised over the lifetime of the CES to improve the transition from primary to post-primary schools for children with special educational needs.

In 2015, the National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS)[[12]](#footnote-12) revised a number of their existing guidance materials on transfer from primary to post-primary school, which include a good practice guide to support students with autistic spectrum disorders who are transitioning from primary to post-primary school developed in collaboration with the HSE. (37)

In 2016, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) published resources to support planning for effective transitions. These included guidelines for parents and guardians of students with special educational needs transferring from primary to post-primary. A revised version of this guidance was then published in 2023. (38) In addition to the written guidance, information videos for parents are also available on the NCSE website.[[13]](#footnote-13)

In 2016, the NCSE also published guidance for parents on supporting transitions between mainstream and special school settings. (39) The guidelines relate to making the decision to transfer, enrolment procedures, planning for the transition, and preparing for change. The resource also contains a list of useful contacts. Unlike the guidelines for transition to primary and post-primary, the guidance document on moving between mainstream and special schools has not been revised since 2016.

**1.4.3 Expansion of guidance counselling to special schools and special classes within mainstream schools**

Career guidance can help young people transition successfully from school to their chosen post-school paths. Research has shown that a focus on employment and career planning needs to start as early as age 13 or the first year of post-primary school to be most effective. (40) Additionally, research has shown involvement in work experience during school years, and in particular, paid work, provides young disabled people with a significantly higher employment rate over the longer term. (41)

Actions to support career guidance were described in the original strategy, and in 2018, the Department of Education commissioned an independent review of career guidance provision in Irish education. (42) Published in 2019, the review was limited in relation to issues concerning disabled students. However, it did recommend that there be enhanced provision of career guidance training for teachers in special schools and improved access in special schools to wider career guidance supports. This recommendation was in response to the more limited career guidance and work experience available to students in special schools, which are classified as primary schools. Guidance counselling services are provided in post-primary schools in Ireland and not yet in primary schools. Provision at primary level is an action to be progressed in the implementation plan in the National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance (2023).

The midterm review of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) committed to implementing the actions arising from the career guidance review. Limited progress has been made in this respect. Where action has been taken, it has been in relation to the provision of information, for example through a careers portal, rather than providing disabled students with appropriate, individualised, and effective career guidance from a guidance counsellor. In December 2023, the government published the National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance (2024-2030) (43), along with an action plan. (44) Actions relating to ensuring provision of guidance supports to students in special schools and improved transition planning are included. Work has begun in terms of progressing action 3.4 of the National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance which seeks ‘to support all individuals including those who are marginalised or have disabilities to access person-centred opportunities such as work-shadowing/work-experience.’ (43, p.5). This action crosses a number of sectors and is a cross-government initiative. The work to date includes preliminary meetings of various stakeholders and research work, with a paper outlining what needs to be done in this area currently in preparation. This work will inform policy in this regard.

In 2022, the NDA published a literature review on learnings from other jurisdictions on effective career guidance models for students with disabilities, a new action arising from the NDIS midterm review. (33) This subsequently led to a policy advice paper on career guidance for disabled students which emphasised that career guidance should be available to all students, regardless of disability status or educational setting. (34) To inform the advice paper, the NDA convened a roundtable discussion in May 2022 with education stakeholders to identify barriers to effective career guidance for post-primary students with disabilities and how these could be addressed. This was followed by a consultation with young people with additional needs.

**1.4.4 School leavers transitioning to work/further education/third level**

During the lifetime of the CES, a more systematic and streamlined system has been introduced by the Health Service Executive (HSE), with the independent guidance of the NDA, to assess the needs of school leavers with disabilities. The system supports the young person to explore alternatives to moving directly to a day service placement, such as engaging in further education or taking up employment. This system also estimates the resources needed to support that person should they go to a day service. Some young people are choosing to take up a personalised budget[[14]](#footnote-14) as an alternative to attending a day service.

In 2018, the NCSE published an information resource for school leavers on the post-school options of rehabilitative training and adult day services, including what the services entail, eligibility criteria, and information on how to apply. (45) The resource also signposts other information sources for school leavers and provides a list of useful contacts.

In 2019, work was commenced by the NCSE and the HSE to consider transition arrangements between HSE-funded services and education, and vice versa. In 2022, the Minister for Education and the Minister of State for Special Education formally announced a pilot transitions programme to help young people with disabilities, in particular those with intellectual disabilities and other complex educational needs, to navigate their post-school options. These may include further education, higher education, day services, placement in apprenticeships, employment, or other personal life choices. (46) The pilot involved 20 schools in clusters in Galway and Dublin working collaboratively with a project coordinator over a two-year period (seven mainstream and three special schools in Galway; seven mainstream and three special schools in Dublin). The pilot project is being overseen by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the Department of Education with the involvement of agencies, schools, disability service providers funded by the HSE. The Department of Education is monitoring the progress of the programme to examine its potential for application to other schools. (46)

Initial findings and learnings from the first phase of the pilot indicated that the additional supports were significantly more beneficial to special schools. However, due to the different needs and levels of ability across special schools, the supports needed to be tailored to meet the individual needs of each school. Based on these initial learnings and to test the pilot further, it was decided to expand the pilot programme to 41 special schools for the 2024/25 school year. This new phase of the pilot will provide additional learnings that will be used to inform the strategic development of guidance policy for all special schools.

In addition to the transitions pilot overseen by the NCSE, the Department of Education and Walkinstown Association for People with an Intellectual Disability (WALK) have undertaken an innovative collaboration on transitions. This project is based in 10 schools – seven special schools and three post-primary schools – and delivers the existing WALK PEER Supported Transitions Programme. WALK have tried and tested the methodology behind the WALK PEER Supported Transitions Programme. (47) An important element of the programme is ensuring participating students have all the information they and their families/carers need to make an informed decision about their post-school transition destination. For those who choose to take up places in HSE-funded Disability services, they exit the WALK PEER Programme and bring their Transition Plan with them to the service of their choice. If they choose to defer the offer of a place in the HSE funded Disability Service, then they continue to be supported by the WALK PEER Programme for up to three years to ensure their transition plan is as successful as possible. Since development of the WALK PEER Programme, no post-school participant has returned to request their place in HSE funded disability services.[[15]](#footnote-15)

A wide range of post-school options for all learners with disabilities is crucial, and this was clear from the NDA consultation with young disabled people on career guidance. (10) In addition to the transitions pilot programmes underway, the innovations in PATH 4 funding school extend the access to higher education for young disabled people. Other important options are the SOLAS provision of Specialist Training, which is currently being reviewed, and the HSE provision of Rehabilitative Training, also currently under review. These options are important steps on the pathway to employment. No information on the outcomes of these reviews was available at the time of publication.

**1.4.5 Number of deferrals of adult day services to take up further education and training**

Until 2018, school leavers with disabilities were assessed and offered a place in an adult day service or in rehabilitative training (RT), and if the person did not accept this offer, their place was lost, and it was not possible to re-enter the system. In acknowledgement that some disabled school leavers wished to enter further education, training, or employment before taking a place in a day service or RT, a deferral process was piloted in 2018.

HSE records showed that 71 people availed of the pilot deferral process in 2019. (4) As of December 2020 this had increased to 206 young people. Of these, only 14 returned to access a day service, and 27 chose to be removed from the deferral list entirely. (48) By 2024, 448 young people had chosen to defer their acceptance of a day service to pursue other pathways, 31 of whom returned to commence a disability day service, with 368 people continuing to defer their placement. (49)

The deferral process was placed on a permanent footing for all young people leaving school and rehabilitative training from September 2022. (48)

In June 2024, it was announced that the option for school leavers to defer a specialist disability day service was extended by three years to five years by the HSE. (49)

**1.5 Destination of persons exiting Rehabilitative Training – i.e. to work, further education and training, or other (Outcome)**

Rehabilitative training (RT) is a training programme of up to four years’ duration that focuses on the development of participants’ life skills, social skills, and basic work skills. The goal of RT is to support individuals to progress to greater levels of independence and integration in their own communities. Funding for RT is provided by the HSE, but delivery is primarily by voluntary agencies throughout the country. Rehabilitative training is available to people with varying profiles and support needs between the ages of 18-65 that are willing to engage and would benefit from the opportunities afforded through participation.

Table 7 below shows the RT outcomes from 2015 to 2023[[16]](#footnote-16). The figures show an annual increase in the proportion of exits from RT into HSE-funded day services, from 27% in 2015 to 49% in 2020, before beginning to drop again. In 2023, the most recent year for which data are available, 44% of exits from RT were to HSE-funded day services, still considerably higher than the 2015 figure. The proportion of those in RT exiting into employment decreased from 9% in 2015 to 7% in 2023, with fluctuation over the intervening years. The proportion of those exiting into training and education has also decreased from 23% in 2015 to 19% in 2023. While fewer exits into employment and education and training accounts for some of the notable growth in exits to HSE-funded day services, this growth is also accounted for in a reduction of ‘other’ exits – including ceasing to attend due to illness or into no occupation.

It was hoped that the proportion of those exiting into employment and further education or training relative to day services would increase over the lifetime of the CES, but this has not occurred. In 2023, the HSE commissioned a national review of rehabilitative training programmes. At the time of publication, a report on this review had not yet been released. It is hoped that findings and recommendations arising from this review might contribute to increased exits from RT into employment and further education or training over time.

Table 7: Rehabilitative Training Outcomes 2015-2023

|  | **2015****%****(n)** | **2016****%****(n)** | **2017****%****(n)** | **2018****%****(n)** | **2019****%****(n)** | **2020****%****(n)** | **2021****%****(n)** | **2022****%****(n)** | **2023****%****(n)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Employment\* | 9%(112) | 5%(74) | 6%(73) | 6%(64) | 7%(80) | 6%(53) | 9%(84) | 7%(73) | 7%(65) |
| Training and Education\*\* | 23%(282) | 18%(288) | 22%(257) | 22%(243) | 19%(204) | 16%(141) | 19%(174) | 21%(206) | 19%(192) |
| HSE-funded Day Service | 27%(341) | 30%(472) | 34%(405) | 41%(452) | 48%(528) | 49%(427) | 47%(446) | 43%(432) | 44%(434) |
| Other\*\*\* | 41%(508) | 46%(723) | 38%(458) | 30%(333) | 26%(289) | 29%(253) | 25%(236) | 29%(286) | 31%(304) |
| **Total** | **1,243** | **1,557** | **1,193** | **1,092** | **1,101** | **874** | **940** | **997** | **995** |

\*Employment figures combines numbers engaged in DSP employment programmes; supported employment, sheltered employment (included up until 2017 – then abolished), open and self-employment.

\*\* Combines numbers engaged in ETB mainstream, ETB specialist training, F**á**ilte Ireland training; Teagasc training; PLC education, private education, ETB education; 3rd level education.

\*\*\* Combines numbers that have ceased to attend; illness; mental health services; voluntary/community work; unoccupied.

**1.6 Proportion of Disability Allowance recipients aged 16-19 (Process)**

A 2021 review of disability, work and inclusion in Ireland by the OECD highlighted that while people in Ireland are eligible for disability allowance from the age of 16, other OECD countries do not grant disability benefits before exhausting all possibilities of vocational rehabilitation, while others still (for example, Denmark) do not grant any long-term disability payment to people under the age of 40, ‘thus putting massive pressure on the public authorities to improve employability and find employment for young adults with disabilities’ (5, p. 20). The review recommended that Ireland focus on early intervention with young people who transition from education to DA in order to improve their labour market outcomes.

The proportion of all Disability Allowance (DA) recipients aged 16-19 increased between 2015 and 2022. In 2015, 5% of DA recipients were aged 16 to 19, which increased to 8% in 2022. The number of DA recipients aged 16 to 19 increased more in this time period than in any other age group (by approximately 6,000 recipients, a 92% increase). (50)

A rise in the numbers of young people receiving disability allowance had been predicted, given the increase in the prevalence of disability among both younger and older age cohorts and the overall rise in the younger age population seen in Census 2016. However, it was hoped that this expected increase would be mitigated by the work of the CES, through raised expectations of young people with disabilities and increased supports provided for other activities. (4) Plans for early engagement with those transitioning directly from education to DA were paused during the pandemic, but Early Engagement, the targeted, voluntary provision of employment services to young people receiving Disability Allowance, was introduced in July 2022. Between July and December 2022, designated Disability Liaison Officers engaged with 2,666 jobseekers with a disability. (51) The Early Engagement process continued in 2023, with 21,300 Disability Allowance recipients contacted and offered the opportunity to meet with a specially trained employment services adviser. More than 9,000 of those contacted in 2023 engaged with employment services, and 705 participants (3.3% of those contacted) had successfully transitioned from their DA payment to employment by the end of the year. (52)

**1.7 Numbers of Back to Education Allowance recipients with disabilities (Process)**

The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) is a scheme to financially support people in receipt of either a jobseeker’s payment, a one parent family payment, or a disability or caring payment to undertake further or higher education. (53)

Table 8 below shows that the numbers moving from disability supports to the BTEA decreased each year between 2015 and 2023.[[17]](#footnote-17) The total number of BTEA recipients also decreased over this period. The percentage of all BTEA recipients who had moved from disability supports increased from 1.8% to 2.5% between 2015 and 2023, although this fluctuated over the years.

Table 8: Back to Education Allowance recipients moving from disability payments 2015-2023

| **Year** | **Number moved to BTEA from disability supports** | **Total number of BTEA recipients** | **Percentage of overall BTEA recipients who had moved from disability supports (%)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **2015** | 318 | 17,879 | 1.8 |
| **2016** | 276 | 13,895 | 2.0 |
| **2017** | 201 | 10,916 | 1.8 |
| **2018** | 199 | 8,816 | 2.3 |
| **2019** | 157 | 7,283 | 2.2 |
| **2020** | 140 | 6,387 | 2.2 |
| **2021** | 146 | 5,545 | 2.6 |
| **2022** | 86 | 3,846 | 2.2 |
| **2023** | 90 | 3,542 | 2.5 |

Source: Department of Social Protection

**1.8 The proportion of persons with disabilities who are early school leavers compared to persons without disabilities (Outcome)**

Persons with disabilities traditionally have higher than average early school leaving rates. Accordingly, early school leaving was added as a new indicator under this strategic priority at the time of the midterm review, offering another way to consider the inclusion of persons with disabilities in education. Early school leaving was defined as having left full time education before the age of 16.

In census 2011, 22.9% of those with disabilities aged 15 and over were early school leavers compared to 8.7% of those without disabilities. By 2016, this gap had narrowed, and the proportion of early school leavers had dropped among the population with disabilities (18.1%) and without (6.4%). Due to changes in the Census disability questions already described and a lack of an alternative data source, it is not possible to provide an update for this indicator at the end of the strategy.

However, data are available on young people who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET), and these are presented in section 2.8.

## Overview of Strategic Priority One

The goal of this priority area was to ensure that each disabled person has the education, skills, competence, and independence to obtain work. Positive developments under this priority area relate to improvements in inclusion seen from preschool age right through to further and higher education. These developments are welcome.

However, gaps in educational attainment, qualifications, and employment outcomes remain between people with and without disabilities. One contributing factor is likely to be the continued lack of provision of individualised career guidance for young disabled learners while at school, which had been identified as a major gap early in the CES drafting process, and which has recently begun to be meaningfully addressed. Research has shown that a focus on employment and career planning needs to start as early as age 13 or the first year of post-primary school to be most effective. Additionally, research has shown involvement in work experience during school years, and in particular, paid work, provides young disabled people with a significantly higher employment rate over the longer term. (41). 2022 saw the establishment of a National Policy Group on Lifelong Guidance to develop a coherent long-term strategic guidance framework and to address the limitations identified in the Indecon report on career guidance. While improvements could be made, many disabled students in mainstream post-primary schools are receiving career guidance, and the Department of Education is now working to meet the needs of students in special schools and the needs of those with disabilities at different stages of the life journey.

In December 2021, the Minister for Special Education and Inclusion launched a review of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004. The Department of Education began a public consultation on the Act in November 2022. A comprehensive report on the review was expected in the second quarter of 2024 (42), but to date this has not been published. It is now expected to be published in Q1 2025. It will be important that any changes made to legislation prioritise the inclusion of students with disabilities and ensuring they are supported to achieve their full potential.

### Key achievements

* Quality early learning and care (ELC) provides an important foundation for skill development and well-being, with early education and care experiences associated with a range of later life outcomes, including educational attainment and employment. The evaluation of AIM has demonstrated that the model has been largely successful in achieving its objective of creating inclusive environments through which all children, regardless of ability, can benefit from quality early learning experiences. AIM is highly regarded by parents and ELC settings alike. The number of children receiving targeted supports under AIM has grown steadily over the lifetime of the CES.
* The proportion of people in further education and training who disclosed a disability increased in recent years (from 5% in 2018 to 7% in 2022).
* Around one in five new entrants to higher education disclosed a disability in the 2022/23 academic year, indicating that people with disabilities are now proportionately represented among new undergraduates.
* The introduction of PATH 4 funding of €12m over a four-year period starting in 2022 should serve to increase access to higher education among disabled people, particularly for people with intellectual disabilities and autism.

### Gaps to be addressed

* The apparent increase in access to further and higher education among people with disabilities has not yet translated to a closing of the educational attainment gap, with data from a number of sources indicating that this gap is still sizeable in Ireland.
* A number of transition pilot projects are underway, and it is vital that lessons from these projects are mainstreamed and have a national rollout. The lack of provision of school-based career guidance in special schools continues to impede transition from school to post-school options and into employment. The evaluation of the transition pilot projects will inform future policy direction in this regard.
* The review of Specialist Training Provision by SOLAS should be completed and any recommendations implemented. This provision is a necessary post-school step on the pathway to work and or participation in society. The links from Rehabilitative Training to STP are also important.
* There remain substantial gaps with respect to the specific delivery of career guidance tailored to the individual needs of the learner with a disability while at school. The Department of Education is aware of these gaps and is seeking to address them in ways outlined in the National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance.

# Strategic Priority 2: Provide bridges and supports into work

The statement of intent developed for this Strategic Priority 2 was that ‘People with disabilities will be provided with individualised bridges and supports to secure jobs in the open labour market.’ (1) Six indicators of progress were examined for this strategic priority.

**Indicator 2.1 on the number of people with disabilities in sheltered employment was deleted due to the shift in Ireland away from segregated employment in sheltered workshops towards employment models more in line with the UNCRPD.**

## 2.2 Numbers of persons with disabilities in work placements, internships, work learning programmes, and apprenticeships (Process)

### 2.2.1 Work-placements

#### Youth Employment Support Scheme

The Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) was a work experience placement programme introduced in October 2018. The scheme was targeted at young jobseekers aged 18-24 who were long-term unemployed or faced barriers to employment and provided a three-month work experience programme for young people that could be extended to six months. Participants worked 24 hours per week over three days or four days. There was no cost to employers as the participants were paid by Intreo. From October 2018 to approximately January 2020, 3% of the young people availing of the YESS scheme were in receipt of a disability-related payment (n=19).[[18]](#footnote-18) At the time of the midterm CES indicators report, 13 of these had completed the programme, five of whom were then employed by the host employer. The NDA advised at the time that the low uptake of the scheme among people with disabilities may have been due to barriers such as the suitability of a 24-hour week and the relatively short duration of placements, given the time it may take for young people to settle into the scheme. (54) The NDA recommended that young people with disabilities be actively targeted with information about the scheme in order to improve uptake among this cohort. (4) However, the scheme came to an end in July 2021.

Also in July 2021, the Work Experience Placement Programme (WEPP) started. The WEPP offers people who have lost their job or who have never had a job an opportunity to gain work experience. Unlike YESS, which was targeted at younger people, the WEPP is open to people aged 18-65 who have been unemployed for more than six months and are in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment. Individuals on a one-parent family payment, Disability Allowance or Blind Pension automatically qualify for WEPP and do not need to meet the six-month qualifying threshold. The scheme involves work experience placements of six months in duration that cannot be extended. Participants are eligible to undertake two placements in total, and these must be with different host organisations. Individuals on placements work 30 hours a week over 4 or 5 days each week, including time spent on training.

The original target was that 10,000 people would commence work experience placements by the end of 2022 and that at least 4,000 of these would be young people. By June 2023, just 701 WEPP approvals had been granted. The considerably lower than anticipated demand has been attributed due to stronger than anticipated labour market participation. (55)

The DSP have also introduced an Employment and Youth Engagement Charter which provides a framework to collaborate with employers to support and inspire young jobseekers, including disabled jobseekers, to build their knowledge, skills and experience to enhance their employability. (56) This charter was launched in 2024 and should have details to report in Q1 2025.

### 2.2.2 Internships

#### Willing Able Mentoring programme

Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) is a work placement programme aimed at widening access to the labour market for graduates with disabilities. WAM also works to build the capacity of employers to create more inclusive workplaces. The WAM programme is an initiative of AHEAD and is funded by the Department of Social Protection. Participating employers collaborate with WAM to provide disabled graduates a full-time, mentored, and paid graduate internship of upwards of six months.

Between its establishment in 2005 and March 2024, 688 graduates had work placements through WAM. The number of graduates on work placements through WAM increased from 31 graduates in 2015 (the start of the CES) to 73 in 2018. From 2019, the number of placements varied, with 50 in 2019, 78 in 2020, 57 in 2021, 64 in 2022 and 69 in 2023.

A report on statistics from the WAM programme between 2012 and 2023 found that 81% of WAM graduates secured employment as a direct result of their WAM placement. (57) A further 7% went back to study, 9% were still looking for work 12 months after their WAM placement, and 3% were not in employment for reasons such as ill health, travelling, career break or assumed caring responsibilities. (57)

Since 2005, 318 graduates with disabilities have secured WAM placements with Civil Service departments and in 2022, a route to permanency for WAM graduates successfully completing a Civil Service WAM placement was developed and trialled. As a result of the pilot, 17 people who had successfully completed a WAM placement with the Civil Service in 2022 and also successful in the confined competition for permanency moved into permanent Executive Officer (EO) roles. (58) A second iteration of the route to permanency was put in place for the cohort starting September 2023, which resulted in an additional 17 people moving into permanent EO roles.

### 2.2.4 Apprenticeships

A review of pathways into apprenticeship in Ireland found that 423 disabled people completed apprenticeship training in 2018, which represented 2.8% of the Irish apprentice population. (32) A majority of these (64.5%), identified themselves as having dyslexia, and a further 10% identified other disabilities related to learning (dyscalculia, dyspraxia, ADD, ADHD). Approximately 13% had physical, hearing, or visual disabilities, while 28% did not specify what type of disability they had. Given national disability prevalence as indicated by Census 2016, people with disabilities were significantly underrepresented in the 2018 apprenticeship population.

Until recently, the AHEAD series of reports on the numbers of people with disabilities registered with disability support services in HEIs (see indicator 1.3.1) did not include any information on apprenticeships. The 2021/22 report was the first in the series to analyse the participation of disabled individuals engaged in apprenticeships through HEIs. (59) In the 2022/23 report, data on apprenticeships was provided by 10 of 24 participating HEIs, up from 9 for the 2021/22 report. (24) Overall, it was reported that there were 7,630 individuals on craft apprenticeships across responding HEIs in 2022/23, of which 510 or 6.7% were registered with their institution’s disability support service; this represents a 20% increase from 2021/22. (24) There were 1,730 students/learners engaged in other apprenticeships across responding HEIs in 2022/23, of which 2.3% (n = 21) were registered with the disability support service. This represented no change from 2021/22. (24)

The Action Plan for Apprenticeships 2021-2025 contains a number of actions relating to people with disabilities. (60) One action commits the National Apprenticeship Office (NAO) to establishing a performance framework to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of apprenticeship which includes the monitoring of apprentice mix in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and disability.

Another action in the Action Plan was to deliver a bursary programme to provide funding support up to 100 apprentices each year who are experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage and who are from target groups, including lone parents, Travellers and Roma, and people with disabilities. In Budget 2023, a total of €400,000 was granted to DFHERIS under the heading of access and inclusion measures, of which €100,00 was allocated to this bursary for targeted access for eligible learners to apprenticeship courses. The bursary was also made available in 2024. Up to €3,000 per apprentice is available to help with costs associated with accommodation, travel, equipment, and preparation for training. While the bursary scheme is welcome, the NDA notes that online information relating to the Access and Inclusion Bursary does not refer anywhere to disability and that disability is not included as a stated eligibility criterion for the scheme. (61)

The Action Plan for Apprenticeship also included an action to conduct a baseline survey of the more than 6,000 apprentice employers in Ireland to assess employer attitudes and awareness of employer supports relating to supporting employees with disabilities. In 2023, the first annual national survey of apprenticeship employers was conducted. The report on the findings from that survey in December 2023 does not mention disability. (62)

**Indicator 2.3 on the number of persons with disabilities in receipt of case management services through Intreo and the broader public employment service was dropped due to lack of availability of data.**

## 2.4 Proportion of EmployAbility participants exiting into employment (Outcome)

The EmployAbility programme is a national employment service dedicated to improving employment outcomes for jobseekers with a disability. EmployAbility participants are people with a disability, who are ‘job ready’, able to work for a minimum of eight hours per week, and who need the support of a job coach to obtain employment in the open labour market. The service is described as not suitable for those that have limited ability or skills. The duration of the service is 18 months.

Table 9 shows the number of participants on the EmployAbility programme from 2014 to 2023, the numbers exiting into employment (where available), and the proportion of participants who have exited into employment. The number of participants on the scheme increased each year from 2,936 in 2014 to a peak of 3,128 in 2018, before falling each year to an overall low of 2,675 in 2023.[[19]](#footnote-19)

An independent review of the EmployAbility service conducted by Indecon and reported on in 2016 found that the service was well received by clients and employer organisations. However, it also found that the service supports only a small cohort of clients relative to the likely demand for supported employment services. (63) The review made recommendations with regard to improving the rate of persons placed in employment. These included ensuring appropriate referrals in the first instance and linking funding with programme performance.

The rate of placement in employment has indeed increased. In 2014, 30.3% of participants exited into employment. This has increased over the lifetime of the CES, peaking at 44.5% in 2022. In 2023, 40.6% of EmployAbility participants exited into employment.

Table 9: Data on EmployAbility participants 2014-2023

| **Year** | **Number of participants** | **Number of people exiting into employment** | **% of participants exiting into employment** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2014 | 2,936 | 891 | 30.3 |
| 2015 | 3,000 | N/A | *unable to calculate* |
| 2016 | 3,095 | 920 | 29.7 |
| 2017 | 2,994 | 1,027 | 34.3 |
| 2018 | 3,128 | 1250 | 39.9 |
| 2019 | 3,103 | 1211 | 39 |
| 2020 | 3070 | 1133 | 36.9 |
| 2021 | 2969 | 1052 | 35.4 |
| 2022 | 2780 | 1237 | 44.5 |
| 2023 | 2675 | 1125 | 40.6 |

Source: Department of Social Protection

## 2.5 Number of persons with mental health difficulties receiving support under the IPS model of supported employment (Process)

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is a specific approach developed to support people who use mental health services to source and maintain paid, mainstream employment. It is run by the Community Mental Health Service. It works by integrating an Employment Specialist into mental health teams to support service users to return to work. These employment specialists may be employed by the State or a third-party specialist provider.

Following a pilot project called Integrating Employment and Mental Health Support (IEMHS) (64), the DSP and the HSE collaborated to roll out the IPS model more widely. Between its official rollout in October 2018 and February 2020, the service had received 1,143 referrals.[[20]](#footnote-20) Four hundred and twenty of these were active clients of the service at the end of February 2020, 311 were on a waiting list, and the remaining 412 people had exited the service. As of 2020, there was an outcome of the achievement of competitive employment in 43% of cases.

In 2023, 774 people availed of IPS support. The NDA recommends that, going forward, data on the numbers availing of IPS support and their outcomes be reported annually.

As part of the National Standard Operating Procedure for the delivery of IPS, quality is routinely evaluated by fidelity reviews. A recent review of outcomes in two sample areas, CHO9 and CHO4, showed that a mean of 46% of participants achieved competitive employment (range: 16% to 88%), with fidelity outcomes of fair to good, and with high dropout rates in some areas.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Recently published qualitative research into the IPS model in Ireland has demonstrated benefits of the model beyond the vocational, including increased confidence, well-being, and positivity which contributed to more purposeful and satisfying time use, participation in activities, and engagement with others. (65)

## 2.6 Percentage of persons with disabilities using public transport services for their journey to work vs non-disabled counterparts (Process)

Affordable and accessible transport is essential for many people to get to college and work. In consultations, disabled people frequently mention the lack of accessible, reliable, and connected transport as a challenge to participation in society and work. The Census collects information on the means of transport to work for persons with and without a disability aged 15 and over. Public transport use can be approximated by looking at the numbers taking the ‘bus, minibus or coach’ or ‘the train, DART or Luas’ to work, according to the census. However, this information does not allow full assessment of the accessibility of public transport services for persons with disabilities for the following reasons:

* a bus, minibus or coach could also refer to a private service,
* the train, DART and Luas exclude many rural areas, and
* these data relate only to those already in employment, while a lack of accessible transport is often cited as a barrier to employment and education for those with disabilities.

Figures from Census 2022 show that 8.1% of those with disabilities who were working took a bus, minibus or coach to work, and this was higher than those without disabilities (5.5%). The proportion of persons with disabilities taking the train, DART or Luas to work was 3.5% in 2022, compared to 2.9% of people without disabilities.

Figure 7: Means of public transport to work of persons with and without disabilities, 2022

The higher proportion of disabled people using public transport as indicated by the Census may be attributable to the overrepresentation of disabled people working in lower paid sectors (meaning that car ownership is not affordable), inability to drive due to some types of impairment, or perhaps that disabled people are more likely to work in roles that are not conducive to working from home.

**Transport**

Transport plays a crucial role in increasing participation in education and employment. Progress has been made in improving the accessibility and reliability of public transport in Ireland over the lifetime of the CES. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has a pivotal role in implementing crucial infrastructure upgrades such as new footbridges, lifts, and refurbished facilities at multiple rail stations. This includes enhanced sanitary facilities, disabled parking bays, help points, induction loops, and tactile signage, all designed to facilitate better access for passengers with disabilities. The introduction of video security systems on lifts and new signage installed at all of their stations has further contributed to a more accessible and secure travel environment in recent years.

In addition to rail improvements, the NTA has focused on enhancing bus services to meet the needs of disabled passengers. Achievements include the installation of wheelchair-accessible bus bays and stops across numerous towns, the rollout of low-floor vehicles, and the integration of visual and audible announcements on all major bus services. The Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan has provided over 100 new or additional accessible bus services, significantly improving connectivity for rural and regional communities. These advancements have enabled greater access to education, employment, and healthcare, fostering social inclusion and economic participation.

A real challenge to accessible transport is retrofitting older transport infrastructure and facilities, for example legacy Victorian era rail infrastructure. This requires considerable investment, as infrastructure improvements take time to be implemented. Matched co-funding from other governmental sources would be welcome, as demonstrated under the very successful ‘Leitrim pilot’ between the NTA and the HSE. Furthermore, the provision of accessible public transport requires a ‘whole journey approach’ which refers to all elements that constitute a journey from the starting point to destination. It also means applying the principles of Universal Design

The expansion of the TFI Travel Assistance Scheme from Dublin to Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway has empowered individuals with disabilities to travel independently by providing personal assistance on various transport services. The implementation of mystery shopper surveys, conducted by people with disabilities and older adults, has also been instrumental in identifying areas for further improvement. Increased funding for public transport services, coupled with initiatives like the Youth Adult Card and the 90-minute fare, has made transportation more affordable and accessible, benefiting all users, including those with hidden disabilities.

## 2.7 Numbers of persons with disabilities accessing Enterprise Ireland supports (Process)

The range of enterprise supports which are available either through Enterprise Ireland or Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are open and available to all, and there are no statistics available in relation to the number of people with a disability who have accessed these supports. Enterprise Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices may be generally aware that some of their clients have a disability, but this would not have been considered relevant to their application for support and information on disability would neither have been sought nor recorded.

It is important to note that over the lifetime of the CES, disabled people, when consulted, have described their experience to becoming self-employed or a sole trader as difficult and characterised by a lack of support or guidance. In 2024, a dedicated webpage was launched for disabled people with intentions to set up a business or who are already in self-employment.[[22]](#footnote-22) LEOs are advised by the NDA to create a dynamic information awareness campaign around the supports that are available and how these are accessible to disabled people.

The NDA have also advised both LEOs and EI to begin a process of data collection that measures both access to and completion of applications to receive funds, training, and services. It has been proposed by NDA to EI that a simple data survey be completed by participants when commencing and when completing their experience with EI.

## 2.7.1 Percentage of persons with and without a disability who are self-employed (Outcome)

As self-employment can provide a greater degree of flexibility than other employment types, for example in terms of working hours and location, the NDA has repeatedly emphasised the importance of self-employment as a route to positive employment outcomes for disabled people.

According to the Census, 5.0% of people with a disability (n = 60,694) were self-employed in 2022, compared to 5.8% of people without a disability (n=308,675), indicating that disabled people are somewhat, but not substantially, underrepresented among the self-employed. However, self-employment rates varied depending on the extent of disability, with 6.6% of people with a disability to some extent indicating that they were self-employed, compared to just 2.3% of people with a disability to a great extent.[[23]](#footnote-23) While it is not possible to examine trends in self-employment with respect to the population with a disability, due to census disability question changes already discussed, it is worthwhile noting that the overall proportion of people who are self-employed has fallen from 8.3% in 2016 to 5.8% in 2022.

Self-employment rates in 2022 also varied by disability type, from a low of 1.4% among people with an intellectual disability, to a high of 6.1% among those who are deaf or hearing impaired (Figure 8).

As part of the CES, Enterprise Ireland (EI) were tasked with creating a strategy that promotes and supports entrepreneurship and self-employment for people with a disability. The NDA does not have evidence to assess the impact of these measures for disabled people.

Figure 8: Population who are self-employed in 2022, by disability status and type

Source: Census 2022

## 2.8 Proportion of young persons with a disability who are NEET compared to young persons without a disability (Outcome) (N)

NEET is the term used to describe the status of a young person who is ‘not in Education, Employment, or Training’. The definition of a ‘young person’ can vary depending on the study or country, and here the age range used is 15-24. Given the changes to the Census disability questions and a lack of an alternative data source, it is not possible to look at trends in the proportion of NEETs with and without disabilities over the lifetime of the CES.

The rate of NEET in Census 2022 was 15.4% for young people with a disability, compared to 6.3% for young people without a disability. The NEET rate also varied by extent of disability, at 9.8% for young people with a disability to some extent and 27.8% among young people with a disability to a great extent.

Figure 9 shows the percentage of persons who were NEET aged 15-24 in 2022 by disability type. The largest proportion of persons classified as NEET were those who had difficulty with basic physical activities (35.4%) and those with intellectual disabilities (29.0%). The NEET rate was lowest among people who are blind or visually impaired (11%).

Figure 9: Percentage of disabled persons aged 15-24 who were NEET in 2022, by disability type

The time young people spend not in employment, education or training can increase the likelihood of unemployment, low wages, or low quality of work later in life. Although it is not possible to look at trends over time for this indicator, the NDA notes with concern that the proportion of young persons with disabilities who were NEET in 2022 was more than double that of young people without disabilities in the latter stages of the CES. More work is required to narrow this gap, and future national strategies should include actions to address this.

## Overview of Strategic Priority Two

The intention of this strategic priority was to ensure that ‘people with disabilities will be provided with individualised bridges and supports to secure jobs in the open labour market’. This strategic priority was concerned with stemming the flow of people with disabilities into joblessness. Post-age 16 options are critical to ensuring this. As evidenced by research, school leavers with disabilities require pathways into further education, training and/or higher education that are based on effective career guidance and appropriate support. This has not been fully realised, and while limited progress has been made in a number of areas, a number of gaps remain.

### Key achievements

* Early Engagement, the targeted, voluntary provision of employment services to young people receiving Disability Allowance was introduced in 2022.
* The proportion of people exiting from EmployAbility into employment has increased over the lifetime of the CES, from 30.4% in 2014 to 40.6% in 2023.
* There was a 20% increase between 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 in the number of apprentices that were registered with disability support services through HEIs (data are not available for previous years of the CES).
* Some graduates with disabilities who undertake WAM placements are now gaining permanent positions in the civil service, although the numbers are small.

### Gaps to be addressed

* There remains a need for a well-resourced supported employment system that prepares and supports people with disabilities to obtain and remain in mainstream employment. Such a system is often described as a ‘place, train and maintain model’ (66) and would involve vocational profiling, job matching and in-work support. A disabled individual would receive individualised support from a job coach, who would work to prepare them for employment, make the links with an employer, and support the individual on-site in settling in and managing job tasks. While the Irish system provides EmployAbility, WAM, Specialisterne[[24]](#footnote-24) and the IPS programme, which to some degree follow a supported employment model, there are gaps in provision. These gaps are especially pronounced for those who have high support needs or those who can only or want to work for a low number of hours per week. As advised by the NDA in earlier assessments of the CES, a successful supported employment programme requires a coherent national approach, with structured methods of support and strong links with employers. This model could also be used to provide vocational rehabilitation support for people already employed who acquire a disability and need support to return to work.
* Activity related to the provision of personal assistance (PA) in an employment context has remained stalled. An ESRI report on the Irish Personal Assistance Service commissioned by the NDA and published in 2022 reported satisfaction among many personal assistance service users with some aspects of their service, but many felt their hours allocated were insufficient. The findings suggest ‘… that systemic shortfalls have a clearly detrimental effect on the functioning and capabilities valued by the participants in relation to their ability to participate in social and economic activities that many people take for granted’. (56, p.694) As part of a previously agreed cross-departmental policy to develop a national programme of supported employment (2018), a commitment was given to further explore provision of PA services in an employment context, and the NDA advises that this should be a key priority in future strategies addressing the employment of disabled people.
* The rate of young people with disabilities not in employment, education, or training (NEET) remains more than twice that of young people without disabilities. The NDA advises that this subgroup warrants particular attention in subsequent strategies.
* The NDA advises that the areas of self-employment and entrepreneurship remain underdeveloped, and that these are two key areas requiring further action by the Department of Trade Enterprise and Employment in the new National Disability Strategy.
* While all new public transport is designed to be accessible, the real challenge lies in retrofitting older infrastructure, such as legacy Victorian-era rail facilities. This process requires considerable investment and time for implementation. Innovative funding approaches are required with joint or matched co-funding from other governmental sources such as the successful 'Leitrim pilot' collaboration between the NTA and the HSE.
* Providing accessible public transport necessitates a 'whole journey approach,' encompassing all elements from start to destination and applying Universal Design principles. This approach requires full engagement from all stakeholders involved in the transport journey, including those responsible for broader transport infrastructure and 'closed' transport services.
* The NTA needs to continue investing in upgrading rail and bus stations, constructing wheelchair-accessible bus bays and stops, purchasing low-floor wheelchair-accessible fleets, and expanding the Travel Assistance Scheme. However, it is evident that some infrastructure, such as bus bays and bus stops, particularly those adjacent to cycling infrastructure, remains unsafe for wheelchair users and others with mobility challenges.

# Strategic Priority 3: Make Work Pay

The statement of intent accompanying this priority area was that ‘Work will pay, and will be seen to pay. People who get a job and have to leave it will have a streamlined return to disability payments.’ (1) One indicator of progress is examined for Strategic Priority 3.

**Indicator 3.1 on the numbers of people with disabilities accessing the DSP ready reckoner on roll-out was removed, as no data were available.**

## 3.2 Number of people receiving disability payments/benefits (Process)

### 3.2.1 Disability allowance

The rationale for including this indicator was that by making work pay and being seen to pay, more people should be in employment and fewer in receipt of disability payments. In fact, the number of recipients of disability allowance has increased every year since the start of the CES. Between 2015 and 2022, the number of recipients increased by 32.3% (see Figure 10). (68)

**Figure 10: Total number of Disability Allowance recipients 2015-2022**

Source: Department of Social Protection annual statistical report 2023 (68)

According to a spending review on Disability Allowance (DA) conducted by the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) in 2023, inflows into DA are mostly from Jobseekers and Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) claims. Jobseeker claims as a proportion of inflows fell from around half (51%) in 2017 to around one third (34%) in 2021. Inflows to DA from DCA rose from around 20% in 2017 to around 33% in 2021. Having identified DCA as a significant pipeline for DA, the IGEES review advises that engagement with active supports at the time of transition from one payment to the other may improve the employment prospects and outcomes of the young people involved. (50) The Green Paper on disability payments reform proposed extending the age of receipt of DA from age 16 to age 18, and this is a reform that the NDA advise is pursued.

In 2020, outflows from DA were to the State Pension (40%), other social protection schemes (14%), and for unspecified reasons (46%), which may include people moving into employment, although data on this are not available.

The IGEES review also found that while employment rates are low among DA recipients, they have been increasing. As of March 2022, 15.5% of DA recipients were in work, up from 13% in 2019 (50). This likely reflects the impact of the increased weekly earnings disregard, which allows people on DA to earn a certain amount of income before their DA begins to reduce. The earnings disregard has been increased a number of times in recent years, rising from €120 to €140 in 2021 and again to €165 in 2023 (69) (70).

A survey of DA recipients conducted in 2015 showed that 43% of people receiving DA and who were not working would like to work either part-time (35%) or full-time (8%). (71) The NDA has advised the need for more flexible work options for this group of people (4).

It should also be noted that in-work DA recipients are disproportionately working in lower-paid sectors. In 2019, for example, 20% of in-work DA recipients worked in the low-wage sector of Wholesale, Retail and Trade, while very low proportions worked in the high-wage sectors of Professional Occupations (1%) and Information and Communication (2%), when compared to the overall population. (50) (72) A survey by Indecon administered as part of their 2021 cost of disability report explored barriers to income that arise as a result of disability. Respondents were asked whether they believed they would have a higher income if they did not have a disability. More than two in three respondents reported believing that they would earn more if they were not disabled, with their estimates of additional income averaging €23,540. (8)

### 3.2.2 Other disability payments

As shown in Figure 11, the number of recipients of Partial Capacity Benefit[[25]](#footnote-25) has trended upward substantially over the lifetime of the CES. The number increased between 2015 and 2016, decreased substantially in 2017 and then increased again in 2018 and annually until 2021, after which there was a small reduction in the number of recipients. Overall, the number of recipients of Partial Capacity Benefit is 91.8% higher in 2022 than it was in 2015. (68)

The number of people receiving Illness Benefit[[26]](#footnote-26) has fluctuated over the period of the CES. The number rose each year from 2015 to 2018 before dropping in 2019 and again in 2020 and increasing once more in 2021. In 2020 and 2021 the numbers include those who received Enhanced Illness Benefit for COVID-19 (a payment introduced in 2020 and ended in 2022). Overall, the number of people receiving Illness Benefit was 7.5% higher in 2022 than in 2015. (68)

The number of people receiving the Invalidity Pension has also fluctuated over the lifetime of the CES, reaching a peak of 59,230 in 2021, up from 55,115 at the start of the Strategy in 2025. Overall, however, the number of recipients was just 2.4% higher in 2022 than in 2015.

Figure 11: Recipients of Partial Capacity Benefit, Illness Benefit and Invalidity Pension 2015-2022

Note: The Illness Benefit figures for 2020 and 2021 include recipients of the temporary Enhanced Illness Benefit for COVID-19 (22,287 recipients in 2020 (73) and 14,937 in 2021 (74)).

## Overview of Strategic Priority Three

The primary goal of this priority area was that work should pay and be seen to pay for disabled people. Across multiple consultations, however, disabled people have detailed their experiences of the disincentives that exist for them in obtaining work and remaining in work. Many of those disincentives were considered and reported on by the Make Work Pay report which was produced by an interdepartmental group and published in 2017. (75)

Recommendations 9a and 9b in the Make Work Pay report focused on new entrants into the Disability Allowance scheme. These recommendations highlighted actions for 16-18-year-olds with significant support needs, with the possibility of increasing the age of receiving DA to 18 and that the 16 -18 period be paid via Domiciliary Care Allowance. The second part of this recommendation was to explore possibilities for the reform of the structure of the Disability Allowance for those between the ages of 18-22 to focus on participation in education, training and/or social inclusion, according to individual capacity. While the programme of Early Engagement currently underway through the Department of Social Protection is a useful first step, more cross-departmental engagement is necessary to ensure that the suite of training, education, and social inclusion measures are presented to the young disabled person.

The number of people in receipt of disability payments has continued to grow over the lifetime of the CES. Further, there are issues to be addressed in relation to ensuring that work pays enough, as there is evidence relating to in-work poverty among people in employment, related both to the additional costs of having a disability and the disparity in earning between disabled people and their non-disabled peers. (8)

### Key achievements

* From April 2017, if a person is in receipt of a long-term disability payment and moves off that payment to get a job, they will retain their entitlement to free travel for a period of five years, providing all other qualifying conditions for the Free Travel Scheme are satisfied.
* Budget 2023 was the third successive budget that the Government progressively increased earnings disregards, which saw people with disabilities retaining more of their payments while in employment. The earnings disregard for recipients of Disability Allowance and Blind Pension increased by almost 38% over these budgets from €120 to €140 to €165 currently.
* From 2017, if a person is in receipt of a long-term disability payment and moves off that payment to get a job, they will retain their entitlement to a medical card for a period of five years, providing all other qualifying conditions are satisfied. However, despite this amendment, many DA recipients still cite fear of losing their medical card as a key disincentive to working.
* In Budget 2024, additional funding for the Free Travel Scheme was announced to provide for those medically certified unfit to drive.
* Where a person exits a disability payment to enter employment, they can now be fast-tracked back to that payment, if the employment ceases within 12 months.
* Legislation was amended to dispense with the requirement for Disability Allowance and Blind Pension that any work undertaken must be of a rehabilitative nature.
* An online ready reckoner ‘Benefit of Work Estimator’ is now available on the MyWelfare website. This allows jobseekers to calculate the impact that starting work or increasing work hours would have on their current social welfare payment.

### Gaps to be addressed

* While Make Work Pay went some way towards addressing obstacles to employment, broader cost of living challenges, the additional costs of having a disability, and the low-paid sectors in which disabled people disproportionately work have continued to prevent the realisation of making work pay for some disabled people. The NDA advises that it is critical to target supports to poorer individuals and families, to ensure that new poverty traps are not created and that the welfare-to-work journey be as smooth as possible. Addressing the additional cost of having a disability in Ireland requires specific attention, and it is clear that obtaining employment alone may not be sufficient.
* It is unfortunate that an annual review of Make Work Pay was not conducted. The implementation of this report was not monitored and there was little oversight to ensure all actions were implemented.
* The issue of young people being eligible to receive DA at age 16 should be examined as to whether it is a disincentive to work. Information on this was collected on this during the consultations on the Green Paper on disability reform and may shed some light on this issue when published.

**Strategic Priority 4: Promote job retention and re-entry to work**

The strategic intention of this priority area was that ‘Individuals who acquire a disability during their working years will be supported to obtain, retain or regain employment, as appropriate.’(1) Four indicators of progress were examined for this strategic priority area.

**4.1 Number of persons in employment supported through the Wage Subsidy Scheme (Process)**

The Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSS) is a financial incentive scheme for employers in the private sector to hire people with disabilities. In instances where the employer and employee agree that the employee has/will have a loss of productivity of 20% or more, the WSS provides a general subsidy to address this shortfall.

Table 10 shows that the number of persons in employment supported through the WSS increased each year between 2015 and 2017, dropped in 2018, and then increased to its highest level in 2019. Although the number of recipients was higher towards the end of the CES in 2023 than at its start in 2015, the 2023 figure is lower than the 2019 peak.[[27]](#footnote-27)

**Table 10: Number of persons in employment supported through the Wage Subsidy Scheme 2015-2023**

| **Year** | **Number of employees** |
| --- | --- |
| 2015 | 2,144 |
| 2016 | 2,482 |
| 2017 | 2,669 |
| 2018 | 2,525 |
| 2019 | 2,755 |
| 2020 | 2,610 |
| 2021 | 2,474 |
| 2022 | 2,405 |
| 2023 | 2,403 |

Source: Department of Social Protection

Certain conditions of the WSS may have disincentivised employers from providing forms of reasonable accommodation, such as part-time or reduced working hours, to their employees. Until recently, for an employer to avail of the WSS, an employee had to work for least 21 hours per week.The stated rationale for this was to increase the likelihood of people with disabilities obtaining and sustaining employment in the open labour market. (76) However, concerns were raised that this threshold was too high. (77)

In addition, employers are only provided with assistance under the WSS where the employee has been in their employ for less than a year. The NDA has advised that the scheme could be made available for those who acquire a disability after 12 months, in order to provide the employer with a financial incentive to retain the employee. (77)

The Wage Subsidy Scheme is seen by some as a support for employers rather than disabled people, and in NDA consultations, some disabled people have criticised the inherent implication in the scheme that disabled people are less productive.

In 2023, a review of the WSS was announced. A public consultation on the WSS review was held in Summer 2023 (78) and a report published in August 2024. (79)

The review resulted in six recommendations aimed at increasing the accessibility and flexibility of the scheme:

* Reduce the required minimum hours of the scheme.
* Remove the language of ‘productivity deficit’ from the scheme.
* Expand the scheme to employers who employ somebody returning to work in receipt of [Partial Capacity Benefit](https://www.gov.ie/en/service/c79268-partial-capacity-benefit/).
* Expand the scheme to the community and voluntary sector and commercial state-sponsored sector.
* Review the subsidy rate on a regular basis.
* Promote and improve knowledge of the scheme.

The scheme’s hours were reduced from 21 hours per week to 15 hours per week in April 2024 based on this review, which is welcomed by the NDA. The remaining recommendations in the review will be acted upon in 2025.

**4.2 Number of successful applications to the Reasonable Accommodation Fund (Process)**

The Reasonable Accommodation Fund (RAF) has provided funding to employees with a disability and also to employers to take appropriate measures to support a disabled person to access, improve, or retain employment. The fund consisted of the Workplace Equipment and Adaptation Grant, the Job Interview Interpreter Grant, the Personal Reader Grant, and the Employee Retention Grant.

Table 11 shows the number of grant claims paid for each fund between 2015 and 2023.[[28]](#footnote-28) Table 11 highlights, in particular, the very limited uptake of the Employee Retention Grant. Between 2015 and 2023, 2018 was the first and only year in which an employer received this grant. The table also shows the clear decrease in claims for the Job Interview Grant over the period of interest, with just four claims paid in 2023, down from 32 in 2015.

Over the lifetime of the CES, DSP expenditure on the RAF rose from a low of €74,790 in 2015 to a peak of €120,413 in 2018, before dropping off (Table 12). In 2021, RAF expenditure was 27.8% higher in 2021 than at the outset of the CES in 2015. The highest level of expenditure was related to the Workplace Equipment and Adaptation Grant. With the exception of €1,900 in 2018 there was no expenditure through the Employee Retention Grant between 2015 and 2021. Over the seven years from 2015 – 2021, total expenditure across all four RAF grant schemes was €690,533. (80)

Table 11: Number of grant claims claimed through the Reasonable Accommodation Fund 2015-2023, by grant type

| **Type of Reasonable Accommodation Fund Grant** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **2018** | **2019** | **2020** | **2021** | **2022** | **2023** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Workplace Equipment and Adaptation Grant | 35 | 39 | 41 | 44 | 40 | 41 | 29 | 33 | 26 |
| Job Interview Interpreter Grant | 32 | 21 | 25 | 36 | 24 | 23 | 15 | 6 | 4 |
| Personal Reader Grant | 36 | 48 | 56 | 35 | 26 | 28 | 55 | 61 | 55 |
| Employee Retention Grant | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | 103 | 108 | 122 | 116 | 90 | 92 | 99 | 100 | 85 |

Source: Department of Social Protection

Table 12: Yearly Reasonable Accommodation Fund expenditure 2015-2021, by grant type

| **Type of Reasonable Accommodation Fund Grant** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **2018** | **2019** | **2020** | **2021** | **Total** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Workplace Equipment and Adaptation Grant | €58,108 | €58,472 | €81,635 | €100,023 | €81,984 | €83,968 | €65,118 | €529,308 |
| Job Interview Interpreter Grant | €4,816 | €3,083 | €4,295 | €6,361 | €4,269 | €4,027 | €2,878 | €29,729 |
| Personal Reader Grant | €11,866 | €16,537 | €31,619 | €12,129 | €10,903 | €18,970 | €27,572 | €129,596 |
| Employee Retention Grant | €0 | €0 | €0 | €1,900 | €0 | €0 | €0 | €1900 |
| **Total** | €74,790 | €78,092 | €117,549 | €120,413 | €97,156 | €106,965 | €95,568 | €690,533 |

Source: Department of Social Protection

A 2019 review of reasonable accommodations by the NDAidentified areas where the scheme could be examined with a view to widening its benefits. (77) The review identified low levels of awareness of the RAF amongst employers, low levels of uptake, and inconsistencies in application processing times across areas. The report also highlighted concerns about issues and conditions associated with specific grants under the RAF. For instance, the Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant was only available on a refund basis, thereby requiring employers to purchase equipment prior to receipt of funding. This can cause difficulties for smaller and medium-sized employers.

Over 2022 and 2023, the DSP undertook their own review of the RAF, which was published in August 2023. (80) This entailed a review of spending on the scheme over the previous decade, a public consultation, a literature review, and comparison with similar schemes internationally. The review concluded that there was low uptake of and low spending on the RAF over the decade preceding the review, with the scheme typically supporting fewer than 100 people each year. The review also revealed that 35% of the claims were for amounts lower than €250, that individual grants are rarely awarded for the maximum amount allowable, and that employers generally apply for funding amounts lower than €1,500. (80) The public consultation identified lack of awareness of schemes, complex paper-based application and processing systems, and low funding levels as the key reasons for the low uptake and spending.

In July 2024, a new scheme of supports called Work and Access (81) was announced to replace the Reasonable Accommodation Fund and the Disability Awareness Support Scheme (DASS)[[29]](#footnote-29), per the recommendations in the RAF review. Work and Access supports aim to remove or reduce barriers in the workplace for disabled people. Supports for employees, jobseekers and self-employed people under Work and Access include:

* Workplace needs assessment to assist in identifying the need for additional supports,
* Communication supports, both for interview purposes and in work,
* In-work support to help an individual perform in their role,
* Personal readers to assist an individual at work,
* Work equipment.

Available supports for employers under Work and Access include:

* Workplace needs assessment,
* Workplace adaptation,
* Disability equality and inclusion training.

An additional €1m was provided to implement the new scheme based on the recommendations in the RAF and DASS review. A nationwide public promotional campaign commenced in August and ran to the end of November 2024.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) have recently drafted a new Code of Practice on the provision of reasonable accommodations, with guidance for both employers and employees. Ibec and ICTU have also developed a ‘reasonable accommodation passport’ (82), which may be a helpful addition to both employee and employer when discussing the how the provision of a reasonable accommodation might work in their individual circumstances.

**4.3 Number of people exiting disability payments/benefits into employment (Outcome)**

By the end of September 2024, approximately 9,000 people had taken up employment and signed off Disability Allowance since the Make Work Pay report was published in April 2017. [[30]](#footnote-30) See 3.2.1 for more information on DA.

**Indicator 4.4 on the percentage of persons with disabilities age 20-64 unemployed after having lost or given up previous job was removed due to lack of data**.

**Indicator 4.5 on the number of queries received by the Employer Disability Information Service on retention of employees with acquired disabilities was removed as the service concluded in January 2020 and data on the nature of queries received were not available.**

## Overview of Strategic Priority Four

This intention of this priority area was to support people who acquire a disability during their working life to retain, regain, or obtain employment. Progress in this regard has been mixed. Examination of schemes relevant to the aims of this priority area shows that uptake has remained low over the course of the CES, remaining relatively static in the case of the Wage Subsidy Scheme and decreasing in the case of the Reasonable Accommodation Fund. However, towards the end of the lifetime of the CES, comprehensive reviews of these schemes have been conducted, and actions to address the recommendations of these reviews have been taken. These developments provide cause for optimism regarding increased appropriateness, accessibility, and flexibility of supports to promote job retention and re-entry to work. Nonetheless, gaps relating to smoothing transitions on re-entry to work after acquisition of a disability remain.

### Key achievements

* The review of the Wage Subsidy Scheme in 2023 and subsequent changes to the scheme’s criteria should make the scheme more accessible and flexible.
* The introduction of the new Work and Access programme, building on the recommendations of the review of the RAF and DASS, is a key achievement that should lead to increased uptake of the supports offered.

### Gaps to be addressed

* Evidence shows that the likelihood of re-entry to work following acquiring a disability or long-term health condition decreases the longer someone has been out of work. Indeed, for many private sector workers, evidence suggests there may no longer be a job to return to after a six-month absence. (83) A systematic response to returning to employment needs to be developed to ensure that people with acquired disabilities can remain in employment.
* To inform actions in this area, the ‘NDA Policy Advice on Vocational Rehabilitation Provision in Ireland’ was published in 2021 (84). This advice paper collated research on return to work from 12 jurisdictions and consultation with disabled people, through a survey and development of case studies finding that supports in Ireland were limited. The NDA advise that with the introduction of the new Work and Access scheme, there should be supports offered to both employer and employee in the return-to-work process.

# Strategic Priority 5: Provide coordinated and seamless support

The statement of intent for this priority area was that ‘The services provided by public bodies to support people with disabilities in their pathway to work and to sustain them in employment, will be both seamless and co-ordinated.’ (1) There are four indicators of progress relating to this indicator.

## 5.1 Evaluation of Ability programmes to provide innovative pre-activation approaches for persons with disabilities (Process)

From July 2018 to August 2021, the Ability programme provided funding to projects around the country focused on bringing young people aged 15-29 closer to the labour market. The Ability Programme aimed to provide work readiness supports to over 2,600 young people with disabilities and was co-financed by the Irish Government and the European Social Fund (ESF) as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020. The total programme budget was €16 million, and the programme was administered by Pobal. In total, 27 organisations received funding. A total of 1,946 participants had enrolled in the programme as of February 2021, falling somewhat short of the original 2,600 target.

An independent evaluation of the Ability Programme by Quality Matters found that of 1,019 programme participants for whom outcome data were available, 32% progressed into education or training, 42% gained a qualification, 25% obtained paid employment, and 15% obtained a voluntary social role. (73) The evaluation identified 24 recommendations under three categories, with recommendations for service providers who are supporting people with disabilities to progress into education, training or employment, future programme planning and design, and wider policy development.

In February 2021, it was announced that once the three-year Ability Programme concluded in June 2021, new measures would be put in place to ensure that funding support for young people with disabilities would remain available into the future. (74)

In August 2023, the Minister for Social Protection launched a call for applications for a new employment-related programme for disabled people, called ‘WorkAbility: Inclusive Pathways to Employment’. Workability builds on the work of the Ability programme, and incorporates learnings from the Ability evaluation, but it has broader aim of supporting people with disabilities aged 16 and older into employment. The initiative involves efforts to build the capacity of employers to recruit, retain, and progress disabled people in their workforces. It also has a focus on facilitating new partnerships amongst stakeholders (disabled people, disability services, employment services and employers) and on new approaches to providing employment supports to people with disabilities. WorkAbility aims to provide supports to up to 5,000 disabled people, is co-financed by the Irish Government and the new European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), and is also administered by Pobal. The programme closed for applications in September 2023, with 52 successful organisations notified in December 2023. Funded projects commenced on 1 January 2024 and will run to 31 December 2028. The overall budget for the programme is €36.29 million.

## 5.2 Evaluation of pilot phase to provide complementary support services to persons with disabilities (5.1 implementation plan) (Outcome)

It was understood that collaborative working across government was necessary to ensure that the CES delivered as intended. In the first CES three-year action plan (2015 to 2018) an interdepartmental working group was established to progress Action 5.1. This action was:

To work together to develop an effective co-ordinated policy approach (and draw up an implementation plan based on that approach), to assist individuals with disabilities, including those who require a high level of support, to obtain and retain employment having due regard to the implementation of New Directions.

The report from this group described the steps necessary to develop a coordinated approach to the provision of employment supports, while recommending the introduction of a national supported employment programme. This recommendation echoed an OECD report that showed ‘unequivocal evidence’ of the effectiveness of supported employment in helping persons with disabilities gain and retain work. (87)

This indicator originally sought to evaluate outcomes from the pilot phase of any demonstration projects arising from Action 5.1 in the CES. Although the cross-departmental working group for Action 5.1 developed and agreed a coordinated policy, and an implementation plan was delivered to the Minister in Q1 2018, the mechanisms to implement this policy were never agreed. As such, there were no demonstration projects to evaluate, and it is not possible to report on this indicator. While the development of the policy by the working group illustrated that cross-departmental work is achievable, a further impetus at senior official level in the relevant government agencies was necessary to ensure implementation of this intrinsic part of the CES. Lack of agreement on advancing Action 5.1 was one of the key stumbling blocks in agreeing a final three-year action plan for the strategy.

## 5.3 Number of persons with mental health difficulties benefiting from IPS model of supported employment (Process)

See indicator 2.5.

## 5.4 Development of protocols and MoUs for cross-departmental cooperation, at national and local level (Process)

The original CES strategic action plan 2015 to 2018 described two actions relevant to protocols and MoU development. Action 1.8 was to agree a Memorandum of Understanding between SOLAS and DSP to include targets and outcomes for people with disabilities. In addition, a second action called 5.2 was to develop and implement Interdepartmental protocols for cross-referrals at national and local level and within organisations.

These actions were realigned as actions within Pathways to Work 2016-2020 which set out a number of actions in relation to protocols and Memoranda of Understanding (MoU). (85)

## Overview of Strategic Priority Five

The aim of this priority was to ensure that individuals with disabilities can access coordinated and seamless support in their pathways to work. Progress under this priority area has been mixed and, when consulted, many disabled people describe their experience of employment services and supports as fragmented and insufficient. Considerable work remains to create the coordinated and seamless pathways envisioned in the CES.

### Key achievements

### An evaluation of the Ability Programme by Quality Matters found positive education and employment outcomes for those who participated. Although, the programme has now ceased, in theory the learning should have been brought into the new WorkAbility programme.

* A total of 52 organisations secured funding for five years (2024 to 2028) under WorkAbility to support people with disabilities into employment.

### Gaps to be addressed

* Over the course of this strategy, the implementation of the agreed cross-departmental policy in relation to a coordinated programme of supported employment (Action 5.1) was not progressed. The need for such support was highlighted as part of the consultations on the new National Disability Strategy, and so the NDA would encourage that an appropriate objective and actions in relation to this are included.
* The Pathways to Work report identified a number of elements necessary for a more coordinated and seamless pathway into employment for persons with disabilities.
* Over the lifetime of the CES, there have been several pilot projects that have specifically supported disabled young people, both in transitions and in activation. These projects have assisted many young people in their journey into employment. However, the lack of knowledge transfer from these pilots remains a significant gap in the mainstream provision of employment supports. The NDA advises to limit the role of pilot projects unless and until each project has built in capacity for mainstreaming the learning in the relevant government department.
* Overall, the NDA advises that reliance on pilot programmes and national programmes with short-term funding leads to a lack of continuity and stability, fragmented support, and inconsistent outcomes. Sustained, long-term funding is necessary for developing robust support systems that lead to meaningful employment outcomes.

# Strategic Priority 6: Engage employers

The statement of intent for Strategic Priority 6 was that ‘Employers will be supported and encouraged to employ people with disabilities, to support job retention and to facilitate return to work after the onset of a disability.’ (1) There are six indicators relating to this strategic priority.

## 6.1 Number of persons in employment supported through the Wage Subsidy Scheme (Process)

See indicator 4.1.

## 6.2 Number of applications for Reasonable Accommodation Fund (Process)

See indicator 4.2.

## 6.3 Employer engagement with the Employer Disability Information service (Process)

The Employer Disability Information (EDI) service, which began as a pilot project in 2016, arose from CES Strategic Priority 6. The intention was to pilot, with the assistance of the NDA, an employer helpline to provide expert guidance, authoritative information, and peer support to employers in relation to the employment of staff with disabilities. The service was managed by a consortium of employer bodies, with the key aim of providing peer-to-peer advice, rather than this being provided by a disability body. The service comprised a dedicated helpline giving advice and information to employers about recruitment and employment of disabled people, a web-based information resource incorporating guidance and a FAQ section, an outreach information service for employers, and an information and resource sharing service for participating organisations through the EDI employer peer network.

The number of calls to the helpline and the reasons for those calls were not collected or recorded. A web audit of the service was conducted in 2018 which offers some insight. It found that users increased by 42% between 2017 and 2018, bringing the total users to 9,763 by 2018. (86) It found that by 2018, page views had increased by 11% since 2017 and 42% since 2016. However, a gradual increase in bounce from 2016-2018 was recorded, meaning people were increasingly leaving the site after arriving, rather than exploring it further. The need to further develop the website, tools, and content was highlighted and signalled as a priority for future development, but the pilot project came to its conclusion in January 2019.

The EDI service conducted surveys in 2016 and 2018 on employers’ attitudes to employing disabled people and on the impact of the EDI service. (75, 76) In 2018, the survey found that just under half (48%) of 250 respondents were aware of the service, which represented a 21% increase from 2016, a positive reflection on the progress of the pilot programme. In 2016, just over one in three (38%) responding enterprises had employed a disabled person, while by 2018 this had increased to 52%. Surveys in both years indicated that the larger the enterprise, the greater the likelihood that they had employed someone with a disability.

Since the pilot project ended in January 2019, there has been a gap in the provision of peer-to-peer support to employers. Other types of support for employers are now provided through Employers for Change, which is funded by DCEDIY through the Open Doors Initiative (ODI). This service is addressing the gap in information and support and, in doing so, works ‘to enable employers with all the information and advice needed to hire, employ, manage and retain staff with disabilities’. In 2022, Employers for Change worked with 95 employers through 185 interactions. These include Brown Thomas / Arnotts, Coillte, Dell, EY, and Salesforce. In 2023, the service worked with 2000 businesses.

Employers for Change has also published an employer’s toolkit (89), research findings on inclusive recruitment, and prepared advice on six key themes. These are:

* Reasonable Accommodation Passports (82)
* Inclusive and Accessible Communication (90)
* How to Write an Inclusive Job Description (91)
* How to Run an Accessible Online Event (92)
* The Guiding Principles of Disclosure (93)

The NDA has advised that the sustainability of Employers for Change is examined, and that multi-annual funding is committed.

## 6.4 No. of employers in peer-to-peer networks (Process)

EDI launched the Employer Peer Network in 2018 to continue sharing best practice and to address common fears about disability at work, such as employee performance, high cost of supports, poor attendance, retention difficulties, and health and safety concerns. At the time of the conclusion of the pilot phase, the online forum had 37 registered users and 80 members. (86)

When Employers for Change was established, they continued supporting employers, with a less specific focus on peer-to-peer engagement. They did this through specific events and through videos of employers talking about their experience on the website and by providing employer toolkits informed by learning from employers.

## Overview of Strategic Priority Six

Strategic Priority 6 focused on fostering employer engagement to create a more inclusive labour market for people with disabilities, aiming to increase the number of employers actively engaged in recruiting, retaining, and supporting employees with disabilities. Despite some promising initiatives, there is limited evidence that efforts under this priority area have made a meaningful difference to employment outcomes for disabled people.

An OECD report on Ireland published in 2021 stated that:

Employer engagement and support for employers are critically important for the improvement of the labour market situation for persons with disabilities in Ireland. Effective strategies for employer engagement are critical to overcome disability-related misperceptions and discrimination and to raise awareness about available support programmes and subsidies. Yet, Ireland has an underdeveloped employer engagement structure with respect to information and supports for the employment of persons with disabilities. (6, p.9)

While the new Work and Access scheme and the pending Code of Practice on reasonable accommodation should provide information and support to employers, the NDA is also aware of the need for employers to access peer support.

With regard to public sector employment over the course of the CES, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) has examined alternative recruitment approaches. In this regard, DPER has supported the OWL project and has made a commitment to continue to promote and enable opportunities for people with disabilities in civil service competitions. This has led to continued work to learn about potential barriers to access as well as work to remove these barriers. In addressing this commitment, DPER will ‘work with partner organisations to build capacity of the programmes to accommodate and aim at increasing the placements annually for the programmes as well as increase the number of permanent roles for programme graduates in order to meet the wider goal of increasing the rate of employment for people with disabilities’[[31]](#footnote-31).

### Key achievements

* The Employers for Change initiative has been a positive development in terms of the provision of advice and information to employers about recruiting and employing people with disabilities.

**Gaps to be addressed**

* An agreed employer awareness campaign did not occur, and the NDA advises that this could be a valuable initiative. Work to adopt October as an employer awareness month was initiated and then stalled.
* Employers for Change is currently providing support for employers. However, a more permanent employer support service is required with particular emphasis on support for small- to medium-sized employers, who have requested peer-to-peer support and information relevant to businesses that do not necessarily have a HR department.

# Conclusion

The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) 2015-2024 has been the primary policy framework for addressing the barriers to employment faced by disabled people in Ireland. This report reflects on the achievements, challenges, and lessons learned over the CES’s lifetime, with particular emphasis on the six strategic priorities: building skills, providing bridges into work, making work pay, promoting job retention, offering seamless support, and supporting employers.

Despite some progress in addressing its primary aims, several gaps and challenges persist. Due to data limitations, it is not possible to say with certainty whether the overall number of disabled people in work increased over the course of the CES, but it is possible to say that the disability employment gap did not close in any meaningful way.

One of the major achievements in the decade of the CES has been the improvement in educational and training opportunities for people with disabilities. Over recent years, the proportion of disabled individuals in further and higher education appears to have increased significantly. One in five new entrants to higher education disclosed a disability in the 2022/2023 academic year. Furthermore, the positive growth in initiatives like the Access and Inclusion Model, as well as the introduction of PATH 4 funding are very positive developments in terms of the educational inclusion of children and young people with disabilities. While these developments lay a crucial foundation for building skills and independence, the persistent educational attainment gap between people with and without disabilities is a continuing concern. More needs to be done to ensure that the increased access to education translates into better educational and employment outcomes, particularly by improving the provision of school-based career guidance and expanding transition supports for young people leaving the education system.

In the area of employment supports, there have been positive developments through initiatives like the Ability Programme and its successor, WorkAbility, which aim to bridge the gap to the labour market for people with disabilities. These programmes have provided or currently provide supports to help disabled people gain qualifications, paid employment, or voluntary roles. Despite these advances, challenges remain in scaling and sustaining these programmes. The reliance on short-term initiative and pilot programmes leads to fragmentation of support and inconsistent outcomes. To create lasting impact, future strategies should prioritise long-term, stable funding for such programmes, ensuring continuity in the supports provided.

While schemes such as the Wage Subsidy Scheme and Reasonable Accommodation Fund have provided necessary financial and practical supports to both employees and employers, the uptake of these has been low and remained low over the course of the CES, meaning they have not contributed to any meaningful narrowing of the disability employment gap. Data show that Ireland continues to have one of the highest disability employment gaps in the European union, underscoring the need for more comprehensive and coordinated policy measures to address this. It is hoped that, over time, recent reforms to the Wage Subsidy Scheme and the introduction of the new Work and Access programme will go some way towards addressing the employment disparities between people with and without disabilities.

The issue of making work pay has been another central focus of the CES, with efforts directed at addressing the financial disincentives that deter people from seeking employment. However, progress in this area has been slower than anticipated, and the number of people claiming a range of disability payments has increased substantially over the lifetime of the CES.

Another area in which progress has been limited is in job retention and re-entry for individuals who acquire a disability while in employment. Gaps remain in relation to the provision of systematic vocational rehabilitation supports in Ireland. Evidence suggests that the longer someone with a disability is out of work, the less likely they are to return. To address this, future strategies should focus on improving return-to-work pathways and ensuring that employers have the resources and knowledge necessary to support employees with newly acquired disabilities to retain their jobs.

Employer engagement was another key pillar of the CES, with initiatives aimed at encouraging businesses to hire and retain disabled employees. Programmes such as the Employer Disability Information (EDI) Service and, latterly, Employers for Change have made important strides in this area, providing resources, support, and information to employers about disability in the workplace. However, the conclusion of the EDI pilot in 2019 left a gap in peer-to-peer support for employers, and while other employer-based initiatives have since emerged, more needs to be done to ensure that employers have access to the tools and knowledge they need to foster truly inclusive workplaces.

For any cross-government strategy, strong coordination and effective communication are key drivers of effective implementation. Communication across the lifetime of the strategy was identified as a clear weakness by CES stakeholders. This was most clearly described by those who were involved in discussions on establishing targets for delivery of specific actions. An additional communication deficit articulated by those involved in the CES implementation group was the non-communication of the Chairperson’s resignation. Other challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, overlap with other national strategies (e.g., the National Disability Inclusion Strategy), the handover of responsibility for the strategy from one department to a new department, and a high level of turnover of personnel involved in the strategy’s coordination and implementation were highlighted as barriers which ultimately led to a loss of momentum and a de facto disbanding of monitoring and oversight structures for the strategy. In particular, failure to agree and implement an action plan for the final years of the strategy has been seen as contributing to the CES not meeting all of its objectives.

A key learning is that, in hindsight, a 10-year strategy may have been too long to sustain momentum, and shorter strategies may be more effective. The fact that there were other disability strategies being implemented in parallel with the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (i.e., the National Disability Inclusion Strategy and the National Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities) may have affected the level of focus on the CES. With the current development of a new National Disability Strategy, a recently launched Autism Innovation Strategy, and a National Housing Strategy for Disabled People currently being implemented, it will be important to make sure that each is given adequate attention and resourcing to ensure it is fully implemented as intended.

Article 27 of the UNCRPD recognises the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others. The NDA advises that the upcoming National Disability Strategy, which will extend to 2030 and include a dedicated employment pillar, offers a valuable opportunity to progress the realisation of rights under Article 27. By building on the lessons learned from the CES and ensuring that future strategies are robust, well-coordinated, and adequately resourced, Ireland can make significant strides towards employment equality for its disabled population.

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# Appendix 1: Amendments to original indicator set for midterm report

| **Strategic priority** | **Core indicator of progress** | **Amended?** | **Reason for change** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | Number of children receiving targeted pre-school support (levels 4-7 of the AIMS model) | No. |  |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | Proportion of people with disabilities achieving each educational attainment level (primary, secondary, tertiary, FET) by disability type. | No. |  |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | The ratio of people without a disability to people with a disability aged 15-65 in further education and training by disability type | Yes. Deleted. | The following indicator shows all people (of any age) accessing further education and training who have a disability. |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | Proportion of all people accessing higher education, further education and training who have a disability. | No. |  |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | Improved transition planning for children and young people with disabilities | Yes – the two indicators below on guidance counselling and deferral of school leavers have been subsumed into this indicator. |  |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | Expansion of guidance counselling to special schools and special classes within mainstream schools | Yes – moved under overarching indicator above “Improved transition planning for children and young people with disabilities”. |  |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | No. of deferrals of adult day services to take up further education and training | Yes – moved under overarching indicator above “Improved transition planning for children and young people with disabilities”. |  |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | Destination of persons existing Rehabilitative Training – i.e. to work, further education and training, or other | No. |  |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | Number of people with a disability on disability payments/benefits e.g. Disability Allowance, Illness payment/ Invalidity pension, by age and by disability type | Yes – to “Proportion of Disability Allowance recipients aged 16-19 years” | Under this strategic priority (SP), the rationale for this indicator originally was that as expectations are raised and supports provided for other activities, the nos. of people opting for Disability Allowance at age 16 should decrease. Hence, this indicator now focusses on the younger cohort taking up Disability Allowance. |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | Nos. of persons with disabilities in work situations not compatible with New Directions/ UNCRPD continue to decrease | Yes – “Nos. of persons with disabilities in sheltered work”. | Changed to reflect what the data will illustrate. |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | Nos. of persons with disabilities in:* Work-placements
* Internships
* Apprenticeships
 | Yes. Work learning programmes added. | Changed to include ‘work learning programmes’. |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | No. of persons with disabilities in receipt of case management services through Intreo and broader public employment service | Awaiting data. Will hopefully also include data on outcomes of Intreo engagement. |  |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | Percentage of persons with disabilities able to access public transport services for journey to work vs non-disabled counterparts | Yes. Slightly rephrased to “Percentage of persons with disabilities *using* public transport services for journey to work vs non-disabled counterparts.” |  |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | Compared to the general population the % of people with disabilities age 15-65 in: * Employment
* Unemployment
* Not active
* Education and training

by disability type | Yes. Removed from this SP. Retained in SP6. | To avoid repetition. |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | Percentage of people with a disability employed in the public sector | Yes. Removed from this SP. Retained in SP6. | To avoid repetition. |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | Nos. of persons with disabilities who are self-employed | Yes. Removed from this SP. Retained in SP6. | To avoid repetition. |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | Nos. of persons with disabilities accessing Enterprise Ireland supports (e.g. LEOs, entrepreneurship programme etc.) | No. |  |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | Nos. of persons with disabilities increasing their level of participation in the work-force – e.g. increasing part-time hours etc. | Yes. Deleted.  | At present there does not appear to be a national dataset available which could illustrate the original intention of this indicator.  |
| SP3: Make work pay | Nos. of people accessing DEASP ready reckoner on roll-out | No. |  |
| SP3: Make work pay | Number of people with a disability on disability payments/benefits e.g. Disability Allowance, Invalidity pension, by disability type | Yes. “Number of people with a disability on disability payments/benefits”. | Disability type not available. |
| SP3: Make work pay | Expenditure and Nos. of persons for whom wage subsidy scheme is paid, reasonable accommodation fund, back to education allowance, EmployAbility Service, any complementary support service  | Yes. There have been a number of changes to this indicator. Each scheme now has its own specific indicator, and all have been removed from this SP, but moved to/retained in other SPs. Wage subsidy scheme now“Number of persons in employment supported through the Wage Subsidy Scheme”. In SP4 and SP6.Reasonable accommodation fund now “Number of applications for Reasonable Accommodation Fund”. In SP4 and SP6.EmployAbility service: “Proportion of EmployAbility participants exiting into employment”. Moved to SP2.Back to Education Allowance: “Numbers of Back to Education Allowance recipients with disabilities”. Moved to SP1. | Indicators were moved to/retained in the most relevant SPs.The focus of the indicators is on persons with disabilities benefitting from the scheme, rather than the input of expenditure.Indicator names were rephrased to reflect changes. |
| SP4: Promote job retention and re-entry to work | Expenditure and Nos. of persons for whom wage subsidy scheme is paid, reasonable accommodation fund, back to education allowance, EmployAbility Service, any complementary support service  | Wage subsidy scheme now“Number of persons in employment supported through the Wage Subsidy Scheme”. In SP4 and SP6.Reasonable accommodation fund now “Number of applications for Reasonable Accommodation Fund”. In SP4 and SP6.EmployAbility service: “Proportion of EmployAbility participants exiting into employment”. Moved to SP2.Back to Education Allowance: “Numbers of Back to Education Allowance recipients with disabilities”. Moved to SP1. | Indicators were moved to/retained in the most relevant SPs.The focus of the indicators is on persons with disabilities benefitting from the scheme, rather than the input of expenditure.Indicator names were rephrased to reflect changes. |
| SP4: Promote job retention and re-entry to work | Number of people with a disability on disability payments/benefits e.g. Disability Allowance, invalidity pension, by disability type if possible | Yes: “Number of people exiting disability payments/benefits into employment.” | Rephrased to reflect more specific data on those exiting out of disability payments. Availability of data TBC. |
| SP4: Promote job retention and re-entry to work | Compared to the general population the % of people with disabilities age 15-65 in: * Employment
* Unemployment
* Not active
* Education and training

by disability type | Yes: “Percentage of persons with disabilities age 20-64 unemployed after having lost or given up previous job”. | This original indicator is still retained in SP6 but removed from here as it is not possible to examine the profiles of those with acquired disabilities using census data. Instead, this indicator is used to examine cohorts of people where employment retention and re-entry is of relevance. |
| SP4: Promote job retention and re-entry to work | Percentage of people with a disability employed in the public sector | Yes. Removed from this SP but retained in SP6. | This original indicator is retained in SP6 but removed from here as it is not possible to disaggregate data relevant to those with acquired disabilities.  |
| SP4: Promote job retention and re-entry to work | Nos. of calls from employers regarding retention of employees with acquired disabilities | Yes. “Queries received by the Employer Disability Information Service on retention of employees with acquired disabilities”. | There was no available information on calls. Rephrased to reflect available data. |
| SP5: Provide coordinated and seamless support | Evaluation of Ability programmes to provide innovative pre-activation approaches for persons with disabilities | No. |  |
| SP5: Provide coordinated and seamless support | Evaluation of pilot phase to provide complementary support services to persons with disabilities (5.1 implementation plan) | No. |  |
| SP5: Provide coordinated and seamless support | Nos. of persons with mental health difficulties benefiting from IPS model of supported employment | Yes. | Also relevant to SP2 so has been duplicated. |
| SP5: Provide coordinated and seamless support | Development of protocols and MoUs for cross-departmental cooperation, at national and local level | No. |  |
| SP6: Engage employers | Nos. of people accessing wage subsidy scheme, reasonable accommodation fund, back to education allowance, EmployAbility Service, any complementary support service  | Wage subsidy scheme now“Number of persons in employment supported through the Wage Subsidy Scheme”. In SP4 and SP6.Reasonable accommodation fund now “Number of applications for Reasonable Accommodation Fund”. In SP4 and SP6.EmployAbility service: “Proportion of EmployAbility participants exiting into employment”. Moved to SP2.Back to Education Allowance: “Numbers of Back to Education Allowance recipients with disabilities”. Moved to SP1. | Indicators were moved to/retained in the most relevant SPs.The focus of the indicators is on persons with disabilities benefitting from the scheme, rather than the input of expenditure.Indicator names were rephrased to reflect changes. |
| SP6: Engage employers | Nos. of calls to EDI, disaggregated by call type | Yes: “Employer engagement with EDI service”. | There was no available information on calls. Rephrased to reflect available data. |
| SP6: Engage employers | No. of employers in peer-to-peer networks | No. |  |
| SP6: Engage employers | Compared to the general population the % of people with disabilities age 15-65 in: * Employment
* Unemployment
* Not active
* Education and training

by disability type | Yes: “Principal economic status of persons with and without disabilities age 20-64”. | Rephrase and change of age to 20-64 to represent the working age population. |
| SP6: Engage employers | Percentage of people with a disability employed in the public sector | No. |  |
| SP6: Engage employers | Nos. of persons with disabilities who are self-employed | Yes: “Percentage of persons with and without a disability who are self-employed.” | Rephrased to take into account proportion instead of numbers. |
| SP6: Engage employers | Nos. of persons with disabilities accessing Enterprise Ireland supports (e.g. LEOs, entrepreneurship programme etc.) | Yes. Deleted. | Data on persons with disabilities is not collected by EI. This indicator may be reinstated if this changes.  |

# Appendix 2: New indicators added to original set

| **Strategic priority** | **New indicator of progress** | **Reason for inclusion** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | The proportion of persons with disabilities who are early school leavers compared to persons without disabilities | Persons with disabilities traditionally have higher than average early school leaving rates. This indicator offers another way to consider the inclusion of persons with disabilities in education. Data source is the census, meaning we can track change from 2011 and 2016, to 2021 and 2026. |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | Proportion of young persons with a disability who are NEET compared to young persons without a disability | This is a useful indicator as time spent NEET can increase the likelihood of unemployment, low wages, or low quality of work later on in life. Proportion of young people who are NEET highlights an important gap in education, training and employment and supports into same. Data source is the census, meaning we can track change from 2011 and 2016, to 2021 and 2026. |

# Appendix 3: Amendments to midterm indicator set for final report

| **Strategic priority** | **Core indicator of progress at midterm review** | **Amended since midterm report?** | **Reason for change** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | Number of children receiving targeted pre-school support (levels 4-7 of the AIMS model) | No, |  |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | Proportion of people with disabilities achieving each educational attainment level (primary, secondary, tertiary, FET) by disability type. | Yes. “Proportion of people with disabilities achieving each educational attainment level”  | Trend data by disability type not available. |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | Proportion of all people accessing higher education, further education and training who have a disability. | No. |  |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | Improved transition planning for children and young people with disabilities | No. |  |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | Destination of persons existing Rehabilitative Training  | No. |  |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | Proportion of Disability Allowance recipients aged 16-19 | No. |  |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | Numbers of Back to Education Allowance recipients with disabilities. | No. |  |
| SP1: Building skills, capacity and independence | The proportion of persons with disabilities who are early school leavers compared to persons without disabilities | No. The indicator has been retained although it has not been possible to provide updated information on trends. |  |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | Number of persons with disabilities in sheltered work | Yes. Removed. | Ireland has shifted away from segregated employment in sheltered workshops towards employment models more in line with the UNCRPD.  |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | Numbers of persons with disabilities in:* Work-placements
* Internships
* Work learning programmes
* Apprenticeships
 | No. |  |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | Number of persons with disabilities in receipt of case management services through Intreo and broader public employment service | Yes. Removed. | No data available. |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | Proportion of EmployAbility participants exiting into employment | No. |  |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | Number of persons with mental health difficulties benefiting from IPS model of supported employment | Yes. Wording amended to: “Number of persons with mental health difficulties receiving support under the IPS model of supported employment” | Rephrased to better capture the data available (numbers receiving support rather than numbers benefitting). |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | Percentage of persons with disabilities usingpublic transport services for journey to work vs non-disabled counterparts | No. The indicator has been retained and data presented for one time point, but trend data for this indicator are not available. |  |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | Nos. of persons with disabilities accessing Enterprise Ireland supports  | Yes. Removed.  | No data available. |
| SP2: Provide bridges and supports into work | Proportion of young persons with a disability who are NEET compared to young persons without a disability | No. The indicator has been retained and data presented at one time point. It has not been possible to examine trends over time. |  |
| SP3: Make work pay | Number of people accessing DEASP ready reckoner on roll-out | Yes. Removed. | No useful data available. |
| SP3: Make work pay | Number of people with a disability on disability payments/benefits  | No. |  |
| SP4: Promote job retention and re-entry to work | Number of persons in employment supported through the Wage Subsidy Scheme | No. |  |
| SP4: Promote job retention and re-entry to work | Number of applications to the Reasonable Accommodation Fund | Yes. Indicator renamed to “Number of *successful* applications to the Reasonable Accommodation Fun”’. | Wording amended to accurately reflect the data provided by the DSP for this indicator. |
| SP4: Promote job retention and re-entry to work | Number of people exiting disability payments/benefits into employment | No. |  |
| SP4: Promote job retention and re-entry to work | Percentage of persons with disabilities age 20-64 unemployed after having lost or given up previous job. | Yes: Removed. | Data unavailable. |
| SP4: Promote job retention and re-entry to work | Queries received by the Employer Disability Information Service on retention of employees with acquired disabilities | Yes. Removed. | This service is no longer in operation.  |
| SP5: Provide coordinated and seamless support | Evaluation of Ability programmes to provide innovative pre-activation approaches for persons with disabilities | No. |  |
| SP5: Provide coordinated and seamless support | Evaluation of pilot phase to provide complementary support services to persons with disabilities (5.1 implementation plan) | No. An explanation of the indicator has been retained, but no updates could be provided. |  |
| SP5: Provide coordinated and seamless support | Number of persons with mental health difficulties benefiting from IPS model of supported employment | Yes. Wording amended, as in SP2 above, to “Number of persons with mental health difficulties receiving support under the IPS model of employment’ | Rephrased to better capture the data available (numbers receiving support rather than numbers benefitting). |
| SP5: Provide coordinated and seamless support | Development of protocols and MoUs for cross-departmental cooperation, at national and local level | No. |  |
| SP6: Engage employers | Number of persons in employment supported through the Wage Subsidy Scheme | No. |  |
| SP6: Engage employers | Number of applications for Reasonable Accommodation Fund | No.  |  |
| SP6: Engage employers | Number of employers in peer-to-peer networks | No  | No data available.  |
| SP6: Engage employers | Principal economic status of persons with and without disabilities age 20-64 | Yes. Removed from SP6 and reported as a primary indicator of the strategy. | This indicator was deemed to be an overarching indicator of strategy progress and not related specifically to employer engagement. |
| SP6: Engage employers | Percentage of people with a disability employed in the public sector | Yes. Removed from SP6 and reported as a primary indicator of the strategy. | This indicator was deemed to be an overarching indicator of strategy progress and not related specifically to employer engagement. |
| SP6: Engage employers | Percentage of persons with and without a disability who are self-employed | Yes. Removed from SP6 and reported instead under SP2 (2.7.1).  | The indicator is now considered in conjunction with the indicator relating to supports provided to people with disabilities by Enterprise Ireland. |

1. DCEDIY was formed in 2020 and responsibility for disability policy transferred from the Department of Justice and Equality. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The National Strategy for Women and Girls, the Migrant Integration Strategy, and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Although a report on the Green Paper consultation has not yet been published the NDA were present at or assisted with a number of the consultation sessions gov.ie - Green Paper on Disability Reform: A Public Consultation to Reform Disability Payments in Ireland (www.gov.ie) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This census was planned for 2021 but delayed to 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Data on disability were derived from answers to two questions on the Census 2022 form. In the first question, census respondents were asked to indicate if they had any of a list of long-lasting conditions or difficulties, by choosing one of three response options: ‘yes, to some extent’, ‘yes, to a great extent’ or ‘no’. In previous censuses, only two response options were provided: ‘yes’ and ‘no’. The second question asked respondents to indicate whether they had difficulty doing any of a series of daily activities, by responding that they had ‘no difficulty’, ‘some difficulty’ or ‘a lot of difficulty’. In previous censuses, respondents were only asked to respond to this question on activity limitation if they had already indicated that they experienced one of the conditions or difficulties in the previous question; in 2022, everyone was asked to respond to both questions. In 2016, 13.5% of the population of Ireland was classified has having a disability. In Census 2022, 21.5% of the population had a disability (to any extent). Specifically, 8% of the population had a disability ‘to a great extent’, and 14% had a disability ‘to some extent’. It is not possible to say with any certainty whether this increase represents (or to what extent it represents) an actual increase in disability prevalence or instead reflects the changes to the census questions. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Relevant refers to the public bodies that report under Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005. Section (3) of Part 5 of the Act states that there are public bodies which Part 5 does not apply to. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. SILC collects data on Global Activity Limitation Indicator (GALI), which captures the respondent’s self-assessment of whether he/she is limited in ‘activities people usually do’ by any on-going physical, mental or emotional health problem, including disease or impairment, and old age. It does not ask people directly to indicate whether they have a disability. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Data were provided by the CSO for primary, secondary, and tertiary education, but not for further education and training specifically. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See: https://universaldesign.ie/education [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Minister for Social Protection made her decision on this issue following direct engagement with DCU PhD student Catherine Gallagher. (29) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. This project involved the development and implementation of a speech and language and occupational therapeutic support model for mainstream schools, special schools, and early years settings. Through a collaboration between the Department of Health, Department of Education, DCEDIY, the HSE and the NCSE, therapeutic supports were collectively delivered and capacity built across 75 schools and 75 early years settings under a new model of provision (33) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The most up-to-date range of resources is available here: [gov - National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) Guidelines, Tips and Handouts for Parents and Teachers (www.gov.ie)](https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/84e52e-national-educational-psychological-service-neps-guidelines-tips-and-/#transfer-from-primary-to-post-primary) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The most up-to-date range of resources is available here: [Transitions – National Council for Special Education – Working to deliver a better special education service (ncse.ie)](https://ncse.ie/transitions-2) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Some young people have accessed a personalised budget through the personalised budget demonstration programme that is currently ongoing. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Information provided directly to the NDA by WALK. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Unpublished data provided by HSE (Angela Moran). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Data provided to the NDA by the DSP. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Figures from the DSP presented to the CESIG in February 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Data provided directly to the NDA by the Department of Social Protection. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Data on this indicator received from the HSE and Genio at the time of the CES midterm review. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Information presented at the IPS Conference on 10th October 2024 and shared with the NDA by Mental Health Reform. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See [Self-Employment-Supports-for-Persons-with-Disabilities - Local Enterprise Office](https://www.localenterprise.ie/Portal/Discover-Business-Supports/Tailored-Supports-for-Persons-with-Disabilities/Self-Employment-Supports-for-Persons-with-Disabilities.html#:~:text=This%20is%20a%20dedicated%20webpage%20for%20persons%20with,a%20business%20or%20who%20are%20already%20in%20self-employment.) [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Data on self-employment among people with disabilities provided directly to the NDA by the CSO. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Specialisterne Ireland is a specialist consultancy for neurodivergent people that supports them into employment. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Partial Capacity Benefit is a social welfare payment scheme that allows an individual to return to work or self-employment while continuing to receive a payment from the DSP, if they have reduced capacity to work. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Illness Benefit is paid by DSP to persons who cannot work due to illness. It is paid for up to two years, with the duration depending upon PRSI contributions. If a person remains ill after this time and is likely to be permanently incapable of work, they may qualify for Invalidity Pension. If, however, a person has a disability that is expected to last for a year or more they may qualify for a means-tested Disability Allowance. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Data provided to the NDA by the DSP. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Data provided directly to the NDA from the DSP. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The Disability Awareness Support Scheme was a funding programme for private sector employers to arrange and pay for disability awareness training for their staff who work with a colleague with a disability. The maximum funding amount is €20,000. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Information provided directly to the NDA by the DSP. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Information provided directly to the NDA by DPER. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)