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Overview

Recent years have seen a huge growth in the supply, range and timeliness of data from a variety of official agencies including the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), Eurostat, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as well as other agencies. Much of the data are publicly and readily available online together with detailed notes about the data. The QEF is not intended to provide an alternative to these sources. It provides a signpost to available sources of data. It selects a few indicators from key areas of concern: employment, unemployment, earnings and labour cost, inequality in income, poverty and public finances.

It is intended to expand and change a selection of indicators over time to cover a somewhat broader range of topics under each heading. However, to avoid information over-load (a not infrequent feature of many of the major statistical sources) it is planned to keep the overall number of indicators shown in this and subsequent editions within a reasonable and manageable size. Comments, queries and suggestions are welcome both in relation to the content as well as the overall scope of this publication.

Each indicator is laid out as follows:

- Definition
- Chart
- Data Table
- Interpretation
- Technical Notes and Sources.

For the purposes of comparisons across European States typically two averages are used where possible: EU 28 for all Member States and EU 15 for those Member States that were in the Union prior to 2004. The latter constitute a more homogeneous group in terms of GDP per capita. Unless otherwise stated, averages at the level of EU 28 or EU 15 are unweighted means.

Please note that, unless otherwise specified, all references to 'Ireland' in this edition of QEF refers to the Republic of Ireland only.

