

Employment and Disability

The participation rate of working-age people with a disability in the labour force is only 29%, less than half of that of general population (60%)¹

People with disabilities are much more likely to be unemployed.² Ireland also has the third highest number of young people on Disability Benefit between the ages of 20 and 34.³ Even at the height of the boom when long-term unemployment was at an all-time low, the percentage of people with disabilities in employment was also less than half that than for those without a disability.⁴

Disabled people and their families are much more likely to experience unemployment compared to non-disabled people⁵

Considering this crisis, people with disabilities and their families should be placed at the top of the jobs agenda. However, the Comprehensive Employment Strategy was substantially delayed. This employment strategy is also placed under the Department of Justice and Equality, unlike other mainstream action plans for jobs. This approach is doomed to leave people with a disability on the margins of the economy.

People with disabilities are excluded from mainstream activation programmes and employment measures

Mainstream activation and employment measures such as Momentum, Gateway, and Community Employment for those on the Live Register exclude people on Disability Allowance. The structure of the system which provides disability payments for those unable to work separate from unemployment assistance/benefit for those on the Live Register has led to a number of

discriminatory practices that are detrimental to social inclusion for people with disabilities.

Intreo Offices are often inaccessible to people with disabilities

Intreo offices which provide a single point of contact for all employment and income supports are often not accessible to people on certain disability and illness payments. Personal assistant and communication services are not automatically available to those who need them. Also, disability awareness is often lacking in staff, due to the lack of appropriate training. This reduces staff's capacity to interact effectively with disabled people.

85% of cases of disability for those of working age is acquired and 41% have had to leave work because of their disability⁶

It is essential that people with acquired disability or chronic illness are supported to retain employment. Lack of flexibility, inaccessible work environments, and the absence of appropriate supports demonstrate the very real way in which disability is socially constructed. Greater flexibility and timeliness in moving in and out of payments is necessary in order to support people to remain economically and socially active.

63% of Irish people believe that disabled people do not receive equal opportunities in the workplace⁷

Negative attitudes and behaviours towards people with disabilities still persist in Irish society. Incentives like the Wage Subsidy Scheme are essential to encourage employers to hire people with disabilities, especially in a competitive jobs market. However, people in receipt of Invalidity Pension and Illness Benefit are excluded from this scheme leaving them at a disadvantage compared to other jobseekers.

¹ Watson, D. Banks, J. & Lyons, S. (2015) Educational and employment experiences of people with a disability in Ireland .ESRI:41

²Ibid.

³Watson, D. & Nolan, B. (2011) A social portrait of people with disabilities in Ireland. ESRI

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ 30.8 per cent, compared with 19 per cent <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile8/Profile,8,Full,document.pdf> p. 15

⁶ Watson, D. Banks, J. & Lyons, S. (2015) Educational and employment experiences of people with a disability in Ireland.ESRI:41

⁷ NDA (2007) Public attitudes to disability in Ireland. NDA:8

Employment for all

Over 65% of young people with disabilities want to work, if the conditions are right⁸

People with disabilities want to work. Currently, we have a system that provides specialist employment supports for people with disabilities, and mainstream activation and employment measures for everyone else. The experience of the majority of people with disabilities is that they are falling into the gaps between these two pillars of the system, with neither meeting their needs.

On the one hand, specialist employment supports need to be adapted to ensure that they are adequately supporting people with all types of disabilities in the labour market. On the other hand mainstream activation measures need to be adapted so that they are fully inclusive of people with disabilities.

8 in 10 Irish people agree that people with disabilities should be entitled to the same return to work support as the unemployed⁹

Regardless of the payment a person receives, they should be able to access mainstream employment measures. Actions from the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES) must be made compatible with other activation policies, such as the Pathways to Work scheme. This will ensure that those closest to the labour market can proceed into work without having to wait for specialist activation programmes.

Intreo must expand its services and train its staff appropriately to have the capacity and time to support people with disabilities and the complex needs that they may require.

Furthermore, labour market activation needs to include all those of working age who are able to work, not just those on the Live Register.

Make work pay for people with disabilities

We cannot talk about employment for people with disabilities without dealing with the major obstacle to activation: the cost of disability. The potential loss of benefits, particularly the medical card, as well as unfavourable tax credits in most cases, are too great a risk for people with disabilities to take. Work must pay and must provide the medium to long-term security a person requires to take up or return to education, training, and employment.

Introduce tax credits to support people with disabilities to earn an adequate income

This will ensure that people with disabilities are raised out of poverty and that work pays in recognition of the cost of living with a disability.

Include young people with disabilities in the Youth Guarantee

Programmes initiated under the Youth Guarantee target those on the Live Register, thus excluding those with disabilities. Young people with disabilities would benefit greatly from this initiative given the appropriate resources for them to participate.

Employment for all: Key Benefits

- ✓ An increase in the disability employment rate indicates a reduction in relative and absolute poverty for disabled people¹⁰
- ✓ Alleviating the strain of unemployment that creates an increased risk of depression¹¹
- ✓ Increased employment for people with disabilities has demonstrated a positive impact on Gross Domestic Product¹²

⁸ Watson, D. Banks, J. & Lyons, S. (2015) Educational and employment experiences of people with a disability in Ireland .ESRI:41

⁹ iReach 2015

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Doyle, C. Kavanagh, P. Metcalfe, O. Lavin, T. (2005) Health impacts of employment. IPH

¹² Gulliford, J. (2015) Enabling work: disabled people, employment and the UK economy. Scope