



Analysis of the European Semester Spring Package 2025

European Disability Forum Paper

By Haydn Hammersley | June 2025

**Analysing the focus on disability issues in the 2025
Country Reports and Country-specific Recommendations**



Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission's CERV Programme. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Introduction	3
Aim of this document.....	3
General overview	3
Austria.....	4
Belgium	5
Bulgaria	7
Croatia	9
Cyprus.....	10
Czechia.....	14
Denmark.....	14
Estonia	15
Finland	16
France	18
Germany.....	18
Greece.....	19
Hungary.....	20
Ireland.....	21
Italy	24
Latvia	25
Lithuania.....	27
Luxembourg	29
Malta	30
Netherlands.....	32
Poland	33
Portugal	35
Romania	36
Slovakia.....	38
Slovenia.....	38
Spain.....	39
Sweden.....	40
Document credits.....	41

Introduction

The European Disability Forum

The European Disability Forum is an independent NGO that represents the interests of 100 million Europeans with disabilities. EDF is a unique platform which brings together representative organisation of persons with disabilities from across Europe. EDF is run by persons with disabilities and their families. We are a strong, united voice of persons with disabilities in Europe.

Aim of this document

Here we will analyse two types of documents for each EU Member State: the Country Reports and the Country-specific Recommendations. These are released each spring as part of what is known as the European Semester Spring Package.

In the European Semester process, Country Reports and Country-specific Recommendations work together to guide EU Member States in shaping their economic and social policies.

The **Country Reports** are published each spring and assess each country's economic and social situation, identifying challenges and progress. Based on this, the European Commission issues **Country-specific Recommendations**, which are tailored suggestions telling each Member State what reforms or actions it should prioritise in the coming year. While the reports analyse the situation, the recommendations suggest solutions.

Member States use this input to plan budgets, develop reforms, and adjust national policies. Importantly, it also influences how they use their EU funds.

In this document, we will give you a general overview of what the Country Reports and Country-specific Recommendations said about disability issues. After this, we will focus on each Member State and share all the extracts in which disability issues were mentioned.

General overview

In 2025 there has been a noticeable increase in the mentions of disability within the European Semester Spring Package. It is a positive sign that the European Commission is increasingly aware of the issues faced by

persons with disabilities, and the responsibility of Member States to address them.

The most common issues raised in the country reports were the following, ordered from the most frequent to the least:

- Employment (appeared in 27 out of the 27 country reports)
- Poverty and social exclusion (22 out of 27 country reports)
- Social protection and disability allowance (10 out of 27 country reports)
- Support services and long-term care (9 out of 27 country reports)
- Education (7 out of 27 country reports)
- De-institutionalisation (6 out of 27 country reports)
- Housing (3 out of 27 country reports)
- Healthcare (2 out of 27 country reports)
- Urban planning (2 out of 27 country reports)
- Digitalisation (2 out of 27 country reports)
- Transport (1 out of 27 country reports)
- Energy poverty (1 out of 27 country reports)
- Climate preparedness (1 out of 27 country reports)

Four Member States had disability included in their country-specific recommendations, meaning that, of all the issues raised in the country reports, these were seen to be a priority to address. This again is a clear increase compared to previous years, where disability was usually limited to the recitals of the documents.

In the 2025 Spring Package, Belgium, Bulgaria and Ireland received recommendations regarding the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market, and Estonia received a recommendation on the adequacy of its social protection schemes for persons with disabilities.

Austria

Support services

- In 2024, more than 40% of women cited care of adults with disabilities or children as a reason for working part-time

Health

- Budgetary risks are expected to increase, including healthcare expenditure due to heat stress, prolonged allergy seasons and new infectious diseases. These health risks disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, including older people, pregnant women, children and individuals with chronic illnesses or disabilities.

Employment

- Further improving the labour market participation and integration of low-skilled workers, older people, those from migrant backgrounds and persons with disabilities could ease labour market tightness.
- In 2023, the employment gap between persons with and without disabilities increased to 26.1 percentage points, while Austria has not yet set up a target for employment of persons with disabilities.
- Although below the EU average, 21.5% of persons with disabilities were at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2023.

Belgium

Employment

- Despite targeted activation measures and some financial incentives, lower-educated people born outside the EU, particularly women, and persons with disabilities continue to face low labour market participation.
- Several indicators, such as the unemployment trap, disability employment gap and low-wage trap, point to working disincentives in Belgium. The complex social benefits system (some of which are not based on the recipient's income or financial situation) and easy access to some forms of early retirement fail to incentivise long-term labour market participation.
- For persons with disabilities, the employment gap compared to those without disabilities is still one of the highest among Member States (33.5 percentage points in 2024 vs 24.0 percentage points in the EU). Belgium set the target to reduce the disability employment gap to 24.5 percentage points by 2030. The NEET rate for young persons with disabilities also remains high at 27.2% in 2022.
- Public services were identified as a key area for action in 2024, but they remain far from their target of 3% employment for persons with disabilities, achieving only 1.44% in 2023.
- About 62% of persons with disabilities were active in Belgium in 2023, in spite of majority of them wanting to work. Measures taken to improve the employment of persons with disabilities include reforms and clarifications to the system of combining work and benefits.

Disability allowance

- The share of disability beneficiaries among the working age population in Belgium in 2018 was of 4.8%, one of the highest in the EU. A study by the Conseil Supérieur de l'Emploi shows that the

economic context alone cannot explain this increase. The study also points to structural issues and advises (among other points) that the disability regime should not be made more financially attractive than the other benefit systems.

Poverty and social exclusion

- People in a more vulnerable situation on the labour market, such as those with a migrant background or those with disabilities, experience higher poverty and social exclusion risks. Concerning persons with disabilities, despite a continuous, albeit small, decline since 2020, 30.0% of persons with disabilities were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (EU 28.8%) in 2024. This is linked to lower employment and a high disability employment gap in Belgium.

Housing

- Individuals over 16 years of age with disabilities suffer an above EU average housing cost overburden (12.0% vs 10.4%).

Use of EU funds

- Recent initiatives also involve a reform of employment financial aid of the Brussels Capital Region's public employment service, with funding from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), to support the costs of equipment adaptations and to incentivise the recruitment of jobseekers with disabilities to employers and increase sustainable labour market integration. Following the final report of the federal action plan for disabilities 2021- 2024, a new law was adopted in 2024, mandating every new government to draft an action plan on the issue
- The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is allocating EUR 836 million for measures that aim to improve access to the job market, especially for the long-term unemployed, young and older people, those with a low level of education, persons with disabilities and inactive persons.
- Belgium's Recovery and Resilience Plan contains several reforms and investments related to fairness and social policies. One of the measures within the payment request assessed over the last year is a deinstitutionalisation strategy for older people and people with a disability, as part of the Walloon health policy. A framework decree was adopted to support pupils with psychosocial and educational issues relating to COVID-19 to prevent early school leaving in the French Community; and 1 358 ICT devices and Wi-Fi points were

provided for schools in Brussels with a high level of vulnerable pupils.

Country-Specific recommendation

- Strengthen the effectiveness and targeting of active labour market policies to further integrate disadvantaged groups into the labour market, in particular people with a low level of education, older workers, people with a migrant background and persons with disabilities.

Bulgaria

Employment

- The gap in employment between persons with and without disabilities is much larger than in other Member States. The disability employment gap (the gap between the employment rate of people with a disability and people without a disability) was one of the highest in the EU in 2024.
- 52% of young persons with disabilities were NEET in 2022. The disability employment gap has also been consistently one of the highest in the EU (except for 2021), standing at 35.4 percentage points in 2024 (vs EU: 24 percentage points), a 5.9 percentage points increase from 2022.
- So far, Bulgaria has not set an employment target for persons with disabilities.
- The country continues to struggle with structural challenges that negatively impact its competitiveness and undermine its economic growth potential. They include: i) adverse demographic developments; ii) migration of talent; iii) skills shortages in the face of the twin green and digital transition; iv) underrepresentation of some groups due to low capacity of active labour market policies, particularly Roma, persons with disabilities, young people and people with low levels of education; and v) stark regional disparities.

De-institutionalisation and support services

- Another persistent challenge is insufficient access to long-term care. Some groups continue to be left behind, especially Roma, but also young people and people with disabilities. Amid a rapidly ageing population, access to long-term care services for older people and persons with disabilities remains limited. In 2022, spending on long-term care (LTC) in Bulgaria was among the lowest in the EU (0.5% of GDP vs 1.7% in the EU).

Poverty and social exclusion

- Despite improvements and progress towards the 2030 poverty-reduction target, the country still has a high share of the population experiencing poverty or social exclusion risks. This in particular affects children, older people, persons with disabilities, and Roma. The social protection system's limited capacity and uneven access to quality services make it hard for Bulgaria to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth. This has also contributed to one of the highest rates of income inequality in the EU.
- The at risk of poverty and exclusion rate was one of the highest in the EU for persons with disabilities (43.8%).

Use of EU funds

- Approximately EUR 632 million from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is allocated for social inclusion and a further EUR 180 million for material aid to the most vulnerable. More sustainable, holistic and multisectoral initiatives could help effectively address the challenges faced by children, persons with disabilities, Roma and the rural population.
- The minimum income reform (a deliverable under the Recovery and Resilience Plan), in force since June 2023, has improved the social assistance system, allowing for better adequacy and larger coverage of a variety of support schemes. The take-up of disability-related benefits has increased, and their adequacy has been improved. Yet, there is scope for further measures to strengthen access to social protection
- The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund support public services, including the creation of additional capacity in healthcare facilities to host an additional 400 000 people a year, and an additional 53 800 places in education facilities. In addition, Bulgaria has allocated EUR 632 million (more than 25% of its total ESF+ resources) to social inclusion measures, with close to EUR 137 million to combat child poverty. The operations strive towards improving the situation of vulnerable groups, particularly children, older people, people with a disability and Roma.
- Bulgaria's Recovery and Resilience Plan contains several reforms and investments related to fairness and social policies. These include social inclusion initiatives promoting personal mobility and accessibility for people with permanent disabilities

Country-specific recommendations

- Address labour shortages, by effectively implementing measures to increase the employment level of persons with disabilities, people with a lower level of education, Roma and inactive persons.

Croatia

Employment

- Despite an overall improving labour market, some vulnerable groups – particularly older people, low-skilled workers and persons with disabilities – face persistent challenges in accessing quality employment. The disability employment gap (the gap between the employment rate of people with a disability and people without a disability) has increased significantly in recent years and reached 41.0 percentage points in 2024. This is worrying considering the already higher risk of poverty faced by this group.
- The employment situation for persons with disabilities is particularly concerning. The disability employment gap increased significantly over two consecutive years, rising from 28.7 percentage points in 2021 to 41.0 percentage points in 2024, well above the EU average of 24.0 percentage points. Only 38.3% of people with some or severe disabilities are active in the labour market, well below the EU average of 64%.
- In 2022, almost half of young persons with disabilities were not in employment, education or training (48% compared to the EU average of 27.3%).
- Croatia has not yet set a target for the employment of persons with disabilities.

Poverty and social exclusion

- Despite improving living standards, income inequality in Croatia is increasing. Although employment is on the rise, the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion is slowly increasing, with continued regional disparities. In addition, certain groups, such as older people and persons with disabilities, face higher and increasing poverty rates.
- Poverty and social exclusion remain moderate, but the situation has been worsening for older people and persons with disabilities. Worsening trends are noticeable in at risk of poverty and exclusion rates for vulnerable groups, especially older people and persons with disabilities. The at risk of poverty and exclusion rate for persons with disabilities increased for the third consecutive year,

reaching 40.2% in 2024, and is among the highest in EU (28.8% EU average). 49.1% of persons with severe disabilities are at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Croatia (vs the EU average of 36.3%, 2024). This is linked to lower employment and a high disability employment gap in Croatia

Social protection

- The adequacy and coverage of Croatia's social protection system is insufficient. The impact of social transfers (excluding pensions) on poverty reduction is among the lowest in the EU (a 21.6% reduction in poverty vs 34.4% in the EU on average in 2024) and has significantly declined in the last decade.

De-institutionalisation and support services

- Limited availability of long-term care services and significant shortages of qualified staff are hindering the process of deinstitutionalising and transitioning persons with disabilities to independent living. It also leads to a high proportion of informal carers delivering intensive informal care.

Use of EU funds

- Croatia is implementing the national plan for equalising opportunities for persons with disabilities for the period 2021- 2027, and personal assistance services are regulated through the country's Law on Personal Assistance, with support from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). Further policy initiatives would be beneficial for expanding employment and training opportunities and would help improve labour market inclusion for persons with disabilities.
- The ESF+ is investing EUR 600 million in community-based services and social inclusion, focusing on children at risk, people with disability and vulnerable groups. This includes EUR 200 million for teaching assistants and personal assistance services for people with a disability.

Cyprus

Employment

- The labour market is expanding in line with Cyprus's rapid economic growth. 2024 saw a further rise in the employment rate, from 79.5% in 2023 to 79.8% in 2024. However, for certain categories of the population such as young people, older women and persons with disabilities, obstacles to entering the labour market persist.

- The public employment service could improve support for employers in hiring persons with disabilities and offering targeted employment schemes for older women.
- Efforts to increase the attractiveness of vocational education and training could focus on digital skills, with support in particular for persons with disabilities, in order to meet rising demand for such skills.
- The capacity of the active labour market policy system is relatively low while young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs), persons with disabilities, and women are much less integrated into the labour market. At the same time, labour shortages are significant in construction and accommodation, and for occupations requiring specific skills or knowledge for the green transition. The projected decline of the working-age population risks further exacerbating these labour shortages.
- The NEET rate is higher for young women than men (14.1% versus 11.7%) and for young persons with disabilities (at 43%, also above the respective EU average of 27.3%).
- Persons with disabilities face persistent challenges as indicated by the relatively wide disability employment gap (24.5 percentage points versus 24.0 percentage points in the EU in 2024), even after a narrowing of 2.5 percentage points from 2021.
- Cyprus has not yet set an employment target for persons with disabilities. Employer support programmes for persons with disabilities could be extended with a greater emphasis on sectors that can offer prospects for further career development. The disability quota system would also need to be extended to the private sector to increase the employment rates for persons with disabilities. This would further ensure their fair and non-discriminatory recruitment in the labour market, not just in the public sector.
- The social economy sector remains underdeveloped. Development of these sectors in Cyprus can be very rewarding and generate positive outcomes, notably in terms of employment and social cohesion. A draft law amending the Social Enterprises Law of 2020 and a regulation creating a registry for social enterprises were approved in December 2023. However, progress is slow with the registration of social enterprises, including the employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Support services

- Public expenditure on long-term care is low while out of pocket expenditures are high, raising issues of affordability and accessibility of care services.

Poverty and social exclusion

- Some population groups, such as persons with disabilities and older people, still face relatively high social exclusion and risk of poverty.
- Persons with disabilities and older people are particularly affected by poverty and social exclusion. Between 2022 and 2024, the at-risk of poverty or social exclusion rates of persons with disabilities increased further (31% in 2024 from 29.7% in 2023), and so did the at risk of poverty and exclusion gap compared to persons without disabilities, now among the widest in the EU (17.7 percentage points vs EU 10.9 percentage points).
- Women over sixteen with disabilities have seen a slight improvement in their situation, with their at risk of poverty and exclusion rates slightly reducing from 32.4% in 2023 to 31.7% in 2024. While men over sixteen with disabilities have seen a worsening of their situation, with their at risk of poverty and exclusion rates rising from 26.8% in 2023 and 30.2% in 2024.
- Active inclusion is key also for persons with disabilities, and minimum income benefits criteria could exempt them from strict rules regarding employment to further incentivise their activation.

Energy poverty

- Energy poverty is also high in Cyprus, while the social economy sector needs to be further developed. Addressing these challenges will contribute to inclusive growth and competitiveness.
- While also offering reduced electricity tariffs for vulnerable consumers (20% lower than the normal tariff), national programmes for improving energy efficiency in housing, financial aid for
- installing residential solar energy systems, and the 2022 programme targeting households in energy poverty where persons with disabilities live. In addition, there are protective rules against grid disconnections for vulnerable consumers during critical periods.

Transportation

- The stagnation in public transport use poses challenges in promoting sustainable and inclusive transportation systems, especially for persons with disabilities.

Education

- Young people with disabilities (aged 18-24) tend to leave school earlier than their peers without disabilities (19.2% compared to 8.6% in 2022).

- Developing digital skills is also very important for persons with disabilities. Neither the official national curriculum nor VET schemes and incentives have shown any essential change and shift towards digital capacity development and empowerment of persons with disabilities.
- The increasingly deteriorating educational prospects of students with disabilities are documented in the latest statistical information published in 2023. The data suggest that Cyprus has one of the lowest scores in terms of the share of persons aged 16 or over with a disability by educational attainment level.

National policies

- To further strengthen support to vulnerable groups, Cyprus developed a national strategy for gender equality and a national strategy for active ageing, updated its disability strategy, and is implementing the European Child Guarantee according to its national action plan.

Use of EU funds

- Cyprus has developed a European Year of Skills action plan titled 'Modern Professional Development for the green and digital transitions', which is financed under the RRF and ESF+. It sets out several initiatives that are expected to reduce skills mismatches and contribute to upskilling and training 100 000 people. This includes vulnerable groups, such as those not in education, employment or training (NEETs), persons with disabilities and people aged 55 and over.
- Cyprus dedicates 47% of the ESF+ allocation (EUR 104.2 million) to social inclusion and 18% (EUR 40.5 million) to combating child poverty and providing support to the most deprived. The ESF+ fosters social cohesion in Cyprus via various actions and initiatives such as subsidy schemes for the employment of vulnerable groups (at least 500 people will be supported into employment), the restructuring of the social welfare services (10 new institutional services to be set up), the provision of affordable early childhood education and care services for children aged up to four years old, home care services for at least 70 people with a disability, a new family intervention and support centre for autism and more.

Czechia

Employment

- Disadvantaged groups, including Ukrainian refugees, people of Roma background and persons with disabilities, struggle to access jobs.
- The disability employment gap was 21.7. percentage points in 2024 (EU: 24 percentage points). In December 2024, Czechia set an employment goal of 45% for persons with disabilities. To achieve this target, in 2024, Czechia approved measures to support social enterprises, cooperatives and non-profits employing persons with disabilities by providing access to funding and improving regulatory conditions.

Denmark

Employment

- People with disabilities continue to be underrepresented in the labour market. The job vacancy rate fell to 2.4% in the 4th quarter of 2024 but remains high in construction and services and in key sectors linked to the digital and green transition and healthcare. While young people, non-EU nationals, and people with disabilities fare well compared to their EU peers, they continue to face barriers in the job market.
- Vulnerable groups still face challenges, and their increased participation in the labour market could help alleviate labour shortages. Persons with disabilities continue to face significant labour market barriers: the disability employment gap rose to 26.1 percentage points in 2024, which was above the EU average of 24 percentage points. In 2023, 38% of NEETs (persons neither in employment, education or training) had a disability. Denmark has not yet set an employment target for persons with disabilities.

Digitalisation

- Denmark remains one of the EU's top performers in terms of digital public services. In 2024, the national audit office published a report on digital accessibility aimed at ensuring that all websites are accessible to persons with disabilities. With many online platforms available for accessing different specialised services, there is potential, however, for redundancy and confusion.

Poverty and social exclusion

- Denmark's strong welfare system continues to tackle poverty and social exclusion effectively, though some risk indicators have increased slightly in recent years. Social benefits play a key role in reducing poverty and inequalities, but vulnerable groups still face significant disparities, especially among non-EU nationals, persons with disabilities and single-parent households. Further efforts to alleviate inequalities affecting these groups will help foster inclusive growth and competitiveness.
- The at risk of poverty and exclusion rate for persons with disabilities has been increasing, going from 23.1% in 2019 to 28.1% in 2024. Although it is below the EU average (28.8%), there is room for improvement to reverse the trend of increasing inequality.

Housing

- The housing cost overburden remains high, despite efforts to mitigate its impact. Denmark continues to have one of the highest housing cost overburden rates, standing at 14.6% in 2024 compared to the EU average of 8.2%. The overburden rate for people with some or severe disabilities was 21.2%, which is roughly double the EU average of 10.4%. Although Denmark has an effective social protection system and a variety of social benefits to mitigate its impact, housing cost overburden remains a significant challenge.

Estonia

Poverty and social exclusion

- The proportion of older people, single person households and people with disabilities at risk of poverty or social exclusion remains high, due to low social spending and low impact of social transfers (excluding pensions) on poverty reduction. The risk of poverty and social exclusion among persons with disabilities is one the highest in the EU.
- For older people and persons with disabilities, the at risk of poverty and exclusion rates (39.4% and 39.1%) fell considerably in the last two years, dropping by 13.1 and 8.7 percentage points respectively, but remain among the highest in the EU due partly to the relatively low adequacy of pensions and the social protection system.
- Reviewing the adequacy and efficiency of the benefits system could help reduce poverty risks, as could targeting support towards

vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, single-person households and older people.

Health and support services

- Despite past measures, Estonia faces persistent challenges in healthcare and long-term care provision. Unmet needs are twice as high for persons with disabilities, mostly as a result of regional disparities in access to services. Public expenditure on long-term care and healthcare services remains low and well below the EU average, and workforce shortages and reliance on municipal funding further limit service provision.

Education

- The dropout rate from education is higher for people with disabilities. Early school leaving remains higher for persons with disabilities (24.9% vs 8.9% for people with no disability in 2024), indicating the need for stronger inclusion efforts.

Employment

- After rising sharply in 2022, the disability employment gap narrowed by 6 percentage points in 2023 and stabilised in 2024, below the EU average (20.8 percentage points vs 24 percentage points in 2024). Estonia set the target for the employment rate of persons with disabilities at 52% by 2030.

Use of EU funds

- The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is financing accessible, high-quality social services to support carers and persons with disabilities in accessing the job market and society.

Country-specific recommendations

- Reduce the risk of poverty by strengthening social protection for older people, single-person households and people with disabilities by increasing the adequacy and efficiency of the benefit system, and for the unemployed, inter alia by extending the coverage of unemployment benefits, in particular to those in non-standard forms of work, while maintaining fiscal sustainability.

Finland

Support services

- Rising demand and costs require changes to the structure of old-age care. In January 2025, the staff-to-patient ratio of 24-hour long-term care services (those that are suitable for care recipients

with the highest levels of need) was reduced from 0.65 to 0.6. Similarly, the wellbeing services counties are aiming to reduce the 24-hour care provision by substituting it with communal living, suitable for those in need of care with lower disability needs. However, resetting the services for older people will need to carefully consider the types of care needed, to effectively address the different levels of disability.

- Access to long-term care (LTC) for older people and persons with disabilities is increasingly limited by labour shortages and the limited availability of places for 24-hour services, particularly as the demand for LTC is expected to increase with the ageing population. The LTC staff-to-patient ratio was reduced from 0.65 to 0.6 from the beginning of 2025 to achieve annual public savings of EUR 45 million. However, expert evaluations highlight the risk that LTC services may become under-resourced if the expenditure savings become excessive. In addition to publicly funded services, LTC relies heavily on local care providers. The role of home-based and family care is also central, particularly in light of limited places in care homes or assisted living facilities.

Social protection

- As the working-age population in Finland continues to decline, achieving a high level of employment becomes ever more important to support the welfare state.

Employment

- Demographic changes make it essential to harness the skills and potential of both younger and older people, inactive persons with disabilities, focusing on i) setting specific targets, ii) education, iii) reskilling and iv) flexible employment options to boost economic resilience and foster intergenerational solidarity.
- The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health coordinates a number of programmes to improve the quality of working life and wellbeing at work to tackle shortages across the labour market. These include a mental health at work programme and a work ability programme, which supports people with partial work ability, ageing workers, people outside of employment and other worker groups at risk of claiming disability pensions. Additional measures could be taken to ensure effective and adequate activation support to get key target groups, such as the long-term unemployed, into work.

Poverty and social exclusion

- 24.4% of persons with some or severe disabilities are at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Finland.

France

Employment

- Vulnerable groups, including people who are less qualified, people with a migrant background and persons with disabilities, have difficulties accessing the labour market.
- The labour market situation of persons with disabilities also remains challenging. In 2023, the disability employment gap stood at 22.4 percentage points, below the EU average of 24 percentage points, but above the lower level of 15.7 percentage points recorded in 2018.
- To address the employment challenges of vulnerable groups, in December 2023, the government adopted the 'full employment law', overhauling the public employment service (PES). The reform aims to improve the support provided to job seekers and persons with disabilities.

Poverty and social exclusion

- More than 1 in 4 people with disabilities faced a risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2024 (28.4%). While this is slightly below the EU average of 28.8%, it is 12.6 percentage points higher than for those without disabilities.

Use of EU funds

- The ESF+ supports social inclusion for the most vulnerable people, including children and access to affordable housing and essential services in mainland France and in the outermost regions (EUR 383.9 million). Among their interventions, ESF+ programmes will support at least 3 million people not in employment, 32 200 people who are homeless and 214 400 people with a disability.

Germany

Employment

- Although the disability employment gap has decreased from 24 percentage points in 2022 to 22.6 percentage points in 2023, it still stands around the EU average of 21.5 percentage points.

Poverty and social exclusion

- 39.5% of persons with severe disabilities were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2023, higher than the EU average (35.6%) and on the rise since 2021 (31%). This is a gap of 18.3 percentage points compared to persons without disabilities.

Employment

- Greece's labour market performance continues to improve, but key structural challenges remain. Unemployment in Greece disproportionately affects women, young people, and persons with disabilities. Regional disparities are particularly pronounced with weaker labour market outcomes observed in northern regions.
- To date, Greece has not set an employment target for persons with disabilities. The disability employment gap stood at 28.5 percentage points in 2024, 4.5 percentage points higher than the EU average. About 52% of persons with disabilities were active in the labour market compared to the EU average of 64%. 40% of young persons with disabilities in Greece are neither in employment, nor in education or training.

Poverty and social exclusion

- The share of people at risk of poverty, severely materially and socially deprived, or living in a household with very low work intensity is high, particularly among third-country nationals, Roma, and persons with disabilities.
- The at risk of poverty and exclusion rate for persons with disabilities increased by 2.4 percentage points, reaching 33% in 2024 and remaining higher than the EU average (28.8%). The severe material and social deprivation rate for persons with disabilities also increased by 1.8 percentage points in 2024, standing at 18.5%.

De-institutionalisation and support services

- The low availability and affordability of quality non-residential community-based care is delaying the deinstitutionalisation process and the transition to independent living of persons with disabilities. Greece is currently developing a strategic framework for Long-term care services with support from the Technical Support Instrument (TSI).

Social protection

- In 2024, Greece adopted a new 2024- 2030 strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities, aiming to coordinate efforts to improve their social inclusion and protection. The accompanying action plan contains EU cohesion policy and Recovery and Resilience Plan measures, such as the personal assistant scheme, the expansion of supported living houses and improving accessibility to public buildings.

Use of EU funds

- The EU cohesion policy funds and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) support active labour market policies for vulnerable groups and measures to promote the integration of third-country nationals and Roma in the labour market. The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) allocates EUR 360 million for material and food aid to the most vulnerable. Complementary initiatives could further help to effectively address the challenges faced by vulnerable groups.
- Up until 2026, the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility will support a wide range of measures to promote employment, including among women, the long-term unemployed and people with disabilities, and upgrade the national healthcare system.
- In Greece, the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) is focused in 2024 on enhancing the coordinating mechanism supporting the rights of persons with disabilities, promoting the integration of AI in the public administration and strengthening the green budgeting reform.
- Among their interventions, the ESF+ programmes will support at least 176 000 people in unemployment, more than 11 000 children and students with a disability, as well as the operation of around 1 250 social and primary healthcare structures at local level.

Hungary

Poverty and social exclusion

- The benefits of economic growth have not been equally distributed. While the overall poverty indicators perform better than the EU average, poverty outcomes remained worse than the EU average among children in large families, low-skilled workers, older people, persons with a disability and the Roma population.
- Educational attainment and employment status play an important role in determining poverty risks. The effects were significantly more pronounced for people with disabilities and people from the Roma community, who often have a low level of education and are underrepresented in the job market.
- Rural areas and some specific groups are particularly affected by poverty or social exclusion. In 2024, the at risk of poverty and exclusion rate increased among persons with disabilities (by 2.4 percentage points to 32.4%, vs 28.8% in the EU), and is 18 percentage points higher than for persons without disabilities. This is linked to lower employment and high disability employment gap in Hungary

Education

- Stronger basic skills are key if Hungary is to expand its productive workforce. Early school leaving remains above the EU average, particularly among persons with disabilities, in the least developed regions and rural areas, and among the Roma community.
- Early school leaving and a lack of basic skills among young people are the main barriers to skills development later in life. Early school leaving decreased for two consecutive years, in 2023 and 2024. For persons with disabilities, it stands at 41.2%, one of the highest in the EU.

Employment

- The disability employment gap decreased by 2.4 percentage points in 2024 but remains high, at 27.2 percentage points. Almost 40% of young persons with disabilities are NEETs (neither in employment, education, or training). To improve the situation, Hungary recently set an employment target for persons with disabilities.
- There is a need to support upward social convergence, improving the participation in the job market of vulnerable groups, including Roma and persons with disabilities, by reskilling and upskilling and strengthening the capacity of the public employment service to provide training and comprehensive support services.

Ireland

Employment

- Despite improvements, Ireland still has one of the highest disability employment gaps in the EU (36.7% vs 21.5%)
- Targeted activation measures, like the 'early engagement' process, whereby the Irish public employment service actively engages with people with disabilities, helped many people find employment.
- The low level of inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market is a longstanding challenge, showing limited improvements. At 38.2percentage points in 2024, the disability employment gap is one of the largest in the EU, with the gap widening slightly from the previous year (+0.1 percentage points).
- Significant differences in labour market participation among different cohorts indicate room to activate much-needed labour (see section below on labour shortages). While the situation is somewhat improving, disadvantaged groups (especially persons with disabilities, single parents and the Roma and Traveller communities) continue to face barriers in accessing (quality) jobs. Comparing their employment indicators to disadvantaged cohorts in other

Member States suggests that they encounter bigger obstacles when seeking work (see dedicated sections below). These structural differences result from various factors, including access to (social) services such as education, housing or childcare and discrimination at work.

- Ireland has one of the highest rates of persons with disabilities neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs), at 35.1% in 2022(160). Lack of suitable housing close to jobs and insufficient accessible transport options are barriers to employment. Inadequate access to reasonable accommodation at work is also an issue.
- From 2024, the new 'Work and Access' programme provides various means of support to employees and employers alike to address the additional needs of applicants or workers with disabilities. Associations representing persons with disabilities repeatedly flagged the fear of losing access to social benefits, medical cards, or even social housing due to the increase in their income after taking up work. Adjusting the eligibility income thresholds of existing welfare schemes (e.g. medical cards or the disability allowance) could help better include persons with disabilities in the labour market. Permanent in-work payments could help compensate for the additional costs of living with a disability.
- Nearly 40% of all inactive women indicate that they are outside of the labour force due to caring responsibilities for children or adults with disabilities.

Poverty and social exclusion

- The percentage of persons with disabilities (32.7%) at risk of poverty or social exclusion is above the respective EU averages (28.8%).
- Although the at risk of poverty and exclusion rate of persons with disabilities has improved, Ireland is still below the EU average, with a rate of 30.1% in 2024. Some stakeholders expressed concern that the improvement was largely thanks to one-off support measures provided in recent years and that the situation would worsen once those are discontinued. The number of persons with disabilities affected by severe social and material deprivation decreased in 2024. Still almost four times as many persons with disabilities could not afford basic goods (8.5%), compared to the general population (2.3%).
- The risk of poverty or social exclusion among children decreased. The at risk of poverty and exclusion rate for children fell by 3.7 percentage points, reaching 20.6% in 2024 (vs EU 24.2%). Risks are more pronounced for children from single-parent households,

children with disabilities and children from Traveller and Roma communities.

Social protection

- The main form of financial support – the disability allowance – has not increased in line with inflation. The EUR 12 increase in the maximum personal rate of weekly disability payments came into effect in January 2025. However, the Disability Federation of Ireland estimates that a further increase of EUR 20 per week is the absolute minimum required for the disability allowance to keep pace with inflation. Currently, the Irish social protection system cannot adequately compensate for the additional costs of disability, which in 2024 amounted to around EUR 10 000-15 000 annually.

Housing

- Housing has been the biggest concern in Ireland for years, with worsening affordability and rising homelessness. Poverty has been decreasing over the past decade, yet vulnerable groups (persons with disabilities, single parents, children, Roma and Travellers) are still facing disproportionate risks of poverty and social exclusion, due in part to limited access to social services, which are often provided by the private or the voluntary sector.

Education

- Educational inequalities affect disadvantaged students. Children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, including students with disabilities, have lower educational outcomes, which is also reflected in the higher early-school leaving rate. The 'Delivering equality of opportunity in schools' (DEIS) national programme provides additional supports to schools with a high share of disadvantaged students, but not all disadvantaged students receive the support they need. Ireland is developing a new DEIS Plan to set a strategy to support children at risk of educational disadvantage in all schools, with a view to providing equitable learning opportunities to all.
- The recent investments in new special schools for students with disabilities risk increasing educational segregation. These are not in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), which Ireland signed in 2018. Inclusive measures in mainstream schools and classes would better address the needs of students with disabilities, families and schools, and would contribute to social cohesion. This could be complemented by improved coordination of educational and health, and therapy services, also at central level.

- Between the 2018/19 and 2022/23 school years, the number of students in special schools increased by 9.1%, the number of students in special classes in primary schools increased by 62.5% and the number of students in special classes in post-primary schools increased by 88.6%. Due to increasing numbers of students with additional needs, five new special schools for children with complex needs will be established in 2025, and more special school building projects are in progress.
- Persons with disabilities have generally low levels of educational attainment. In Ireland, 4 out of 10 working-age individuals with a disability have attained only primary or lower secondary education – twice the proportion observed in the rest of the working-age population.
- Children and students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, including Travellers and Roma, and students with disabilities have lower educational outcomes. Skills levels remain closely linked to poverty and social exclusion. Ireland has launched new policy measures and reviewed its systems to better support vulnerable children and students to enable them to reach their full potential. The results are still to be seen.
- The rate of early leavers from education and training remains low, at 4% in 2023. It remains, however, high among vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities (10.7%).

Country-specific recommendations

- Strengthen the labour market and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups, in particular persons with disabilities and single parents, by putting in place better targeted outreach and upskilling.

Italy

Employment

- The disability employment gap experienced a deterioration from 15.9 percentage points in 2023 to 25.1 percentage points in 2024, while Italy has not yet set a target for employing persons with disabilities. At the same time, only 41.7% of persons with disabilities were active in the labour market.

Social protection

- The effectiveness of the social protection system is improving, but gaps in terms of adequacy and coverage remain. Italy's new minimum income scheme, the Assegno di Inclusione (Inclusion

Allowance, AdI), replaced the Reddito di Cittadinanza (RdC) in 2024. The AdI has stricter eligibility criteria, focusing in particular on households with minors, seniors, persons with disabilities, or those in conditions of disadvantage and supported by social or healthcare services. While Italy spent EUR 8 billion on the RdC in 2022, projected annual expenditure for AdI in 2024 was EUR 4 billion, reflecting significant savings. However, an estimated 40.6% of households in absolute poverty previously receiving RdC are excluded from AdI, with the exclusion risk being higher for single person households, those without minors or elderly, and households in the north. The number of recipient households dropped by 37.6%, from around 1 million (RdC, May 2023) to around 625 000 (AdI, May 2024), while the number of individuals decreased by 28.3%, from around 2.1 million to around 1.5 million, significantly reducing the coverage of the measure.

Use of EU funds

- Reforms under the Recovery and Resilience Plan are intended to simplify at least 600 administrative procedures by June 2026 concerning citizen and business interactions with the public administration, including disability support.
- As part of Italy's Recovery and Resilience Plan, the national programme for the guaranteed employability of workers has introduced uniform standards for public employment services across the country, focusing on skills forecasting, personalised training plans, guidance and job coaching. At least 3 million people are expected to benefit from the programme by 2025, particularly women, long-term unemployed people, persons with disabilities and those under 30 or over 55, through targeted active labour market policies along with upskilling and reskilling.
- ESF+ programmes will support at least 590 000 people in unemployment, 151 000 people outside the labour force, at least 133 000 people who are homeless or affected by housing exclusion and more than 35 000 people with a disability
- In the field of healthcare, legislation has been adopted to strengthen the autonomy of people with disability, and action has been taken to support dependent older people.

Latvia

Employment

- Investments in labour market support in Latvia are low, with spending on active labour market policies (ALMP) among the lowest

in the EU, negatively affecting vulnerable groups, including young people, persons with disabilities and women.

- The disability employment gap in Latvia stood at 21.3% in 2024, almost 3 percentage points below the EU average, but has been increasing by almost 3 percentage points since 2023, which calls for increased activation of this group, which faces a high risk of social exclusion and poverty. According to 2022 data, 34.3% of young persons with disabilities in Latvia were not in employment, education or training. As for adults with a disability 60% were in employment, vs 77.4% for adults overall.
- Latvia has set a national target of at least 50% of persons with disability being in employment by 2027, based on national data (41.4% in 2022).
- The Social Enterprise Law (192) has led to a significant increase in the number of persons with disabilities working in social enterprises, from 53 in 2020 to 152 in 2024. To support activation of this group, it would be beneficial if Latvia also continued to invest in workplace adaptations, and the improvement of accessibility to public and private buildings and to support subsidised employment to activate persons with a disability, which has so far had a high success rate.

Poverty and social exclusion

- 38.5% of persons with disabilities were at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2023, 19.4 percentage points higher than those without disabilities. Moreover, over 50% of persons with severe disabilities were at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Latvia in the same year, which was one of the highest rates in the EU.

Use of EU funds

- EUR 40 million under the European Social Fund Plus has been allocated for promoting the integration of disadvantaged unemployed and economically inactive people into the labour market through, among other things, subsidised jobs, measures to develop work skills, promotion of job mobility, as well as support services for people with disabilities. EUR 10.2 million from the ESF+ will also support social entrepreneurship.
- Latvia's ESF+ allocates EUR 68 million to promoting social cohesion through deinstitutionalisation, developing community-based and family-oriented care services for children and adults with a disability. The programme aims to set up over 250 service centres by 2029, supporting 2 800 individuals at risk of social exclusion.

Employment

- A substantial proportion of the unemployed and persons with disabilities face poverty risks, driven by gaps in coverage and the low adequacy of social benefits.
- People with disabilities in Lithuania face the highest at-risk-of poverty rate in the EU in 2024 (38.2% vs 20.7%), which reflects their low employment rates. Lithuania has one of the highest disability employment gaps in the EU, which is further exacerbated by the low adequacy of disability benefits.
- Lithuania's labour market is recovering, but further progress could be hindered by the remaining structural challenges. Other factors include demographic change and underrepresentation of certain groups in the labour market, particularly young people, the low-skilled and persons with disabilities.
- The disability employment gap remains among the highest in the EU. After a slight decrease in 2023, the disability employment gap increased substantially in 2024, reaching 39.9 percentage points in 2024, well above the EU average of 24 percentage points. The gap is significantly higher for men than for women (46 percentage points vs 32.8 percentage points), a trend observed since 2018. While national statistics on employment and unemployment rates for people with disabilities differ, they consistently indicate significant challenges in the integration of people with disabilities into work. Only 46.5% of people with disabilities (15-64) were active in the labour market in Lithuania in 2024, below the EU average of 55.5%. Furthermore, 46.4% of young persons with disabilities (15-29) were NEETs (neither in employment, education or training), with a disability gap of 33.5 percentage points (vs 19.8 percentage points in the EU), further underscoring challenges related to their transition into the workforce.
- There is a strong correlation between low employment rates among people with disabilities and high poverty rates. To address these issues, Lithuania has launched reforms to encourage people with disabilities to participate in an open labour market. These measures remain at an early stage and have not yet brought about a noticeable increase in employment of people with disabilities. Further efforts, such as expanding targeted active labour market policies measures and enhancing cooperation with employers, could be beneficial to improve labour market outcomes for people with disabilities.
- Recent reforms on the disability assessment (as of 2024) and on the participation of persons with disabilities in an open labour

market (as of 2023), along with other efforts, aim to address these issues.

Social protection

- Spending on social protection is also systematically below the EU average, at 14.0% of GDP in 2023, almost six percentage points lower than the EU average of 19.8%. In addition, the efficiency of social protection spending, particularly on sickness and disability policies, appears to be limited. In 2023, Lithuania allocated 3.7% of its GDP to sickness and disability payments and measures, the fourth highest level in the EU. However, despite similar disability prevalence rates (27.4% of Lithuania's total population in 2023 vs 26.8% in the EU), Lithuania had the second highest at-risk-of-poverty rate for people with disabilities in the EU in 2023 and the highest rate in 2024

Poverty and social exclusion

- Lithuania continues to face challenges linked to persistently high levels of inequality and poverty risks, particularly for older people, unemployed people and persons with disabilities. To achieve the 2030 poverty reduction target, it would be beneficial for Lithuania to implement the delayed reforms under the recovery and resilience plan (Recovery and Resilience Plan) as soon as possible, and to address high levels of income inequality, old-age poverty and its gender gap, poverty of the unemployed and persons with disabilities. Addressing these challenges will contribute to inclusive growth and competitiveness.
- Poverty is particularly acute among persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities face the highest risk of poverty and exclusion rate in the EU (45.8% vs 28.8% in the EU). It is mainly driven by the at-risk-of-poverty rate, which is also the highest in the EU (38.2% vs 20.7% in the EU in 2024). This also reflects the low employment rates of people with disabilities, with the disability employment gap in Lithuania being among the highest in the EU, which is further hindering Lithuania's inclusive growth and competitiveness. At the same time, Lithuania allocated 3.7% of its GDP to sickness and disability payments and measures, the fourth highest in the EU and had similar disability prevalence rates (27.4% of Lithuania's total population in 2023 vs. 26.8% in the EU). Such a situation signals low efficiency of social protection spending on sickness and disability policies.

Use of EU funds

- With a budget of more than EUR 175 million, European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) programmes will, in addition to comprehensive family services for at least 75 000 persons, and community services for at least 5400 vulnerable children, support deinstitutionalisation of at least 3300 persons with disabilities through the transition from institutional care to family and community-based services. While it remains unclear whether measures addressing low adequacy of disability benefits will be included in the scope of the planned Recovery and Resilience Plan reform on improving minimum income adequacy, it would be beneficial for Lithuania to consider targeted measures to address this.

Luxembourg

Employment

- Although it has proved resilient to external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Luxembourg's employment growth has significantly slowed down since 2022. Certain demographic groups – such as older workers, young people and vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, the low-skilled and those not born in the EU – are particularly prone to unemployment.
- The disability employment gap narrowed from 23.7 percentage points in 2023 to 19.1 percentage points in 2024, below the EU average (24 percentage points). Barriers include a lack of adapted workplaces, private sector employers failing to comply with legal hiring quotas (only 12% of companies meet this obligation) and weak enforcement mechanisms. Fear of stigmatisation may discourage people from disclosing disabilities, which are not always visible, leading to underreporting. Measures to help narrow the disability employment gap could include continued awareness-raising, mentoring and de-stigmatisation campaigns, additional incentives for companies who meet disability quotas, offering training or adapting workplaces (and/or penalties for those who do not), and the setting of nationwide employment targets.

Use of EU funds

- Promoting fairness and social cohesion are among the key priorities of EU funding in Luxembourg. The ESF+ fosters social cohesion in Luxembourg through active inclusion projects targeting disadvantaged people and vulnerable groups, fostering integrated pathways to work, partnerships with economic actors for sustainable professional integration, workshops for social and

professional reintegration and dedicated actions for people with a migrant background. The ESF+ is also used to support the Child Guarantee and fight child poverty through specific actions in the field of education. At least 3 260 unemployed people, 3 000 children and young students, and 1 290 disadvantaged people (including people with a disability or from a migrant background) will benefit under the ESF+ programme.

Malta

Employment

- Malta can further enhance its labour market by tapping into underutilised talent pools, particularly by further reducing the gender employment gap and enhancing the inclusion of persons with disabilities. The disability employment gap remains wide, particularly among women. The gap is particularly significant for women at 24.4 percentage points (vs EU 20.4 percentage points) against 22.0 percentage points for men. Policy initiatives, with support from EU funding such as the European Social Fund Plus, aim to get more persons with disabilities into the labour market but seem insufficient to tackle the challenges. Strengthening targeted active labour market policies, including up- and reskilling and reasonable accommodation in the workplace, could help more persons with disabilities enter the labour market.
- These challenges are also reflected in labour force participation rates of this section of the population, at 53.5% in Malta compared to 54.3% in the EU. In 2022, 32.9% of young persons with disabilities were NEETs – neither in employment education or training (27.3% in the EU). A relatively large proportion (58.3% in 2023) of persons with disabilities have low skill levels, which places them at a disadvantage in the labour market compared to persons without disabilities when looking for work.
- Malta has set a target of a 15 percentage points increase in the employment rate of persons with disabilities by 2030.

Accessibility of public spaces

- In addition to increased noise and air pollution, the large number of cars on Malta's roads impacts the population's quality of life, leaving less room for open spaces and limiting the independence of more vulnerable groups such as children, older people, and people with disabilities.

Education

- Persons with disabilities often encounter limited access to education, training and employment.
- Still 9.6% of young people between the age of 18-24 leave education with at most a lower secondary qualification (EU: 9.3%), and this is higher among young people with disabilities (33% vs EU: 18% in 2022)

Poverty and social exclusion

- Poverty among certain groups weakens social cohesion, despite policy action being taken. Those most impacted by higher poverty risks are non-EU nationals, the low-educated, persons with disabilities, and older adults, particularly women.
- Some groups face higher risks of poverty and social exclusion. Persons with disabilities face stark disparities too, with 33.7% being at risk of poverty and social exclusion compared to 16.3% among those without disabilities, closely related to their difficult employment situation.

Social protection

- Social protection spending is relatively low and mostly allocated to old age and health, and less to family, disability, housing, and unemployment support. Persons with disabilities (4.0%) and people who suffer from social exclusion (2.3%) also receive modest funding, raising concerns about the inclusiveness and fairness of Malta's social protection system.

Use of EU funds

- The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) supports the VASTE programme in funding, offering tailored services such as training, work exposure, job coaching and mentoring for persons with disabilities.
- Malta's Recovery and Resilience Plan aims to improve basic skills and literacy, track early school leavers, improve online training, and adapt educational infrastructure for students with disabilities.
- The ESF+ is supporting investments to upskill and reskill the workforce, particularly in green and digital fields, while also addressing skills gaps in emerging sectors. Initiatives aim to support vulnerable groups by providing training in basic and digital skills, second chance education, and active inclusion for people with disabilities.
- The European Regional Development Fund is adding classroom capacity in education facilities for 1 200 pupils. The ESF+ in Malta

dedicates 26.1% of its budget to social inclusion, including training for vulnerable groups, skills development and active inclusion for persons with a disability. Social inclusion actions should benefit 1 500 persons with a disability.

Netherlands

Employment

- Despite a high participation rate, certain groups such as people with low skills, those from a migrant background or persons with disabilities, encounter difficulties in finding quality jobs.
- The disability employment gap narrowed further in 2024 and is now below the EU average (20.9 percentage points vs 24.0 percentage points). The Netherlands has not set a target for the employment of persons with disabilities. Tapping into the labour market potential of these groups can help to alleviate shortages (which may otherwise hold back investment projects, including those relating to the green and digital transitions) and increase such people's ability to enter work.
- More targeted or tailored support could help increase the effective outreach for upskilling and reskilling those in an unfavourable labour market situation. These groups include the low-skilled, people with flexible or temporary contracts, people with a migrant background, and people with disabilities. The decentralised system of providing support means that vulnerable groups, in particular, may not always be equally or adequately supported. Continued investment in improving basic, technical and digital skills, increasing mobility between sectors, sustainable employability, and improving the quality and inclusiveness of education and training for all are essential for the Netherlands to reach its national target of at least 62% of adults participating in training every year by 2030, which should support competitiveness further.

Poverty and social exclusion

- While poverty levels remain relatively low, some population groups experience higher risks. persons with disabilities have an at risk of poverty and exclusion rate of 22% and continue to face challenges linked to overrepresentation in precarious, flexible contracts, lack of recognition of qualifications, reduced job opportunities, in-work poverty and discrimination.

Use of EU funds

- The Netherlands has included measures in their recovery and resilience plan for the introduction of a mandatory disability insurance for the self-employed.

Poland

Employment

- The disability employment gap has widened further in recent years to 35.6% and is now one of the largest in the EU. This is partly due to the absence of a legal basis for supported employment and a lack of knowledge and skills among employers on how to integrate persons with disabilities in the workplace. Although Poland has set itself a target to increase the number of persons with disabilities in employment, no concrete and measurable actions have been implemented so far for employers and other stakeholders. The newly launched project to develop a model of supported employment and prepare for its introduction as a labour market instrument is a positive step.
- To further support persons with disabilities, measures for helping them find employment could be strengthened, for example by tapping into the full potential of the social economy to create economic opportunities and promote social inclusion and integration of disadvantaged groups.
- Existing labour market tools are still not meeting the required objectives, despite a comprehensive diagnosis of obstacles and a call for bold investment in evidence-based policy reform. Employers' preparedness to employ persons with disabilities remains a challenge due to the absence of a legal basis for supported employment and the knowledge and skills on how to integrate such people into the workplace.
- In addition, the proportion of young people (aged 16-29) not in employment, education or training (NEETs) with disabilities (40%) is one of the highest in the EU. Poland has set a target of 40% for the employment of persons with disabilities by 2030.

Education

- The education gap between persons with disabilities and persons without, in particular in higher education, is wide (21.4 percentage points compared to an EU average of 11.3 percentage points). To address the challenges faced by young persons with disabilities in acquiring competitive skills and transitioning to the labour market, Poland's current policy priority, reform measures and investments in

inclusive education would benefit from an inclusive education and training strategy.

- The tertiary education rate of persons with disabilities was 32% in 2021/2022, and the mean tertiary education gap in those years stood at 18.4 percentage points (EU 11.3 percentage points).
- Poland has been implementing inclusive education measures and investments supporting the needs of pupils with disabilities. Nevertheless, a targeted national strategy is missing, and a significant proportion of students with special educational needs is enrolled in special schools, especially at upper secondary level (80%).

Poverty and social exclusion

- Persons with disabilities are also at a higher rate of poverty and social exclusion, at 25.5%, which is linked to their lower educational attainment and employment, and high disability employment gap.

Social protection

- The social protection system presents adequacy and coverage gaps. Despite an increase in family and child benefits, Poland's spending on unemployment and disability benefits as a percentage of GDP is very low (0.2% vs EU: 1% on unemployment and 1% vs EU: 1.9% on disability in 2023) and has fallen.

Urban planning and climate change

- In the absence of nationally coordinated action, a dedicated project for cities helps advance climate adaptation in the health sector in Poland. The project establishes a methodology for developing urban adaptation plans that consider vulnerable sectors' and groups' exposure to climate change impacts. In almost all of the 44 cities with over 100 000 inhabitants participating in the project, actions to improve the public health sector's resilience to climate change impacts have been developed. These actions involve improving the functioning of municipal services and social infrastructure, broadening the uptake of early warning systems, and increasing public awareness. They are directed towards vulnerable groups – the elderly, isolated, persons with disabilities and the chronically ill, as well as people in the crisis of homelessness.

Use of EU funds

- Disability or illness is one of the main causes of economic inactivity in Poland. Initiatives are being undertaken to support the labour market integration of persons with disabilities, including the development of a network of information and counselling centres,

support programmes for students and graduates with disabilities to facilitate their transition into the labour market, and actions to increase the accessibility of higher education institutions, partly funded via ESF+.

- One reform under the Recovery and Resilience Plan aims to increase the labour-market participation with a view to helping the Polish economy to achieve higher productivity, crisis resilience and global competitiveness. Cohesion policy supports the functioning of the public employment services, specifically for persons with disabilities, and inclusive education for children with disabilities. In 2023, the ESF funded 23 education support centres, a qualification framework for special needs assistants, and training of 28 000 school staff on inclusive education.

Portugal

Support services

- Portugal's per-capita public investment in long-term care is three times lower than the EU average. Access to home care remained at around half the EU average in 2022. Despite improvements, coverage rates in long-term care remain low across all regions, with even greater disparities in rural and remote areas, as well as in the Azores and Madeira. The number of carers has increased, but the size of the workforce is still insufficient to cope with the growing demand for care, resulting in a strong reliance on informal carers. Implementing the action plan for the national strategy for long-term care would help meet the growing demand for services and address staff shortages. Portugal could also benefit from improving the coverage of the independent life support model (MAVI), a scheme co-financed by the European Social Fund Plus to promote the independent living of people with disabilities and incapacity so that they can lead an independent, self-determined life.

Digitalisation

- The take-up of digital services in Portugal is uneven. An integrated citizen-centred process has been put in place for people with disabilities, to minimise unnecessary travel and interactions, ensuring information is only submitted once.

Employment

- The disability employment gap increased by 7.3 percentage points between 2023 and 2024 and lies at 21.3%.
- The government is rolling out a new package of active labour market programmes targeting a wide range of unemployed

individuals, including low and highly skilled workers, young people, persons with disabilities and migrants.

Poverty and social exclusion

- Poverty levels are disproportionately high among certain groups, including persons with disabilities and non-EU-born individuals.

Education

- There has been progress in early childhood education and care, but gaps remain in areas such as inclusive education and the adaptation of facilities, materials and teaching methods for children with disabilities. Improving children's access to healthcare is also crucial, particularly as only 37% of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion report having 'very good health' (37%), which was well below the EU average of 63%.

Romania

Employment

- Labour market activity has improved further in 2024, although significant challenges remain. Higher employment is constrained by the limited participation in the labour market by women, young people, the low-skilled, people with disabilities and people from the Roma community. The employment of people with disabilities has been improving, but it remains a challenge.
- With a disability employment gap at 44.8 percentage points (EU: 24.0 percentage points), and one of the lowest activity rates in the EU (47.8% in 2022, compared to the EU average of 64%), Romania faces challenges in helping persons with disabilities into work.
- The rate of young persons with disabilities not in employment, education or training in Romania was 46.3% in 2022, which was one of the highest rates in the EU.
- Romania has set a target of 55% employment of persons with disabilities by 2027.
- Targeting and outreach campaigns also seem to be ineffective. Of the 17 775 unemployed people enrolled on training courses offered by public employment services (PES) in 2024, only 44 were people with disabilities (0.24% of the total participants). Women, NEETs and persons with disabilities who participate in active labour market programmes measures appear to have less success in getting work compared to other job seekers. To address these issues, it would be beneficial to enhance the effectiveness of PESs, focusing on effective outreach and personalised support for job seekers.

Poverty and social exclusion

- Tackling widespread poverty, social exclusion and inequality remains a critical challenge. There are increased risks for vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, Roma, the low-educated, part-time workers, and partially the self-employed.
- The at risk of poverty and exclusion rate for persons with disabilities improved in 2024 but remained one of the highest in the EU (38.4% vs the EU average of 28.8%). Almost 50% of persons with severe disabilities were at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Romania in 2024. This is also linked to the low employment rate of persons with disabilities and a large disability employment gap in Romania.

Support services and social protection

- Romania's long-term care services are underfunded, with public expenditure far below the EU average. Affordable, quality community-based care is crucial to support deinstitutionalisation and independent living for people with disabilities. Romania's 2024 reform of social assistance services aims to improve financing and service quality. Its success is contingent on appropriate governance and implementation structures. These involve strengthening the capacity of local authorities, adopting secondary legislation and conducting a comprehensive assessment of staffing needs to address the increasing demand for qualified care workers and the development of home and community-based care services.

De-institutionalisation

- The low availability and affordability of quality non-residential, community-based care delays the deinstitutionalisation and transition to independent living of persons with disabilities. As of November 2024, out of the 124 centres providing services to persons with disabilities, only 4 were located in rural areas, while 6 out of the 41 counties lacked a registered centre in their territory. In 2022, Romania adopted a national strategy on long-term care and active ageing for 2023-2030. In 2024, Romania also adopted a wider reform aiming to improve the financing and quality of social assistance.

Use of EU funds

- The reform is underpinned by Recovery and Resilience Plan measures, such as the national strategy on preventing the institutionalisation of adults with disabilities for 2022-2030 and the law on supporting the process of deinstitutionalisation of adults with disabilities. More than EUR 800 million from 2021-2027 cohesion

policy funds are earmarked for services for older persons and those with disabilities.

- In 2022, as part of its Recovery and Resilience Plan, Romania adopted its first ever national housing strategy for 2022-2050, aiming to increase access to adequate housing for vulnerable groups, especially young people, persons with disabilities, people in informal settlements and homeless people. The Recovery and Resilience Plan includes investments in new housing for young people and for healthcare and education professionals working in marginalised communities. The cohesion policy funds support energy-efficient construction and renovation, as well as the construction and renovation of social housing.

Slovakia

Employment

- Although the gap in employment between persons with and without disabilities is narrowing, it remains significant at 22.1 percentage points (percentage points) (vs the EU average of 21.5 percentage points in 2022).
- Slovakia has not yet set an employment target for persons with disabilities.
- A third of young persons with disabilities is in the NEETs category (neither in employment, education or training).

Slovenia

Employment

- The disability employment gap narrowed from 21.7 percentage points in 2020 to 14.2 percentage points in 2024 (EU: 24) and is the lowest in the EU. Nearly a third of young persons with disabilities are neither in employment, nor in education or training (NEETs) (27%, 2022). Slovenia has yet to set a target for the employment of persons with disabilities.

Poverty and social exclusion

- Persons with disabilities also face a higher at risk of poverty and exclusion than the general population. This might be driven by the negative impact of high energy prices and inflation in recent years on pensions and wages. As there is also a high proportion of households and individuals just above the poverty threshold, particular policy attention is warranted. In this context, the impact

of social transfers (other than pensions) on poverty reduction has significantly declined from 44.8% in 2021 to 37.7% in 2024.

Support services and de-institutionalisation

- The most important challenges remain access, adequacy, quality and, especially, staff shortages and long-term financial sustainability. In terms of access, the challenges are twofold, especially in rural areas: (i) the limited availability of respite care and support for families and carers of older and disabled people, and (ii) the limited availability of specialised care for older people with complex needs. Another critical factor hampering the effective provision of services is staffing. In 2023, Slovenia faced staff shortages (with many staff members leaving the sector due to burnout and poor working conditions), with a shortage in the long-term care sector of approximately 2 000 caregivers, and in the social care sector of approximately 1000 social workers. The lack of staff is compounded by relatively high turnover rates (15% for long-term care professionals, and 20% in the social care sector) as well as an ageing workforce. In Slovenia, the average age of long-term care professionals is approximately 50, and 55 in the case of social workers.
- In 2023, Slovenia adopted a national deinstitutionalisation strategy, which aims to transform 22 institutions by 2034 and provide

Use of EU funds

- Around EUR 237 million from the European Social Fund+ (ESF+) is allocated to improving social inclusion for vulnerable groups. This includes improving social services' accessibility and quality (with learning and digital skills workshops), supporting healthcare services and implementing measures for minorities and people with disabilities.

Spain

Poverty and social exclusion

- Poverty and social exclusion remain significant concerns. Although poverty and social exclusion decreased in 2024, the number of people at risk remains above pre-pandemic levels, and the at-risk of poverty or social exclusion rate was among the highest in the EU, with significant differences between regions. Vulnerable groups such as single-parent and large families, persons with disabilities, young people, third-country nationals and the Roma population are disproportionately affected.

- Persons with disabilities and young people (15-29) have a high risk of poverty and social exclusion (32.9% and 26.7%).
- 13.1% of persons with disabilities are severely materially and socially deprived, compared with 10.4% in the EU.

Employment

- Spain has a disability employment gap of 23.4 percentage points. Spain set a target for employing persons with disabilities of 51% by 2030 (a relative increase of 91% over 10 years).

De-institutionalisation

- Spain's 2024-2030 national deinstitutionalisation strategy aims to improve care services and empower vulnerable groups and persons with disabilities. By prioritising person-centred care, expanding community-based services and improving working conditions for care staff, it seeks to strengthen social protection and improve the accessibility and quality of support for those most in need.

Sweden

Employment

- Finding work is particularly difficult for people from vulnerable groups. The disability employment gap in Sweden is 22.9 percentage points
- The rate of young people aged 15-24 not in education, employment or training (NEETs) was among the lowest in the EU at a rate of 5.5% in 2023 (vs EU: 9.1%). This figure slightly increased by 0.4 percentage points compared to 2023. However, in 2024, at 13,3% the NEET rate was significantly higher among young persons with disabilities

Poverty and social exclusion

- The risk of poverty or social exclusion for persons with disabilities (aged sixteen years or over) is also slightly above the EU average (29% vs 28.8%), and significantly higher than the at risk of poverty and exclusion rate for persons without any disabilities (15.1%).

Use of EU funds

- The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) specifically aims to help those who are furthest away from the labour market, including persons with disabilities, newly arrived migrants, young people and the long-term unemployed.

Document credits

This document was prepared by Haydn Hammersley



The European Disability Forum
Mundo Madou
Avenue des Arts 7-8
1210 Brussels, Belgium.

www.edf-feph.org

info@edf-feph.org



Funded by
the European Union

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission's CERV Programme. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.