



Outcomes of the European Semester 2026

European Disability Forum

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**The place of disability in the 2026 Country Reports and
Country-Specific Recommendations**



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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.

Executive Summary

The European Semester is an annual cycle where the European Commission assesses policy challenges in the 27 Member States and presents recommendations on how to address these. Social policy issues have become increasingly present in recent years.

The recommendations are non-binding. However, Member States have an obligation to report to the Commission on how they are planning to address them. As of the next long-term EU budget, from 2028-2030, the European Semester will take on another role. The analysis and recommendations the Commission delivers to the Member States will form the basis for where EU countries should spend their EU funds as a priority.

On the 3rd of June, the European Commission released what is known as the [Spring Package](#). This includes the [Country Reports](#) and [Country-Specific Recommendations](#) for each Member State. The Country Reports give a detailed assessment of social and economic issues the country is facing as well as what reforms and initiatives have taken place to address them. The Country-Specific Recommendations then use these to deliver a short set of recommendations on how to improve the situation.

In this paper, we will explain what the outcomes of the 2026 Spring Package has been regarding issues faced by persons with disabilities. We will summarise the analysis that appears in the Country Reports of each Member State, as well as any relevant references in the Country-Specific Recommendations.

General tendencies from this year's Spring Package

2026 was a record-breaker for how many times disability was mentioned in the country reports. In total, disability was referenced 591 times. Some Member States saw extensive mentions to disability, namely Ireland (56 mentions), Cyprus (56 mentions), Romania (52 mentions) Croatia (42

mentions), Lithuania (36 mentions) Latvia (35 mentions), Poland (31 mentions).

As always, barriers to employment and the risk of poverty and social exclusion were the most commonly addressed issues. Compared to previous years, access to inclusive education was also very high on the agenda.

One of the biggest changes compared to previous years is an increasing focus on accessible and affordable housing for persons with disabilities, as well as the transition from institutions to independent living and community-based services.

Other frequently-raised issues included the adequacy of social protection schemes, and access to assistive technology.

Below you can find the specific points that were raised for each of the 27 EU Member States. To read the full reports for each Member State, you can visit:

- [The Commission web page for the country reports](#)
- [The Commission web page for the Country-Specific Recommendations](#)

Austria

Poverty and social exclusion

- Austria is today further away from reaching its 2030 target than in 2019 and sustained and comprehensive anti-poverty policies remain essential to ensure sufficient progress. Significant regional imbalances persist (from 14.6% in Salzburg to 29.4% in Vienna) and groups such as older people, single parents, people with a migrant background and persons with disabilities face elevated risks.
- The situation of persons with disabilities has improved slightly, though leaving room for further improvement. After a marked increase in 2023 and 2024, levels of severe material and social deprivation declined to 5.4% in 2025. At the same time, 17.7% of people with disabilities were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (EU: 20.6%), a 5.8 percentage points difference compared with people without disabilities.

Employment

- Austria has one of the widest gender gaps in parttime employment in the EU, at 37.1 percentage points in 2025, with almost half of all

women (49.6%) working part-time. In 2025, 42.1% of women working parttime cite care responsibilities for children or adults with disabilities as the primary reason for choosing this type of work, and a further 26.5% cite other personal reasons, a part of which can also be driven by perceptions of gender roles and care responsibilities.

- there is scope for increasing the employment rate of persons with disabilities. Although the figure is above the EU average, the gap in employment between persons with and without disabilities is 18.8 percentage points (2025).
- 27% of young persons with disabilities were neither in employment nor in education and training (NEETs) in 2024. Work integration social enterprises support the labour market integration of people with reduced employability.
- Although a pilot programme for improved personal assistance at work exists, there is scope for further measures to help people with disabilities find work. Sheltered workplaces currently offer low pay and no access to social security benefits. Promoting equal pay and employment in the open labour market could help reduce poverty levels. The recent initiative on Inclusive Employment contributes to this, supporting the access of people with high support needs to the labour market with insurance coverage and fair wages.
- Although a quota system for employing people with disabilities in companies is in place, only 23.9% of firms comply. The ability-to-work examination exempts people with a disability level above 50%, focusing on limitations rather than support needs. Exemptions are granted to people with disabilities under 25, accompanied by youth coaching. Targeted, conditional and activation-oriented exemptions could be considered for those over 25.

Education

- Low performance in basic skills accumulates and can hamper intergenerational mobility. The 2023 UN monitoring of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reveals that progress in inclusive education is insufficient. The inclusion rate in schools has been stagnating for years and remains at around 63%. An overall strategy in this area is lacking. In addition, OECD Talis 2024 identified Austria as having a distinctively low rate of inclusion in schools (8.1%; EU average: 50.2).

Belgium

Poverty and social exclusion

- Belgium has one of the highest rates of people living in very low work intensity households in the EU (11.0% vs EU: 7.9%), with wide regional differences, reaching 22.1% in Brussels. More than half of this group reports a disability, and many are low qualified and live in households with children. Notably, 68.3% of children in these households are at risk of poverty, raising concerns about the cycle of deprivation being passed down through generations. While social protection is effective, disadvantaged groups in these households need targeted support focused on employment, which offers the most sustainable way out of poverty.
- persons with disabilities were twice as likely to face poverty or social exclusion risks (27.2%) than persons without disabilities (12.2%). This is linked to worse labour market outcomes for persons with disabilities and a high disability employment gap.

Employment

- While major labour market reforms were adopted recently, the employment rate remains below the EU average, especially for low-skilled, people with a migrant background, persons with disabilities and older workers.
- People with disabilities, a low education level and older people also face significant barriers to work. In 2025, Belgium received a Country-Specific Recommendation to further integrate disadvantaged groups into the labour market. The disability employment gap is high (34.7 percentage points; EU: 24.2 percentage points) and contributes to higher poverty rates among people with disabilities.
- Because of worse labour market outcomes, poverty risks are above EU average for people with a migrant background and people with disabilities. Nevertheless, social protection is effective in Belgium, reducing poverty by more than half.
- In an effort to reduce the high and growing number of people on long-term sickness leave, the government is also expanding its 'Return-to-Work' measures. The share of persons in the working age population that are inactive due to health or disability reasons in Belgium is the highest of all EU Member States and is almost double that of Germany and France. The reform involves stricter controls, particularly after the one-year benchmark.

- The 2025 country-specific recommendations (Country-Specific Recommendation) for Belgium highlighted the need to make active labour market policies more effective and targeted to further integrate disadvantaged groups, in particular people with a low level of education, older people, people with a migrant background and persons with disabilities.
- The disability employment gap in Belgium remains high (34.7 percentage points vs EU: 24.2 percentage points in 2025). The rate has slightly increased relative to 2024 (33.1 percentage points) and remains well above the national target of reducing the gap to below 24.5 percentage points by 2030. The activity rate of persons with disabilities at 50.9% is low (EU: 64.4%; 2023), pointing to limited incentives to work, and Belgium is strengthening its 'Return-to-Work' policy to tackle this.
- Labour market participation remains low in particular for vulnerable groups, such as adults with a lower level of education, people with a migrant background and people with disabilities.

Education

- In Belgium, where the disability employment gap is large, young adults with disabilities (18-29 years old) are more likely to leave school early (23.8%) compared to the EU peers (20.0%) and their Belgian counterparts without disabilities (7.7%). Belgian data suggest that enrolment in special education is increasing, notably due to the rise in Flanders. In the Flemish Community, 5.8% of primary school children are educated outside of mainstream education, and in the German-speaking Community, this figure is 4.5%, compared to an average of 1.4% across 35 European systems. In 2025, the Flemish government launched a new policy framework for inclusive education until 2040, aiming to better integrate students with special learning needs into mainstream education. Pioneer schools will pilot the model in 2026. More students with disabilities are enrolling in Flemish higher education, as a result of tailored arrangements and support from the Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education. However, they also drop out faster than other students. In the French Community, territorial clusters were created in 2021 to support full mainstream integration, but the results of the evaluation of these clusters are not yet available.

Housing

- Significant challenges in housing affordability persist for vulnerable groups. While Belgium's overall housing cost overburden rate is lower than the EU average at 6.7% (EU: 7.7%), vulnerable groups face heightened pressures. Persons at risk of poverty and individuals with disabilities have above-EU average housing cost overburden rates (31.3% and 12.0% respectively).
- In 2024, 8.0% of people felt discriminated against during their housing search in Belgium (EU: 5.8%), a rate that is higher among people at risk of poverty and persons with disabilities.

Social protection

- The share of people receiving disability benefits is higher than in neighbouring Member States like Germany and the Netherlands. This cannot be explained by a deterioration in the health of the overall population, but the improved labour market participation of women and older workers plays a role as they are more likely to experience health issues. Improved prevention and reintegration, including timely action and better cross institutional cooperation, could help curb this rise. To deal with this challenge, Belgium is further expanding its 'Return-to-Work' measures.
- Social benefits play an important role in reducing poverty and inequalities. However, vulnerable groups continue to face significant disparities, especially people with a migrant background, persons with disabilities and single parent households, partly associated with weaker labour market outcomes. In 2025, the country specific recommendations for Belgium called for making the long-term care system more cost effective while keeping access to care and services affordable. Further efforts to tackle these challenges will help contribute to Belgium's competitiveness, inclusive growth and prosperity.

Relevant recommendations

- Strengthen the effectiveness and targeting of active labour market policies to further integrate disadvantaged groups into the labour market and to address regional disparities.

Poverty and social exclusion

- Despite progress in reaching the 2030 poverty target, Bulgaria has one of the highest at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) rates in the EU, especially for vulnerable groups such as children, persons with disabilities and Roma.
- Persistent poverty risks are the result of a combination of factors, such as the limited impact of social benefits but also unequal opportunities and limited access to quality inclusive education, healthcare and social services. This is especially the case in rural areas and for disadvantaged groups, notably Roma and persons with disabilities.
- Persons with disabilities and the Roma population had the highest AROPE rates, at 42.3% and 77.8% respectively.
- despite improvements, including to other schemes such as disability related benefits, the system's effectiveness in addressing poverty remains limited.

Employment

- The 2025 Country-Specific Recommendations indicated that labour shortages should be addressed by increasing employment rates for vulnerable groups and inactive people. Supported largely by EU funding, implementation of measures targeting persons with disabilities has expanded in recent years. However, despite narrowing in 2025, the disability employment gap remains relatively high compared with the rest of the EU, and the share of persons with disabilities, who were neither in employment nor in education and training (NEETs) was 86.6% in 2024, one of the highest in the EU.
- In 2025, the country-specific recommendations for Bulgaria highlighted the need to tackle labour shortages by implementing measures effectively to increase the employment rate of persons with disabilities, people with a lower level of education, Roma and people outside the workforce and to tackle the shortage of health professionals. Despite some positive results, challenges remain. Improving access to integrated employment and social services is expected to improve labour market outcomes and social inclusion.
- The gap in employment rates for those with and without disabilities remained high at 33.2 percentage points, compared with the EU average of 24.2 percentage points.

- Some measures to increase employment levels of vulnerable groups have been taken, in line with the 2025 recommendation. The focus on persons with disabilities, however, has been on sheltered workshops rather than on the open labour market.
- Despite ESF+ co-funded projects and legal measures aiming to increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, the disability employment gap has not shown a consistent decline. This suggests gaps in effectiveness of these measures exist, in particular in transitioning from education to employment by promoting universal design, digital skills, and vocational training mirroring this group's needs. Integrated employment and social assistance services are provided in 76 employment and social assistance centres, but expansion in coverage has stalled.

Housing

- Young Bulgarians are highly affected by prolonged dependence on family and their inability to afford a house. Lack of support and lack of accessibility in their own homes continues to cause persons with disabilities to be institutionalised, posing a barrier for the deinstitutionalisation process in Bulgaria.
- The country lacks a long-term social housing system with dedicated public funding and integrated measures for the homeless and for other groups in need, such as persons with disabilities. There is no updated monitoring system to count people experiencing homelessness, nor statistical data on the housing needs of persons with disabilities.
- The national strategy for persons with disabilities (2021–2030) emphasises the need for accessible housing, but there are no binding targets. The 2025-2026 action plan for the implementation of the strategy introduced a specific target for new or modernised social housing for 1 247 persons with disabilities in 2029, to be financed with close to EUR 32.4 million under the development of regions programme.
- The national programme for an accessible environment and personal mobility is also providing around EUR 1.3 million annually to build accessible environments in residential buildings, with a target of 100 facilities by the end of 2026. However, the allocated resources do not appear commensurate to the challenge, as 82.4% of all buildings were estimated to be inaccessible in 2021.

De-institutionalisation

- Staff shortages, poor working conditions and insufficient training in the care sector are also hindering the provision of community-based services to support independent living and the transition towards home-based care for adults with disabilities.
- The situation for persons with disabilities is more precarious than for the general population, especially in terms of accessibility and institutionalisation.
- The lack of sufficient accessible affordable and social housing and of housing support in the community is stalling the process of deinstitutionalisation of adults with disabilities.

Social protection

- There is a comparatively low 10% flat tax on all taxable personal income with no basic tax-free allowance, except for a few small exemptions for special types of income or persons with disabilities.

Relevant recommendations

- Increase the employment of underrepresented groups. Strengthen skills acquisition, including adult learning, to boost competitiveness. Address social inclusion by improving access to better integrated employment and social services, community-based long-term care, and a more effective minimum income support.

Croatia

Poverty and social exclusion

- Two action plans are currently being drafted for Government adoption in 2026: one on poverty and social exclusion and one on equalisation of opportunities for persons with disabilities.
- In 2025, 39.8% of persons with disabilities faced risks of poverty or social exclusion (28.8% EU) and the gap when compared with persons without disabilities was 24.2 percentage points (percentage points), one of the highest in the EU.

Employment

- Employment rates remain low for some vulnerable groups, in particular people with disabilities, low-skilled, and older workers.
- The employment rates remain low for some vulnerable groups, in particular people with disabilities, low-skilled, and older workers. There are also pronounced regional differences in overall

employment rates. The disability employment gap decreased in 2025, but it remains particularly wide (39.7 pp. vs 24.2 pp. in the EU), signalling that current measures to integrate these groups are not yet sufficiently targeted. While Croatia continues to use active labour market policies and EU-funded measures to support employability and training, it could make the support more effective by putting more emphasis on groups with low labour market participation and by better linking job schemes to related reskilling and upskilling pathways.

- Employment and unemployment have reached historically favourable levels. While Croatia is on track to reach its 2030 employment rate target, achieving a more inclusive labour market and robust economic growth will require activating underrepresented groups (particularly older people, low-skilled workers and persons with disabilities) and better using their potential.
- The disability employment gap decreased to 39.7 percentage points in 2025, but it still remains well above the EU average (24.2 percentage points). Only 46.5% of persons with some or severe disabilities are active in the labour market, compared with 64.4% in the EU. Nearly half of young persons with disabilities are not in employment, education or training, the second highest rate in the EU (46% vs EU: 28%). Since 2019, the number of persons with disabilities employed through the Croatian Employment Service (CES) mediation has been steadily increasing. However, there are regional disparities: more than 40% of all unemployed persons with disabilities registered with CES are in just 3 out of 21 counties (City of Zagreb, Osijek-Baranja and Split-Dalmatia). Participation of persons with disabilities in active labour market policies (ALMPs) has been expanded in 2026 with the possibility of employing people with disabilities on the part-time basis through employment support. Employers often deny the right to reasonable adjustments to working conditions and work organisation. This indicates the need to further promote the employment of persons with disabilities, particularly through awareness raising.
- Croatia is implementing the National Plan for Equalising Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2021- 2027, and personal assistance services are regulated through the Law on Personal Assistance, with support from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). Under the Technical Support Instrument (TSI), Croatia is working to improve the assessment of remaining work capacity of

persons with disabilities to support their inclusion in the labour market. Further policy initiatives, for example on flexible working arrangements and targeted ALMPs, would be beneficial expanding employment and training opportunities and improving labour market inclusion.

Education

- Further action to improve access for learners with disabilities and other vulnerable groups would also help ensure that the vocational education and training system contributes both to the country's competitiveness and social inclusion.

Housing

- The Affordable Housing Act (adopted in April 2026) aims to provide affordable housing to vulnerable groups and citizens who are not creditworthy. The Act defines the target groups entitled to receive subsidies or housing assistance covering people with lower incomes, persons who do not own an adequate residential property, and at the same time are individuals with income that cannot exceed 2.5 times the regional median net salary for a single person, and for each additional member of the immediate family, the limit of their total income is increased by 0.5 times the regional median net salary, young people, families with children, persons over 65 years of age, persons with disabilities, families in which a member of the immediate family is a person with a disability or a child with developmental difficulties, etc.
- Comprehensive data on the current living conditions and residential distribution of persons with disabilities, as well as other vulnerable groups, are very limited. A small survey conducted by associations of persons with disabilities in 2021 showed that 84.2% of persons with disabilities believed that their housing needs were only partially or not at all met, given their household income levels. The new national housing policy plan and its accompanying action plan set out a legal and strategic framework that addresses housing issues affecting persons with disabilities. However, certain areas remain insufficiently regulated, such as the accessibility of buildings and housing units.

De-institutionalisation

- In February 2025, Croatia and the World Bank concluded a 2023–2025 technical assistance project to transition 38 social welfare

institutions to community-based care. The reform aims to expand services such as day care, psychosocial support, personal assistance, early development support, mentoring, and employment aid for persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups by 2027.

- Since the beginning of the drive to move from residential care to home care, only a few LTC homes for persons with disabilities have been completely transformed into providers of services rather than long-term accommodation, and the total number of people placed in such residential care homes in Croatia has not significantly decreased. The lack of community-based services to support. In addition, the Croatian LTC system is understaffed and faces labour shortages.

Social protection

- Croatia's low levels and impacts of social benefits hinder progress towards the 2030 poverty reduction target and leave vulnerable groups, including older people, people with disabilities, lower levels of income and rural communities without adequate support.
- In 2025, Croatia received a Country-Specific Recommendation to increase the adequacy of social benefits, including pensions, while maintaining fiscal sustainability. Relevant recent measures include increases in the minimum and disability pension.
- Inadequate social protection, low pension adequacy and high poverty risks for vulnerable groups, especially older people, people with disabilities, rural communities and low income households, have resulted in slow progress towards the 2030 poverty reduction target.
- Croatia allocates 42% of total social benefit spending to old-age and survivor benefits, while disability benefits account for 10.7%.
- Only 5.3% of social benefits were means-tested in Croatia, compared with 10.9% in the EU in 2023, and only 3.5% of disability benefits were means-tested compared with 27.2% in the EU.
- Disability benefits underwent a reform that combined several benefits into a single benefit, increasing the adequacy and changing the scope, which significantly increased the coverage of the different levels of the benefit, but also raises questions about the efficiency and sustainability of this benefit.
- Under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, Croatia increased the minimum pension (by 3%) and the survivor's pension and introduced the combination of an old-age or disability pension with

a partial survivor's pension as of 2023. The disability pensions were increased by 10%, effective from 1 January 2026.

Relevant recommendations

- Better target active labour market policies to vulnerable groups, and strengthen efforts to attract, develop and retain talent. Reduce poverty and income inequality by increasing the adequacy of social benefits while maintaining fiscal sustainability through better targeting. Improve access to formal home- and community-based long-term care.

Cyprus

Poverty and social exclusion

- Rising poverty risks among older people (331.7% vs EU 18.8%) and persons with disabilities (33.8% vs EU 28.8%) reflect inadequate pension income. Guaranteed minimum income levels have eroded due to lack of inflation adjustment and structural weaknesses in the long-term care system.
- Older people and persons with disabilities remain disproportionately affected by poverty, and their situation has been worsening in recent years. At the same time, the expected increase in demand for long-term care (LTC) is placing sustained pressure on the LTC system. Deinstitutionalisation services and the related social housing that is offered in Cyprus is limited, and there is no comprehensive national strategy to support independent living.
- In 2025, the AROPE rate of persons with disabilities increased to 33.8% (by 2.8 percentage points), persistently high for a decade. The AROPE gap compared to persons without disabilities grew over time and is now among the widest in the EU (21.0 percentage points (percentage points) vs EU 11.1 percentage points).
- Older persons with disabilities are experiencing an even higher rate of poverty and social exclusions risks, having reached 42% in 2025, up by 4.1 percentage points in a single year.
- Rising poverty risks among older people and persons with disabilities reflect insufficient adequacy, mainly in terms of state-provided and supplementary pensions.

Employment

- The disability employment gap, after a decrease of 0.6 percentage points, is now slightly below the EU average at 23.95 percentage

points in 2024 (EU: 24.2 percentage points) Cyprus has not yet set a specific employment target for persons with disabilities. It could be beneficial to strengthen employer support schemes to sectors offering sustainable career progression paths and to extend the existing disability quota system to the private sector. Social entrepreneurship new incentives approved by the Council of Ministers in July 2025 are expected to increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

- Active labour market policy (ALMP) outcomes are modest, remaining insufficient to tackle structural mismatches and reduce the gaps in outreach targeting women and vulnerable groups, especially non-EU nationals and persons with disabilities
- Financial incentives have been introduced to make social enterprises more attractive, such as those that employ persons with disabilities. Yet, the number of new registrations remains low and Cyprus faces long administrative delays and a lack of administrative support. Cyprus could use the potential of social economy entities (work integration social enterprises – WISE), in particular social enterprises, to integrate vulnerable people into the labour market. By improving support and cooperation between public authorities and social economy entities, Cyprus could tap into the potential of the social economy in the provision of care and thus enable the provision of services, including home care and personal assistance.

Education

- Inclusive education has become a significant challenge. Students with disabilities and/or special educational needs still face barriers to effective participation in mainstream education. In 2023, young adults with disabilities (aged 18-24) were more likely to leave school early (36.8% vs EU 19.1%) – one of the widest gaps in the EU. Improving inclusive learning environments through tailored learning materials, assessment methods and training of mainstream teachers is crucial in order to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to develop strong foundational skills and reduce inequality.
- Persons with disabilities face barriers to participation in education and training. Investing in human capital and skills can further boost productivity growth, strengthen competitiveness and the resilience of the country's economy.
- In 2025, the share of 18–24-year-olds leaving education and training early although slightly decreased by 1.5 percentage points

(percentage points) to 9.8% compared to the previous year, it stands still above the EU average: 9.1%. In 2023, young adults with disabilities (aged 18–24 years) were more likely to leave school early (36.8%, compared to 3.3% for young adults without disabilities; EU average: 19.1% and 9.3%, respectively).

- Supporting the academic and social development of pupils and students with disabilities or special educational needs would help them integrate into mainstream classes. Increasing the resources for special needs education will help reduce the overall basic skills gap. The proposed amendment to the existing Law on Education and Training of Children with Special Needs is under consultation. Despite the persistently low basic skills levels and the high shares of early school leaving, policy responses remain focused on special education solutions for individual disabilities, while less attention is given to reforming schools, teaching and learning as the foundation for eliminating disabling barriers and ensuring inclusion. Cyprus could develop differentiated learning objectives, adapted teaching methods, modified educational materials and alternative assessment methods for pupils and students with disabilities or SEN. In addition, supporting the training of mainstream teachers (not only school assistants) in promoting inclusive education would be beneficial.
- In Cyprus, no formalised disability-related support is provided in secondary education for students with disabilities or SEN studying in the general classroom or in special units. In Cyprus, inclusive education is key to advancing deinstitutionalisation and independent living, especially as 29.6% of persons with disabilities remained at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 20245, a persistently high rate for over a decade. Strengthening inclusive education can enhance skills, improve employment prospects, reduce poverty risks, and promote greater autonomy and social and economic participation.

Housing

- A new housing subsidy scheme for older people and persons with disabilities (2025) increased funding to EUR 1 300, expanded eligibility, and strengthened quality criteria.
- People with disabilities suffer from the lack of accessible housing. Apart from increasing the allowances for this target group, Cyprus has not scaled up investments in accessible housing for them. Slow and limited mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing the implementation of accessibility requirements contribute to the issue.

The forthcoming Law on Social Participation, Inclusion and Independent Living of Persons with Disabilities lacks a housing element and therefore could miss the opportunity to strengthen independent living frameworks.

Social protection

- Disability-specific benefits are both low in value and underrepresented in overall social protection spending, leaving many recipients financially vulnerable. On a positive note, planned reforms (including a draft law to improve social services and an increase in disability allowances) aim to improve these arrangements.
- The impact of social transfers on poverty reduction is relatively low. In 2025, this impact (excluding pensions) was 31.3%, below the EU average of 33.2%. This has an especially severe impact on disability-specific benefits, which are not aligned with the cost of living. Disability benefits only accounted for 3.3% of the total expenditure on social protection benefits for 2024, among the lowest in the EU. The new law on Social Participation, Inclusion and Independent Living of Persons with Disabilities will upgrade and increase social services and benefits for persons with disabilities, disconnecting disabilities allowances from GMI.
- Currently, Cyprus is considering reforming the disability benefit system by decoupling disability benefits from the guaranteed minimum income.

Transport

- The use of public transport in Cyprus is the lowest in the EU. Difficult physical access was reported by 10.5% of the population as a reason for not using public transport regularly (vs EU 3.3%), while 59.5% referred to schedule reasons (vs EU 13.3%). This is especially true for persons with disabilities. Approximately 55% of the population cannot reach a healthcare facility within 45 minutes by public transport.
- The stagnation in public transport use highlights the need to expand sustainable, inclusive, and accessible systems, including for people with disabilities.

Technology

- A vocational education and training strategy is being developed, and its implementation will be key for increasing the attractiveness and

capacity of the sector. For instance, developing new infrastructure, taking into account the digital dimension, would help meet the rising demand for such skills, especially for persons with disabilities. The use of assistive technology (AT) is not yet developed, nor is an accessibility service delivery system, including support for AT and digital competence development for persons with disabilities.

- In 2025, after an increase in line with the EU average, 55.8% of Cypriot adults had at least a basic level of digital skills (up from 49.5% in 2023, compared with an EU average of 60.4% in 2025 and 55.6% in 2023). Nevertheless, despite recent improvements, people with no or low skills, including young people and persons with disabilities, still fall significantly behind the average, also in terms of digital skills.

Disability strategy

- A new disability law has been adopted in April 2026. For its implementation, additional financial provisions have been included in the State Budget. In addition, the new law provides for new social services in kind.
- There is a Revised National Strategy and Action Plan for Disability 2024- 2028.

Relevant recommendations

- Address labour shortages and promote job quality by strengthening labour market participation of vulnerable groups.
- Further increase participation in early childhood education and care
- Expand the availability and coverage of long-term care services, broaden eligibility, and reduce high out-of-pocket payments.
- Improve social protection for vulnerable groups by providing targeted support to energy-poor households, ensuring adequate minimum pensions and increasing the availability of affordable and social housing.

Czechia

Employment

- To address the 2025 Country-Specific Recommendation, it would be beneficial for Czechia to take further measures to strengthen student support, improve access for disadvantaged groups,

including for persons with disabilities, provide career guidance, and encourage participation in STEM fields.

- Access to employment also remains limited for other disadvantaged groups, such as Czech citizens of Roma background and persons with disabilities.
- The disability employment gap increased by 2.1 percentage points in 2025 reaching 23.8 percentage points (EU: 24.2 percentage points). In 2023, Czechia introduced a 5% tax reduction in social contributions for part-time employment of target vulnerable groups, including parents and informal carers. The act on Work Integration Social Enterprises entered into force in January 2025, and in July 2025 the government approved the Strategic Framework for Social Entrepreneurship for 2026-2030.

Education

- In 2023, a higher share of students with some or severe limitation or disability left school early in comparison with those without limitation (18.4% vs 5.1%), and this is larger than in the EU on average (19.1% vs 9.3%).
- In 2023, the share of persons with disabilities (aged 25-34) who had completed tertiary education in Czechia was 29.8% (EU average: 36%), lower than among people without disability (36%; EU average: 45.8%).

De-institutionalisation

- The long-term care system remains heavily oriented towards residential services, which poses risks linked to high care costs. In 2022, 60.2% of public long-term care spending was allocated to residential care (EU: 46.2%), while only 8.3% went to home care (terénní služby), far below the EU average of 28.8%. Approximately 63% of people with disabilities between 18 and 64 do not use field services due to systemic issues such as insufficient capacity, inflexible services, and high costs, rather than personal preference.

Relevant recommendations

- Increase the labour market participation of underrepresented groups.
- Improve the supply of childcare and long-term care services to encourage more women to enter the labour market. Reduce the tax burden on low-income workers and exemptions for high-income self-employed. Boost skills and educational outcomes by increasing

participation, reducing dropout rates, and providing more student support for tertiary education, and providing more support for disadvantaged schools and pupils in primary and secondary education.

Denmark

Poverty and social exclusion

- Poverty and social exclusion risks in Denmark remain relatively low, but the rate is considerably higher in cities compared to rural areas, towns and suburbs, and certain vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities, are particularly affected. Denmark is significantly behind its 2030 poverty reduction target, underscoring the scope for further policy measures aimed at preventing inequalities and alleviating poverty or social exclusion.
- the percentage of persons with disabilities living in quasi-jobless households and their AROPE rate rose considerably between 2022 and 2025 (by 6.7 percentage points and 3.8 percentage points respectively). The AROPE rate of this group stood at 28.5% in 2025 (EU: 28.8%), with 24% of them living in very low work intensity households, well above the EU average of 18.9% in 2025.

Employment

- The disability employment gap reached 26 percentage points in 2024 (EU: 24 percentage points), up from 20.4 percentage points in 2023 (EU: 21.4%) and stood at 23.5% in 2025 (24.2%). In November 2025, Denmark adopted an action plan for increasing the employment of persons with disabilities, setting a target of an additional 15 000 persons with disabilities in employment by 2030.

Education

- Among other things, the new measures include enhanced support for pupils and students with disabilities throughout the education system and targeted guidance for their transition from education into the labour market.

Healthcare

- In 2023, the leading causes of death, morbidity and disability in Denmark were cancer and diseases of the circulatory system (cardiovascular diseases – CVDs). Rising life expectancy has led to an increase in chronic conditions. More than one third (35%) of

people aged 65 years and over have multiple chronic conditions, with women more likely than men to report limitations in daily activities (26% vs 20%).

Relevant recommendations

- Address the skills shortages to meet labour market needs. Step up action to improve basic skills, address attainment inequalities in education and training, tackle shortages of qualified teachers, and address early school leaving.
- Increase housing supply, particularly in major cities, by simplifying planning procedures and reviewing land-use planning rules to facilitate the construction of new dwellings.

Estonia

Poverty and social exclusion

- Vulnerable groups such as older people, persons with disabilities and single-parent households are still at a relatively high risk of poverty in Estonia. In particular, challenges remain regarding the adequacy and coverage of social protection and the affordability of and access to healthcare and long-term care, which could become more acute if no effective policy action is taken.
- In 2025, Estonia received a Country-Specific Recommendation to reduce poverty risks by strengthening social protection for older people, single-person households, persons with disabilities and the unemployed. Estonia has taken steps to address these challenges. Planned reforms to the unemployment insurance system aim to improve coverage, also for workers with limited employment histories and persons with disabilities.
- Persons with disabilities, including those in employment, are at a much higher risk of poverty than the general population, partly reflecting relatively low disability benefits and the limited effectiveness of social transfers.
- People with disabilities are particularly exposed to poverty risks. In 2024, 39.1% of people in this category were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (compared with the EU average of 28.7%). Among people with severe disabilities, the rate stood at 49%. Relatively low disability benefits and the limited effectiveness of social benefits are key factors contributing to the high AROPE rate among persons with disabilities.

- The AROPE rate for the working-age population with disabilities is 32.5%, compared with 15% for people without disabilities. The in-work at-risk-of-poverty rate among employed persons with disabilities is also considerably higher in Estonia than the EU average. This reflects a higher prevalence of part-time work due to disability and higher rates of early school leaving among students with disabilities.
- Among older persons with disabilities, the AROPE rate is 46.4%, compared with 33.6% among those without disabilities, reflecting the general inadequacy of pensions.
- To tackle these persistent challenges, Estonia has allocated EUR 161 million under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) for social inclusion measures, complemented by a further EUR 16.2 million address material deprivation. A comprehensive approach, as set out in the EU anti-poverty strategy, could help address the multiple dimensions of poverty and achieve the national anti-poverty target.
- Relative poverty rates in eastern border counties such as Ida-Viru and Jõgeva (33% and 24% in 2024, respectively) are much higher than those in better-performing regions such as Harju and Rapla (both 17%), highlighting stark and persistent regional disparities. (221) These differences are compounded by significant regional inequalities in access to social services, affecting people with disabilities, older people, families with children and other vulnerable groups. The availability and quality of social services varies widely across municipalities, with smaller and rural areas often lacking the administrative and financial capacity to provide adequate and timely support.
- Persons with disabilities have among the highest poverty rates. Although they represented 12.9% of social housing residents in 2021, limited data on affordable and accessible housing restricts the assessment of how effectively municipal social services meet their housing needs across regions.

Employment

- After rising sharply in 2022, the disability employment gap has decreased significantly from 26,2pp in 2022 to 16pp in 2025 below the EU average of 24,2 percentage points. The labour market integration of persons with disabilities could be further promoted through: (i) continued investment in tailored recruitment and employment pathways; (ii) workplace adaptations and employer engagement; and (iii) stronger accessibility policies and reasonable

accommodation policies. Greater support and involvement of social economy organisations in implementing labour market policies could also help improve employment outcomes for young people and persons with disabilities.

Education

- Pupils with some disabilities are more than twice as likely to leave school early compared to their peers, with a rate of 20.5% in 2024, above the EU average of 17.1%.

Housing

- In the previous programming period, an EU-co-financed programme (around EUR 9.4 million) also supported the adaptation of over 2 000 homes for persons with disabilities.

Social protection

- Disability benefits per person, adjusted for purchasing power parity, are significantly below the EU average (485.8 Purchasing Power Standard in Estonia vs 725 Purchasing Power Standard in the EU in 2023).
- Estonia allocates a larger proportion of benefits than the EU average to disability benefits (10.7% of total benefits expenditure compared with 7.0% for the EU), while spending a smaller proportion on old age and survivor benefits (43.3% vs 47.0% in 2024). Estonia allocates only 0.38% of total benefits expenditure to housing benefits, highlighting a potential gap in the social protection system. Despite substantial improvements since 2023, the impact of social benefits (excluding pensions) on poverty reduction remains below the EU average (31.5% vs 34.2%).
- Estonia will improve social protection, in line with the 2025 country-specific recommendation, as workers with disabilities will be able to combine work ability allowance with unemployment benefits.

Relevant recommendations

- Improve skills by expanding opportunities for low-skilled and older adults and strengthening STEM education across all levels.
- Reduce early school leaving by addressing teacher shortages and supporting learners with special needs.
- Strengthen social protection to reduce the risk of poverty among vulnerable groups by increasing the adequacy and efficiency of the benefit system.

- Improve accessibility and affordability of healthcare and long-term care, including to address regional disparities, by ensuring funding.

Finland

Poverty and social exclusion

- Among children in families where at least one parent has a disability, the AROPE rate is 33%, which is above the EU average of 24%. A comprehensive approach could help address the multiple dimensions of poverty and achieve the national anti-poverty target.

Employment

- For young persons with disabilities, the unemployment rate was 24.3% in 2024. These trends likely reflect limited job opportunities and insufficient support for the transition from education to work, contributing to the feeling of demotivation among young people.
- While the gender employment gap in Finland is the lowest in the EU, the gender pay gap remains persistently above the EU average, rising from 16% in 2022 to 16.3% in 2025. The gap in employment between persons with and without disabilities is 20.4 percentage points (against 24 percentage points in the EU in 2024).

France

Employment

- The share of young people (15-29) neither in employment nor in education and training (NEETs) remains higher than the EU average of 11%, and slightly increasing (12.7%). The NEET unemployment rate is of particular concern for persons with disabilities (30% in 2023) and those in the outermost regions (31.9% in Guyane in 2025).
- The Disability employment gap stands at 21.6 percentage points.

Social protection

- The profitability of non-life insurance in France has improved, in part due to lower inflation, but it remains under pressure. Although insurance premiums rose more slowly than inflation in 2022–2023, they picked up in 2024, particularly in motor insurance. Nonetheless, some lines like construction, general liability, and

disability coverage remain exposed to inflation over the long term due to less frequent price revisions.

Relevant recommendations

- Prevent and reduce in-work poverty and child poverty, by removing barriers to gainful and sustainable employment, notably for parents, by improving access to quality early childhood education and care for the most disadvantaged households.

Germany

Poverty and social exclusion

- Persons with severe disabilities face particularly high risks of poverty: 40.1% were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2025, which is above the EU average of 37.2%, and almost 23 percentage points higher than for persons without disabilities.

Employment

- A large proportion of persons with disabilities are employed in sheltered workshops, working without employee status or entitlement to the national minimum wage.
- The disability employment gap is 22 percentage points (against the EU average of 24 percentage points). A third of young persons with disabilities were neither in employment nor in education or training (31% in 2023).

Education

- Early school leaving rates are high and increasing, particularly affecting individuals born outside of Germany and those with disabilities. For individuals with some disabilities, the rate was 22.2% in 2024 (EU average: 17.1%), while those with severe disabilities had a rate of 52.7% (EU average: 44.2%).

Housing

- Housing cost overburden, while declining overall, has increased for parts of the population. Single-person households (22.6%, EU:20.1%) and people with disabilities (14.3%, EU: 9.9%) are also disproportionately exposed.

Relevant recommendations

- Improve education outcomes, including by promoting excellence, preventing early school leaving, and providing targeted support to disadvantaged groups.
- Improve the availability and quality of early childhood education and care and all-day schools, as well as of cost-efficient long-term care.

Greece

Poverty and social exclusion

- The risk of poverty remains high and particularly impacts children and vulnerable groups. The rate is higher for individuals with low educational attainment and vulnerable groups (e.g. persons with disabilities) and varies between regions.
- 35.8% of persons with disabilities were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2025, which is significantly higher than the EU average of 28.8%.

Employment

- Weak labour market attachment is an issue among vulnerable groups. In 2025, the disability employment gap reached 35.9 percentage points, increasing further by 7.4 percentage points compared with the previous year. In 2024, young persons with some or severe disabilities represented 83.7% of the total NEETs in Greece.

Education

- Promoting inclusiveness in education can help improve educational outcomes across the board and promote social integration. Students with a migrant background, students with disabilities, and Roma pupils have poorer educational outcomes and are more likely to leave education earlier than other pupils. Another important consideration is the growing number of students with special educational needs. In line with the Council's Recommendation on Human Capital in the EU, it remains key to support these vulnerable groups (including by making education and training more accessible and adaptive to their needs).

- Young adults (18- 24) with disabilities are more likely to abandon education, with an early school leaving rate of 9.7% (EU average: 19.1%).

Housing

- Greek households are facing rising housing costs. In 2025, they spent on average 34.6% of their income on housing expenses, the highest rate in the EU (EU: 18.9%). Single households, low-income households and vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities and non-EU nationals are particularly affected.
- One in three (33%) households with persons with disabilities in Greece spent more than 40% of their income on housing costs in 2024, a share more than three times the EU average (10.4%). Several strategic frameworks are in place, recognising housing as a priority area for the social integration of vulnerable groups and promoting measures to improve access to adequate housing, but implementation remains slow and fragmented.

Relevant recommendations

- Increase the employment rate of vulnerable groups
- Expand formal early childhood education and care and long-term care.
- Continue streamlining social benefits and improving access to services.
- Expand affordable and social housing supply including through a new building code.

Hungary

Poverty and social exclusion

- 28.3% of all persons with disabilities were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2025 (28.8% in the EU).

Employment

- The labour market remains tight and significant inequalities persist. Low-educated people, Roma and persons with disabilities continue to face barriers to accessing and staying in the labour market.
- Large-scale ESF+-funded measures have been implemented and some measures have helped reduce the disability employment gap, though it remains at the EU average. The disability employment gap

improved (24.3 percentage points vs 24.2 percentage points in the EU) and is now at EU average.

- Low educated people, Roma and persons with disabilities experience significantly higher social exclusion risks, including when in employment.

Education

- Despite efforts to reduce early school leaving, significant disparities persist for some territories and vulnerable groups. 4 in 10 persons with disabilities were early leavers in 2024.
- Hungary has one of the highest shares of early school leavers and young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) among persons with disabilities in the EU.
- In 2024, 41.2% of persons with some or severe disabilities were early school leavers (EU average: 24.6%), in contrast to 10.1% of the total population. In addition, young persons with disabilities are much more likely to be NEET in Hungary (59.0%) than in the EU on average (31.4%). As for adults, the share of persons with disabilities who have low educational attainment was above the EU average (33.7% vs 32.9%) in 2024, and the share of persons with disabilities who have tertiary attainment was well below the EU average (11.1% vs 21.4%).
- Support for students with special educational needs is uneven across the country. The number of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) has been growing in recent years, especially the number of pupils with behavioural and learning disorders. While the majority of children with SEN are educated in mainstream settings, they do not all have access to adequate levels of support, which impedes their social and economic integration. The number of special education professionals almost doubled between 2015 and 2025. Nonetheless, in the northeast of Hungary, fewer children are diagnosed with SEN compared to the southwest, in part also due to limited access to diagnostic services.

Housing

- People at risk of poverty, single-parent households, people with disabilities and Roma are disproportionately overburdened by housing costs. There has been no targeted support in recent years to help low-income groups and young people to access housing. In 2024, half of the housing loans went to households in the highest income quintile, suggesting that the loan-based measures are not

effectively supporting lower-income households. Housing programmes announced in 2025 did not improve the situation.

- People with disabilities and older people with low income face significant structural, financial and accessibility barriers to accessing suitable and independent housing, in particular, in the private housing market. The quality of housing and access to a home depend to a large extent on the person's financial situation, i.e. whether they are able to finance accessibility measures or whether their family can provide financial support. In addition, access to appropriate housing support is very limited and the de-institutionalization approach is missing.

De-institutionalisation

- Targeted reform and investment measures supporting the renovation and construction of accessible social housing in non-segregated areas with good access to education and employment, including the related social and care services and home rental support, could help improve the living conditions of socioeconomically disadvantaged people and persons with disabilities.

Relevant recommendations

- Increase access to effective active labour market measures, in particular by providing upskilling and reskilling opportunities to disadvantaged groups
- Improve the adequacy of social assistance.
- ensure access for all to quality mainstream essential services.
- Improve access to quality healthcare and long-term care, in particular preventive and primary care services.
- Target support measures in the housing sector to low-income households and increase housing supply, including for affordable and social housing.

Ireland

Poverty and social exclusion

- Persons with disabilities still face much higher poverty risks. At 32.6% in 2025, the AROPE rate for this group increased by more than 2percentage points, well above the EU average (28.8%). Also, poverty among those with severe activity limitations increased, from 41.1% to 45.1%. The 2026 budget eliminated the one-off

cost-of-living payments, and there were limited changes to welfare payments for persons with disabilities, which might lead to increased poverty risks. To address the situation, some measures have been launched with the adoption of the 2026 budget. For instance, after taking up work, persons with disabilities can qualify for the back-to-work family dividend. These measures incentivise entering the labour market, without the risk of losing some of the much-needed social support right away. Still, consistently high poverty rates for this group reaffirm that reliable and broad support (including income support and services) are necessary even after taking up work to compensate for the costs of disability.

- The risk of poverty or social exclusion among children has decreased but some disparities persist for disadvantaged groups. The AROPE rate for children sharply increased from 20.9% to 23.7% in 2025, now nearing the EU average (24.3%). Risks are more pronounced for children from single-parent households, children with disabilities and children from Traveller and Roma communities.

Employment

- Persons with a disability in Ireland continue to experience one of the highest disability employment gaps in the EU as highlighted in a 2025 Country-Specific Recommendation. In 2025, the government launched the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2030. This included actions for 2025–2026 aiming to expand employment opportunities and a new statutory 6% public sector target, but no targets for other sectors. The Wage Subsidy Scheme, which supports employers that hire workers with disabilities, was expanded to the voluntary and community sector and the eligibility threshold was reduced. The effect of these measures still needs to be assessed.
- Increasing labour market participation among women could significantly expand the labour supply. As of Q3-2025, 1.5 million people aged 15 and over were inactive, with 738 000 over the age of 65. Those of prime working age (25-54) make up 18% of the inactive population, and inactivity among this group is highly gendered: 72% are women. 70% report that they do not want to work, often due to family or household responsibilities, with women making up 90% of those citing this reason. Health or disability is the second most cited reason.

- Remote work presents a structural opportunity to support inclusivity. Increasing labour market participation among women and persons with disabilities could add around 100 000 workers to the labour force.
- There is significant potential to increase the labour market participation of persons with disabilities. The disability employment gap reached 38.2 percentage points in 2024, one of the highest in the EU. It dropped however to 30.5% in 2025. It remains to be seen how much of the sharp drop in the latest data is due to a change in the methodology and how much is due to new measures that Ireland put in place recently. These measures include a public sector employment target, wage subsidies and reasonable accommodation, with their full impact yet to be seen. 40% of young persons with disabilities are not in employment, education or training. Moreover, 60% of unemployed persons with a disability are long-term unemployed, rising to 72% among those with more severe, long-lasting conditions.
- Insufficient access to reasonable workplace accommodation and facilities remains a barrier. Other challenges include a lack of suitable housing near employment opportunities and inaccessible transport options. The 'Work and Access' programme, launched in 2024, offers targeted recruitment support and incentives for both employers and employees. However, uptake has been slow and concentrated among larger organisations. Similarly, awareness and use of the expanded Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant has been limited. Disability advocacy groups also highlight the risk of losing benefits, such as medical cards, social housing support and disability allowances, if income rises after taking up work. Adjusting income thresholds across all relevant welfare schemes could help reduce this 'benefits trap' and support higher labour market participation among persons with disabilities.

Education

- Ireland continues to increase the number of new special schools and classes for students with disabilities. Although the country supports students with special educational needs, it has also significantly increased the number of segregated settings – an approach that runs counter to the United Nations Charter of Rights for People with Disabilities. The review of special classes in primary schools by the Department of Education and Youth highlights the need for a clearer vision for educational provision for autistic pupils within an inclusive

education system. There is also a need to address the significant challenges that parents of autistic children face at each stage of their child's educational journey. Better coordination of educational and health and therapy services, including at central level, could facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream education.

- This persistent gap is mirrored in education and skills. 14.4% of persons with disabilities aged 15 and over leave education after primary school – almost double the rate of the general population (7.4%).
- Education is of high quality and overall equitable, with close links to the labour market. Irish students' basic skills are among the best in international comparisons, and the tertiary educational attainment level is the highest in the EU, playing a significant role in supporting competitiveness and growth. However, children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and students with disabilities continue to fall behind their peers.
- The expansion of special schools and classes for children with a disability may affect the inclusiveness of the education system.
- EU co-financed initiatives help disadvantaged learners, including the 'WorkAbility' programme, supported by the European Social Fund Plus, which provides tailored support to enable people with disabilities to access education, training or employment, depending on their needs and abilities.

Housing

- Homelessness continues to rise. It is now affecting over 17 500 people, out of which more than 5500 children. This includes persons with disabilities, single-parent families, young people, Roma and Travellers.
- Children, older people, persons with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups are increasingly impacted by the lack of affordable housing. The National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027 sets out the government's plan to deliver accessible housing for disabled people.

De-institutionalisation

- A 2024 report found that institutionalisation was on the rise for persons with disabilities in all age groups, including inappropriate placements for persons with disabilities in nursing homes, as well as

homelessness, both driven by the lack of accessible (social) housing to meet needs.

Social protection

- Core welfare rates were increased, but the one-off cost-of-living supports ceased with the 2026 budget. From September 2026 persons with disabilities will be allowed to keep the fuel allowance after taking up employment. The Back to Work family dividend was extended to persons with disabilities who have children and take up employment. However, further efforts are necessary to reduce poverty among this group. The new strategy commits to easing the reduction in benefits after taking up work over a transition period of several years, during which benefits will only be gradually reduced.
- According to estimates, the costs related to disability absorb more than half the disposable income of households with persons with disabilities, underlining the need for welfare supports to be benchmarked against minimum living standards.

Disability strategy

- In September 2025, the government launched the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025-2030. The strategy includes a dedicated employment pillar, with priority actions for 2025-2026 focused on expanding work opportunities for persons with disabilities in the civil and public service.
- The government recently adopted the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025–2030, which covers employment, education, independent living, health and mobility. Stakeholders broadly welcomed.

Relevant recommendations

- Further increase the supply of affordable and social housing, while preventing and reducing housing exclusion of vulnerable groups
- Strengthen the labour market and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups by putting in place better targeted outreach and upskilling, and by improving the provision of and facilitating access to social services.

Italy

Employment

- The Disability employment gap stands at 25.1 percentage points.
- vulnerable groups, including low-qualified adults, second-generation immigrants and persons with disabilities, face barriers to labour market integration

Relevant recommendations

- Support labour market participation, including by improving active labour market policies and access to affordable and quality care services,
- Continue to improve the coverage and adequacy of social protection as well as access to social services for people in vulnerable situations, notably children, while maintaining fiscal sustainability.

Latvia

Poverty and social exclusion

- Vulnerable groups (including older persons, persons with disabilities, unemployed persons and single parent households) are particularly exposed to poverty and social exclusion.
- Both the poverty rate and the extent of poverty after social transfers (excluding pensions) increased for several vulnerable household groups (i.e. households with persons with disabilities, with elderly members and members with a migration background) between 2015 and 2025.
- Poverty is particularly high among unemployed people, people of pensionable age and people with disabilities, and among those with a low level of education.
- The AROPE rate among persons with disabilities in Latvia is one of the highest in the EU, at 42.6% in 2025 (EU: 28.8%), with no significant improvement over the past ten years. This figure is 24.5 percentage points higher than for people without disabilities in Latvia. The situation is even worse for people with severe disabilities (56.5% compared with 36.5% for the EU) and for women with disabilities (46.4% in 2025 compared with 29.5% for the EU). Poverty or social exclusion is much greater among persons with disabilities aged 65 and over (50.2% vs 22.6% in the EU), than among those aged 16- 29 (32.4% vs 36.2% in the EU),

suggesting that more effective support mechanisms are in place for younger persons with disabilities and that there is a need to strengthen the policy support framework to better address the overlapping inequalities faced by vulnerable groups. The carer's allowance remains unchanged at EUR 213.43 and has not been increased for 15 years.

Employment

- Young people and persons with disabilities continue to face barriers to labour market integration, but some positive developments have emerged with regard to supporting employment opportunities for the most vulnerable groups, including through the growing social economy.
- Persons with disabilities struggle to integrate into the labour market. The disability employment gap reached 21.3 percentage points in 2024, its highest level in the past decade (EU: 24 percentage points), before falling to 19.8 percentage points in 2025 (EU: 24.2 percentage points). 58.2% of persons with some or severe disabilities are actively participating in the labour market (EU: 55.5%). The unemployment rate for persons with disabilities however, though improving (down from 12.4% in 2022 to 11.6% in 2024), remains above the EU average (9.5%). These outcomes are primarily due to a mismatch between the employment offer and the skills and capabilities of persons with disabilities, as further evidenced by the labour market slack for persons with disabilities, which stood at 17% in 2024 (EU: 18.8%). Expanding access to quality job opportunities in the open labour market, outside of sheltered workshops, could help improve their labour market outcomes. There is also a need for individualised support services tailored to the severity of the person's disability and the type of functional impairment. Latvia continues to invest in active labour market policies for persons with disabilities (including training and subsidised employment schemes for a maximum period of two years) as well as in workplace adaptations. However, disability policy remains insufficiently integrated into broader, increasingly important cross-sectoral policy initiatives that aim to boost competitiveness and reduce labour and skills shortages.
- In 2024, only 24.9% of people in long-term unemployment had no disability (EU: 31.1%), indicating that, in these cases, a more tailored approach would benefit activation. On the upside, Latvia is progressing with its social economy. Since the adoption of the

Social Enterprise Law in 2017, which aims to foster the employment of the most vulnerable groups, more than 380 social enterprises have been established, and 279 were still active in 2025.

Housing

- The rental market and social housing markets remain underdeveloped. Social housing is primarily provided on the basis of income level and is not well-adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities.
- Housing policy does not consider the needs of people with disabilities. Currently, there is a severe lack of municipal housing for people with disabilities. The regulatory framework for construction does not set accessibility standards for single-family residential houses, and in 2024, only one municipality provided a serviced apartment. Amendments to the Disability Law in 2022 excluded support for the adaptation of housing at the national level. Support for making private dwellings more accessible is thus currently limited to one Recovery and Resilience Facility funded project, which will improve accessibility for around 250 people by 2026.
- wheelchair-users usually need larger dwellings, as they need sufficient room to manoeuvre their wheelchairs. The various factors contribute to higher housing expenditures for persons with a disability and the housing cost overburden rate at 8.9% for persons with disability is consequently well above the rate for persons without (5.6%).

De-institutionalisation

- There is still scope to further align the provision of community-based services for persons with disabilities with the right to independent living.
- Latvia has the highest share of self-perceived disability in the EU at 35.9% (EU: 24.2%) in 2025. Deinstitutionalisation is slow and appears to be stalling, with reports that several municipalities are showing reduced interest in expanding or continuing to provide existing community-based services due to increasing financial constraints.
- The availability of long-term care services is insufficient. Latvia has one of the highest levels of long-term care (LTC) needs in the EU (38.8% compared with 26.6% for the EU) (325) and one of the lowest levels of public expenditure on LTC at 0.5% of GDP (EU: 1.7%). Public support primarily focuses on people with severe

needs, while people with moderate or low needs receive limited or no support and face higher out-of-pocket than the EU average.

- Following the adoption of the minimum services basket reform, all municipalities are obliged to have established a home care service for persons with severe disability as of 2025.

Social protection

- Latvia has improved social protection adequacy, notably by improving social assistance and increasing child benefits. Pension adequacy nevertheless remains low and some benefits (e.g. the care allowance for persons with disabilities) require immediate attention.
- Some benefits (e.g. the care allowance for persons with disabilities) remain low and have not been adjusted to keep pace with inflation for several years.
- The effectiveness of social transfers in reducing the risk of poverty in Latvia is low and deteriorating. The largest increases in poverty rates were observed for households with persons with disabilities, migrant households and households with older people (aged 65 years and over). This indicates that these groups are most affected by the decreasing effectiveness of social transfers. The poverty gap after social transfers increased by 3.52 percentage points for households consisting only of older people, 2.62 percentage points for households with persons with disabilities and 4.28 percentage points for households where at least one member had a migration background.

Relevant recommendations

- Address labour and skills shortages, including through targeted upskilling and reskilling of adults to meet labour market needs and improved working conditions.
- Strengthen social protection to reduce poverty and inequality, including by improving the adequacy of old-age pensions and the access to quality social services.
- Increase the availability and quality of affordable and social housing, in particular outside the capital region.

Poverty and social exclusion

- The already high levels of poverty and income inequality have increased, especially with regard to vulnerable groups (e.g. persons with disabilities, who face the highest risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU).
- The share of the population facing poverty or social exclusion risks has increased, driven by the low adequacy of pensions and social benefits, coverage gaps, and inadequate access to quality inclusive education, employment support and health and social services. These risks are particularly high for certain groups such as unemployed people, older people (65+) and persons with disabilities.
- The social situation of persons with disabilities continues to deteriorate. Their AROPE rate has remained persistently high over the years and increased further in 2025 to 50.5%, the highest in the EU (EU: 28.8%). All the AROPE components rose, with the biggest increase in the share of persons with disabilities living in households with very low work intensity (39.7% vs 18.9% in the EU). For persons with disabilities, the rate of severe material and social deprivation and the AROP rate increased to 13.1% (EU: 10.5%) and 43.5% (EU: 20.9%) respectively. They are both closely linked to the low employment rates affecting this group and the low impact of social benefits (including pensions) on reducing poverty (37.1% in 2025 vs 47.3% in the EU). The recent one-stop-shop and disability assessment reform has not yet brought about the desired results, as the number of individual support plans in place, although increasing, remains very low and there are gaps in the data exchange between the relevant institutions.

Employment

- Challenges include weaknesses in the active labour market policy (ALMP) system, a high unemployment trap, stark regional differences and low labour market participation of young people and persons with disabilities.
- The disability employment gap increased significantly, from 32.4 percentage points in 2023 to 39.9 percentage points in 2024 (EU: 24 percentage points) and 42.8 percentage points in 2025, although national administrative data (based on registered disability) do not indicate any deterioration. At the same time, national data point to

very low employment levels of persons with disabilities: 30.8% of working-age (16-64) persons with registered disabilities were employed in 2024.

- Only about 10% of working-age persons with disabilities contact the public employment service annually, and only about 5% of working-age persons with disabilities participated in ALMPs in 2024. Public sector institutions with more than 25 employees must employ persons with disabilities in at least 5% of their positions. However, this quota is not sufficiently enforced, further hindering the integration of persons with disabilities into the open labour market.
- The ESF+ continues to support young people's access to employment through the Youth Guarantee, and the new government's programme includes commitments to continue this implementation. To encourage more persons with disabilities to enter the labour market, since September 2024, beneficiaries can keep their social assistance disability pension if they find a job. In addition, in 2025, Lithuania expanded the eligibility for these benefits to people who have lost 45-55% of their work capacity after the age of 24. However, further efforts are needed to reduce high share of NEETs and improve the labour market integration of persons with disabilities.
- It is too early to assess the impact of the 2024 reform on improving the incentives for persons with disabilities to find jobs by allowing them to work and still receive their disability pensions and by expanding the eligibility criteria for disability pensions. The government plans to expand social housing with specific attention to persons with disabilities, and to ensure sufficient integrated assistance for this group.

Education

- Persons with disabilities record the highest rates of early leaving from education and training (25.3% vs 19.1% in the EU) and NEET (30.3% vs 28% in the EU) in 2023, hindering their labour market integration. Their labour force participation is relatively high among those with tertiary education – 75.4% in 2024 (EU: 75.8%) – but drops significantly at lower levels of educational attainment.
- The dynamics of the share of early leavers from education and training (ELET) is an emerging challenge for competitiveness. The share is also markedly high among persons with disabilities in 2023 (25.3%; EU average: 19.1%).

Housing

- A law on support for housing acquisition or rental is also planned for 2026 covering, among other things, purchase and rental support, quality requirements for social housing and the protection of older tenants and tenants with disabilities. In the meantime, the state budget for housing remains small compared with other EU countries.
- The development of social housing stock in 2021-2027 is financed by European funds, with an initial allocation of ca EUR 85 million (including the national contribution), with a target of ca 2060 users, mainly persons with disabilities and large families.
- In many municipalities, social housing is not adapted to the needs of people with disabilities, nor is it suitable for families with three or more children

General

- Overall, Lithuania would benefit from a more holistic approach to persons with disabilities, encompassing coordinated education, labour market, social inclusion, housing and other relevant policies to improve their situation.

Relevant recommendations

- Strengthen access to primary and community-based care and increase the availability of health and long-term care professionals, particularly in remote areas.
- Address income inequality and poverty by increasing the coverage and adequacy of the social protection system, further developing a centralised monitoring system for social services, and expanding quality social housing.
- Address skills shortages by increasing the labour market relevance of higher education, increasing the attractiveness of VET, improving adult learning, including for vulnerable groups, and increasing the coverage of active labour market policies.

Luxembourg

Employment

- In 2024, almost 75% of long-term unemployed people aged 45 and over had reduced capacity for work or a disability.

Housing

- Affordability and availability pressures disproportionately affect homeless people and those with disabilities.
- People with disabilities suffer from an insufficient supply of accessible housing. Legal accessibility requirements for new housing, through the Accessibility Act (2022), require at least 10% of homes in all new collective residential buildings to be accessible. However, this means that many existing homes are inaccessible or expensive to retrofit. People with disabilities are also over-represented among low-income households and consequently face higher housing cost overburden rates.
- There is also a lack of disability-related data, with no systematic monitoring of housing accessibility, retrofit implementation or the residential autonomy of people with disabilities.

Technology

- The national digital inclusion action plan, published in 2021, was aimed at ensuring that all individuals, irrespective of age, income, education, location, disability and language, can participate meaningfully in the digital society. Digital services would be more attractive with mobile access. Luxembourg used 27% of available funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility to support its digital objectives.

Relevant recommendations

- Improve the performance of the school system and ensure equal opportunities in schools by adapting teaching to the needs of disadvantaged students.

Malta

Poverty and social exclusion

- Malta's social outcomes are uneven, with specific and persistent vulnerabilities. While overall poverty rates remained stable, third-country nationals, people with disabilities, people with a low education level and older people, especially women, remain particularly vulnerable. There is room for improvement in benefits adequacy, accessibility, and coverage. The effectiveness of social transfers in alleviating monetary poverty ranks among the lowest in the EU.

- The overall poverty rates remained stable, and severe material and social deprivation and income inequalities decreased. Nonetheless, in-work poverty remains on an increasing trend. Some groups remain particularly vulnerable, including third-country nationals, people with low-level education, persons with disabilities, and older people, especially women.
- Persons with disabilities were also exposed to substantially higher and increasing risks of poverty and social exclusion (35.9% vs 16.6% for persons without disabilities, EU: 28.7% vs 17.7%); this is linked to barriers and limited employment and educational opportunities for persons with disabilities, as illustrated by a wide disability employment gap.

Employment

- Significant disparities in employment remain between men and women as well as people with and without disabilities.
- The disability employment gap has increased in 2025 and is now further above the EU average, showing persistent barriers to the integration of persons with disabilities in the labour market. Closing these gaps through targeted policies could enable Malta to exploit its existing potential.
- The employment gap between persons with and without disabilities widened in 2025, well above the EU average (30.1 percentage points vs EU: 24.2 percentage points and 24.0 percentage points in 2024). It is now more pronounced for men (30.7 percentage points vs 27.6 percentage points for women). The labour force participation rate for persons with disabilities is slightly below the EU average (52% vs 55.5% in 2024), while their NEET rates in 2024 remained moderate at 45.2% but still above the EU average (29.8%). A relatively large proportion of persons with disabilities are low-skilled, facing strong competition in a labour market with a high share of low-skilled workers. In this context, limited inclusiveness in sectors such as tourism, construction and ICT further restricts their employment opportunities.

Education

- Efforts have also been made to improve the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream schools through expanded support services, recovery-and-resilience plan-backed measures in inclusive learning environments and strengthened teacher training on diversity and special educational needs.

- Early school leaving remains particularly high among young people with disabilities, reaching 36.6% in 2024 (EU: 24.6%), while 45.2% were not in employment, education or training.
- early leaving from education and training has declined markedly over the past decade, from over 15.6% in 2016 to 8.6% in 2025, now below the EU average (9.1%). However, it remains high for specific groups, notably young men and young persons with disabilities, among whom early leaving reached 36.6% in 2024 (EU average: 24.6%). These challenges extend beyond early leaving: in 2024, 45.2% of young people with disabilities were not in employment, education or training (EU average: 29.8%).

Housing

- High rental rates and limited access to accessible social housing make it difficult for people with disabilities in Malta to live independently.

Social protection

- Malta relies on a broad mix of cash and in-kind benefits covering pensions, unemployment, housing, disability, and family and child support. A study conducted by the Joint Research Centre indicates that coverage varies among different social benefits.
- Social protection spending remains relatively low and unevenly distributed. In 2023, total expenditure amounted to 13.1% of GDP, continuing a downward trend and falling well below the EU average of 27.8%. Allocations to family and child (6.9%), disability (4.2%), housing (1.4%) and unemployment (0.8%) benefits remain comparatively limited.

Relevant recommendations

- Strengthen the inclusiveness of education and training, including by enhancing access to high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC).

Netherlands

Poverty and social exclusion

- The Netherlands continues to perform strongly on social outcomes. Although overall poverty trends have improved, the risk of poverty remains markedly higher for non-EU-born residents, persons with disabilities and children with foreign-born parents.

Employment

- The share of young people neither in employment nor in education and training increased to 4.9% in 2024, still among the lowest in the EU, including for young persons with disabilities.
- Despite a high participation rate, access to quality employment remains uneven across groups. The 2025 country-specific recommendations also call for better mobilisation of underused labour potential. People with low levels of skills, people with a migrant background and persons with disabilities continue to face difficulties in securing stable and well-paid jobs.
- The disability employment gap has increased in 2025 (24.3 percentage points vs 20.9 percentage points in 2024) and is around the EU average, while the Netherlands has not set a target for improving the employment rate of persons with disabilities.
- Despite strong overall performance, structural challenges in ensuring inclusive and labour-market relevant lifelong learning persist.
- Participation also remains uneven: low-qualified adults, those on temporary or flexible contracts, people with a migrant background, persons with disabilities and people outside the labour force participate significantly less, limiting the role of training in supporting upward mobility and career transitions.

Relevant recommendations

- Address labour and skills shortages, including by tapping into underused labour potential and by increased targeting of up- and reskilling measures.

Poland

Employment

- Participation of persons with disabilities in the labour market remains a major challenge and is exacerbating labour shortages. In 2025, Poland received a Country-Specific Recommendation on increasing the participation of disadvantaged groups in the labour market, including through effective education-to-employment transitions. The progress achieved (including under the Recovery and Resilience Plan) varies between groups.
- Low participation of underrepresented groups in the labour market persists, notably for persons with disabilities. The disability employment gap further increased from 33.9 percentage points in

2023 to 35.6 percentage points in 2024, higher than the EU average of 24 percentage points (37). The labour force participation of persons with disabilities is just above 50%, because disability and illness remain a leading driver of inactivity. Further progress is constrained by limited access to tailored labour market support. Poland has introduced a new Act on the Labour Market and Employment Services (Journal of Laws of 2025, item 620), while the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the Polish Recovery and Resilience Plan also supports Public Employment Services. However, strengthening targeted support could help in making full use of this opportunity to support disadvantaged groups.

- Unemployment is among the lowest in the EU, and the national employment rate target of 78.3% has been met. Meanwhile, the reported labour shortages remain high, also driven by demographic trends and persistently low participation among several groups, including women, persons with disabilities and older people. Insufficient availability of childcare, and issues undermining work-life balance and inclusive employment support continue to constrain labour supply.
- Labour market outcomes for persons with disabilities remain weak. The disability employment gap slightly dropped from 35.6 percentage points in 2024 to 35.0 percentage points in 2025 (EU: 24.2 percentage points). For persons with severe disabilities, the gap reaches 61 percentage points (EU: 45.5 percentage points). Labour force participation among persons with disabilities is just above 50%, as disability or illness remains a leading cause of inactivity. Poland has met its interim 2025 employment target for persons with disabilities (32.5%), but further progress is constrained by limited access to tailored labour market support. Regional disparities are also significant. In Q2- 2025, the employment rate of persons with disabilities aged 16–64 ranged from 42.5% in Dolnośląskie and 37.0% in Lubuskie and Pomorskie to 25.0% in Warmińsko-mazurskie and 26.0% in Kujawsko-pomorskie, compared with a national average of 30.2%, which points to uneven labour market integration across regions. The ESF+ supports measures to reduce the disability employment gap by promoting labour market inclusion. Poland also increased wage subsidies for persons with disabilities in 2025 and now offers reimbursement of recruitment and training costs. A pilot 'supported employment' scheme has potential, but existing labour market instruments remain insufficiently effective.

- Working time patterns are among the most intensive in the EU, which has a negative impact on job quality and labour market inclusiveness. These patterns may discourage people with care responsibilities, persons with disabilities and older workers from entering the labour market.
- Labour market instruments to increase participation rely heavily on the EU Cohesion Fund and RRF funding. In response to the 2025 country-specific recommendation regarding the participation of disadvantaged groups in the labour market, Poland has reformed its public employment services by expanding their proactive outreach to economically inactive people, piloting 'supported employment' schemes for people with disabilities, and refocusing training and activation measures towards groups furthest away from the labour market. Better targeting of measures is crucial for activating vulnerable groups. At the same time, the sustainability of these instruments remains a concern due to their heavy reliance on EU funding. Moreover, the budget of the national Labour Fund used to finance Poland's active labour market policies has been decreased substantially for 2026.

Education

- Students with disabilities also continue to face barriers to effective participation in mainstream education and this is further undermining their inclusion in the labour market.
- Inclusive education remains a challenge. Education outcomes for persons with disabilities lag significantly behind those of their peers: early school leaving stands at 17.4% (vs 2.8% for persons without disabilities), and students with disabilities constituted only 1.8% of the total tertiary student population in 2023.

Housing

- Complex social challenges affect access to housing. There is a relatively limited municipal and social housing stock. One third of households fall into the rental gap (between social and private market conditions). Moreover, the arrival of over one million displaced persons from Ukraine has had an impact on the level of demand, while homelessness remains a persistent social challenge. People with some or severe disabilities and women suffer levels of discrimination that are above the EU average.
- In 2024, 6.2% of the population reported feeling discriminated against when seeking housing (EU average: 5.8%), with higher

proportions among people with some or severe disabilities (12.7% vs the EU average of 8.2%).

- Housing support for people with disabilities is provided through the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities, including subsidies for exchanging dwellings for barrier-free housing.

Social protection

- Poland does not have a wealth tax, but people who earn over PLN 1 million a year must pay a solidarity contribution of 4% on the income over that amount (after the deduction of social security contributions). The revenues from the solidarity contribution are used to finance the Solidarity Fund for Persons with Disabilities.
- Between 2023 and 2024, spending on disability benefits increased from 0.96% to 1.06% of GDP (compared with 1.92% in the EU).

Relevant recommendations

- Increase the participation of disadvantaged groups in the labour market, particularly of persons with disabilities, including by providing tailored labour market support.

Portugal

Poverty and social exclusion

- Poverty risks are disproportionately high among certain groups, including persons with disabilities, Roma and non-EU nationals.

Employment

- The disability employment gap is only slightly above the EU average and rose by 1.3 percentage points in 2025, to 24.5 percentage points. Both employment growth and the decrease in unemployment are expected to moderate in 2026 and 2027 according to forecasts.

Housing

- Young people and disadvantaged groups are more exposed to increased housing costs. In 2025, the housing cost overburden rate (the proportion of people who spend over 40% of their household income on housing) slightly decreased by 0.6 percentage points (percentage points) compared with 2024, reaching 6.3%, after years of increase. The most-affected cohorts include people with disabilities.

De-institutionalisation

- Despite some actions, gaps remain, including on home and community-based care. Expanding and improving working conditions of the formal care workforce, as well as providing training and assistance for both formal and informal carers could help addressing staff constraints. Accelerating the full implementation of informal carer support measures, including respite care and income aid, and ensuring access to the independent living model for people with disabilities by tackling existing backlogs and regional disparities in the 'Movement of Support to Independent Life' programme could also offer an essential contribution.
- The MAVI programme, which supports independent living for persons with disabilities through personal assistance, continues to face funding and coverage gaps at national level. Demand exceeds available resources, resulting in delays in access to support, while regional disparities persist.

Relevant recommendations

- Ensure equal access to quality long-term care, including by addressing regional disparities and strengthening home and community-based care solutions.
- Promote better educational outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged students.

Romania

Poverty and social exclusion

- Vulnerable groups, such as Roma, persons with disabilities, and populations with lower education, face elevated risks of poverty and social exclusion.
- Persons with disabilities face significantly higher risks of poverty and social exclusion (37% vs EU 28.8%).
- Romania has a far-reaching policy framework in place, including the 2022-2027 national strategy on social inclusion and poverty reduction, along with sectoral strategies targeting specific vulnerable groups such as children, homeless people, Roma, persons with disabilities and older persons. A comprehensive approach, as outlined in the EU anti-poverty strategy, could help address the multiple dimensions of poverty and achieve the national anti-poverty target.

Employment

- Limited employment rates among persons with disabilities are primarily due to insufficient accessibility support and incentives to encourage their participation in the workforce.
- Economic growth remains subdued, and employment growth is still constrained by the under-representation of women, young people and persons with disabilities in the labour market, and by limited access to skills development and employment opportunities for the population.
- In 2025, the disability employment gap increased by 0.6 pp and reached 45.4%, which is 21.2 percentage points above the EU average (24.2%). Incentives and support for persons with disabilities to help them look for work are limited, and their labour market participation at the end of their careers (55-64) is one of the lowest in the EU (24.3% vs EU: 55.1% in 2024).
- Strengthening vocational education and training's labour-market relevance and making use of digital and AI technologies would improve employment outcomes, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and improve inclusion of students with disabilities. With demand for highly skilled labour projected to grow strongly by 2035, persistent skills gaps could lead to labour shortages and weaker innovation, productivity and competitiveness.

Education

- school segregation of Roma and limited inclusion of children with disabilities, further exacerbate inequities and learning disadvantages.
- While Romania has introduced major education and skills reforms to optimise skills development, challenges persist in enhancing basic skills, particularly among disadvantaged students and students with disabilities, and in aligning educational outcomes with labour market needs.
- Early childhood education and care remains limited, especially in rural areas and for children with disabilities, while staff shortages and turnover affect quality. Gaps in staff training, quality assurance and outreach to disadvantaged communities limit accessibility.
- Few teachers are trained to work with children with disabilities and/or special education needs.
- School segregation remains critical, with 43% of Roma students in schools and only 31% of children with disabilities attending mainstream school. This exacerbates marginalisation and learning

disadvantages. Romania has adopted a new monitoring framework with TSI support to identify and help combat school segregation, but effective implementation remains crucial.

- in 2024 early school leaving concerned 61.6% of young people with disabilities (EU: 24.6%). Through the national programme for reducing school dropout (PNRAS), financed under the RRF, 2 300 schools receive support for educational, remedial and preventive activities in grades 5-8, with 45% of schools selected under the first lot showing improved participation and performance in national evaluations, and reduced dropout rates. Similar measures are expected to be rolled out in primary education under the ESF+, although the project is delayed.

Housing

- Social housing in Romania is scarce despite high needs. In 2024 households experiencing poverty spent more than twice the share of their disposable income on housing compared with average income households. Poor housing conditions in general remain widespread, affecting in particular vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities and Roma households.
- The Romanian housing market is geared towards owner-occupied housing, with most rentals being informal and no legally secured tenant protection. With the high ownership rates, policies tend to focus on homeownership. However, the lack of rental protection could negatively impact the chances of a healthy and larger formal rental market developing, which would be particularly beneficial for young and older people, people with disabilities, vulnerable groups, such as Roma, mobile workers and expats.
- People with disabilities often face higher housing and energy costs due to accessibility and increased energy needs for medical equipment, mobility devices and temperature regulation.
- People with disabilities continue to experience inequality in housing conditions and limited access to accessible housing and support. Thus, many adults with disabilities live with their parents or in institutions owing to a lack of accessible (social) housing in the community.
- A particular gap remains in the provision of accessible housing, as acknowledged in the national strategy for the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

- The national housing strategy aims to increase access to suitable housing for vulnerable groups, especially young people, people with disabilities, people in informal settlements and homeless people.
- While there are no data available on waiting lists in Romania, the estimated housing needs among the most vulnerable are high. This includes people living in deprivation and overcrowded conditions, people with disabilities living in institutions, as well as people in informal or unsuitable housing situations.
- Accessibility barriers remain high in residential housing for people with disabilities. While a national accessibility standard (applying to new constructions, major renovations and public and private housing developments) exists for public buildings and urban spaces, its implementation is lagging. In addition, accessibility standards address only physical disabilities but not other forms of disability (intellectual or sensorial disabilities).

De-institutionalisation

- Long-term care (LTC) services, particularly home care, are insufficient and community-based services to support independent living of persons with disabilities remain scarce. Romania has one of the highest rates of self-reported LTC needs, but one of the lowest homecare coverage rates and public expenditure levels.
- Despite the legislative reforms on deinstitutionalisation (DI) supported through the Recovery and Resilience Plan, a substantial share of adults with disabilities still reside in large and small-scale institutions, while non-residential community-based services and support remain scarce. Improved coordination to address delays in implementing the DI strategy, as well as the Recovery and Resilience Plan-supported LTC and active aging strategy for 2023-2030, is crucial, especially on access for the most vulnerable, but also for those with moderate needs. Additional measures to address the growing mental health challenges in the country, and to strengthen the LTC workforce would be beneficial.
- Despite progress in deinstitutionalisation, a substantial proportion of adults with disabilities still reside in large and small-scale institutions, while non-residential community-based services and support remain scarce. Around EUR 2.28 billion from cohesion policy funds is available to improve service accessibility and quality. A flagship initiative to scale up integrated social, health and educational services in 2 000 disadvantaged rural communities started in 2025, supported by the European Social Fund+ and the

European Regional Development Fund. The 2023-2027 CAP strategic plan also allocates EUR 500 million to community-led development initiatives supporting access to health and social infrastructure.

- Availability of long-term care services remains insufficient, particularly for home care and independent living for persons with disabilities. Romania has one of the highest rates of self-reported long-term care (LTC) needs (56.5% vs 26.6% in the EU in 2019), but one of the lowest public expenditure levels (0.3% GDP vs 1.7% GDP on average in the EU).
- Territorial gaps in access persist, with rural and remote communities often relying on scarce, uneven and low-quality services. For example, only 369 out of 949 centres providing services for persons with disabilities are located in rural areas, where 50% of the total live. Non-residential community-based care is still scarce and often unaffordable, delaying the deinstitutionalisation and transition to independent living of persons with disabilities.
- Over 15 000 people with disabilities are estimated to remain institutionalised in housing solutions for their deinstitutionalisation.

Social protection

- A new public pensions law, supported through the Recovery and Resilience Plan and effective since September 2024, increased the adequacy of low and medium pensions and the social indemnity for pensioners, with additional legislation to support persons with disabilities.

Transport

- Overall, Romania's transport infrastructure and public transport system may not adequately meet the needs of the population, particularly low-income households and persons with disabilities.

Technology

- Romania's digitalisation efforts are hindered by digital skills gaps, particularly among the rural and older population and people with disabilities, risking exclusion from the labour market and public services.

Relevant recommendations

- Strengthen labour market participation of underrepresented groups through improving effectiveness of active labour market policies,

accessibility of workplaces and participation in early childhood education and care.

- Reduce poverty and social exclusion risks by extending social protection and improving its effectiveness, including through better access to quality services, focusing on primary and preventive healthcare, long-term care, social, educational and employment services, in particular for disadvantaged groups, while maintaining fiscal sustainability.

Slovakia

Employment

- More than 40% of young persons with disabilities are neither in employment nor in education and training (43% in 2023), resulting in a low rate of transition to employment and a persistent disability employment gap.
- Not enough persons with disabilities are active participants in the labour market in Slovakia. The disability employment gap remains at 23.8 percentage points (against 24 percentage points at EU level).

Education

- Increasing participation in high-quality early childhood education and care, in particular among the youngest children, Roma and children with disabilities, would help strengthen foundational skills development. Enrolment among children between three and the starting age of compulsory primary education has increased by 2.2 percentage points since 2022, reaching 80.8% in 2023, but still significantly below the EU average of 94%. Expanding the work of counselling and prevention centres and closer coordination with early childhood education and care would enhance quality and availability of early intervention for children with disabilities and special educational needs (age 0-7). These measures could contribute to supporting parental employment and strengthening gender equality.
- The number of children with disabilities in mainstream primary education increased by 1.6 times between 2014 and 2024, and the number of teaching assistants rose sharply (by 4.7 at primary level and by 10.96 at lower-secondary level). Despite this growth in staff, the availability of support to children with special education needs is still insufficient and substantial gaps in inclusion remain. For

example, even though children with special education needs make up one-third of all pupils, support measures were provided to only 14% of them during the 2024/2025 school year. More action is needed to address this challenge, including ensuring systematic teacher training and support.

Relevant recommendations

- Ensure equal and inclusive access to quality education at all levels, with a focus on teaching of basic skills, including for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Slovenia

Poverty and social exclusion

- Slovenia has a well-functioning welfare system, with some of the lowest inequality and poverty rates in the EU. Despite the generally positive social situation, poverty levels have been trending in the wrong direction since the Covid-19 pandemic, leading Slovenia to move further away from its national 2030 poverty reduction target. Vulnerable groups include unemployed people (with at risk of poverty and social exclusion rates of 53.8%), those born outside the EU (23.8%), persons with disabilities (26.9%), and tenants renting at market prices (27.1%). The newly introduced annual winter allowance, in the amount of EUR 250 paid to pensioners and recipients of disability benefits on top of their regular pension, will improve the situation of standard retirees.

Employment

- The low labour market participation of certain groups weighs on the country's growth potential. Older and low skilled workers, young people, women with a foreign background and persons with disabilities tend to have relatively lower employment rates than the overall working-age population.
- The disability employment gap has narrowed significantly, from 21.7 percentage points in 2020 to 14.2 percentage points in 2024 (EU: 24 percentage points) and is among the lowest in the EU. However, in 2025, the gap saw a slight uptick to 15.7 percentage points.
- The Recovery and Resilience Facility supports workplace adaptations for people with disabilities and youth employment transitions: approximately 1 950 unemployed young people secured permanent

contracts between 2022 and 2024. There is scope for further action to ensure accessible and systemic early occupational activation to address the challenges of an ageing workforce.

Spain

Poverty and social exclusion

- Overall poverty risks also remain high, with marked regional and socio-economic disparities. Some vulnerable groups are more exposed in Spain than in other EU countries (single-parent households, large families, third country nationals (TCNs), people with disabilities, Roma and young people).
- Among persons with disabilities, 32.2% were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2025 (EU: 28.8%), and 13.5% faced severe material and social deprivation (EU: 10.5%).

Employment

- Job creation has been concentrated in lower-productivity sectors, limiting real wage progression and productivity gains. Comparatively high unemployment and low productivity remain key constraints, with young people, older workers, persons with disabilities, women and third-country nationals facing the greatest barriers. Active labour market policies have significant potential to support Spain's competitiveness, but shortcomings in their design and targeting limit their effectiveness, especially in terms of skills development.
- National statistics indicate stable employment rates for persons with disabilities.
- Building on the 2023 Employment Law, the 2025 Annual Plan for Decent Employment sets quantitative objectives for key groups (e.g. women, young people, low-skilled workers, persons with disabilities) and relies on upgraded digital tools and AI-supported profiling. Ensuring the consistent uptake of these reforms across Spain's regions and their evaluation will be essential to delivering tangible improvements.
- The Disability Employment gap stands at 22.6 percentage points.

Education

- Educational inequalities hamper skills development and undermine social and territorial cohesion. Socio-economic disadvantage, gender, migrant background and disability continue to strongly

shape educational trajectories, with long-lasting implications for social and territorial cohesion, labour market outcomes and productivity. About a third of young people with disabilities exit the system with no more than lower secondary education.

- Socioeconomic disadvantage, gender, migrant background and disability continue to influence educational trajectories, with long-lasting implications for labour-market outcomes and productivity.
- Disability-related gaps are also significant, with around 1 in 3 young people with some or severe activity limitations leaving education early, compared with just 11% of those without limitations, in 2024.

Housing

- persistent gaps and barriers to equal access to housing for persons with disabilities remain, notably a structural inaccessibility of the existing housing stock and limited availability of suitable housing options.
- Housing costs exacerbate poverty significantly, with strong heterogeneity across tenure status, regions and income groups. Evidence by the Commission's Joint Research Centre shows that accounting for housing costs would increase incidence and markedly deepen poverty, particularly in regions and among vulnerable population groups exposed to tight housing markets. The impact is systematically stronger for children and for persons with disabilities, reinforcing existing social inequalities.

Social protection

- Non-refundable tax credits (e.g. for dependent children) tend to exclude low-income families, while refundable tax credits apply to mothers who work or receive unemployment benefits (contributory or not), large families and dependants with disabilities.
- In 2024, social protection spending was concentrated on old-age (42%, EU: 41.5%) and healthcare (29.26%, EU: 29.7%). Comparatively less resources were foreseen for social inclusion (2.0% vs EU: 2.21%), disability (6% vs EU: 7.2%) and housing (0.44% vs EU: 1.35%). Specific investment in early intervention and disability support for children also remained low.

Poverty and social exclusion

- Overall, Sweden's social situation has improved, but vulnerable groups continue to face a higher risk of poverty. People with a low level of education, children and persons with disabilities face higher poverty risks.
- persons with disabilities aged 16 years and over face a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion (28.1%) than those without disabilities (15.3%), close to the EU average of 28.8%.
- To reduce the impact of poverty on children, Sweden has implemented the European Child Guarantee (ECG) through its national action plan launched in March 2022. The 2024 progress report shows that support has increased in several areas. These include early childhood education and care, services for children with disabilities and learning difficulties, and special needs training for teachers. According to the 2025 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), 15% of teachers in Sweden reported a high need for training in teaching students with special needs, which is lower than the EU average (24.2%). However, implementation challenges remain, and some groups continue to face barriers. Moreover, there are insufficient national data on poverty, social exclusion, children with disabilities and access to welfare services for children in care, which hinders the effective monitoring of these groups. The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) supports the ECG by funding initiatives to prevent early school dropouts and provide organised extracurricular activities for vulnerable children.

Employment

- Despite high employment rates, Sweden's labour market faces structural challenges that potentially affect productivity growth and competitiveness. Notably, employment rates are lower and unemployment rates higher for people with a disadvantaged socio-economic background, those with a migrant background, people with low educational attainment levels, and people with disabilities.
- In recent years, unemployment has been increasingly concentrated among people aged over 55, and people with disabilities. Persons with disabilities also face barriers to employment, and this is reflected in the disability employment gap, at 22.6 percentage points in 2025 (EU:24.2 percentage points).

- Sweden continues to record one of the lowest rates of young people (15-24) neither in employment nor in education and training (NEETs), at 5.9% in 2025, significantly below the EU average of 11.0%, making the country one of the best performers in the EU. However, the NEET rate is significantly higher among persons with disabilities, at 14.5%. To reduce the number of NEETs, in April 2025, the government commissioned the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society to serve as a national coordination and support hub, focusing on mental health, and allocated SEK 31 million in grants to municipalities and regions.

Social protection

- Sweden allocates 45.4% of its total social-benefit spending to old-age benefits and 38.2% to sickness, healthcare and disability.

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