

The Labour Market Impact of COVID-19 on Young People with Disabilities: The Case of Ireland

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Outline

1. Introduction (COVID-19)
2. Literature review and gaps
3. Research questions
4. Data and methodology
5. Preliminary results
6. Preliminary conclusions

Introduction – Covid-19 labour market impacts

- In Ireland, **unemployment rose** from 4.9% in Feb 2020 to 14.7% by Sept 2020 (*McQuinn et al., 2020*)
- Disproportionate impacts, among economic sectors and groups of individuals
- **Young people:**
 - Overrepresented in precarious, low-wage, face-to-face sectors.
 - 58.7% of 18–19-year-olds claimed PUP (*McQuinn et al., 2020*).
 - Largest employment shocks across EU/UK, but signs of stronger rebound (*Eurofound, 2022*).
- **People with disability:**
 - Faced pre-existing employment barriers and sectoral vulnerability.
 - 2019 employment rate: 51% in EU27 (vs. 76% without disabilities), 33% in Ireland (vs. 77%) (*Doyle, 2023*).
 - Exposed to ableism and discrimination during the pandemic (*Brown & Ciciurkaite, 2023*).
 - Accelerated adoption of remote work, which may have benefited some people with disabilities by reducing physical and social barriers (*Ne'eman and Maestas, 2023*)

Literature review

- In the EU27, youth with disabilities (aged 16–24) saw **unemployment rise from 25% in 2019 to over 31% in 2020**, compared to a smaller increase among their non-disabled peers (*Grammenos, 2022*)
- In the UK, disabled youth aged 16–24 experienced a 1.8 p.p. drop in employment (*Atay et al., 2021*)
- This group remains **under-researched**, but available data suggest they were among the most vulnerable: more likely to be in precarious jobs and among the first to be laid off, faced compounded barriers due to age and disability, reported lower income, fewer hours, and limited career progression.
- In **Ireland**, however, some data suggest that young people with chronic illness or disability were not more likely to lose jobs than their peers during COVID-19 (*Smyth & Nolan, 2022*)
- Historical data from the **2008–09 recession** show that people with disabilities experienced slower recovery and more severe job losses (*Kelly and Maitre, 2023*). Similar patterns were observed during COVID-19, though the rise of remote work may have mitigated some long-term scarring effects (*Ne’eman and Maestas, 2023*).

Gaps in the literature

- Despite broad research on COVID-19's labour market effects, young people with disabilities remain underrepresented in the literature.
- Limited focus on the intersection of youth and disability in labour market studies.
- Need more disaggregated data by disability type, economic sector, and recovery trajectory.

Research Questions

1. Was the **unemployment impact** of COVID-19 between young people with and without disabilities equal?
2. Did the impact vary by **type of disability**?
3. Was the **pace of labour market recovery** the same between young disabled and non-disabled people?

Data – I

- **Irish Labour Force Survey (LFS) data (CSO)**
 - Provides quarterly data on labour market indicators (unemployment rate, etc.)
- **Q2 2020 LFS data** used to capture COVID-19 pandemic period and **Q2 2023** the economy at the end of the pandemic.
- **COVID-19 led to a change in LFS data collection mode**
 - CSO undertook steps to address the effects of this on the data (weighting, calibration), but cannot rule out that some observed differences between Q1 2020 and subsequent quarters could be due to changes in data collection mode.

Data – II

- **LFS disability data:**

- Since **2020**, captured in Q2 only
- **Disability questions asked prior to 2020 different to those asked in Q2 2020 and Q2 2023:**
 - Cannot use earlier data to examine labour market (LM) situation for individuals with disabilities prior to COVID-19 pandemic
 - **BUT** to get some insight, examined the LM status of those identified as having a disability in Q2 2020 in Q1 2020
- Respondents asked if they have a **long-lasting condition or difficulty:**
 - Yes, to a great extent; yes, to some extent (two categories combined); and no
- **Disability type:** seven categories (e.g., blind or vision impairment, difficulty learning)
 - For sample size reasons, four categories used in this paper

- 8
- **Disability impact:** yes, a lot; yes, a little, and no (not used in analysis)

Data – III

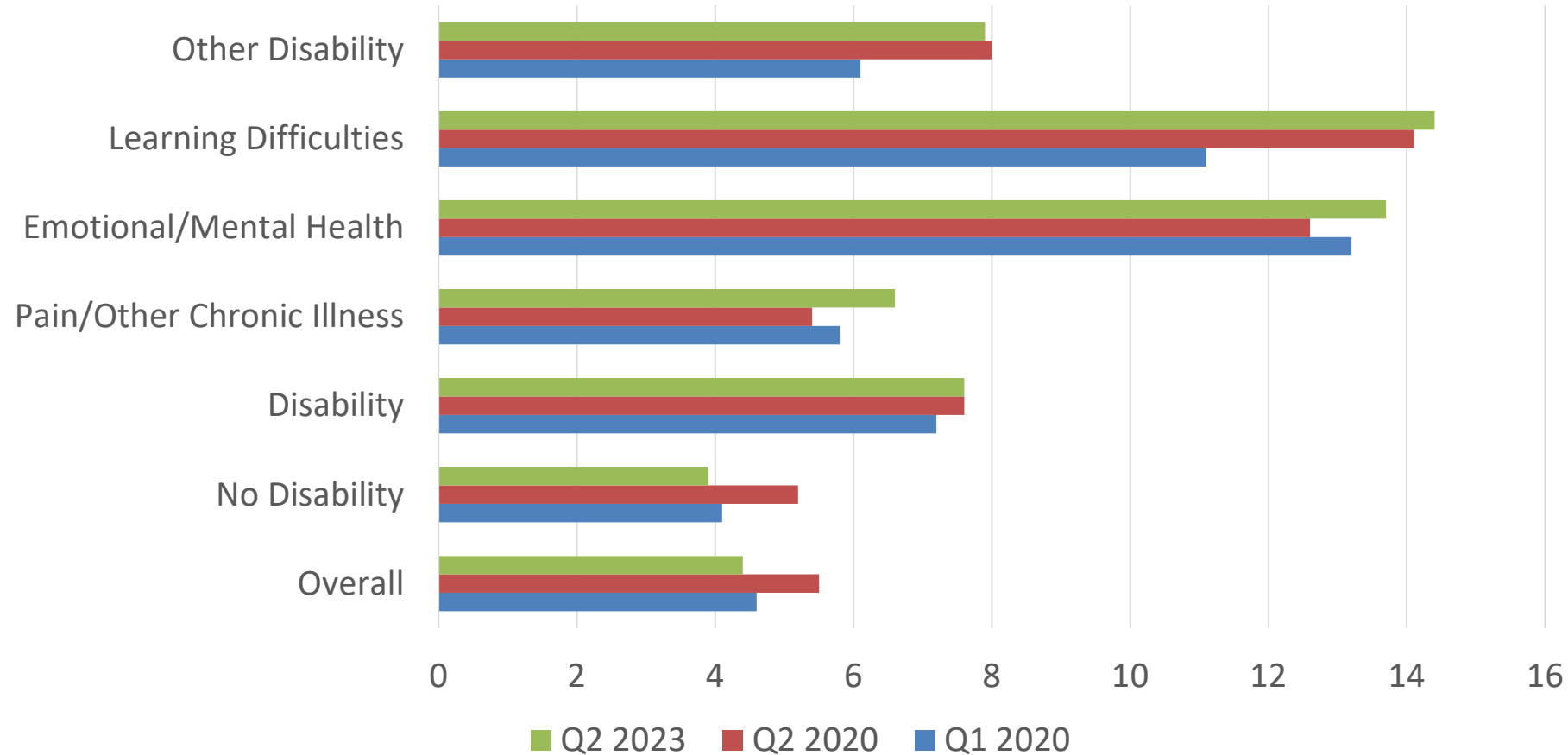
- LFS contains a rich array of other **demographic and socio-economic information (age, educational attainment, citizenship, economic sector of employment, etc.)** – included as controls in our estimated regression models
- Focus on **young people aged 15-34**
 - Definition used by **Eurostat**: “To cover more extensively the transition from formal education to the labour market” ([25184.pdf](#))
- **Data weighted** to ensure samples representative of young people in the labour force in Ireland in Q2 2020 and Q2 2023

Methodology

- **Examine young people with disabilities risk of being unemployed relative to employed**
 - **ILO** measure used to identify those in employment/unemployment
 - Dependent variable – (ILO) unemployed
- Estimate **binary probit models** to identify the characteristics associated with being unemployed, with a particular focus on disability status
 - For interpretation, also estimated marginal effects after probit models
- **Model 1:** Disability dummy variable; **Model 2:** Disability type
- Estimate models with and without **economic sector of employment**
- Estimated a series of OLS regression models with **2023 year interactions**

Preliminary Results

Unemployment Rates – Aged 15-34:



Probit Model of UE: Disability DV - I

- No gender effect, in either time point.
- Those aged 15-19 less likely to be unemployed – stronger during COVID-19.
- Single youths more likely to be unemployed, both time points.
- No family unit effect during COVID-19, but all family unit types more likely to be unemployed relative to couples without children after the pandemic.

	2020	2023
Gender (Female):		
Male	-0.001 (0.012)	0.011 (0.007)
Age (25-34):		
Age 15-19	-0.027** (0.011)	-0.009* (0.005)
Age 20-24	0.012 (0.011)	0.005 (0.007)
Marital Status (Married):		
Single	0.035** (0.016)	0.013** (0.007)
Family Unit (Couple, No Children):		
Couple, children	0.016 (0.016)	0.037*** (0.007)
Lone parent	0.034 (0.026)	0.075*** (0.013)
Not in family unit	-0.009 (0.021)	0.041*** (0.015)

Probit Model of UE: Disability DV - II

- Rest of Europe/World citizens more likely to be unemployed, weaker in 2023.
- Anyone with a qualification less than a degree more likely to be unemployed during COVID-19, especially those with a lower secondary or less qualification; no education effect after the pandemic.
- Those from the South-east less likely to be unemployed compared to those from Dublin during the pandemic; no longer the case after COVID-19.
- Those from the Border region more likely to be unemployed after the pandemic, while those from the West are marginally less likely to be unemployed after COVID-19.

	2020	2023
Citizenship (Irish):		
EU-15	0.013	-0.006
Eastern Europe	0.045	0.018
Asia	0.026	0.005
Rest of Eur/World	0.048** (0.024)	0.018* (0.011)
Educational Attainment (Degree or Higher):		
Lower sec or less	0.120*** (0.016)	0.003 (0.017)
Upper secondary	0.046*** (0.012)	0.010 (0.008)
Post secondary	0.047*** (0.010)	0.002 (0.008)
Geographic Location (Dublin):		
Border	0.020 (0.016)	0.029** (0.014)
Midlands	0.010	-0.004
West	-0.003 (0.031)	-0.012* (0.006)
Mid-east	-0.005	-0.005
Mid-west	-0.023	0.012
South-east	-0.024*** (0.008)	0.023 (0.016)

Probit Model of UE: Disability DV - III

- Young people with a disability are more likely to be unemployed in both time points, but the size of the effect is smaller after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The results are the same when you control for sector of employment.
- The other covariate results also remain the same when you control for sector of employment.

	2020	2023
No Sector Controls:		
Disability	0.061*** (0.019)	0.023*** (0.005)
Sector Controls:		
	0.069*** (0.014)	0.020*** (0.006)
Observations	2,201	2,998

Probit Model of UE: Disability Type

Apart from those with a pain, breathing or chronic illness difficulty, all other disability types were more likely to be unemployed compared to youths without a disability during COVID-19.

After the pandemic (2023), only those with a psychological, emotional or mental health issue continue to be more likely to be unemployed compared to youths without a disability.

All the other covariates results remain similar to those in the disability type specification (without and without sector controls).

	2020	2023
Disability Type (Ref: None)		
Learning, Remembering, Concentrating Difficulty	0.032** (0.014)	-0.002 (0.027)
Psychological, Emotional or Mental Health Issue	0.074*** (0.026)	0.053*** (0.005)
Pain, Breathing or Chronic Illness Difficulty	0.031 (0.024)	-0.006 (0.013)
Other Disability type	0.029*** (0.004)	-0.006 (0.016)
Observations	2,201	2,998

Note: Sector controls included.

OLS Interactions Models

Are the changes observed between the COVID-19 pandemic (2020) and after (2023) statistically significant?

The overall change in the disability dummy variable, falling from 0.069*** to 0.020***, is statistically significant.

For the disability type variables, the change over time in the 'pain, breathing or chronic illness difficulty' result, from 0.031 to -0.006, is significant. Individually, it is not significant (going from more likely to less likely), but the large decline in their likelihood of being unemployed compared to those without a disability is statistically significant.

The small decline in the negative effect for those with a psychological, Emotional or Mental Health Issue is not statistically significant.

Interaction Model Results	
Disability (None):	
Disability	Yes
Disability Type (None):	
Learning, Remembering, Concentrating Difficulty	No
Psychological, Emotional or Mental Health Issue	No
Pain, Breathing or Chronic Illness Difficulty	Yes
Other Disability	No
Observations	5,199

Note: All controls, included sector, included.

Conclusions – I

- Young people with disabilities in Ireland faced compounded labour market vulnerabilities during COVID-19, shaped by pre-existing barriers, precarious employment, and limited policy focus.
- Historical patterns and international evidence highlight persistent risks of exclusion, with remote work offering a potential—but uneven—mitigating factor.
- Descriptively, the unemployment rate for those individuals with a disability increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and did not return to its pre-pandemic level.
- When we examine this by disability type, we find that the unemployment rates for all disability types were higher after the pandemic than what they were before COVID-19.

Conclusions – II

- Based on our econometric results, when we control for a number of factors that can influence someone's likelihood of being unemployed, those youths with a disability were more likely to be unemployed during the COVID-19 pandemic and also after it ended.
- However, the size of this effect was smaller after the pandemic, and our year interaction's model confirmed that this decline over time was statistically significant.

Conclusions – III

- We found that, apart from those with a ‘pain, breathing or a chronic illness difficulty’, all other disability types were more likely to be unemployed compared to youths without a disability during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Those with a psychological, emotional or mental health issue were the only group found to be still more likely to be unemployed compared to youths without a disability after the pandemic. While there was a slight decline in the size of this effect, our year interaction’s model indicated that this decline was not statistically significant.
- This is work in progress, so all comments are welcome

Thank you

Any questions / comments?



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