

POLICY BRIEF

Young persons with disabilities on the EU labour market



NEETcraft Initiative: Innovations for Empowering Youth with Disabilities

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Context

Young persons with disabilities in the EU face compounding disadvantages across education and employment, yet express a strong underlying motivation to participate in the labour market. This report examines their situation on the EU labour market, drawing on EU-LFS 2024 data and EU-SILC indicators. Statistics on labour market participation, working conditions, education, and NEET status are presented, along with the identification of the sub-groups at greatest risk of labour market exclusion. At the end, policy implications are presented.

Key Statistics at a Glance

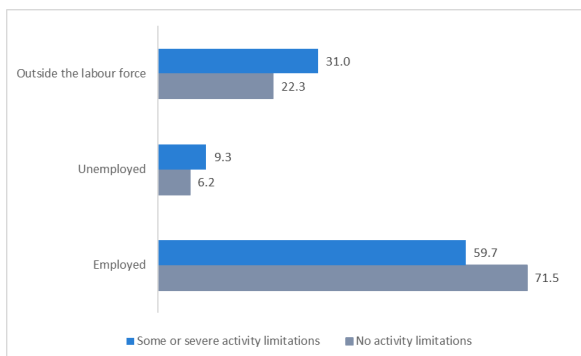
	With disabilities	Without disabilities
Employed	60%	72%
Not searching for employment, but would nevertheless like to work	40%	23%
Look for another job	18%	8%
Early school leavers	25%	8%
NEET rate (EU-27)	31%	11%

Labour force participation

Young people with disabilities are significantly less attached to the labour market, despite expressing a strong desire to work. Overall, young persons with disabilities are 12 p.p. less likely to be employed, and their risk of being outside the labour force is higher by 9 p.p. (Figure 1). Among persons with disabilities, the subgroups who are particularly vulnerable to being outside the labour force are:

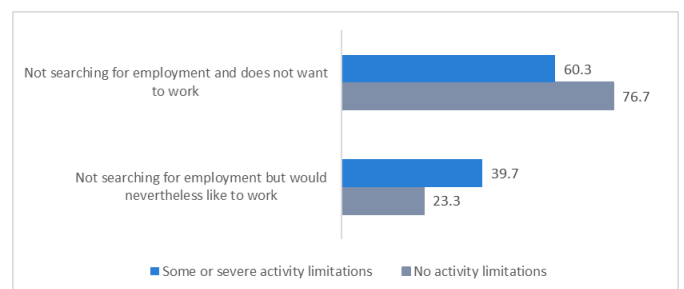
- Persons without a tertiary education, by 8 p.p.;
- Persons who consider their skills lower than required at a (last) job, by 6 p.p. larger than among those who find their skills adequate;
- Early leavers from education, by 4 p.p.;
- Persons living in the cities, by 3-4 p.p. than those living in towns or rural areas;
- Men, by 3 p.p. than women.

Figure 1. ILO employment status of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

Figure 2. Willingness to work even if not searching for employment of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

Working conditions

When employed, young persons with disabilities face more precarious and unstable conditions than their peers without disabilities, but have slightly more flexibility. Compared to those without disabilities, persons with disabilities:

- Work part-time more often, by 13 p.p.;
- Hold fixed-term contracts more often, by 4 p.p.;
- Find the number of their working hours satisfactory less often, by 14 p.p.;
- Work from home more often, by 3 p.p.;
- Have some control over their work schedules more often, by 5 p.p.;
- Look for another job more often, by 10 p.p.

Education

Educational disadvantage is a major driver of labour market exclusion. Research estimates that the education gap accounts for 27% of the employment gap among persons aged 25–34 (Albinowski, Magda, & Rozszczypała, 2025). Young persons with disabilities:

- Participate in education 14 p.p. less often than peers without disabilities;
- Drop out at a rate of 25%, compared to 8% for those without disabilities;
- Attain tertiary education at a rate 11–16 p.p. lower;
- Do jobs not requiring specific education more often (by 2 p.p.), or jobs that have no overlap with their field of education at all (by 3 p.p.).
- See their skills, level and field of education as less well matched to their job place than persons without disabilities (Figures 3–4).

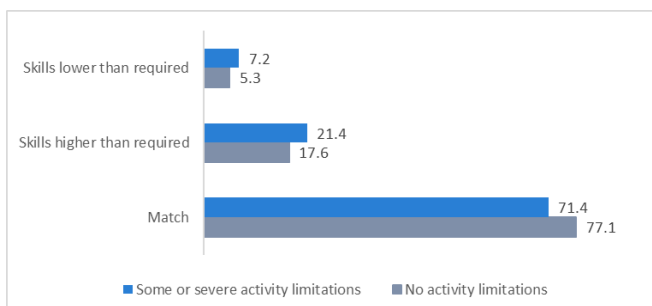
Figure 3. Match between skills and current/last main job of persons aged 15–34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation

NEET status

Young people with disabilities are more often not in employment, education or training (NEET). The NEET rate for young people with disabilities in the EU-27 stands at 31%, compared to 11% for young people without disabilities. Cross-country variation is extreme, ranging from below 20% in Luxembourg, Sweden, and Finland to above 75% in Romania, Greece, and Bulgaria. Among persons with disabilities, the subgroups more vulnerable to being NEET are:

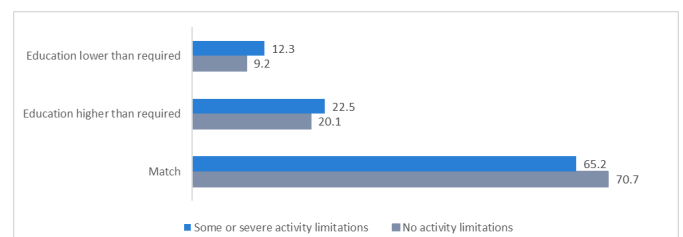
- Persons with lower than tertiary education, by 11 p.p.;
- Men, by 5 p.p. than women;
- Early leavers from education, by 4 p.p.;
- Persons graduated in fields other than STEM, by 3 p.p.

Figure 3. Match between skills and current/last main job of persons aged 15–34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

Figure 4. Match between educational attainment level and current/last main job of persons aged 15–34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

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Policy implications

The findings point to several priority areas for policy action:

- **Education retention and support:** reducing early school leaving among young people with disabilities is critical, with particular attention needed for boys and young men.
- **Pathways to tertiary and STEM education:** expanding access and completion rates in higher education and STEM fields would significantly reduce both employment and NEET gaps.
- **Skill matching and vocational guidance:** better alignment between qualifications and labour market needs can improve employment prospects, particularly for those who feel under-qualified.
- **Targeted outreach to vulnerable sub-groups:** policy interventions should specifically address men with disabilities, those living in cities, and those without recent participation in education or training.
- **Job quality:** efforts to reduce precarious employment (fixed-term, part-time) and support flexible working arrangements can improve retention and satisfaction among employed persons with disabilities.

References

Albinowski, M., Magda, I. and Rozszczypała, A. (2025). 'The employment effects of the disability education gap in Europe', *Education Economics*, 33(5), pp. 686–699. doi: 10.1080/09645292.2024.2395564



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