



Green Paper on Disability Reform
Public Consultation Event
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DO'S AND DON'TS IN DISABILITY POLICY


Key lessons from OECD's work – and how they are followed by member countries

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BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

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Purpose of this contribution as part of the public consultation

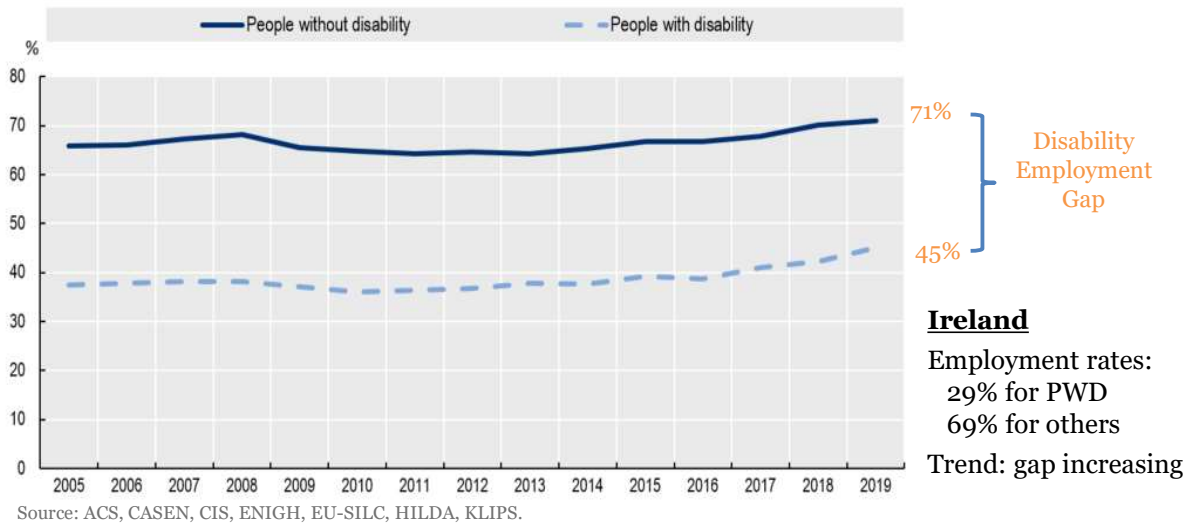
- The OECD has not been involved in the preparation of the Green Paper, but it has prepared disability reports on Ireland in 2008 and 2021
- Not an assessment of Ireland's reform plans but general considerations about key challenges that any disability reform is facing
- Some examples of how countries have/have not followed the conclusions that the OECD has reached through its work over the past 20 years
- Some questions that the OECD has about the planned reform, and some suggestions on issues that could be considered in the reform

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Employment rates of people with disability have improved but the employment gap has not

Employment rate for people with disability (PWD) and people without disability, OECD average

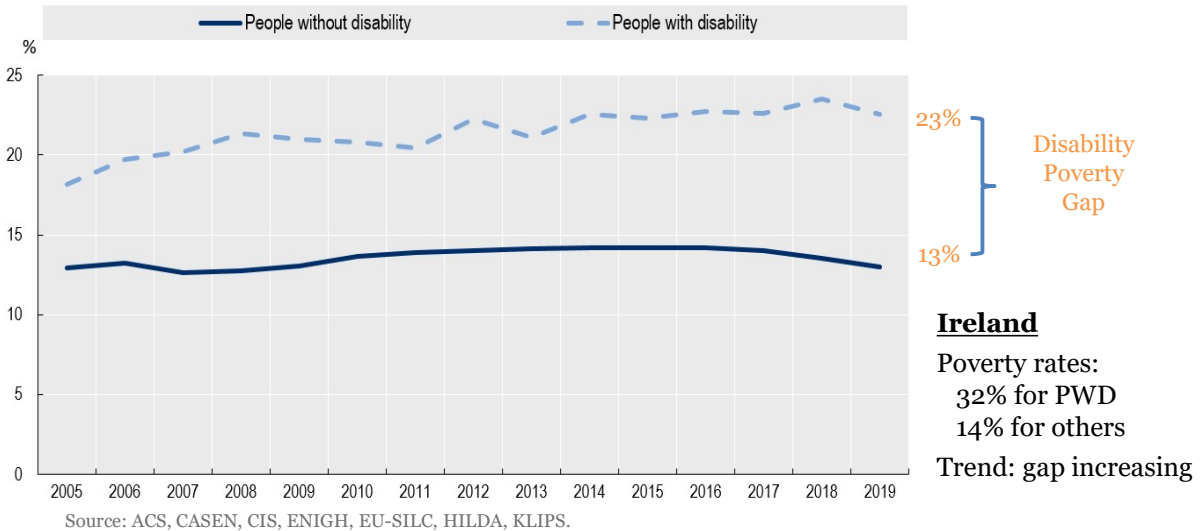


3



The disability poverty gap is large and higher now (=pre-COVID) than it was 15 years ago

Share of people with and without disability with household income below 60% of the median, OECD average

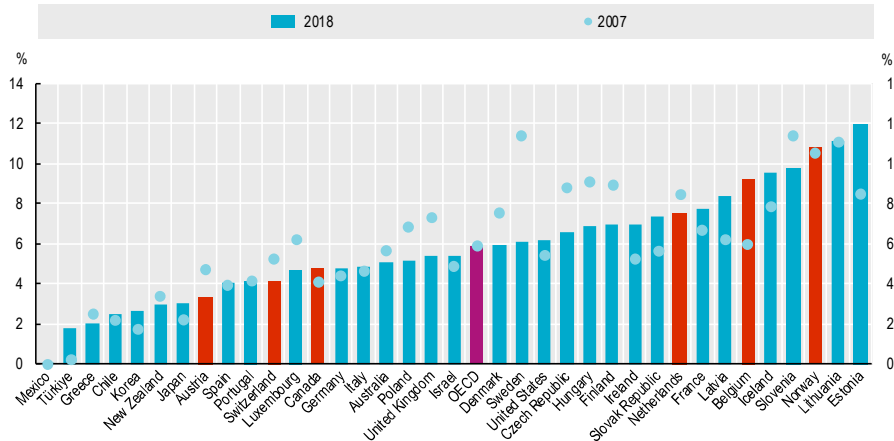


4



Shares of people receiving disability payments vary hugely, with Ireland now being found in the top third

Share of the working-age population receiving a disability payment, 2007 & 2018



Source: SOC-R (social benefit receipt) database of the OECD

- Roughly equal number of OECD countries with increasing or decreasing rates
- Large declines in some European countries (shifts to other benefits?)
- Ireland has seen one of the fastest increases in the pre-COVID decade

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Lesson 1: Accurately assessing who can and who cannot work is very challenging

- *Key issues to keep in mind:*
 - Disability assessment is generally used to determine benefit eligibility
 - Focus on functioning (ICF) is paramount for an accurate assessment
 - Assessing work or earnings capacity accurately is very difficult
 - Reassessment would seem needed – but will it change much?
- *Country developments:*
 - Two types of reforms: a) Shift to ICF and b) Attempt to identify those who cannot work and transform the system for those who can
 - Alternative: assessment of costs and needs only (see UK plans)
- *Question for Ireland:*
 - How will people be assigned to tier 1, tier 2 and tier 3; i.e., how is high, moderate, low, and very low capacity to work defined and assessed?

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Lesson 2: Moving people off disability payments is virtually impossible

- *Key consequences to keep in mind:*
 - Focus on early intervention to prevent disability payment claims
 - Reconsider minimum age at which disability payment can be claimed
 - Offer benefits paid irrespective of the person's employment status
- *Country developments:*
 - Granting payments temporarily initially is common but has no effect
 - Payment suspension has become common, but take-up is negligible
 - Increase in minimum age of transfer to a quasi-permanent payment
 - Shift to provision of rehabilitation benefits and/or retraining benefits
- *Question for Ireland:*
 - Should one consider removing all employment restrictions for those receiving a disability payment? So far, no country has tried this.

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Lesson 3: Cost-of-disability payments are essential

- *Key issues to keep in mind:*
 - Special work incapacity benefits are problematic because they are often more generous and come without activation requirements
 - Cost-of-disability payments are much fairer, not hindering employment and thus much more likely to help people out of poverty
 - Idea: Single working-age benefit plus strong cost-of-disability payment
- *Country developments:*
 - Surprisingly, cost-of-disability payments are not very widespread
 - If they exist, they are not individually targeted (i.e., supplements)
 - Shift to a single working-age payment discussed but not implemented
- *Question for Ireland:*
 - Are any more individualised cost-of-disability payments planned?

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Lesson 4: Early intervention is the single most important disability policy measure

- *Key issues to keep in mind:*
 - “Early” meaning no later than 5-6 months into sick leave
 - Sickness programme is the most important disability policy tool
 - Employers have a key role to play in managing sickness and RTW
 - Policy must find ways to involve doctors in the RTW process
- *Country developments:*
 - Traditionally passive systems; countries start to realise importance
 - Employer incentives and obligations increasingly widespread
 - Structured series of meetings involving worker, employer, doctor
- *Question for Ireland:*
 - Is a reform of Illness Benefit also planned, to turn it into an active return-to-work payment (also allowing a gradual return)?

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Lesson 5: Disability mainstreaming in all policies and practices will be critical

- *Key issues to keep in mind:*
 - Need to find a balance between special and mainstream support
 - Mainstream institutions must be disability competent, provide support to PWD as to everyone else, and be held accountable for doing so
 - Strong labour market best predictor for high employment of PWD
- *Country developments :*
 - Importance of unemployment system increasingly recognised
 - Special interventions by special institutions for special people...?
 - Can we learn from gender mainstreaming approaches?
- *Question for Ireland:*
 - Are PWD adequately serviced by Public Employment Services (incl. Intreo) and Adult Education Services (especially Solas)?

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THANK YOU

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