

# Debunking Dangerous Disability Statistics

Chris Lowe

- In 2016 the Hibernia Forum publish **“We need to weed out bogus disability claims for the people who really need it”**
- 3 sources - The first misread the census and the others contradict the article.
- 1 – David McWilliams “Mystery of disability” 2013
- 2 – C&AG Annual Report 2003 chapter 13
- 3 – Disability Allowance statistics
- TheJournal.ie version has 21,058 views [as of 10/5/17], 140 comments and 133 shares

# Hibernia Forum (2016) say



By Aaron McKenna in The Journal, 26 March 2016

Since 2006, over 60,000 people have been removed from the workforce to be classified as disabled. Between 2002 and 2006, the number of people leaving the workforce to be classed as disabled rose by 2,000.

Let's have a little think about that for a minute. Roughly speaking, we went from having 500 people a year leaving the workforce to classify as disabled to having 7,500 a year doing the same.

Someone at the HSE or the Health and Safety Authority or the Office of Emergency Planning ought to get on that, because a population larger than that of Waterford has been taken out since 2006 for some reason. Something, something happened after 2006 that wasn't happening in the years before to 2002. What was it again...?

# David McWilliams (2013) says

Yet, since 2006, there has been a 37.7pc increase in the number of people who have left the labour force citing a condition that substantially limits one or smore basic physical activities.

	A condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities	% Change	Psychological or emotional condition	% Change
2002	170,812			
2006	172,603	1.0%	61,499	
2011	237,748	37.7%	88,898	44.6%

This is not people who have been unfortunate enough to be born with a disability, but people who have developed a disabling condition. This means 55,000 people – bigger than Waterford, the country's fifth largest city. Between 2002 and 2006, the same figure only increased by 1pc which is less than 2,000 people.

So what has happened from 2006 to 2012 to cause 53,000 extra people to leave the labour force due to physical disability?

Meanwhile, the number of people leaving the labour force citing a psychological or emotional condition has risen even more dramatically – 88,000 people are now diagnosed with an emotional or psychological condition that is bad enough that they can't work. This is a 27,000 rise from the same figure in 2006.

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**2002 Population Aged 15 Years and Over with a Disability (Number) by Type of Disability, Sex, Age Group, Principal Economic Status and Census Year**

		2002
<b>A condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities</b>		
Both sexes		
All ages		
Persons at work		17,239
Unemployed looking for first regular job		369
Unemployed having lost or given up previous job		3,789
All persons aged 15 years and over in labour force		21,397
Student or pupil		2,519
Looking after home/family		25,488
Retired		57,671
Unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability		60,008
Others not in labour force		3,729
All persons aged 15 years and over not in labour force		149,415
All persons aged 15 years and over		170,812

Source Census 2002 CSO.ie

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**Population Aged 15 Years and Over (Number) by Sex, Age Group, Type of Disability, Principal Economic Status and Census Year**

		2006
<b>Both sexes</b>		
All ages		
A condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities		
Persons at work		18,171
Unemployed looking for first regular job		334
Unemployed having lost or given up previous job		3,923
All persons aged 15 years and over in labour force		22,428
Student or pupil		2,292
Looking after home/family		22,144
Retired		66,653
Unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability		57,744
Others not in labour force		1,342
All persons aged 15 years and over not in labour force		150,175
All persons aged 15 years and over		172,603
Psychological or emotional condition		
Persons at work		11,854
Unemployed looking for first regular job		394
Unemployed having lost or given up previous job		4,233
All persons aged 15 years and over in labour force		16,481
Student or pupil		2,546
Looking after home/family		5,834
Retired		9,889
Unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability		25,803
Others not in labour force		946
All persons aged 15 years and over not in labour force		45,018
All persons aged 15 years and over		61,499

	A condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities	% Change	Psychological or emotional condition	% Change
2002	170,812			
2006	172,603	1.0%	61,499	
2011	237,748	37.7%	88,898	44.6%

**Population Aged 15 Years and Over (Number) by Sex, Age Group, Disability Type, Principal Economic Status and Census Year**

		2011
<b>Both sexes</b>		
All ages		
A condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities		
Persons at work		21,240
Unemployed looking for first regular job		394
Unemployed having lost or given up previous job		11,979
All persons aged 15 years and over in labour force		33,613
Student or pupil		3,411
Looking after home/family		23,784
Retired		103,415
Unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability		72,239
Others not in labour force		1,286
All persons aged 15 years and over not in labour force		204,135
← All persons aged 15 years and over		237,748
Psychological or emotional condition		
Persons at work		15,723
Unemployed looking for first regular job		616
Unemployed having lost or given up previous job		10,499
All persons aged 15 years and over in labour force		26,838
Student or pupil		5,559
Looking after home/family		7,112
Retired		13,599
Unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability		34,840
Others not in labour force		950
All persons aged 15 years and over not in labour force		62,060
← All persons aged 15 years and over		88,898

Census Year	Number	Number in Labour Force	Percentage
2002	170,812	21,397	12.53
2006	172,603	22,428	13 (12.993)
2011	237,748	33,613	14.14
Census Year	Number aged 15 to 65 (subtracted figure)	Number in Labour Force aged 15 to 65 (subtracted figure)	Percentage
2002	79,827 (-90,985)	20,238 (-1,159)	25.35
2006	78,203 (-94,400)	21,073 (-1,355)	26.9
2011	106,291 (-131,457)	30,542 (-3071)	28.7

Labour force participants adjusted for age as part of the overall population of physically disabled people (A condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities)

Census Year	Total Disabled People Aged 15+ (adjusted for age figure)	Number in Labour Force (aged 15 to 65 [subtracted figure])	Percentage (adjusted to remove 65+)
Psychological or emotional condition			
2006	61,499 (46,827)	16,481 (16,319 [-162])	26.7988 (34.85)
2011	88,898 (70,771)	26,838 (26,471 [-367])	30.2 (37.4)

Labour force participants adjusted for age as part of the overall population of disabled people citing a psychological or emotional condition



Census Year	Total Disabled People Aged 15+ (adjusted for age figure)	Unable to work due permanent illness or disability (less 65+)	Percentage (adjusted to remove 65+)
<b>A condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities</b>			
2002	170,812 (79,827)	60,008 (41,736)	35.13 (52.28)
2006	172,603 (78,203)	57,744 (41,568)	33.45 (53.15)
2011	237,748 (106,291)	72,239 (56,272)	30.38 (52.94)
<b>Psychological or emotional condition</b>			
2006	61,499 (46,827)	25,803 (21,526)	49.6 (46)
2011	88,898 (70,771)	34,840 (30,374)	38.79 (42.9)

The number of disabled people unable to work due to permanent illness and disability as a percentage of working aged disabled people in each census year.

Figures sourced CSO.ie

# Notes and caveats

- The above was based on the CSO's interactive census tables for their respective years.
- McWilliams does not say the increase is down to welfare fraud, he is openly unsure of the cause, his readers make the assumption.
- The Census may underestimate the number of disabled people 13% population in 2011 Census, 8.1% 2006 census – 18.5% National Disability Survey (2006).
- NDS brought figures in line with Census for US 19.3% 2002, Canada 16% 2001, England + Wales, 18.2 2001, NI 19.7 2001 + 18.0 2006 SADL, New Zealand 20% 2003, Australia 2001 19.8 (NDS 2006 :20)

# Back pain statistics

## Hibernia Forum 2016

In 2003, the Department of Social Protection ran a pilot program on disability payment [claimants reporting lower back pain](#).

They took in 1,362 claimants for medical assessment. 1,200 of the claims – 88% – were terminated following the doctors reports. The Department called another 2,775 claimants in and, again, found that only 10% of the claims were eligible.

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If the department could survey just one group of claimants and weed out 90% as bogus, how much money is being robbed from those who need it?

# Damning Except C&AG 2003 pg 124

**Department of Social and Family Affairs**

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**Table 55**

<b>Project Cases</b>	<b>1532</b>	
Less Final Certificate Submitted before Notification of Appointment	<u>172</u>	
<b>Called for Examination</b>	<b><u>1360</u></b>	<sup>25</sup>
Final Certificate Submitted after Notification of Appointment	736	
Did not attend	197	
<b>Examined</b>	<b>556</b>	
Qualified due to lower back pain		154
Qualified for reasons other than lower back pain		127
Not Qualified		275
<b>Appealed</b>	<b>122</b>	
Deemed Capable of Work		77
Did not Attend Appeal or Returned Final Certificate		29
Appeal Upheld		16

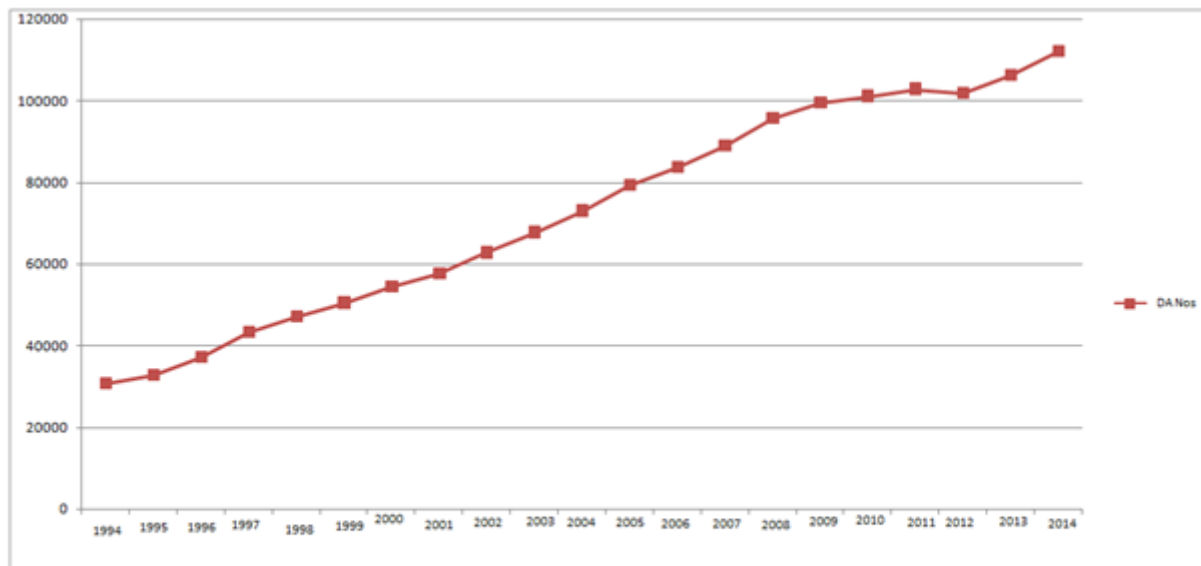
# Disability Allowance (Hibernia Forum 2016)

The [annual cost](#) of disability, illness and carer related payments has increased from €2 billion per year in 2005 to €3.4 billion a year in 2014, the latest for which Department of Social Protection statistics have been published. The [number of people on Disability Allowance](#) alone has increased by 33,000 since the recession began.

Quite coincidentally, 33,000 is nearly the same number of people who were classed as being long term unemployed at the height of the boom. In 2006, there were 31,100 people in the workforce who were claiming dole for more than a year, at a time when so many jobs were available that we had the largest net inflow of people into the country at any time in our history.

When the Troika arrived they looked at our system of allowing people to claim indefinitely, rightly said it was crazy and forced us to make it more difficult to sit on your backside without challenge. Admittedly, they introduced these measures at a time when it was quite difficult to get a job; but those some 31,000 people from 2006 were happily claiming their scratch and were giving no indication they'd change if we returned to full employment again.

Department of Social Protection Value for money review of disability allowance (figures up to 2008) pg 29 [Department of Social Protection Annual Review 2014 (figures from 2006) pg 95.



Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Number	30,693	32,699	37,054	43,192	47,126	50,431	54,303	57,655	62,783	67,720	72,976
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	72,976	79,253	83,697	89,048	95,754	99,576	101,111	102,866	101,784	106,279	112,097

# How easy is it to get on DA?

- Disability is seen as a legitimate reason not to be in the labour force – but DA perceived as particularly vulnerable to fraud.

BUT:

- “Between January and April, the Department of Social Protection turned down 4,823 applications – this represents a 61 per cent refusal rate, up from 54 per cent in 2010.” – Willie O’Dea quoted thejournal 20/10/12
- High rate of refusal (55%), high level of successful appeals – Examiner 11/3/14
- 42% refused disability allowance first go in 2016, closer to 50% in 2015. – Examiner 3/2/17
- Fraud and error accounts for 2.1% of DA expenditure - O’Broin SBP 23/4/17 pg. 20 – (1.2% fraud, 0.9% error) equivalent to 1.6% of claims being fraudulent and 0.7% down to error (DSP 2012:5).

# Potential consequences

- UK Experience of benefit cuts – UN report (2016) shows media portrayal central to this.
- Aside from social protection:
- Prejudice - see UK Experience of Hate Crime – **“Of the 61 who gave further details about their experience, 11 mentioned being called ‘scroungers’ or being told to get off benefits, or that they were too lazy to work”** (Quarmby 2015 – self reported 100 person survey)
- Quarmby quotes one respondent: “Bigotry, fuelled by propaganda against people on benefits”. (Quarmby 2015)



# Welfare fraud accusations and (mis)understanding of impairment

- Quarmby 2015 identifies not looking disabled as a hate crime flashpoint in the UK, note the assumption of benefit fraud below:
- “I’ve been chastised for managing to walk to my front gate without my walking stick, (it’s only a couple of steps). I’ve been insulted for using a disabled toilet and slapped on a bus for using a designated seat. I’ve twice been reported to the DWP for being a ‘bogus’ claimant...had my car repeatedly scratched (16 reports to police), had my car spat on and an egg thrown on it.” (Quarmby 2015)
- “I was asked why I use a wheelchair some times but had been seen using sticks on others days, I tried to explain that my condition varies from day to day and on days when I can walk I try to do so. I was then told I was just fat and lazy and was doing it to get benefits. I have been abused for using a blue badge. Been called a spastic, and to go to bloody work...I have been spat at.” (Quarmby 2015)

# Sources

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- Noel Baker 3/2/17 **42% are refused disability allowance at first go** <https://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/42-are-refused-disability-allowance-at-first-go-441920.html>
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<http://www.thejournal.ie/disability-allowance-refusal-appeals-643133-Oct2012/>
- Eoin O’Brion 23/4/17 **Varadkar’s Figures Just don’t add up** Sunday Business Post pg 20