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um Chearta an Duine  
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Irish Human Rights and  
Equality Commission

Research Series

# The Equality Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Irish Labour Market

**Anousheh Alamir, Frances McGinnity  
and Helen Russell**



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**Anousheh Alamir, Frances McGinnity  
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## FOREWORD

I am delighted to introduce this paper *The Equality Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Irish Labour Market*.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on society, causing significant upheaval and widespread disruption to daily life. It also served to highlight the interdependence of human rights, and the multiple inequalities experienced by structurally vulnerable groups. The differential impact of the pandemic further exposed the consequences of a legacy of poor investment in public services, serving as a reminder that such investment is a fundamental to realising human rights and equality. At its height, the pandemic had a seismic impact on economic rights and access to work, through the direct and indirect outcomes of the restrictions imposed. It is vital that we understand and learn about the impact of the pandemic, and the persistence of its effects, post-crisis.

The Commission has repeatedly called on the State to examine the impact of its COVID-19 response with regard to structurally vulnerable groups.

This report provides a meaningful contribution to that evidence-base in the context of the labour market. The evidence demonstrates that employment levels rose for almost all groups analysed post-pandemic, while unemployment and labour market inactivity generally fell. The overall recovery in the labour market post pandemic has been extraordinary given the nature and extent of the shock, likely due in part to the package of financial measures. The findings shine a light on the buffering effect of the fiscal response to the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market, highlighting the protective and stabilising role of significant public investment.

Notwithstanding, a closer look at the data serves to highlight negative impacts for some structurally vulnerable groups. While I welcome evidence that employment rates improved for some disabled people, I note with concern that the employment rates among disabled people who identified as strongly limited in their activities fell further during the pandemic. I also note that those with lower levels of education were even more likely to be inactive post-pandemic, and the gap between early school leavers and those that completed higher education also widened in the case of usual hours of work and remote working. Drawing on

these findings, and through our work, the Commission will continue to call for improved access to decent, quality work.

The findings also highlight gaps in the available equality data, including data on disabled people, ethnic minority groups, and Traveller and Roma people. These gaps are particularly concerning in the context of the forthcoming national equality strategies, and further underscore the importance of the forthcoming national Equality Data Strategy.

I wish to extend my thanks to Professor Helen Russell, Professor Frances McGinnity and Dr Anousheh Alamir for their work undertaking this analysis and delivering this report.

This report is the first in the 2022-2024 IHREC/ESRI Research programme, but marks the eleventh published report since 2017 under the IHREC/ESRI Irish Human Rights and Equality Research Programme Series. These research reports examine equality and discrimination in Ireland across a wide range of themes and topics including inequality in the labour market, disability, caring and unpaid work, inequality in housing and attitudinal research towards diversity and migration in Ireland.

These detailed studies continue to provide us with a better understanding of equality and discrimination in Ireland, expanding the boundaries of existing knowledge and guiding us towards new horizons of insight.

On behalf of the Commission, I would like to acknowledge the ESRI and all of the researchers who worked on these studies and to thank you for your significant contribution to knowledge on equality and discrimination in Ireland.

Eoin Ronayne, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

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*This report has been peer reviewed prior to publication. The authors are solely responsible for the content and the views expressed.*

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## GLOSSARY

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CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EHRC	Equality and Human Rights Commission
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EWCTS	European Working Conditions Telephone Survey
EWSS	Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Jobs
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LSE-CEP	London School of Economics - Centre for Economic Performance
NACE	European Industrial Activity Classification
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PUP	Pandemic Unemployment Payment
TILDA	The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing
TWSCS	Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme
TWSS	Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme
WFH	Work From Home

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the lives of people in Ireland and around the world. Yet while everyone was impacted, there is abundant evidence the effects were not equally experienced across all members of society. Moreover, while there was much research on the immediate effects of the pandemic and the public health measures to address it, to date there is relatively little evidence on which effects have persisted once the immediate crisis had passed. Here we focus on one aspect of the pandemic – the labour market impacts – and consider the evidence of how structurally vulnerable groups – those particularly at risk of inequality or having their rights denied – have fared.<sup>1</sup> The approach taken builds on previous research analysing equality at work in Ireland, by comparing the labour market situation of groups protected under Irish equality legislation for whom robust evidence is available (McGinnity et al., 2021). In this report the focus is the pandemic, therefore we compare the situation of these groups in terms of their employment and the nature of their jobs pre-pandemic in 2019 compared to 2022, using large, representative data sources with identical definitions of groups and labour market outcomes in both years. The key research question is: how has the labour market impact of COVID-19 in Ireland differed by gender, age, marital status, family status, educational qualifications, and disability status? The labour market is the major source of income for households, and exclusion from employment can have long-term effects on poverty risk, standard of living and inequality (McGinnity et al., 2021).

### EMPLOYMENT PRE- AND POST-COVID-19 MAIN FINDINGS

Comparing pre-pandemic employment levels in 2019 with employment levels in 2022, we find that employment rose for almost all groups analysed, while unemployment and labour market inactivity fell. We found little difference between groups in these overall patterns.

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<sup>1</sup> A 'structurally vulnerable' person or group is one who may be particularly vulnerable to violations of their rights and/or inequality due to political, economic, social, and cultural structures, as opposed to inherent characteristics of the individuals themselves or groups to which they belong. See <https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2023/07/Submission-on-the-Review-of-the-Equality-Acts.pdf> for a discussion of 'structural discrimination'.

The employment of young adults was disproportionately negatively affected during the pandemic, but rebounded quickly post-pandemic. By 2022, youth employment rates had increased more than for other age groups. This is consistent with findings elsewhere (Blundell et al., 2022; Eurofound, 2022d), though in sharp contrast to the findings about the labour market impact of the Great Recession in Ireland (Kelly et al., 2014).<sup>2</sup>

The employment rate of older (50–64-year-old) workers is lower than many other groups, and their inactivity rates are higher, but the gaps have not widened post-pandemic and there is no evidence of the ‘great withdrawal’ in Ireland proposed in other contexts.

Rates of employment, unemployment and inactivity among women and men also followed a similar trajectory. By 2022 rates of unemployment for working-age women and men were just over 4 per cent and employment rates were higher than pre-pandemic rates. There is no evidence of widening gender gaps.

While parents of young and school-going children experienced significant challenges to employment during the pandemic lockdowns, there is no evidence that this has affected their overall employment rates post-pandemic. The employment gap between mothers and non-mothers is the same in 2022 as in 2019. Similarly, lone parents’ employment rates are lower, on average, than couple parents and non-parents, and this did not change post-pandemic.

Due to data limitations, a separate data source is used to analyse disability. This shows that for those who report being somewhat limited by health issues, employment rates have actually improved between 2019 and 2022, relative to non-disabled people.

## **NATURE OF EMPLOYMENT**

While levels of employment have increased there may be a legacy of the pandemic on the nature of work. One such legacy is the rise in remote working. In 2022, levels of remote working – measured as doing any work from home in the past four weeks – were 15 percentage points higher than pre-pandemic. This rise is strongly patterned by sector and

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<sup>2</sup> In terms of the labour market, the period from 2008-2012 (inclusive) is usually considered the depth of the recession period, although unemployment rates were still high in 2013 (see Bergin et al., 2012).

occupation, with the greatest increases in information technology and financial services as well as the 'Professional, scientific and technical' sector, and for workers in professional and clerical support occupations. While remote working has risen across all the 'equality'<sup>3</sup> groups observed, we find that, even after accounting for sector and occupation, some groups are less likely to work remotely, namely the lowest educated group and those living in rural areas. Lone parents are less likely to work remotely but this appears to be driven by sectors and jobs in which they work. Post-pandemic, workers in Dublin are much more likely to work from home than in any of the other regions in Ireland.

Working time has also changed post-pandemic. While men's average hours of work decreased by 1.4 per cent between 2019 and 2022, women's increased by 1.1 per cent; this resulted in a narrowing of the gender gap in paid working hours.

The pandemic also brought a shift in the number of weeks worked which varied across equality groups. There was a decrease in the average weeks of work during the previous quarter for young women (18-24 years) but an increase for women aged 30-49 years, leading to a wider divergence between the two groups. This decline in working week may indicate a rise in precarious employment among young women; although this requires further research, it is however likely that this led to reduced income.

The disparity between people whose highest education was Junior Certificate or below and those that completed higher education widened over the pandemic in the case of usual hours of work and remote working. This provides further evidence that the lower educated group have been disproportionately negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The proportion of jobs that are defined as professional or managerial, which bring higher rewards and involve high levels of skill and autonomy, increased between 2019 and 2022, continuing a longer-term trend. These occupations are unequally distributed across educational groups, age groups and, for women, by family status, but there is no evidence of narrowing or widening inequalities across the groups measured.

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<sup>3</sup> As explained in Section 3.1, the 'equality' (i.e. social) groups are gender, age, family composition, and educational attainment.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Irish government has recently announced its intention to hold a COVID-19 inquiry, although at the time of writing the terms of reference have not been published. The recovery in the labour market post-pandemic has been remarkable given the severe nature of the shock. The analysis has shown that this recovery has been evenly spread across groups in society that may have been expected to fare worse given their starting position. The rapid recovery internationally in economic activity after pandemic-related restrictions were lifted provided favourable macroeconomic conditions for the labour market recovery. It is likely that the recovery was also facilitated by the large-scale state intervention during the pandemic in terms of employment and social welfare supports: this has also been argued in international research on the labour market impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2020b; Eurofound, 2021). Spending on the COVID-19 employment supports – i.e. the Pandemic Unemployment Payment and the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme – amounted to €16.7 billion from March 2020 to October 2021, and at their height were supporting around one million individuals and 37,000 enterprises (DPER, 2021). While very expensive, it may be that such schemes could be usefully activated in future labour market crises, if carefully designed and adequately resourced (Eurofound, 2021).

The full effects of remote working have yet to play out. New legislation has provided workers with the right to request remote working but there are some groups, such as lone parents, that have not shared equally in the rising access to these options even though they might experience greater potential benefits. Ongoing monitoring and research need to track whether remote working is delivering the promised benefits and to ensure inequalities are not reinforced.

The absence of useable Labour Force Survey data on disability is a major gap. This group was structurally disadvantaged in the labour market prior to the pandemic and there is a strong policy imperative to uncover the effect of the pandemic on labour market inclusion. The absence of ongoing data on the outcomes of ethnic minority groups, including Irish Travellers and Roma; gender identity and sexual orientation is also of concern, particularly in light of the recent *National Action Plan against Racism*, the *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy* and the *National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy*. The absence of data on these

groups means monitoring the effectiveness of these strategies and the successor to the National Disability Inclusion Strategy is difficult, and underscores the importance of the forthcoming Equality Data Strategy.

## CHAPTER 1

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### Introduction and international evidence

#### 1.1 WHY ANALYSE THE EQUALITY IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC?

Ireland experienced a severe labour market shock due to governmental measures put in place to reduce the health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtually everyone was affected by lockdown restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the virus. As we know, some were more exposed than others to the contagion and health risks, with 90 per cent of deaths among those aged 65 or older (HPSC, 2023). Some groups were more vulnerable to socio-economic effects triggered by lockdown measures. Drawing on Irish equality legislation and previous research to identify structurally vulnerable groups, this study investigates the impact of the pandemic on the groups for whom data are available (McGinnity et al., 2021).<sup>4</sup> As an unexpected global event, the pandemic-associated lockdown was a significant shock to the Irish labour market, whose effects can be discerned by comparing ‘before’ versus ‘after’. While there was considerable labour market disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic period, which varied according to health-related restrictions in place, it is by analysing the post-pandemic period that any more enduring impact can be assessed. Research on previous crises that have affected the labour market, such as the Great Recession, have shown that there can be longer-lasting scarring effects, though these effects are typically analysed 5, 10 or even 20 years later (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011; 2021; Regan, 2020; Helbling et al., 2019).

Recent research has assessed the impact of the pandemic on the employment of migrant workers, so they are not considered here (McGinnity et al., 2023). In this report, we focus instead on the effects by family status – including lone parenthood, age group and disability – and build on the IHREC/ESRI analysis on decent work in Ireland (McGinnity et al., 2021). Furthermore, we investigate whether the impact of the pandemic differs by gender, and whether there is evidence of intersectional effects. For example, among those parenting young children, were mothers disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

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<sup>4</sup> For example, there is no analysis of family workers or own account workers, as well as informal workers (see McGinnity et al., 2021 for a discussion).



restrictions compared to fathers? Were lone parents more affected than couple parents?

While the labour market impact is only one aspect of the potential pandemic impact, it is an important one. As McGinnity et al. (2021) note, a decent job gives workers adequate financial resources, contributes to their physical and mental health, and gives them a sense of purpose.

This report is fundamentally concerned with evidence of inequality between groups before the pandemic and how, if at all, it has changed after. The focus is on ‘structurally vulnerable groups’. These groups broadly follow the grounds covered by the equality legislation for gender, age, marital and family status and disability status.<sup>5</sup> The range of structurally vulnerable groups that can be included will be limited by the data sources. As an example, we lack data on ethnic and religious minorities and members of the LGBTQ+ community, and we know from other sources that these groups may be disadvantaged and experience discrimination (McGinnity et al., 2018; FRA, 2020). Migrant labour market outcomes have been analysed post-COVID-19 (McGinnity et al., 2023), so they are not the focus of the current report. Adding a socio-economic ground to Irish equality legislation is under review,<sup>6</sup> but in the Labour Force Survey data used, there is no measure of social origin, typically measured as parent’s job or socio-economic status when the person was growing up (Curristan et al., 2022). We follow McGinnity et al. (2021) in using educational attainment as a stratifying mechanism in the labour market.<sup>7</sup> A body of work has established differences between these groups in terms of employment in Ireland (Watson et al., 2011; Kelly and Maître, 2021; McGinnity et al., 2021).

The aim of the report is to map these differences before and after the pandemic. Looking across the society, has there been a convergence or divergence across each of the equality grounds following the pandemic in terms of paid work and the nature of the job? Have some groups been able to participate in remote working more than others, and are these groups further privileged today, as a result? The remainder of this chapter briefly

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<sup>5</sup> Note persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others see (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-1-purpose.html>).

<sup>6</sup> See also <https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2023/07/Submission-on-the-Review-of-the-Equality-Acts.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> As McGinnity et al. (2021) note, using other indicators of socio-economic status such as unemployment or current social class, typically measured as current occupation, are problematic for a report considering labour market outcomes.

summarises some previous and recent research from other countries, and in Chapter 2 we move on to discuss both the pandemic response in Ireland and early evidence of the labour market impact *during* the pandemic. Chapter 3 considers employment and participation rates for different groups in 2019 and 2022. Chapter 4 considers how the nature of work changed for groups between the two years, measured as hours and weeks of work, the ability to work remotely, and working in a managerial or professional job. Chapter 5 summarises the results and reflects on their implications.

## **1.2 PREVIOUS INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE ON THE PANDEMIC IMPACT**

What has the recent literature found about how groups have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? Most of the existing research focuses on the immediate pandemic outcomes – particularly 2020, but also including 2021. We contribute to this literature by providing one of the first ‘post-pandemic’ analyses, comparing labour market outcomes in 2022 to 2019 across equality grounds.

### **1.2.1 Disparities by age**

There is a growing body of research on how the pandemic has differentially impacted on different age groups. For young people, the significant disruption to education, training, labour market, and transition to adulthood has been compounded by significant increases in mental health problems, which exceed those recorded by other groups (Smyth and Nolan, 2022). Comparative research from earlier crises also indicates the long-term scarring effects of entering the labour market during a recession on young people’s career (Scarpetta et al., 2010; Bell and Blanchflower, 2011; Helbling et al., 2019). For these reasons we might expect employment effects of the pandemic to be particularly sharp for younger people, as found by Montenovo et al. (2022) for the US.

The health risks of the pandemic were greater for older age groups, which was reflected in the vaccine prioritisation by age. Those at the upper end of the working age group (50-64) may therefore have experienced more disruption to their labour market participation, all else being equal. In their 2022 report, Botelho and Weißler use data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) to show that 175,000 EU workers went into early retirement following the outbreak of the pandemic due to various factors

including lockdowns, increasing economic and health uncertainty, ‘and the strong fiscal support and labour market policy actions involving the widespread use of job retention schemes’. Following the outbreak of the pandemic, the authors find that around 30 per cent of the older workers that assessed their health to be relatively poor retired earlier than initially planned. On the other hand, only 12 per cent of those perceived in excellent health retired early. Going further, the authors find that 23 per cent of the retirees interviewed between March 2020 and June 2021 reported having retired earlier than planned. Amongst them, 38 per cent declared that the reason was the pandemic. On the other hand, only 7 per cent of the retirees reported having retired later than planned due to the pandemic. This provides evidence that some of the older workers tried to mitigate the effects of the increasing labour market uncertainty by retiring early.

In the UK, along with those with precarious employment and minority ethnic groups, the below 30 age group experienced the biggest labour market shocks up to May 2020 (Crossley et al., 2021). By the start of 2021, Blundell et al. (2022) found that the increase in non-working rates (unemployed or inactive) was largest among the youngest workers, as their jobs were less secure and disproportionately concentrated in the lockdown sectors. However, their non-working rates have since converged to levels similar to those observed for other groups as they returned to work, moved into new jobs, or remained in education for longer. These authors find an 8-percentage point increase in the rate of 18-year-olds in full-time education between 2019 and 2020 (ibid.; see also Cribb et al., 2021). Following the pandemic, Blundell et al. (2022) showed that re-employment probabilities for older workers made redundant have been particularly low.

Similarly, although workers aged 15-24 also experienced significant drops in employment between 2019 and 2020 in the EU27, they saw the strongest rebound between 2020 and 2021 (Eurofound, 2022d). In terms of actual weekly hours worked, data from the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) show that the largest year-on-year reduction between Q2 2019 and Q2 2020 was seen among older men – aged 55-64 – followed by men aged 25-54 (Eurofound, 2022d).

### 1.2.2 Disparities by gender

There is some international evidence showing that women fared worse than men in terms of job, hours, and income losses during the pandemic (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020; Andrew et al., 2022; Alon et al., 2022; Fabrizio et al., 2021). However, Dang and Nguyen (2021) point to disparities between countries. For instance, women were more likely than men to lose their job both temporarily and permanently in China, but less likely in Japan and South Korea. In both Italy and the US, women were more likely than men to lose their jobs permanently, but less likely to lose their jobs temporarily. Further evidence for the US showed that the employment of women from minority ethnic backgrounds (Gezici and Ozay, 2020) and with least education (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020) were the most severely hit. Similarly in Canada, women, racial minorities, and lower income workers have faced higher rates of unemployment and greater losses of income and work hours than the rest of the population (Lemieux et al., 2020; Qian and Fuller, 2020). In the UK, job loss and furlough (temporary layoff) were initially lower for women than men but then converged. This is in part because female jobs are concentrated in essential sectors such as health, and also in occupations that can be done from home (Blundell et al., 2022).

Pre-pandemic, the gender employment gap was stable since 2014 in the EU27, at just under 12 percentage points according to Eurostat data (Eurofound, 2022c). The pandemic worsened the gap, at least in the short term, as more women than men lost their jobs between April and September 2020. Over the course of 2020 and 2021, gender gaps narrowed slightly at EU27 level in terms of employment and inactivity, while the gender gap in unemployment remained constant (*ibid.*, Figure 14). However, research highlights variation in these patterns across different sectors and socioeconomic groups: in particular it was women in low paid jobs that suffered the initial impact of the pandemic in most countries (Eurofound and European Commission Joint Research Centre, 2021; Eurofound, 2022c).

### 1.2.3 Disparities by family status

International evidence from Canada and the UK suggests that employment rates of mothers with pre-school and school-aged children have been particularly affected (Fuller and Qian, 2021; Andrew et al., 2022). In Canada, fathers' employment recovered more quickly than

mothers' employment and thus a gender gap in employment grew in the later part of 2020 (Fuller and Qian, 2021). Those caring for young children also experienced a particular set of stressors during the pandemic, associated with combining care and paid work, resulting in declining mental health in the UK (Xue and McMunn, 2021; also in Ireland – see Laurence et al., 2023). In a Europe-wide survey of 27 countries, ECDPC and Eurofound (2023) investigated the impact of stay-at-home orders and school/crèche closures on work-life balance and found parents – particularly mothers – with young children were more affected than other groups (see also Eurofound, 2022c).<sup>8</sup> There is less evidence for lone parents, but research from the United States finds that unemployment rates were consistently higher in the pandemic period (April 2020-December 2021) for lone parents than adults in two-parent homes (Parolin and Lee, 2022). The authors attribute this in part to the particular challenges of childcare closures for lone parents.

By 2021, Eurofound showed, using survey data collected by the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS), that women spent on average six hours less per week than men in paid work (Eurofound, 2022d). But this was overcompensated by the 13 extra hours they spent per week in unpaid work. This gender gap is mostly explained by an uneven distribution in caring for children between women and men. At the peak of the gap, working women aged 35-44 spent 11.3 hours more per week taking care of children than men of the same age. Women also spent six hours more than men doing housework, on average, across age groups.

While research from various countries pointed out that fathers took on more childcare duties during the lockdowns compared to the pre-pandemic period (Andrew et al., 2022; Chung et al., 2021; Hipp and Bünning, 2021; Petts et al., 2021; Yerkes et al., 2020), studies also found that the overall workload of mothers increased even more (Chung et al., 2021; Collins et al., 2021; Fodor et al., 2021; Hipp and Bünning, 2021; Petts et al., 2021; Eurofound, 2022). During the pandemic unpaid care work increased for both men and women in the EU, but the impact was greater on women, especially mothers with children under 12 years old (Eurofound, 2020a; 2020b; EIGE, 2021a). By 2021, men with children

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<sup>8</sup> The study used linked data from the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) 'Living, Working and COVID-19' e-survey and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the Joint Research Centre (JRC) Response Measures Database.

spent 1.3 more hours per week on paid work and another 14.2 hours more per week on unpaid work than men without children (Eurofound, 2022c). For women with children, paid working time was 1.5 hours shorter than for women without children, but their unpaid work was 29.3 hours longer. The additional unpaid hours worked by women with children were almost double those worked by men with children, pointing to the persistence in gender norms establishing who should take care of children and who should be the main breadwinner in the family (Eurofound, 2022c). Other studies showed that as they took on more duties at home, mothers were more likely to reduce their working hours or leave employment (Blaskó et al., 2020; Cook and Grimshaw, 2021; Heggeness, 2020; Collins et al., 2021). While prior to the pandemic remote working had been heralded as a solution to work-life conflict challenges, Dunatchik et al. (2021) find that in 2020 in the United States, the large-scale shift to remote working, combined with closure of schools and childcare facilities, served to exacerbate the unequal household division of labour.

In the case of lone parents, single fathers reported spending 21 hours less per week on unpaid work than single mothers, which may be partly explained by differing custody arrangements or differing use of external help (Eurofound, 2022c).

#### **1.2.4 Disparities by self-employment status**

Self-employed workers were affected particularly hard by the pandemic. Many of them did not have access to public support measures at its outset (Eurofound, 2021, Chapter 4). In the UK, Cribb et al. (2021) found that a higher proportion of self-employed workers than employees worked zero hours throughout the pandemic up to January 2021. Blundell et al. (2021) found that, on average, earnings of the self-employed failed to recover after the first lockdown. However, effects differed amongst the self-employed. Recent research by the Centre for Economic Performance (Blackburn et al., 2023) showed, using LSE-CEP online survey data on UK Self-employment,<sup>9</sup> that the income of the self-employed did not experience any significant post-pandemic improvement. But while there is widespread willingness of the self-employed to move to employee jobs, most of them reported that in practice they would find it hard to switch. This is especially the case for the older self-

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<sup>9</sup> The LSE-CEP Survey of UK Self-employment collected responses online from more than 1,500 people between 30 May and 4 July 2023. This was the seventh round, with previous rounds occurring in May 2020, September 2020, February 2021, September 2021, May 2022, and November 2022.

employed, whose main obstacles would be the lack of appropriate skills and old age (Blackburn et al., 2023).

### **1.2.5 Disparities by education level**

The labour market impact of the pandemic varied for those with different education levels. In the UK, research has highlighted that the lockdowns and social distancing particularly reduced the ability for the less educated to work as compared to university graduates, as they were more likely to work in sectors that were shut down (Blundell et al., 2022). The less educated were also:

*more likely to be older, have health vulnerabilities, and work in jobs that require physical proximity to others. The combination of these factors may have weighted in their decision to continue working if their jobs remained open (Blundell et al., 2022).*

The authors found that, relative to a counterfactual of the labour market continuing to look like it did in 2019, the pandemic led to a reduction of 2.7 million person-years of full-time work and a further 1.5 million of part-time work by mid-2021. This is equivalent to 14 per cent of the workforce stopping working for a year. And for those who stopped education at lower secondary school (i.e. at around 16), that figure reaches 24 per cent, with two-thirds of the effect coming from reduced full-time work.

However, job-support programmes particularly helped lower paid jobs, thereby increasing job opportunities for those types of jobs, whilst opportunities for those with higher levels of education were significantly lower than pre-COVID-19 (Blundell et al., 2022).

### **1.2.6 Disparities by disability status**

Disabled people may be particularly structurally vulnerable in situations of risk, as highlighted by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).<sup>10</sup> Research from the United States found that disabled people experienced a range of stressors during

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<sup>10</sup> [https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/article-11-of-the-crpd-legal-frameworks-guiding-inclusive-humanitarian-action-reporting-guidance\\_final-version.pdf](https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/article-11-of-the-crpd-legal-frameworks-guiding-inclusive-humanitarian-action-reporting-guidance_final-version.pdf).

the pandemic, including rises in unemployment, depression, and prevalence of ableism<sup>11</sup> and discrimination (Brown and Ciciurkaite, 2023). Using the ‘Living, Working and COVID-19’ e-survey in spring 2021, Eurofound (2022c) found that many disabled people had a health need that went unmet during the pandemic. Disabled people also reported significantly worse mental well-being and were more financially precarious (ibid.) Shikako et al. (2023) note how, despite heightened risks experienced by disabled people during the pandemic, very few countries explicitly addressed these needs in their pandemic response. In the US, data from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission show that disability-related discrimination claims increased in 2020, becoming the second most common cause of filed claims (Ogletree et al., 2021). Using a nationally representative survey of around 60,000 households (the Current Population Survey), Ne’eman and Maestas (2023) showed that when the pandemic began, disabled people experienced employment losses in the US that were proportionately similar to those without. However, from Q4 2021 to Q2 2022, the employment rate of people with disabilities grew faster due to increasing labour force participation. These employment gains were concentrated in occupations that can be done remotely, essential occupations, and non-frontline occupations. This raises the potential for long-term structural changes, particularly the rise in remote working, that may facilitate the inclusion of people with disabilities (Ne’eman and Maestas, 2023).

Voices of disabled people are also important to consider (Taylor and Knipe, 2022). Maroto et al. (2021) explored data from a quota-based online survey on 1,027 Canadian adults with disabilities and chronic health conditions, conducted in June and in August to November 2020. They found that, although the pandemic had no direct effects on job losses for most people with disabilities and chronic health conditions – a group with already low employment levels – those who have lost their jobs due to COVID-19 are struggling financially.

*Sixty per cent of these respondents reported worsening financial situations and over 70 per cent reported that COVID-19 affected their ability to pay*

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<sup>11</sup> Defined as prejudice, discrimination, and the application of stigma toward people with disabilities (Friedman and Owen, 2017; see also Timmons et al., 2023).



*down debt, make mortgage or rent payments, pay utility bills, purchase groceries, or contribute to savings to a moderate or great extent (ibid.)*

In the UK, Emerson et al. (2021) compared employment and financial stress among disabled people using pre-pandemic (2017-2019) and pandemic (April-June 2020) data from Understanding Society, the UK's main annual household survey.<sup>12</sup> They found that while disabled people were no more likely than others to lose their jobs, they were more likely to reduce working hours and experience financial strain during the pandemic. This is even after accounting for disabled people's much lower employment rate and greater financial strain prior to the pandemic. The thinktank Work Foundation surveyed 406 disabled workers about their experiences of remote and hybrid working before and during the pandemic. Survey respondents highlighted clear benefits from being able to work from home, as they had more autonomy over how they work, which 'allowed them to better manage their health and wellbeing' (Taylor et al., 2022b). Furthermore, 85 per cent of the respondents felt more productive working from home. However, respondents also highlighted concerns about losing development opportunities at work if they needed to remain at home when others went back to the office. An EHRC analysis found that between 2019/20 and 2021/22 in the UK, the gap in employment rates between disabled people and non-disabled people narrowed, although the earnings gap widened slightly (EHRC, 2023).<sup>13</sup>

### **1.2.7 Disparities by ethnicity, nationality and migration status**

Research from the UK indicates that ethnic minorities were particularly hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, both in term of mortality and economic impacts, partly related to the occupations they worked in (Platt, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment rates were much higher for ethnic minorities than for Whites in the UK (Sestanovic et al., 2021). Couch et al. (2020) also report disproportionate impacts on ethnic minority unemployment in the United States, which they argue raises questions regarding longer-term consequences of the pandemic on racial inequality.

Data on ethnicity and race are not routinely collected in labour market or income surveys in the EU, including Ireland, but information on nationality or country of birth is more widely

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/>.

<sup>13</sup> Using annual population surveys for the UK. See EHRC (2023, Figure 27).

available. OECD (2020) comparative research found that employment falls were generally greater for migrants in European countries, partly due to over-representation in sectors hard-hit by the pandemic, such as hospitality, though they do find variation both across countries and between migrant groups within countries. Yet OECD (2022), using the latest available data at the time (Q3 2021) showed a return to or near pre-crisis levels for migrants in most OECD countries.<sup>14</sup>

### **1.2.8 Remote working (working from home/teleworking )**

As is clear from the previous discussion, the ability to work from home or remotely became an important new cross-cutting cleavage among workers during the pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the potential that a job could be performed online in a location different from the employer's premises using digital devices (such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones) became an important determinant of who could continue working during the pandemic restrictions (Sostero et al., 2020), alongside frontline workers whose work was considered essential (e.g. health workers, childcare workers, people working in food processing, and workers in groceries). The ILO (2021) describes remote work as 'situations where the work is fully or partly carried out on an alternative worksite other than the default place of work'.<sup>15</sup> Telework is a subcategory of the broader concept of remote work, which includes the use of personal electronic devices. Working from home, which is what is regularly measured in the Labour Force Survey and used in this report, includes teleworkers who work from home, but also those who regularly work from home and do not have an alternative workplace (for example farmers and other self-employed workers).

Using latent class analysis of 2021 data collected by the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS), Eurofound (2022a) distinguished four groups of workers during the COVID pandemic, based on their type of job, main place of work and exposure to infection. They distinguish home-office workers (those who mostly worked in teleworkable office jobs); frontline workers, on-location production workers and on-location service workers. Home-office workers are mostly composed of white-collar occupations. They were

<sup>14</sup> Once again there was considerable variation by countries in this pattern, including a number of countries where migrant employment rates rose more than native-born employment between Q3 2019 and Q3 2021 (see OECD, 2022, Figure 2).

<sup>15</sup> As Felstead (2023) points out, remote working can be carried out in the home but also a co-working hub, or a while travelling.

also the most highly educated group (with 67 per cent having completed tertiary education) and the most balanced group in terms of age, although younger workers (aged 16-34) are underrepresented. Remote working was also more common among workers who were self-employed, women, and people living in urban areas (Eurofound and European Commission Joint Research Centre, 2021; Eurofound, 2022a). Eurofound (2022a) also showed that those who are able to do remote working have more working time flexibility than the other groups. However, a high proportion of home-office workers (39 per cent) worked more than their contracted hours. In addition, as Xiang (2022) points out, some people are free to choose whether to work remotely, others are not allowed to do so, and some are forced to do so.

By contrast, frontline workers (health professionals, teaching professionals, personal care workers and protective services), which mainly comprises public sector workers, experienced high levels of work demand during the pandemic, with potential health and well-being consequences).<sup>16</sup>

In the UK, Blundell et al. (2022) showed that the ability to work from home was unevenly distributed across the wage distribution during the pandemic. In the bottom earnings decile, less than one-in-five non-key workers had jobs that could be done from home in sectors that remained active. In the top decile, this figure rose up to three-in-four. Sostero et al. (2020) find a higher teleworking potential in jobs at the top of the wage distribution in the EU. Eurofound (2022c) argue that telework may have exacerbated the wage and employment gap between high and low-skilled workers as it took place mostly in better paid, higher level occupations.

### 1.3 SUMMARY

International evidence suggests that the labour market impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was not evenly spread, though for some the impact varied across the period. Some groups were most severely affected during the pandemic, but their labour market outcomes have recovered in the post-pandemic period, where this is analysed. Young people for example

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<sup>16</sup> Of the COVID groups, the frontline workers group had the highest share of workers (22 per cent) who disagreed with the statement that they received the recognition they deserved for their job (with no strong difference between sectors). More than two-thirds (67 per cent) of frontline workers were women (Eurofound, 2022d).

experienced the greatest falls in employment and participation during the pandemic, but these rebounded post-pandemic, whereas among older workers the fall in labour market participation persisted – particularly in the United States – including a move to early retirement. In the early pandemic period, female employment fell more sharply than male employment, particularly low-paid employment. Yet in both the UK and the EU27, female employment converged with male employment later in the pandemic. Family status mattered. The employment of parents with primary-school age children, particularly mothers, was more affected than those with no children or with teenage children, as there were additional challenges caused by closures of childcare facilities and schools. Mothers were also more likely to reduce their working hours given childcare challenges than either fathers or women with no children.

Remote working was a new cross-cutting cleavage to emerge during the pandemic, primarily benefiting those in advantageous jobs with higher education, many of whom also recorded an increase in working hours. North American evidence suggests that while disabled people experienced more severe effects on employment during the pandemic, the use of remote work was a bonus for disabled people who could work remotely, and may ultimately lead to an increase in employment rates for disabled people. Finally, higher education was found to have been a protective factor during the COVID-19 pandemic period, with much higher rates of employment among those with higher education.

## CHAPTER 2

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### Pandemic response and evidence of disparities in Ireland

This chapter describes the pandemic response in Ireland focusing on the measures that affected the labour market. This encompasses both the public health measures that restricted the opening of non-essential workplaces and the social welfare measures put in place to protect households' incomes and to support enterprises. The chapter also outlines the research findings and previously published statistics on the immediate impact of the pandemic on the labour market in Ireland, highlighting what is known about inequalities in outcomes as the pandemic was ongoing.

#### 2.1 PANDEMIC RESPONSE IN IRELAND

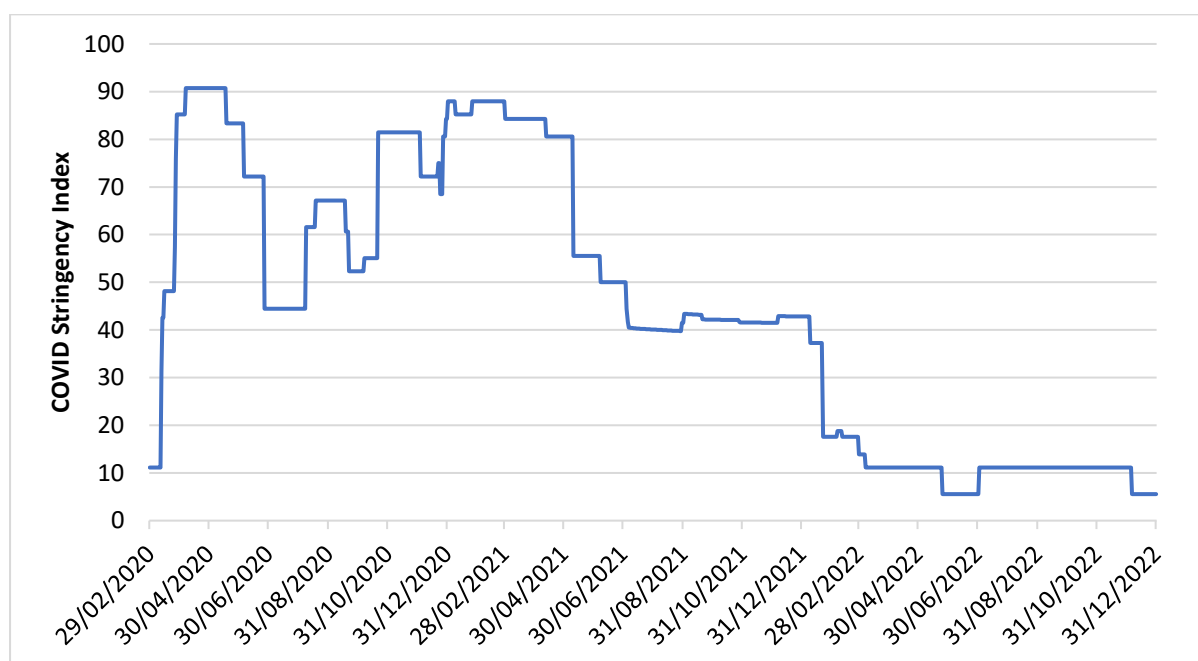
Ireland had one of the longest closures of public space in the first wave of the pandemic in Europe and reintroduced a reduced lockdown in the second wave (OECD, 2020a).<sup>17</sup> Analysing the level of restrictions, we use Hale et al. (2021)'s COVID-19 Stringency Index. This is a composite measure based on nine response indicators including school closures, workplace closures and travel bans, rescaled to a value from 0 to 100, 100 being the strictest.<sup>18</sup> Figure 2.1 shows how restrictions changed over the period of interest using data from the Our World in Data COVID-19 Stringency Index (Our World in Data, 2023).

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<sup>17</sup> For an overview of policy measures at the EU level and across Member States see Eurofound (2021).

<sup>18</sup> <https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-explorer?uniformYAxis=0&country=USA~BRA~JPN~DEU&Metric=Stringency+index&Interval=Cumulative&Relative+to+Population=true&Color+by+test+positivity=false>.

**FIGURE 2.1 COVID-19 STRINGENCY INDEX IN IRELAND**



Source: Authors' analysis using Our World in Data (2023) – COVID-19 Stringency Index.

### 2.1.1 School and childcare closures

School and childcare closures are particularly relevant for the time pressures experienced by parents and their ability to continue with paid employment, particularly if they cannot work remotely. Young people making the transition into the labour market were also more exposed to disruption to education and training (Darmody et al., 2020).

Primary and secondary schools in Ireland were initially closed from 13 March 2020 to 1 Sept 2020. Schools remained open until the Christmas holidays in December 2020 but did not reopen in January 2021. A staggered return occurred from mid-February: special classes in post-primary schools returned on 22 February; Leaving Certificate students (sixth year) and students in Junior Infants, Senior Infants, first and second class returned on 1 March 2021; the remaining primary school students and fifth year students in secondary schools returned on 15 March 2021, and the remaining secondary school students did not return to in-person schooling until 12 April 2021.

Early Childhood Education and Care services followed a somewhat different timetable of closures. Following their closure during the initial lockdown starting in mid-March 2020, childcare services were permitted to re-open on 29 June 2020. Priority was to be given to

children of frontline workers, vulnerable children, and disabled children.<sup>19</sup> Pobal reported that 94 per cent of full-year service reopened during this period (Pobal, 2021). The ECCE programme, which provides universal free-preschool education, operates on a term-time basis, and 99 per cent of its services were reopened by September 2020 (Pobal, 2021). Services remained open until 6 January 2021 when they were suspended again except for children of essential workers and vulnerable children (Pobal, 2022). They reopened fully on 29 March 2021. The number of children enrolled in Early Childhood Education and Care services decreased by 12 per cent between 2018/19 and 2020/21.

### 2.1.2 COVID-19 income supports

The Irish government responded to the employment shock by introducing a range of new income supports and wage subsidies. The Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) was introduced in March 2020 to compensate those who lost their jobs due to the pandemic. The PUP was non-means tested and initially paid at a flat rate of €203 per week, which was the prevailing level of basic social welfare payments such as Jobseeker's payments.<sup>20</sup> This was quickly increased to €350 per week from 24 March. From October 2020, the payment became related to previous earnings (see Table 2.1).

**TABLE 2.1 COVID-19 PANDEMIC UNEMPLOYMENT PAYMENT WEEKLY RATE (FROM 16 OCTOBER 2020 TO 30 JUNE 2021)**

Average Weekly Earnings	Personal Rate
€400 or over	€350
€300- €399	€300
€200- €299	€250
Less than €200	€203

Source: Citizens Information.

The PUP was withdrawn for full-time students in September 2021 and the scheme ended for everyone in March 2022, with anyone still on the scheme transferring to Jobseeker's payments if they were eligible.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/23b25-minister-zappone-announces-decisions-and-guidance-to-support-the-reopening-of-childcare-services/>.

<sup>20</sup> Unlike Jobseeker's Benefit the PUP required no contribution history and unlike Jobseeker's Assistance it did not require a means test.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.inou.ie/information/covid-19-unemployment-payment/>.

Furthermore, the government introduced a Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) in March 2020. It subsidised up to 70 per cent of the net wages of employees whose employers were severely affected by the pandemic, up to a maximum of €410 per week. The employer could make additional payments to employees (up to a maximum), subject to a reduced rate of employer PRSI (Beirne et al., 2020). The TWSS was replaced by the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) on 1 September 2020. This scheme allowed employers to claim subsidies for eligible employees and keep them on their payroll, with or without topping their income up to its pre-pandemic level. The EWSS provided a two-tier subsidy of €151.50 or €203 per employee to employers who experienced a loss in turnover of at least 30 per cent. The EWSS was withdrawn by May 2022.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, for employees in the childcare sector, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) subsidised the remaining 30 per cent of the wage bill up to a maximum of €350 per week under the Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme (TWSCS). Childcare providers also received an additional payment from the Department of 15 per cent of their staff costs to use for overheads (Beirne et al., 2020). The final COVID-specific support for the childcare sector ended in April 2022, though some new supports were then introduced.<sup>23</sup>

The cost of PUP and TWSS/EWSS was very substantial, amounting to €16.7 billion up to October 2021. At their height these schemes were supporting one million workers and 37,000 enterprises (DPER, 2021).

Other governmental measures during COVID-19 include abolishing the waiting period for Illness Benefit for those who contracted the virus and/or were required to self-isolate, and the rate of this benefit increased to match that of the PUP (Beirne et al., 2020). Fuel allowance was also increased by extending the winter fuel season by four weeks. The

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/a43a2-wage-subsidy-scheme-ends-after-two-years-of-unprecedented-support-to-employers/>.

<sup>23</sup> A Transition Fund and Interim Fund then ran from May to September 2022 to provide financial stability to services between the ending of the enhanced Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme in April 2022 and the start of the sector-specific Core Funding in September 2022. See here for details of all supports for the childcare sector: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2023-12-12/711/?highlight%5B0%5D=childcare>.



standard rate of VAT was also cut by 2 percentage points from September 2020 until February 2021.

These income support schemes cushioned pandemic related income losses for most households (Doorley et al., 2020). Without the interventions household incomes would have fallen by an average of 7 per cent, the initial responses (introduction of PUP, wage subsidies and VAT cut) reduced this loss to 3.5 per cent on average. With the supports the losses were greatest for households at the top of the income distribution – quintile 5 still experienced a 6.5 per cent loss compared to pre-COVID-19, while those in the bottom quintile saw an increase. It was estimated that those aged 18-29 years would have lost 15 per cent of disposable income in the absence of the COVID supports, but with the supports their loss was 5 per cent. Those aged 60-69 experienced the lowest fall in income, because they were less affected by COVID-19 job losses (ibid).

## **2.2 RESEARCH ON THE IMMEDIATE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC IN IRELAND**

### **2.2.1 The COVID-19 pandemic and the Irish labour market**

Although National Income<sup>24</sup> had risen substantially, and unemployment has fallen in the years prior to and including 2019, Ireland faced economic challenges and uncertainty following the health crisis and economic recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic revealed inequalities in the labour market and differential risk of exposure to the virus among particular sectors and groups of workers.

Some jobs were defined as ‘essential’ or ‘front-line’, though precisely which jobs these were depended on the nature of restrictions at any given time (Redmond and McGuinness, 2020a). At various stages of the pandemic response those who could work from home were encouraged/instructed to do so, and whether jobs could be done from home or not emerged as a key cleavage (Redmond and McGuinness, 2020b; Enright et al., 2020). Other workers whose jobs could not be done from home but were not considered essential were

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<sup>24</sup> CSO Annual National Accounts 2022 <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-ana/annualnationalaccounts2022/gniandde-globalisedresults/>.

put on temporary or partial lay-off supported by the TWSS/EWSS or were laid off and supported by the PUP (McGuinness and Kelly, 2020).

According to the CSO, the unemployment rate in January 2021 in Ireland would have been 25 per cent if those in receipt of COVID-related payments were included. Workplace closures and job losses due to the pandemic were not uniform across the economy. In the first half of 2020, workers in the Hospitality sector, the Arts/entertainment, and certain parts of the Retail sector (non-essential retail) were particularly hard hit.<sup>25</sup> According to Brioscú et al. (2021), Hospitality, Retail and Construction were the most impacted sectors within the first year of the pandemic. Furthermore, Coates et al. (2020) found that the low-skilled and part-time workers were the most likely to suffer from job loss as a result of pandemic mitigation measures.

Construction employment closed in the initial lockdown, but was allowed to reopen under certain conditions in summer of 2020. The construction sector was kept open until January 2021, when it was again restricted. The hospitality and leisure sector experienced repeated closures and restrictions to opening hours, and international travel was restricted up until March 2022.<sup>26</sup> The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on job quality is much less clear.

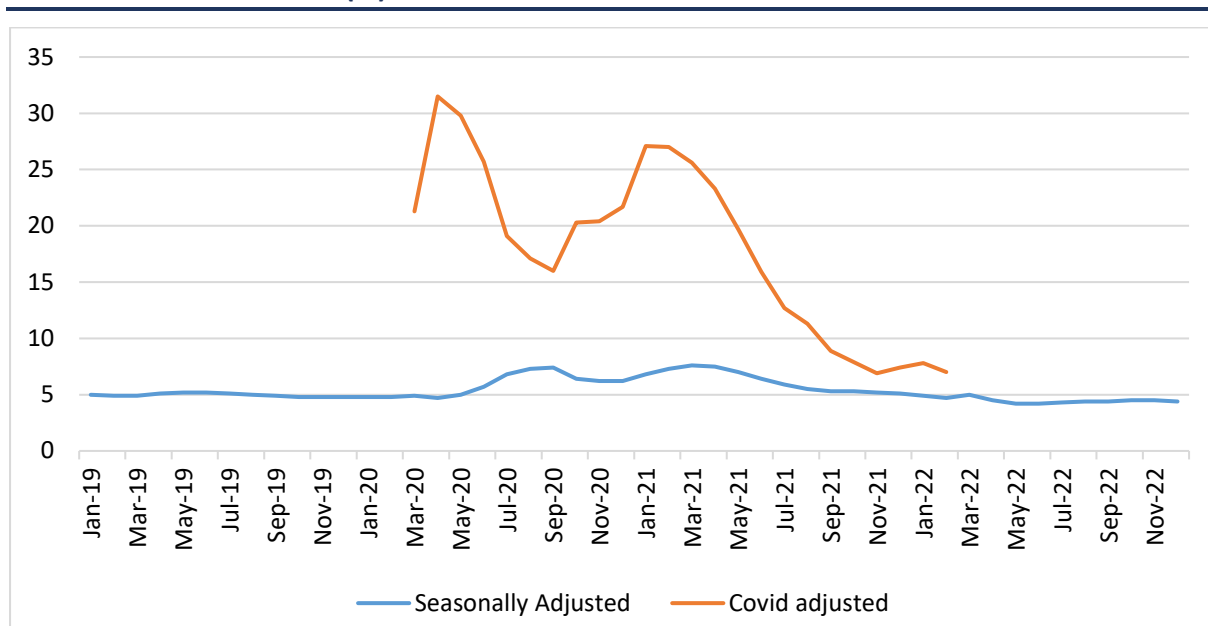
The COVID-19 adjusted unemployment rate which includes those in receipt of the PUP (but not those on the wage subsidy schemes) shows the sharp rise during the initial lockdown with the rate peaking at 31.5 per cent in April 2020. Unemployment then fell but began to rise again in October 2020 to a second peak in January 2021. This pattern reflects the reintroduction of stricter restriction in winter 2020/21 as shown in the Figure 2.2.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/br/b-lfs/labourmarketinsightbulletinseries2/>.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/0cacf-ending-of-covid-19-requirements-for-travellers-to-ireland/>.

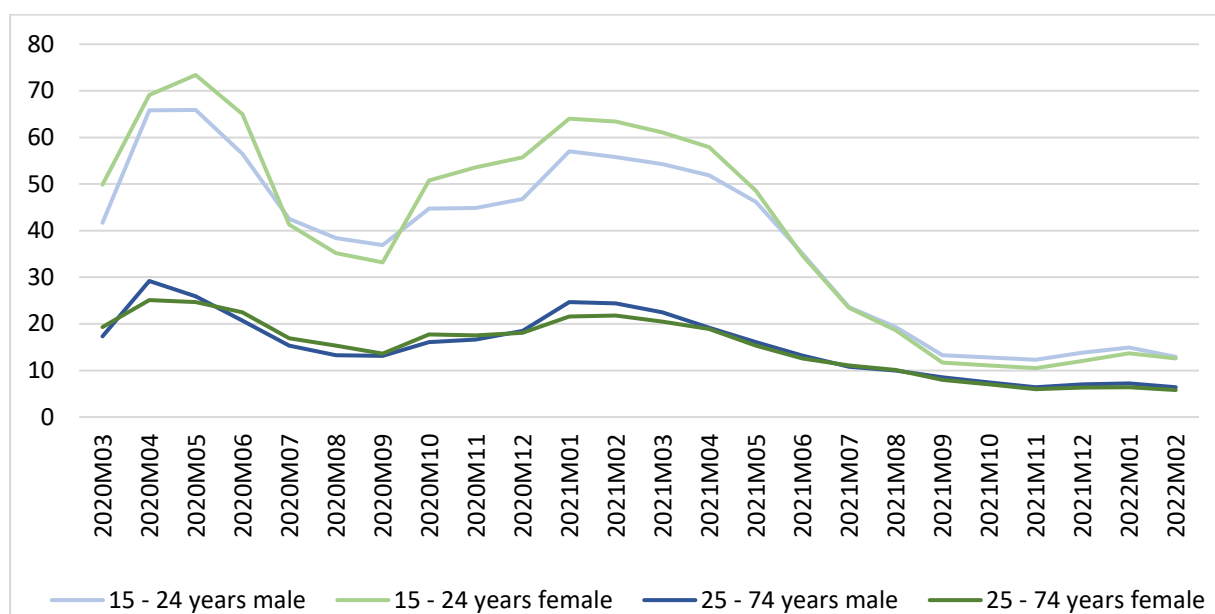
**FIGURE 2.2 MONTHLY UNEMPLOYMENT RATES – SEASONALLY ADJUSTED AND COVID-19 ADJUSTED (%)**



Source: CSO <https://data.cso.ie/table/MUM01> and <https://data.cso.ie/table/MUM02>.

The pattern of job losses was not uniform across the population. The 15-25 age cohort were particularly badly hit, with COVID-adjusted (CA) unemployment rates of 70 per cent in May 2020 compared to a rate of 25 per cent for those aged 25-74 years. Gender differences were also visible, though this fluctuated over the period and differed by age (see Figure 2.3).

**FIGURE 2.3 COVID-19 ADJUSTED UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BY GENDER AND AGE GROUP (%)**



Source: CSO website <https://data.cso.ie/table/MUM02>.

Figures from the Department of Social Welfare show that a slightly higher proportion of the female labour force was claiming PUP for much of the period from March 2020 to March 2021, except in the first lockdown and in the third lockdown in early 2021 (Brioscú et al., 2021 – Figure 6).

A significant proportion of young people that claimed PUP and are therefore included in the CA-unemployment rate were students in full-time education, who would not have been entitled to claim regular Jobseeker's payments. Brioscú et al. (2021) estimated that students accounted for around 10 per cent of all PUP claimants in March 2021.

While young people were more at risk of losing their jobs and claiming PUP, they were less likely to remain on PUP in the long term (52 or more weekly payments). Those aged 55 years and over were significantly over-represented among the long-term PUP claimants (Brioscú et al., 2021). There was no difference in the risk of long-term claims between men and women. However, using data on PUP claimants covering the period of March 2020 to September 2021, Whelan et al. (2023) found that, within each age group, women had longer durations of receipt than men. They also found that those over the age of 55 years spent longer on PUP than younger age groups.

A special COVID-wave of the *Growing Up in Ireland '98* Cohort who were aged 22 years at the onset of the pandemic provides more detail on the impact of the pandemic on the employment of young people. Among this cohort, 36 per cent of those who had been in paid work in February 2020 lost a main job, 20 per cent lost a term-time job and a further 16 per cent experienced a reduction in their hours of work (Smyth and Nolan, 2022). This level of employment disruption was a great deal higher than that recorded by the parents of the GUI '08 Cohort, mostly aged in their 30s and 40s. Young people were also much less likely to have switched to working from home compared to parents of the '08 Cohort (ibid), with only 16 per cent of young people switching to remote work. The study also found that young people in rural areas and those from lone parent households were more likely to have lost their main job. Young people in professional/managerial occupations at age 20 were less likely to lose their main job and those in skilled manual employment more likely compared to those in non-manual employment. There was less variation in the characteristics of those losing 'term-time' jobs, but controlling for occupation at age 20,

females, those living in urban areas and those with the highest Leaving Certificate grades were less likely of have lost a term-time job, while those in insecure jobs at 20 years were more likely.

The labour market impact of COVID also had consequences for young people's financial and mental well-being. Financial strain was highest among young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) before the pandemic, followed by those who lost their main job (Smyth and Nolan, 2022). Rates of depression were twice as high among young men who lost their full-time job; levels for women were slightly higher but the difference was not statistically significant. Being able to work remotely had a protective effect on the mental health of young women but not for young men.

Prior to the pandemic, research showed that when older workers lose their jobs, they are less likely to secure re-employment or find a job with similar earnings to their previous positions (Crawford et al., 2021; Neumark et al., 2019). In Ireland, forthcoming research by Nolan and Ward shows that the older population who were in economically vulnerable situations before the pandemic (e.g. experiencing a shortage of money) were most affected in terms of falls in income and deteriorating overall financial situation by 2021. Using data collected through the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA), the authors found differential effects by gender as older women who were working prior to the pandemic were more likely to have lost their jobs by 2021 than men.

Finally, the labour market impact of COVID-19 varied by place. Both the proportion of adults on PUP and the duration of time spent on PUP was higher in areas of disadvantage (Whelan et al., 2023).

### **2.2.2 Disparities by migration status**

Some groups of migrant workers were more impacted by the pandemic job losses than the Irish-born population in the early stages of the pandemic. Comparing levels of employment in Q1 2020 to Q2 2020, Enright et al. (2020) found the fall in employment was much greater for Eastern European nationals than Irish nationals. Non-EU nationals and migrants from Western Europe were not disproportionately affected by the decline in employment levels, although the former group had lower employment rates than Irish nationals throughout the

period (ibid). Ability to work remotely was part of the explanation of these patterns: Eastern European nationals were much less likely to be working in occupations that could be done remotely when compared to Irish nationals, non-EU nationals and those from Western Europe.

More recent analysis that covers the period Q1 2020 up to Q1 2022 found that the employment levels of migrants have recovered rapidly to surpass pre-pandemic levels (McGinnity et al., 2023). By Q1 2022, at 77 per cent, the migrant employment rate exceeded both migrant employment rates in Q1 2020 (71 per cent) and the Irish-born employment rate in Q1 2022 (72 per cent).<sup>27</sup>

Young people from migrant backgrounds<sup>28</sup> were no more likely to have lost their main jobs or term-time jobs during the pandemic than non-migrants (GUI '98 Cohort, Smyth and Nolan, 2022). However they were more likely to experience financial strain, even taking into account levels of pre-COVID-19 financial strain i.e. they experienced a greater rise in financial strain.

Regarding mortality rates, Duffy et al. (2022) found some evidence that some non-White and non-Irish-born/Irish nationals accounted for a higher share of COVID-19 deaths than their respective shares of the 65+ population.<sup>29</sup>

### **2.2.3 Disparities by disability**

Pre-pandemic, the employment gap between disabled people and non-disabled people was amongst the highest in Europe (Kelly and Maître, 2021). At 36 per cent, Ireland had the fourth lowest percentage of employment rates of disabled people in the EU28 in 2018. LFS data indicate that employment levels of non-disabled people grew by 11.8 per cent over the period 2010-2017, compared to a 5.7 per cent growth rate of disabled people, leaving a disability gap (difference between employment rates of people with and without disabilities) of 39 percentage points by 2019 (ibid.). There is a lack of evidence on the impact

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<sup>27</sup> As OECD (2022) note, Ireland was one of a number of OECD countries where employment rates increased more strongly for immigrants between Q3 2019 and Q3 2021 (ibid., Figure 2).

<sup>28</sup> Defined as both parents born outside Ireland, or one parent if in a lone parent family.

<sup>29</sup> Duffy et al. (2022) use COVID-19 mortality data provided by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). They note that these were provisional, not adjusted for age, and were for March 2020 to May 2021 only.

of the pandemic on disabled people's employment in Ireland, which this report seeks to address.

Providing care to a person with a disability also impacts on employment. A survey by Indecon (2021) found that in over 30 per cent of households where there is a disabled person, there is someone in the household working fewer hours than they would like due to caring responsibilities. The Indecon report calculated that lost household income as a result of working fewer hours amounted to €482 per week, on average. These figures were highest in households where a household member suffers from an 'intellectual disability'. Paid working hours for carers may have decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the need to 'shield' vulnerable household members. However, there are no population data on this question.

There is meagre evidence of the impact of the pandemic on disabled people in Ireland. Focusing on young people, Smyth and Nolan (2022) find no difference in the labour market impact of COVID-19 among those with a disability or chronic illness, nor in the proportion reporting a more positive educational experience during the pandemic.<sup>30</sup>

### **2.3 CHANGES IN WORKING CONDITIONS IN IRELAND DURING THE PANDEMIC**

Those workers who remained employed during the pandemic also experienced significant changes in their working conditions, the most significant of which was the shift to remote working. From March 2020, non-essential workers were not permitted to travel to their workplaces and were instructed to work from home if possible. The advice to work from home if possible remained in place with the phased reopening of economy and society during 2020. In September 2020 the Government introduced a Plan for Living with COVID-19, which included a framework with five different levels of restrictions (see Table 2.2). Even at the lowest level of restrictions those who could work from home were asked to do so.

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<sup>30</sup> 'Educational experience' is an index based on six items such as 'found it difficult to study', 'didn't do exams', or 'didn't do as well as expected'.

A revised plan for dealing with COVID-19 was published in February 2021;<sup>31</sup> this again advised that workers continue to work from home ‘unless work is an essential health, social care or other essential service or activity that cannot be done from home’ with no date given for lifting that restriction. In August 2021 employers were advised that attendance at work for specific business requirements may commence on a phased and staggered attendance basis from 20 September 2021.<sup>32</sup>

**TABLE 2.2 SEPTEMBER 2020 PLAN FOR LIVING WITH COVID-19 – ARRANGEMENTS FOR NON-ESSENTIAL WORKERS**

Item	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Work	Work from home if possible. Attendance at work for specific business requirements and on a staggered attendance basis.	Work from home if possible. Attendance at work for essential onsite meetings, inductions, training.	Work from home unless absolutely necessary to attend in person.	Only essential or other designated workers should go to work.	Work from home unless essential for work which is an essential health, social care or other essential service and cannot be done from home.

Source: Plan for Living with COVID-19, Government of Ireland (2020).

These restrictions led to a major shift in remote working. According to the recent CSO Work-Life Balance Survey, only 8.2 per cent of employees had worked remotely pre COVID-19.<sup>33</sup> By Q3 2021, 39 per cent of employees reported having worked remotely at some stage in the previous 12 months. The proportion of workers engaged in remote work varied widely by sector. Government measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic included the closing down of all schools, pre-schools and further and higher education settings during periods of 2020 and 2021. Consequently, the Education sector had the highest (86.2 per cent) uptake of remote working in 2021, while only 2.8 per cent of Education employees had availed of remote working pre COVID-19. Over half of public service workers availed of remote working in 2021.

Next to education, the highest levels of remote working were in the Financial, insurance and real estate activities sector. Pre-pandemic almost 30 per cent of workers in this sector were working remotely. This figure more than doubled in 2021 (64.2 per cent), i.e. during the pandemic. The lowest level of remote working during the pandemic was in Construction

<sup>31</sup> <https://assets.gov.ie/124440/a3fa7c2b-9ee4-492a-b0c0-ed3374fb1729.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> <https://assets.gov.ie/197018/ee93451c-2c67-4ea4-ad2b-ba5fb38bfce2.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pwlbw/personalandwork-lifebalance2021-remoteworking/workingremotely/>.



(12 per cent), Retail (13 per cent), Accommodation and food (13 per cent) and Health (14 per cent), as many of the jobs in these sectors could not be carried out remotely. Remote work was highest among professional and managerial workers and lowest among skilled trade workers. Full-time workers were nearly twice as likely to have worked remotely as part-time workers.

Those living with dependent children were more likely to have worked remotely over the past 12 months in 2021 than those without dependent children (41.2 per cent versus 37.1 per cent). The CSO publication does not consider whether opportunities for remote working vary by other equality characteristics such as gender, age, disability or nationality.

The impacts of remote work for groups vulnerable to labour market exclusion are uncertain. Remote working has potential positive impacts for those with caring responsibilities and people with a disability, since it provides greater accessibility and flexibility in terms of time management, childcare, and commuting (Williamson, 2022).<sup>34</sup> Research in Ireland pre-COVID suggested that remote working was the one form of flexible working that was more common among men (Russell et al., 2009). However, unlike other forms of flexibility, remote working was associated with greater work pressure and work-family conflict, as it was often associated with working longer hours (ibid.). There are also potential downsides for career advancement if differences emerge in the opportunities available to those working remotely and those in the office. Therefore, the implication of increased remote working for work-life balance and gender equality cannot necessarily be assumed to be positive and may be influenced by existing gender norms (Kasperska, 2022; Touzet, 2023). It is too early to assess the full equality consequences of the rise in remote working but a first step in understanding this pandemic-related change to work is to analyse the distribution of remote working opportunities in Ireland (see also Eurofound, 2022c).

### **2.3.1 Digital exclusion**

Access to remote working depends not only on the nature of job and employers' demands, but also access to broadband and IT equipment. In 2019, prior the pandemic, the CSO ICT

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<sup>34</sup> A CSO 'Our Lives Online' Pulse Survey found 75 per cent of people currently not in employment who are engaged in home duties would consider taking up a job if it could be done remotely. This figure was 69 per cent for people with long-standing health problems (Williamson, 2022).

Survey showed that 92 per cent of private households in Ireland had access to an internet connection.<sup>35</sup> This is similar to estimates from Census 2016 (87 per cent of households).<sup>36</sup> For households that have access, the type of internet access varies by region, with fixed broadband connection in 2019 highest in Dublin (92 per cent) compared to regions such as the Border (71 per cent) and the Midlands (69 per cent).<sup>37</sup> In 2022, the proportion of households with internet access had increased to 94 per cent according to the CSO's ICT Household Survey.<sup>38</sup> In most households, this was through fixed broadband (84 per cent). Variation in access was similar to 2019, with access to the internet lower among single person households (82 per cent) and households in the Border region (77 per cent). Access to fixed broadband is higher among households in very affluent areas and lower in households in disadvantaged (81 per cent) or very disadvantaged (84 per cent) areas. Single person households also have lower than average access to fixed broadband. These results suggest that some households may experience digital exclusion which affects their ability to work remotely.

## 2.4 SUMMARY

This chapter described the immediate labour market impacts of the pandemic in Ireland and the nature of the policy response. The shock to the labour market was unprecedented in terms of the scale and speed of the impact. The government response to the crisis was also unparalleled, with new schemes to support those who lost their jobs or had to close their business introduced rapidly. These schemes were more generous than existing welfare payments for jobseekers and played a significant role in preventing poverty and protecting jobs. The extent to which these interventions were sufficient to prevent a deterioration in the labour market situation of structurally vulnerable groups is investigated in the following chapters. This chapter also outlined the existing research and published statistics in Ireland, which showed that the immediate labour impact of the pandemic differed across groups, with the youngest age groups being particularly hard hit. However, the body of research is small and there are relatively few nationally representative studies to draw on. There are

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-isshh/informationssocietystatistics-households2019/householdinternetconnectivity/>. The ICT survey found the main reason reported for lack of internet access is that it is not needed (52 per cent) or that they lack the skills (42 per cent).

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/isshh/informationssocietystatistics-households2016/>.

<sup>37</sup> Closest to Dublin, 90 per cent of households in the Mid-East had broadband access, followed by the South-West (84 per cent) the South-East (83 per cent) the West (78 per cent) and the South-East (77 per cent).

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-isshhict/internetcoverageandusageinireland2022/>.

therefore gaps in knowledge about how particular groups fared during the pandemic in labour market terms. In the following chapters we set out to consider how selected structurally vulnerable groups are faring post-pandemic. Have the patterns of employment disruption outlined here persisted into the post-pandemic period?

## CHAPTER 3

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### Changes in access to employment since the pandemic

In this chapter, we analyse differing employment patterns by subgroups of the population following the pandemic. After describing the data used, summary statistics are presented to show the general trends in employment in 2019 compared to 2022. We then undertake regression analyses to assess whether any of the groups were more structurally vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic than others. While the main focus in this chapter is employment rates, given some evidence outlined in Chapter 1 that some groups saw a rise in labour market inactivity post-pandemic, we also consider the nature of non-employment, i.e. both unemployment and withdrawal from the labour market (inactivity).

#### 3.1 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

##### 3.1.1 Data sources

The primary data used in this report come from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) which is compiled by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The key advantage of large-scale survey data is that they are designed to be representative of the population in Ireland – and subgroups – at the time of the survey. This means that, for the most part, differences can be generalised to the full population. The large sample size means that smaller, potentially structurally vulnerable groups can be distinguished, such as lone parents. Participation in the survey is voluntary and has a design sample of 32,500 private households.<sup>39</sup> Each sample household is surveyed over five successive quarters or Waves before being replaced. In both 2019 and 2022, the years used in this report, the first interview was in-person (Computer Assisted Personal Interview) and the subsequent four interviews by telephone (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview).<sup>40</sup> As the four quarters of each year are pooled together to provide yearly observations, one individual is likely to appear as more than one observation in one year (if their first interview occurred prior to Q4 of that year, and if they responded during the following Wave). We select 18–64-year-old individuals who responded to the

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<sup>39</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/methods/labourmarket/labourforcesurvey/>.

<sup>40</sup> During the COVID pandemic, from March 2020 until late 2021, all in-person interviews were suspended; see <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/in/lfs/informationnoteonimplicationsofcovid-19onthelabourforcesurvey/>.

employment and socio-demographic information that we analyse. This results in an aggregate number of 81,191 individual observations in 2019, and 65,363 in 2022. We note the lower response rate following the pandemic: the response rate fell from 64 per cent in 2019 to 53 per cent in 2022.<sup>41</sup> However the sampling weight attributed to each individual takes into account these changes when incorporating population estimates broken down by age, gender, and region.<sup>42</sup> The distribution of the weighted sample across each observed subcategory is shown in Table A3.1.

Given substantial changes in question wording between 2019 and 2022, the Labour Force Survey does not currently contain information on the disability status of respondents that is comparable over the relevant years. We therefore use the Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC) for Box 3.1, and follow the same logic as with LFS data when selecting the observations. We thus have a total of 5,822 unweighted observations in 2019 and 6,271 in 2022.

### **3.1.2 Outcomes of interest: employment, unemployment and inactivity**

The principal outcomes of interest are the ILO statuses,<sup>43</sup> being employed, unemployed or inactive. When analysing employment, the dependent or outcome variable is given a value of 1 if the person is employed, and 0 for the rest of the working age population (including the inactive population). The outcome variable for the unemployment model is set to 1 if the respondent is unemployed and 0 if employed. The unemployment model is estimated only for those participating in the labour market, following convention (McGinnity et al., 2014). Finally, in the model on labour market inactivity, the outcome variable is 0 if the

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<sup>41</sup> Authors' calculations from pooled response rate per quarter for both years, derived from: [https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/methods/labourforcesurvey/lfsqualityreport/2022/LFS\\_Quality\\_Report\\_2022-Q1.pdf](https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/methods/labourforcesurvey/lfsqualityreport/2022/LFS_Quality_Report_2022-Q1.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> For details of weighting, see [https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/methods/labourforcesurvey/lfsqualityreport/2022/LFS\\_Quality\\_Report\\_2022-Q1.pdf](https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/methods/labourforcesurvey/lfsqualityreport/2022/LFS_Quality_Report_2022-Q1.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> Following the official International Labour Organization (ILO) measures, an individual is defined as being in employment if he/she worked in the week before the survey for one hour or more for payment or profit. This includes all persons who had a job but were not at work in the week before because of illness, holidays, etc. An individual is defined as unemployed if, in the week before the survey, he or she was without work but was available for work and had taken specific steps in the preceding four weeks to find work (i.e. was looking for a job). Labour market participants include those who are unemployed or employed on these definitions. Those who have not worked for at least one hour and who have not been actively seeking work are defined as non-participants or 'economically inactive'.

respondent is either employed or unemployed, and 1 if they are economically inactive (for example studying full-time, caring full-time, unable to work because of disability).

In Chapter 4, we also analyse changes to the nature of work for the employed population by using remote working patterns, usual weekly hours of work, quarterly weeks of work, and working in a managerial or professional occupation.

### 3.1.3 Equality groups

Following McGinnity et al. (2021), this report uses the primary equality legislation in Ireland as a starting point for defining groups. In particular, the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015<sup>44</sup> outlaw discrimination in a wide range of employment and employment-related areas, including recruitment, equal pay and promotion. The legislation specifies nine grounds for discrimination,<sup>45</sup> namely gender, civil status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion, race, and membership of the Traveller community. Based on the LFS data available, we focus on gender,<sup>46</sup> age of the respondent, family structure (age of youngest child in the family unit), and lone parent status. Adding a socio-economic ground to the Irish equality legislation is under review, but there is no measure of social origin in the LFS data. We thus follow McGinnity et al. (2021) in using educational attainment as a stratifying mechanism in the labour market.

In the models we also control for nationality (Irish, British, EU15, EU27 excluding countries in the EU15, Africa, South and East Asia, North America/Australia/Oceania, and the rest of the world); and region of residence (grouped as Dublin, Border, Western, Mid-West, South-East, South-West, Mid-East, and Midlands). Though these are not our primary focus, nationality and region of residence are likely to influence employment rates. In the next chapter, we control for other job characteristics including the economic activity of the organisation the person works for using the European Industrial Activity Classification

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1998/act/21/enacted/en/html>.

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.ihrec.ie/your-rights/>.

<sup>46</sup> Gender was measured in the same way across surveys with respondents having the option to choose male or female. Non-binary and transgender are not captured by the Labour Force Survey.

(NACE),<sup>47</sup> the role a person plays in the organisation classifying jobs by content and skill level using the International Standard Classification of Jobs (ISCO),<sup>48</sup> and self-employment status.

### 3.1.4 Analytical approach

To explore differences in employment trends amongst groups, this chapter starts by showing the raw percentage of 18–64-year-old respondents who reported being employed amongst each subgroup in 2019 (i.e. pre-COVID pandemic) and 2022 (post-COVID pandemic).

Next, probit regression results are estimated to analyse whether membership to each subgroup is significantly associated with changes in each of the observed outcome variables (employment, unemployment, and inactivity statuses) over the years.<sup>49</sup> We interpret the main effects and the interaction between time and membership of each equality group. When interpreting the coefficients in the Appendix tables, those in the ‘Main effect’ column show the associations, in 2019 (i.e. prior to the pandemic), between the outcome variable of interest (for example employment) and membership to each subgroup compared to their reference category (namely females compared to males; younger and older generations compared to the middle-age category;<sup>50</sup> lone parents compared to non-parents and/or people in relationships; people with children below 18 in the family unit compared to those without;<sup>51</sup> and people with upper secondary education or more compared to those with Junior Certificates or less).

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<sup>47</sup> The Labour Force Survey uses the new version of the European industrial activity classification (NACE Rev.2). <https://www.cso.ie/en/methods/classifications/industrialactivity/>. We use major sectors of activity (NACE 1 digit). For further details of what is included in each major category, see [https://showvoc.op.europa.eu/#/datasets/ESTAT\\_Statistical\\_Classification\\_of\\_Economic\\_Activities\\_in\\_the\\_European\\_Community\\_Rev.\\_2/data?resId=http:%2F%2Fdata.europa.eu%2Fux2%2Fnace2%2Fsections](https://showvoc.op.europa.eu/#/datasets/ESTAT_Statistical_Classification_of_Economic_Activities_in_the_European_Community_Rev._2/data?resId=http:%2F%2Fdata.europa.eu%2Fux2%2Fnace2%2Fsections).

<sup>48</sup> We use the one digit ISCO-08 classification provided in the survey. For further information on these major occupational groups see <https://ilostat.ilo.org/resources/concepts-and-definitions/classification-occupation/>.

<sup>49</sup> Probit regression analysis is used to model binary outcomes such as employed versus not employed. The modelling allows us to judge whether different characteristics such as age or gender are associated (or correlated) with the outcome once other influencing factors are accounted for. Importantly, the model also assesses whether the difference observed in the model is unlikely to be observed by chance, given the sample size (‘statistically significant’). By interacting each categorical variable of interest with the year variable, we can also observe whether potential disparities between subcategories (e.g. between people who studied above higher secondary and those who stopped before) change over time.

<sup>50</sup> Younger generations are 18-24 and 25-29; middle-aged are 30-49; and older generations are 50-64 years old.

<sup>51</sup> For the sake of brevity, we call people with children below 18 in their family unit nucleus structure ‘parents’ and individuals with nobody below 18 in their family unit nucleus structure ‘non-parents’ throughout the rest of this analysis.

Coefficients in the ‘Change 2019-2022’ columns show the changes over time in the disparity between the groups, to answer the question: did the gap between groups – for example between men and women – widen, narrow, or stay the same pre- and post-pandemic?<sup>52</sup>

Puhani (2012) shows that when dealing with non-linear models (such as probit models) in which variables of interest (here, our equality groups) are interacted with time, one should also verify the statistical significance of the interaction coefficients by analysing the contrasts of predictive margins.<sup>53</sup> We thus do so throughout the paper, and only interpret significant changes in time when these contrasts confirm the results.<sup>54</sup>

Finally, we graphically illustrate the predicted marginal probability of being employed, controlling for other individual characteristics, based on these models – we call this the ‘Estimated employment rate’.<sup>55</sup> Graphs for the other two dependent variables (unemployment and labour market inactivity) show similar results and are thus not shown here but remain available from the authors upon request.

### 3.2 EMPLOYMENT IN IRELAND: PRE VERSUS POST COVID-19 TRENDS

Figure 3.1 presents the weighted percentage of employed individuals amongst each observed subgroup in 2019 and 2022. We see that employment grew for all subgroups between the two periods, although at a higher rate for women, 18- to 24-year-olds, couple parents and non-parents (i.e. not lone parents), and those whose youngest child in the household is between 0 and 12. The fact that the employment rates are broadly similar between the years indicates that the composition of the employed population did not

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<sup>52</sup> Those are the coefficients of the interaction between the binary variable ‘Year 2022’ (set to 0 in 2019 and 1 in 2022) and membership to each observed subcategory.

<sup>53</sup> Contrasts of predictive margins show the evolution of the differences in the predicted probabilities between subgroups of a categorical predictor and their reference group after probit estimations, for different values of another variable (e.g. when the year is 2019 versus 2022). So, if employment is the observed outcome variable, educational attainment the categorical predictor, and lower educated workers the reference group, the contrasts of predictive margins show how much more (or less) likely it is for people who attained higher education to be employed in comparison to those who have lower levels of education, in 2019 versus 2022.

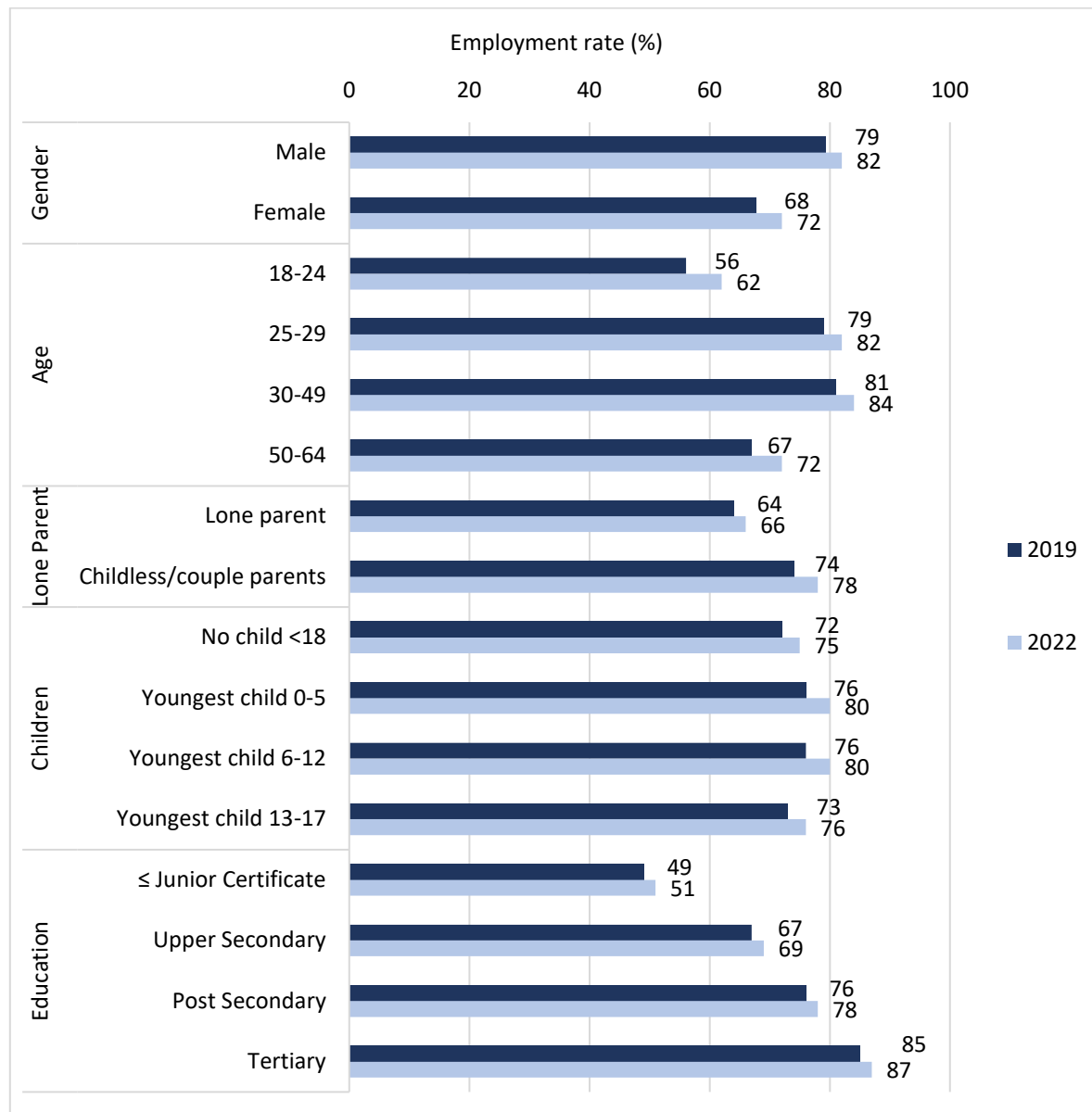
<sup>54</sup> The detailed results from the contrast margins robustness checks are not presented in the report (or appendices), but are available on request from the authors.

<sup>55</sup> Based on these models, we estimate and graphically represent the relationships between each subcategory and the outcome variable over time. These are the probabilities of, for instance, being employed (if our dependent variable is employment) in each year, for each subcategory, controlling for other predicting factors. We show these probabilities in percentage terms, for ease of representation.



change markedly over the three years, and thus that observed changes for each subcategory are not due to changes in the composition of the employed population.

**FIGURE 3.1 EMPLOYMENT RATE BY GROUP, 2019 AND 2022 (NO CONTROLS)**



Source: LFS, 2019 and 2022.

Notes: Analysis restricted to those aged 18-64. Figure lists proportions of employed individuals in each group.

Next, we use probit analyses to separate the links between membership of different groups and whether people were at work in 2022 compared to 2019, controlling for other characteristics that can impact on a person’s likelihood of being employed, namely region of residence and nationality. Appendix Table A3.2A shows the associations between membership to each group and employment prior to the pandemic (columns ‘Main effect’) as well as the changes over time for each group (columns ‘Change 2019-2022’). Prior to the

pandemic, the 'Main effect' column shows that the groups of people who were least likely to be employed were women (compared to men), both younger and older generations (compared to 30–49-year-olds), lone parents (compared to couples with children and non-parents), and parents of 0–5-year-olds (compared to people with no children below 18). On the other hand, the more educated the individuals, the more likely they were to be employed. This confirms patterns presented in Figure 3.1.

Did these employment gaps between groups change over time? In Appendix Table A3.2A, the 'Change 2019-2022' column shows that post-COVID, inequalities between groups were only significantly reduced for 18–24-year-olds (compared to 30–49-year-olds). That is, while all groups experienced an increase in employment rates in the post-pandemic period, the increase for young adults was higher than for other groups, in comparison to their reference category.

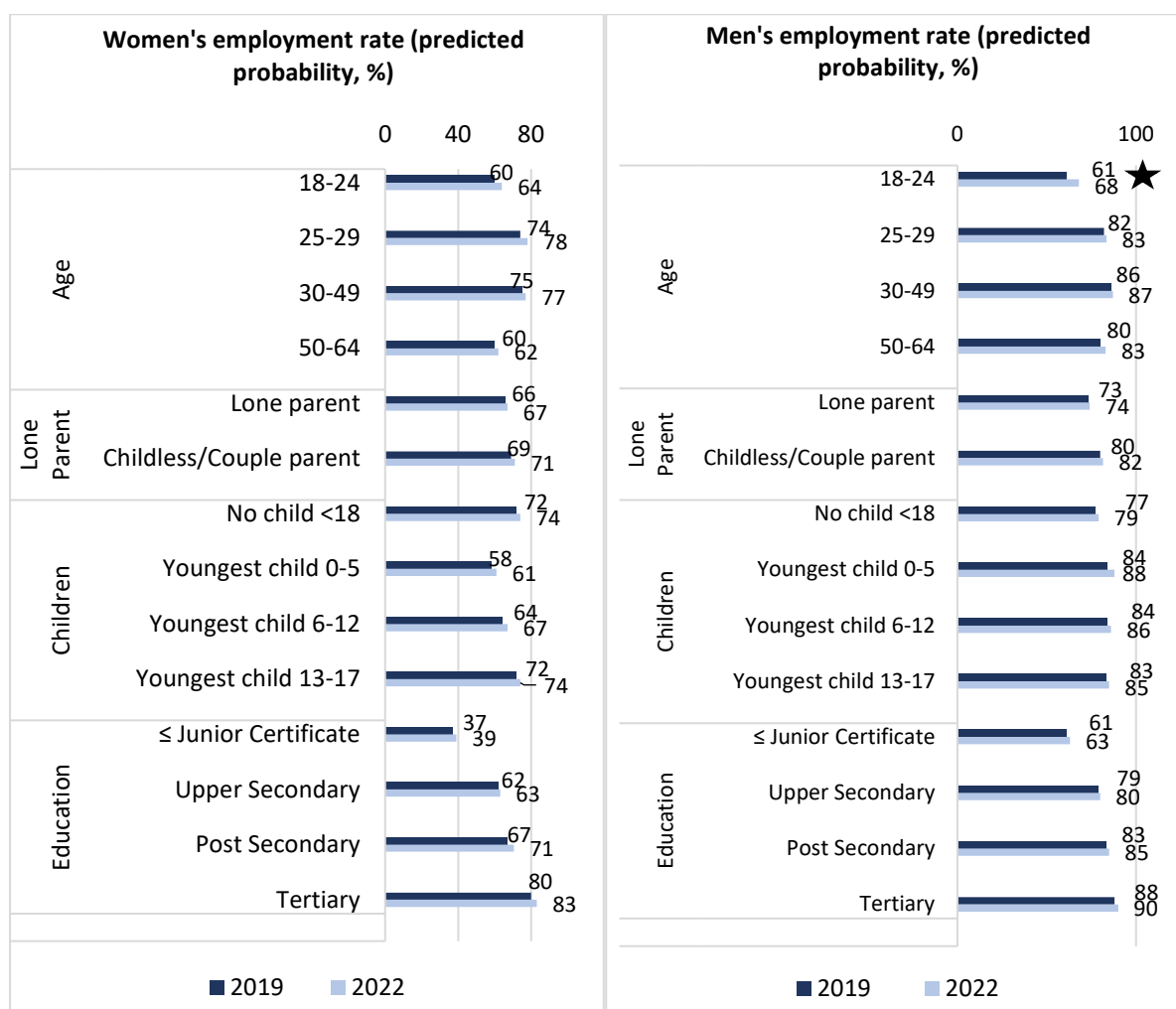
Considering there may be intersectional effects (see Chapter 2), Figure 3.2 distinguishes these effects for men and women separately. Figure 3.2 shows the estimated employment rate over time for each group of men and women, controlling for all other groups as well as for region of residence and nationality. Estimates from Figure 3.2 confirm the raw percentages shown in Figure 3.1, that employment rose for all subgroups in 2022 compared to 2019. However, distinguishing by gender, we see that this increase was strongest for 18–24-year-old men (see star symbol in Figure 3.2).

What role does the employment of full-time students play in this effect of increased employment for younger adults? Education participation is very high among this group in Ireland. Further analysis shows that when we exclude full-time students who are also working from the model, the increase in employment rates is no longer statistically significant, suggesting that much of the increase is driven by student employment. However, the increase observed for young men is still statistically significant, even when students are excluded. These findings give some indication of intersectionality in the employment effects, in that the increase in employment for young people is greater for men.

Other groups also showed somewhat greater increases in their employment rates – for example parents of very young (0–5-year-old) children (especially fathers), non-parents and

couple parents (i.e. not lone-parents), and women whose highest level of education is post-secondary, although the increase for these groups is not significantly different to the increase for their respective reference categories (see Appendix Table A3.2B).

**FIGURE 3.2 ESTIMATED EMPLOYMENT RATES BY GROUP FOR WOMEN AND MEN, 2019 AND 2022 (CONTROLLING FOR OTHER FACTORS)**



Source:

LFS, 2019 and 2022.

Notes:

Base = individuals aged 18-64. See Table A3.2B in the Appendix for the probit model underlying the above-represented margins. Controls: Region of residence and nationality. The star illustrates the statistically significant faster growth in the share of 18–24-year-old men who are employed, in comparison to the 30–49-year-old men. Total N of cases unweighted = 146,554.

### 3.3 UNEMPLOYMENT (2019 AND 2022)

As discussed in Chapter 2, overall unemployment rates were very low in Ireland in both the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic periods. In 2019, the unemployment rate among the working-age population was 4.9 per cent; by 2022 this figure was 4.6 per cent.<sup>56</sup> Many coefficients from the unemployment model, shown in Appendix Table A3.3, mirror the employment results. Namely, while 18–24 and 25–29-year-olds were both significantly more likely to be unemployed than 30–49-year-olds pre-pandemic, this inequality was only significantly reduced for 18–24-year-olds in 2022. Likewise, lone parents were more prone to unemployment pre-COVID, and no sign of change was found post-COVID. Furthermore, people who studied beyond the Junior Certificate were less likely to be unemployed, and this remained so post-COVID.

However, in contrast to the employment model, no significant differences in the likelihood of being unemployed are found between men and women, nor between parents and those without dependent children.

### 3.4 INACTIVITY (2019 AND 2022)

In 2019, LFS data show that inactivity rate amongst 18–64-year-olds was 23 per cent, and this went down to 20 per cent in 2022. Appendix Table A3.4 shows the relationship between each subgroup and inactivity (i.e. individuals not participating in the labour market).

According to our findings, the lower likelihood of women being employed is related to a significantly greater likelihood for them to be inactive rather than unemployed, compared to men (see Table A3.3's 'Main Effect' column). But once again, no change in this trend is found post-COVID, indicating that women were no more (or less) likely to withdraw from the labour market post-COVID. Likewise, while we found that parents whose youngest child is between 0 and 5 are no more likely to be unemployed, they are significantly more likely to be inactive than non-parents (see Table A3.4). On the other hand, parents whose youngest child is between 13 and 17 are significantly less likely to be inactive (and, as previously found, significantly more likely to be employed). Although again, these trends did not change post-COVID.

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<sup>56</sup> Based on weighted averages from four waves of pooled Labour Force Survey data in each year.

Similar to the unemployment model, 18–24- and 50–64-year-olds were both more likely to be inactive than 30–49-year-olds pre-COVID, and this gap was only reduced for 18–24-year-olds post-COVID. So, while inactivity fell for young adults, among the older working age group it did not change significantly.

Finally, related to both the employment and the unemployment models, people with Leaving Certificate qualifications or higher were less likely to be inactive than those without, on average, throughout the period.<sup>57</sup>

### BOX 3.1 EMPLOYMENT CHANGES AMONG DISABLED PEOPLE, 2019-2022

**Data Source:** Given substantial changes in question wording between 2019 and 2022, the Labour Force Survey does not currently contain information on the disability status of respondents that is comparable over the years.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, we have carried out a separate analysis drawing on the Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC).<sup>59</sup>

**Definition of employment, unemployment and inactivity:** Employment status in SILC is self-defined, which differs from that used in the LFS analysis. SILC data do not contain the information necessary to calculate an ILO measure. There are known differences between the measures. For example, those who combine low hours of paid work with care or study are less likely to self-define themselves as employed. While those considered unemployed in the analysis are those who replied ‘unemployed’ in the self-defined current economic status question, those considered ‘inactive’ include students, people doing unpaid work, retirees, those permanently disabled and/or unfit to work, those in compulsory military or civilian service, those fulfilling domestic tasks and care responsibilities, and other inactive populations.

<sup>57</sup> We note that Appendix Table A3.4 shows that those who accomplished tertiary education were less likely to be inactive before the pandemic than those with Junior Certificate or less, and this gap increased post-COVID. This significant result is however not confirmed by additional robustness checks (predictive margins).

<sup>58</sup> In 2019 the question in the Labour Force Survey was ‘Do you have any of the following long-lasting conditions or difficulties?’. This was not fielded in 2022. In 2022 the questions were about self-perceived general health and whether the respondent was limited in activities because of health problems,

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2022/backgroundnotes/>.

**Definition of disability:** SILC asks the interviewees whether they have limitation in their activities because of health problems. The question is ‘For at least the last six months have you been limited in activities people usually do, because of a health problem?’. Three options are provided for the answers, namely i) not limited; ii) limited; and iii) strongly limited. In the working age population, around 86 per cent reported that they had no health-related limitations in both years.<sup>60</sup> In 2019, 9.4 per cent reported being limited and 4.4 per cent were strongly limited; in 2022, this was 11 per cent limited and 3 per cent strongly limited. No further information is provided on the cause of the limitations reported.

**Summary statistics:** Figure 3.3 shows the 2019 to 2022 evolution of the employment, unemployment, and inactivity rates amongst those with no general activity limitations (non-disabled), those with some limitations (disability, limited), and those strongly limited (disability, strongly limited). We see large differences in employment rates between disabled and non-disabled people, as previously reported (Kelly and Maître, 2021). Furthermore, the more limited in their activities the group is, the higher the inactivity and unemployment rates, and the lower the employment rate (see Figure 3.3). In 2022, the employment rate for non-disabled people was 84 per cent, for ‘disabled, limited’ it was 54 per cent and for the strongly limited, 13 per cent. While this gap is reduced between 2019 and 2022 between the non-disabled and the ‘disabled, limited’ group, the employment gap has increased between disabled people who are strongly limited and the non-disabled. Indeed, while both the inactivity rate and the unemployment rate went down for the non-limited and the ‘disabled, limited’ group, both unemployment and inactivity went up for the ‘disabled, strongly limited’. Likewise, while the employment rate went up for the non-disabled and the ‘disabled, limited’, it went down for the ‘strongly limited’ group.

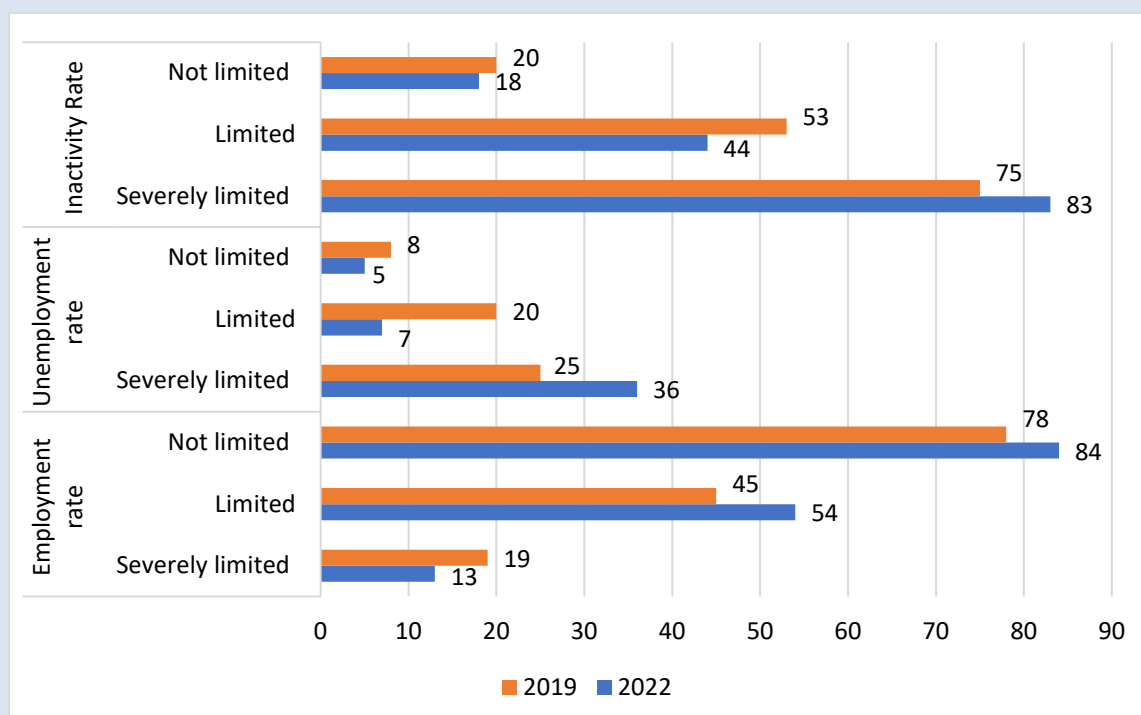
**Model Results:** In order to understand whether the observed changes in inequalities between the non-disabled and the disabled groups are statistically significant, we undertake three probit analyses where the outcomes of interest are employment,

<sup>60</sup> The 2019 LFS data show the same proportion, when taking into account the interviewees who answered the question ‘Person has at least one long-lasting condition or difficulty’. It is worth noting however that 77 per cent of the interviewees did not answer that question, and that the LFS data regarding disability are currently under review.

unemployment, and inactivity status. We control for gender, age, educational attainment, nationality, and region. Appendix Table A3.5 shows that the reduced inequality between the ‘disabled, limited’ group and the non-disabled<sup>61</sup> is only significant at 5 per cent level when unemployment is the outcome of interest, while the increased inequality between the strongly limited and the non-disabled are not statistically significant in any model. The employment model also shows a drop in the gap between the disabled, limited, and the non-disabled, and a widening of the gap between the disabled, strongly limited, and the non-disabled. However, those estimates are not statistically significant at 5 per cent level, which is likely due to small sample size.

**Summary:** In summary, we find some evidence of reduced unemployment for disabled people that are somewhat limited in their activities, in comparison to the non-disabled population. This is potentially linked to the increased use of remote work in many sectors (see Chapter 4).

**FIGURE 3.3 EMPLOYMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT AND INACTIVITY RATES AMONG DISABLED PEOPLE WHO ARE LIMITED AND STRONGLY LIMITED AND THE NON-DISABLED, 2019 AND 2022**



Source: EU-SILC, 2019 and 2022. Population aged 18-64. Weighted.

<sup>61</sup> See coefficient in ‘Change 2019-2022’ column, line ‘Limited’, which shows how employment and unemployment changed for disabled people over time, in comparison to the non-disabled population.

### 3.5 SUMMARY

This chapter examines changes in employment, unemployment and inactivity since the COVID pandemic. Overall, we find that employment rose since 2019 for almost all groups analysed, while unemployment and labour market inactivity fell. We found little difference between most groups in these overall patterns.

One important exception is young, working-age adults. While their employment rates were disproportionately negatively affected at various periods of the pandemic in Ireland (see Chapter 2), their employment rates have increased post-pandemic more than other age groups. This echoes the findings of previous international research, that young adults were particularly affected in the early lockdown phase, but their employment rates recovered in 2021 (Blundell et al., 2022; Eurofound, 2022d). Data from the labour market in Ireland extend this analysis, showing that by 2022 the employment rates of young adults had grown even more than other age groups. In the UK, Blundell et al. (2022) also found re-employment rates of older workers fell disproportionately during the pandemic. While the employment rate of older (50–64-year-old) workers in Ireland is lower than many other groups, and their inactivity rates are higher, we find no evidence that gaps have widened post-pandemic. Similarly, while parents of primary school age children experienced a rapid rise in care commitments during the pandemic when schools and childcare facilities closed, there is no evidence that this has affected their overall employment rates post-pandemic. The employment rates of mothers of young children are much lower than mothers with older children or no children in 2022, but this was also the case prior to the pandemic. Similarly, lone parents' employment rates are lower, on average, than couple parents and non-parents, and this did not change post-pandemic.

Comparable LFS data on disabled people are not available for 2019 and 2022. Analysis of SILC data in Box 3.1 shows that while disabled people had a higher unemployment rate than non-disabled people prior COVID-19, the gap between those who are limited, but not severely, in their physical activities and the non-disabled has been reduced over time.

In the next chapter, we investigate whether broader changes in the nature of employment occurred for the structurally vulnerable groups between 2019 and 2022.



## CHAPTER 4

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### Changes in the nature of work

In this chapter, we analyse whether membership of each equality group is associated with significant changes in the nature of work between 2019 and 2022. We consider the quantity of work (usual weekly hours of work; part-time/full-time work; quarterly weeks of work), the place of work (remote work), and the quality of work (working in a managerial or professional occupation). Quality of work is a multidimensional concept (Burchell et al., 2014); professional/managerial status is used because it is an excellent proxy for many elements of job quality. Those working in professional/managerial occupations typically have higher wages, greater security of employment, better career prospects, training opportunities and working conditions (Goldthorpe and McKnight, 2006; Russell et al., 2018). The same data sources are used as in the last chapter, although the analysis now focuses only on individuals aged 18 to 64 years who are employed.

Again, we investigate the differential changes over time for each gender, age group, education level, and family status (our main observed equality groups). Given the discussion of digital exclusion (see Chapter 2), we also distinguish whether individuals had differing propensities to work from home according to how urbanised their area of residence is,<sup>62</sup> and according to the region of Ireland they live in. Region is defined using the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) 3 classification, giving the following eight regions: Dublin, Mid-East, Midlands, Mid-West, South-East, South-West, West and Border.<sup>63</sup> We interact these two variables with time in order to see if disparities changed with the pandemic.

We start each analysis with the equality group controls, nationality and region (as in Chapter 3), and then expand the regressions to control for certain job characteristics: the NACE economic sector, ISCO occupation, and self-employment status. The NACE economic

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<sup>62</sup> LFS uses Eurostat's 'degree of urbanisation' classification, based on the 2011 population grid and 2016 Local Administrative Units (LAU) boundaries. Based on the share of local population living in urban clusters and in urban centres, LAU (or communes) are defined as either cities (densely populated areas); towns and suburbs (intermediate density areas); or rural areas (thinly populated areas).

See <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/degree-of-urbanisation/background> for more information.

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/methods/informationnotefordatausersrevisiontotheishnuts2andnuts3regions/>.

sectors measure the main activity of the organisation or business the person works in, and are grouped as A-B Agriculture, mining, and quarrying (which we summarise as ‘agricultural sector’); C Manufacturing; D-E Utilities; F Construction; G-H Wholesale, retail, transportation; I Accommodation and food; J-K-L Information, financial services and real estate; M-N Professional, scientific, technical and administration; O-P-Q Public administration, education, health, and social work; R-S-T-U Entertainment, arts and other.<sup>64</sup> For occupational groups, jobs are classified in terms of their skill level and content using 1-digit ISCO-08 categories.<sup>65</sup> These are: armed forces; managers; professionals; technical and associates; clerical support workers; service and sales workers; skilled agriculture; craft and related; plant and machinery; and elementary occupation. Given that the findings for each equality group do not differ significantly when adding these extra controls but a better fit is found when including them (i.e. a higher R-squared), we only show and discuss the results with these extra controls. Results when only controlling for nationality and region of residence remain nonetheless available from the authors upon request.

To investigate whether the membership of each subgroup is significantly correlated with changes in each measure of work over the years, we use binary and multinomial probit models, as well as ordinary least squares regressions,<sup>66</sup> depending on the nature of the dependent variable. While we only show estimates from the full sample of 18–64-year-olds for ease of presentation, we check the robustness of our results by reducing our observed sample to non-students (i.e. removing those whose self-defined principle economic status is ‘student or pupil’); removing answers received through proxies (i.e. not the actual individuals whose information is provided); and the top percentile for the usual working hours model (namely those that usually work above 70 hours per week, as these could be considered as outliers). The main findings remain unchanged in each model specification. The main specification presented in this chapter thus includes proxy answers (to avoid dropping too many observations) but removes outliers (to avoid unrealistic answers). We

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<sup>64</sup> The Labour Force Survey uses the new version of the European industrial activity classification (NACE Rev.2). For further details of what is included in each major category, see <https://statbank.cso.ie/px/u/NACECoder/NACEItems/searchnace.asp>.

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/isco08/index.htm>.

<sup>66</sup> Ordinary least squares is often used when the outcome of interest is continuous (like hours or weeks of work). For more information, see for example: <https://vitalflux.com/ordinary-least-squares-method-concepts-examples/>.

point out when differing results emerge when separating the samples by gender and when excluding students, as both sets of results can be deemed relevant.

## 4.1 QUANTITY OF WORK

### 4.1.1 Usual weekly hours of work in the main job

Table 4.1 shows the mean hours per week usually worked for 18–64-year-old workers in the observed subgroups, in 2019 and 2022.<sup>67</sup> Although women worked, on average, less than men in both years, men’s average hours went down by 1.4 per cent to reach 39.8 in 2022, while women’s went up by 1.1 per cent to reach 32.8 hours. The 18–24-cohort worked the least hours in 2019, and their average went further down post-COVID. Only 25–29-year-olds saw a rise between the years, although remaining below the average for 30–49-year-olds. In terms of education, those who stopped at the Junior Certificate worked the least hours in both periods, although they are the only education group who saw an average rise between the periods. Both people without any dependent children and parents of teenagers saw an average reduction in hours, while parents of 0–5-year-olds not only had the highest average hours in 2019, but this increased further in 2022 to 37.1 hours per week. Average hours also grew for lone parents, although remaining largely below all others (31.1 hours in 2022 compared to 36.8 for people in couples with children and/or non-parents).

The self-employed saw the strongest reduction of all groups, going from 45.9 hours in 2019 to 42.6 hours in 2022. This could partly be explained by the fact that many self-employed did not receive the same support as employees during the pandemic. Nevertheless, their average hours remained higher than for employees. The next largest reduction in hours occurred among skilled agricultural workers, although this remained the occupation with the highest average hours, at 49.1 in 2022. Unsurprisingly, when looking at the economic sectors next, those working in agriculture, mining, and quarrying saw the strongest reduction.

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<sup>67</sup> Respondents were asked ‘How many hours per week do you usually work in your main job? Please do not include the time you spend on lunch breaks but do include any regular overtime that you are expected to work.’

**BOX 4.1 COMPOSITION OF SELF-EMPLOYED POPULATION, AS COMPARED WITH OTHER WORKERS, IN 2022**

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In 2022, 12 per cent of workers aged 20-65 years were self-employed. While not classified as a structurally vulnerable group, Table 4.1 shows that self-employed workers saw the sharpest drop in usual weekly hours of work since 2019 (7.1 per cent). In this Box, we dig deeper into who these self-employed workers are, and how they differ from the other workers.

Appendix Table A4.8 shows that the self-employed are predominantly men, above 30, with no children under 18, a tertiary education, and Irish.

Their occupations are quite diverse, with the majority working either as managers or professionals, followed closely by 'skilled agriculture' and 'craft and related'. Likewise, the economic sectors we see them most in are Agriculture, mining, and quarrying, followed closely by Construction, Professional, scientific, technical and administration, and Wholesale, retail, and transportation.

Comparing the self-employed to employees, we note that the employee group is less male dominated (50 per cent are males compared to 73 per cent of the self-employed). A higher proportion of the self-employed are aged 50-65 years old. The composition of the two groups also differs in terms of nationality and education. Fewer of the self-employed group are of non-Irish nationality and a higher proportion of the self-employed are in the lowest educational category compared to employees (14 per cent versus 7 per cent). A higher proportion of the self-employed live in rural areas (54 per cent) compared to employees (39 per cent) and they are less likely to live in the Dublin region (24 per cent versus 32 per cent). Further investigation of self-employment is beyond the scope of this report, but see Department of Finance (2024) for an analysis of how transitions into and out of different types of self-employment is related to the business cycle in Ireland.

**TABLE 4.1 MEAN USUAL HOURS OF WORK PER WEEK (SAMPLE: WORKERS AGED 18-64)**

VARIABLES	CATEGORY	2019 Hours	2022 Hours	% Change 2019-2022
<b>Gender</b>	Male	40.5	39.9	-1.36%
	Female	32.4	32.8	1.13%
<b>Age</b>	18-24	30.5	29.9	-1.75%
	25-29	37.2	37.3	0.32%
	30-49	37.8	37.7	-0.13%
	50-64	36.9	36.8	-0.10%
<b>Lone Parent</b>	Childless/Couple with child(ren)	37.1	36.8	-0.63%
	Lone Parent	31.3	32.0	2.22%
<b>Children</b>	No child <18	37.0	36.7	-0.89%
	Youngest child 0-5	37.1	37.1	0.04%
	Youngest child 6-12	36.2	36.5	0.89%
	Youngest child 13-17	35.2	35.1	-0.49%
<b>Education</b>	≤ Junior Certificate	36.0	36.0	0.04%
	Upper Secondary	34.7	34.3	-1.26%
	Post Secondary	36.7	36.5	-0.52%
	Tertiary	37.8	37.6	-0.60%
<b>Self-employment</b>	Employee	35.5	35.8	0.69%
	Self-employed	45.9	42.6	-7.11%
<b>Economic sector</b>	Agriculture, mining, quarrying	50.2	47.6	-5.19%
	Manufacturing	39.8	40.0	0.56%
	Utilities	39.8	39.9	0.29%
	Construction	41.2	40.9	-0.75%
	Wholesale, retail, transp.	35.3	35.1	-0.45%
	Accommodation, food	32.4	31.3	-3.34%
	Information, fin. services, real estate	39.4	39.9	1.29%
	Professional, scientific, tech., admin.	37.7	37.0	-1.79%
	Public admin, educ., health, soc. work	33.9	33.7	-0.55%
	Entertainment, arts, other	31.5	31.6	0.22%
<b>Occupation</b>	Managers	43.8	42.4	-3.24%
	Professionals	37.4	37.1	-0.73%
	Technicians and associate professionals	37.2	37.2	0.10%
	Clerical support workers	33.3	33.6	0.92%
	Service and sales workers	30.9	30.4	-1.50%
	Skilled agriculture	51.8	49.1	-5.33%
	Craft and related	40.6	40.7	0.32%
	Plant and machinery	40.1	39.6	-1.26%
Elementary occupation	32.2	32.1	-0.40%	

Source: LFS Q1-Q4 2019, Q1-Q4 2022.

Notes: Analysis based on all employed aged 18-64. Although included in the analysis, summary statistics for the 'Armed forces' occupation are not shown here as the unweighted number of observations is below the minimum required by the Central Statistics Office to allow publication.

#### 4.1.2 Do changes in hours of work differ significantly across groups?

We next investigate whether any of the observed changes post-pandemic for gender, family status and age are statistically significant by estimating an ordinary least squares regression. The analysis is done at individual level, with usual hours of work as dependent variable, and the interaction between year and membership to each equality group as explanatory variable, controlling for the previously described variables.

The ‘Main effect’ column in Table A4.1 shows that women worked significantly fewer hours than men prior to the pandemic (in 2019, which is the reference year), but this disparity was reduced by 2022 (as observed with the significantly positive coefficient in the ‘Change 2019-2022’ column), closing some of the gender gap in working hours. In terms of age groups, 18–24 and 50–64-year-olds were both working significantly less than the reference group (30–49) in 2019, and no significant changes are found in 2022. Nonetheless, a significant reduction in the gap between 18–24- and 30–49-year-olds is found when removing students.<sup>68</sup> Thus, when focusing on people who have left full-time education, the number of hours worked seems to have improved for the youngest age group compared to the middle age group (30–49).

Parents<sup>69</sup> worked less hours, on average, than non-parents in 2019. By 2022, a significant drop in this disparity between parents of 6- to 12-year-olds and non-parents is found. Parenting has a differential effect on hours of work for men and women. Young children significantly reduce paid work hours among mothers while fathers work the same or longer hours (in the case of those with children aged 6–12 years) than men without children (see Appendix Table A4.2). Post-pandemic, a significant reduction in the disparity between mothers of 6- to 12-year-olds and non-mothers is found. No significant change is found amongst men.

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<sup>68</sup> Results available from the authors upon request.

<sup>69</sup> As noted in Chapter 3, we refer to individuals with children below the age of 18 in their family unit as ‘parents’ and others as ‘non-parents’.

Lone parents worked fewer hours than others in 2019, and no change was found by 2022. While the effect of lone parenthood on hours of work is greater for women there is no lasting change in hours post-COVID for lone mothers or lone fathers.

In 2019, the more educated the individuals, the higher their usual hours of work. When students are removed from the sample, the gap in hours between those that attained tertiary education and those with low education is found to have widened by 2022. Further analysis showed that this widening gap was only found amongst men.<sup>70</sup>

#### 4.1.3 Reported full-time versus part-time work

For this subsection, we analyse changes in full-time and part-time work.<sup>71</sup> In 2019, 81 per cent of the employed reported working full-time, with the remaining 19 per cent part-time. The proportion of the employed working part-time fell during the pandemic, to 17 per cent in 2020, but in 2022 it had returned to the pre-pandemic level of 19 per cent.<sup>72</sup>

Figure 4.1 presents the estimated probability of working part-time compared to full-time, controlling for other factors, derived from a probit model (presented in Table A4.3). Confirming the usual hours of work analysis, Figure 4.1 shows that particular groups are more likely to work in part-time jobs in both years: women, the under-25 and above 50 age groups; lone parents, parents of primary school age children and those whose highest qualification was Junior Certificate or lower. None of the changes between 2019 and 2022 are significant, and the patterns across groups are stable over time when all working-aged individuals are observed. However, when we exclude students from the sample and focus only on those who have fully entered the labour market, the disparity between 18–24-year-olds and 30–49-year-olds is found to be reduced by 2022.<sup>73</sup> This is due to a greater increase in part-time work among 30–49-year-olds rather than to a decline in the proportion of 18–

<sup>70</sup> Results available from the authors upon request.

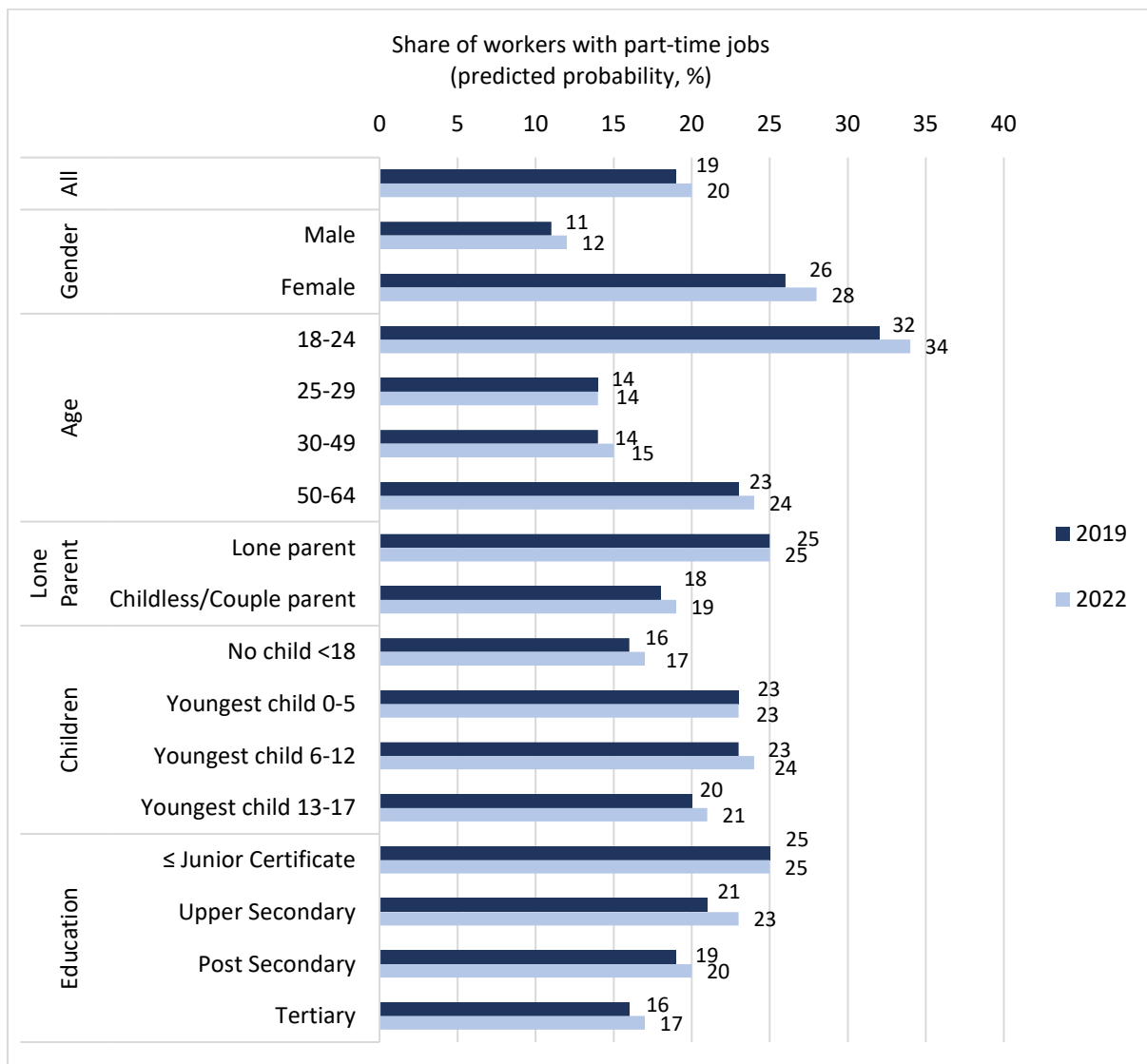
<sup>71</sup> Respondents were asked ‘Do you work full-time or part-time in this job?’.

<sup>72</sup> The part-time employment rates in Ireland were relatively stable over the longer term. Between 1998 and 2008 the rate among employed women (age 15 and over) stood at 30 and 32 per cent throughout. The rate of part-time working rose during the recession period from late 2008, reaching a peak of 36 per cent before falling back to 31 per cent in 2017, and remained at this level until the pandemic. A similar pattern is visible for men, with relative stability apart from a rise during the Great Recession <https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF01>.

<sup>73</sup> Results excluding students available from the authors upon request.

24-year-olds working part-time. When separating the sample by gender, this reduction in disparity between age groups is only significant for non-student male workers.

**FIGURE 4.1 PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF WORKING PART-TIME, 2019 AND 2022 (CONTROLLING FOR OTHER FACTORS)**



Source: LFS, 2019 and 2022.

Note: Base = workers aged 18-64. Analysis by authors based on estimated probit margins. Table A4.3 in the Appendix presents the full probit model underlying the above-represented margins. Total N of cases unweighted = 108,726.

#### 4.1.4 Underemployment among part-time workers

Previous research has shown that while for some people part-time work is a choice, others would prefer to work longer hours (Bell and Blanchflower, 2021). In order to investigate this, we next estimate a multinomial probit regression, separating part-time workers between those who wish to work more than their current number of hours (which we



define as underemployed part-time workers),<sup>74</sup> and those who do not (part-time not underemployed). Using this definition, of the 19 per cent of workers who worked part-time in 2019, 13 per cent were not underemployed part-time workers, and 6 per cent were underemployed part-time workers. Underemployed part-time work had fallen slightly to 5 per cent of the total sample in 2022.

As shown in the previous analysis (see Figure 4.1), women were more likely to work part-time in general prior to the pandemic. Appendix Table A4.4 shows that this is true of both underemployed and not underemployed part-time work. We see no change in this gap over time. However, when full-time students are excluded, a significant decline in not underemployed part-time work for women is found but no change in underemployment.

As seen in Figure 4.1, workers aged below 25 and above 50 were more likely to work part-time – either underemployed or not. While no significant change in this pattern is found over time, removing students reveals a reduction in this disparity for both types of part-time younger workers (below 25 compared to 30–49-year-old workers).

Prior to the pandemic, parents were more likely to work part-time (underemployed or not) than non-parents. No significant change in this trend is found over time. However lone parents, who were significantly more likely to work part-time in 2019, saw a significant drop in this gap by 2022, although only amongst involuntary part-time workers. When separating the sample by gender, this significant result is confined to women – not surprisingly, as most lone parents are women.<sup>75</sup>

Finally, while those who studied beyond their Junior Certificate were less likely to work part-time in 2019, this gap did not change over time, whether for the underemployed or for those who are not.

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<sup>74</sup> In this analysis, we define involuntary part-time work as wishing to work more hours, and voluntary as working part-time and not wanting to work more hours. This definition is more inclusive than a measure based on whether people work part-time because they could not find full-time work. For example, we include here parents who work part-time because they could not find the necessary childcare services to pick a full-time job.

<sup>75</sup> Results available from the authors upon request.

#### 4.1.5 Weeks of work in previous quarter

This section only includes persons who match with their employee payroll data, which represents 56 per cent of our pooled 2019 and 2022 employee sample. The dependent variable is an estimate of weeks worked over the past quarter. This is used to capture those who, while being employed at the time of interview, may have experienced breaks in employment over the previous quarter or intermittent work. We investigate reductions in working weeks, as Roantree and Doorley (2023) found that among the lowest income households (in the bottom income quintile), the number of usual hours worked and the number of months worked over the year was lower than in 2021, despite an improving labour market. In 2019, mean weeks worked in the quarter for employees was 12.5 weeks for men and 12.3 weeks for women. Overall, we see no decline in the number of weeks worked in 2022 compared to pre-pandemic. As this is a continuous variable, an ordinary least squares regression is used.

Appendix Table A4.5 shows that women worked on average fewer weeks than men, and this did not change over time. Workers under the age of 30 worked fewer weeks than those above, prior to the pandemic. Appendix Table A4.6 shows that amongst women, the disparity between 18–24 and 30–49-year-olds further intensified by 2022. Looking at the raw statistics,<sup>76</sup> this seems to be explained by decreasing average weeks of work for 18–24-year-old women, especially amongst students, and increasing weeks for 30–49-year-olds. Thus, work intensity in terms of weeks were most reduced for women below 25, while it increased for women with more seniority following the pandemic.

On average, parents of pre-school children (0–5-year-olds) worked significantly fewer weeks than non-parents prior to the pandemic. When separating by gender however, we find that fathers of children under 12 (both pre-school and primary school age) worked significantly more weeks than non-fathers, while mothers of children below 12 worked for significantly fewer weeks. Post-pandemic, these disparities are only reduced for women so that the average number of weeks worked is closer between mothers and non-mothers in 2022. In

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<sup>76</sup> Results available from the authors upon request.

particular the weeks worked by women with children aged 6-12 years increased in comparison to 2019.

In terms of education, those who studied beyond secondary school worked more weeks, on average, than those who did not finish upper secondary education. We find this gap to be reduced for men, between 2019 and 2022 (see Appendix Table A4.6).

## 4.2 WORKING FROM HOME (WFH)

A notable work feature during COVID-19 was the rise in working from home. At various stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ireland, those who could work from home have been encouraged/instructed to do so, and whether jobs could be done from home or not emerged as a key cleavage (see Chapter 2; Redmond and McGuinness, 2020b; Enright et al., 2020). Since the end of the pandemic, there has also been a notable rise in time employees spend working remotely, and new legislation permits the right to request remote work in Ireland (Williamson, 2022). We investigate the extent to which working from home has persisted across social groups by exploring the share of employed individuals who report having worked from home over the four weeks preceding their interview (no matter the frequency)<sup>77</sup> compared to those who did not. To understand the potential effect of digital exclusion for people living in remote locations (e.g. due to reduced broadband access), we add an interaction between time and population density (or urbanisation), and time and region of residence.

### 4.2.1 Pre and post-pandemic

Table 4.2 shows the percentage change in the raw<sup>78</sup> share of each subcategory that worked from home in 2019 compared to 2022. Overall in 2019, 21 per cent of those employed worked from home in the preceding four weeks, compared to 36 per cent in 2022.<sup>79</sup> We see that this share had grown for everyone except those working in the Agricultural sector, and

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<sup>77</sup> Employees were asked 'Thinking about the four weeks ending Sunday, have you done any work at home for your job?' Respondents who said 'yes' were then asked how frequently they worked from home (less than half the time but more than one hour or more than half the time). For this analysis we combine these two categories together.

<sup>78</sup> Raw figures means the actual shares, as opposed to the modelled shares which we compute by controlling for other factors.

<sup>79</sup> This is higher than the proportion of 32 per cent reported in the 2022 Census (WDC, 2023).

in skilled agricultural occupations. These two overlapping<sup>80</sup> groups already had very high rates of working from home in 2019 since the figures include self-employed farmers who live and work on the farm.<sup>81</sup> There is considerable variation both by sector and occupation in the prevalence of WFH. Some sectors had a low prevalence pre-pandemic and this remained low – particularly Accommodation and food (7.4 per cent of workers regularly worked from home in 2022) but also Construction and Retail/transportation. Other sectors had quite a low prevalence of WFH pre-pandemic but these increased to around one-third of workers in the sector (Manufacturing; Public admin, education, health; and Entertainment, arts). The Information and financial services sector had one of the highest levels of WFH pre-pandemic and saw the largest increase post-pandemic. The next strongest increases were in utilities and professional services. In terms of occupations, it is among white-collar occupations such as managers, professionals and associate professionals as well as clerical support workers, where high levels of WFH are found. The important exception is services and sales workers, a large, lower skilled service sector, where a very low proportion of people worked from home, even post-pandemic (9 per cent). For most manual workers – craft and related, plant and machinery operators and elementary occupations, WFH is very uncommon (see Table 4.2). Thus, some occupations and economic sectors saw an increasing opportunity in working from home following the pandemic in comparison to others (see discussion in Chapter 2).

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<sup>80</sup> While the majority of ‘skilled agriculture’ occupations are reported in the agriculture sector, and vice versa, some are reported in other sectors. Likewise, other occupations are reported in the agricultural sector.

<sup>81</sup> We note that ‘working from home’ for this category of workers is most likely not intended as ‘telework’ (that is remote work with a digital device), but working on their farm.

**TABLE 4.2 CHANGES IN SHARE OF REMOTE WORKERS<sup>82</sup> (SAMPLE: WORKERS AGED 18-64)**

VARIABLE	CATEGORY	2019 (%)	2022 (%)	Percentage change 2019-2022
<b>Gender</b>	Male	21.9	35.3	61.19
	Female	17.7	35.2	98.87
<b>Age</b>	18-24	5.5	13.4	143.64
	25-29	13.1	35.3	169.47
	30-49	22.0	39.6	80.00
	50-64	24.4	36.4	49.18
<b>Lone Parent</b>	Childless/Couple parent	20.2	35.8	77.23
	Lone Parent	15.7	26.6	69.43
<b>Children</b>	No child <18	18.2	35.0	92.31
	Youngest child 0-5	21.0	36.5	73.81
	Youngest child 6-12	24.3	38.3	57.61
	Youngest child 13-17	20.6	30.1	46.12
<b>Education</b>	≤ Junior Certificate	11.8	12.1	2.54
	Upper Secondary	8.5	15.4	81.18
	Post Secondary	13.5	19.4	43.70
	Tertiary	29.7	51.5	73.40
<b>Self-employment</b>	Employee	15.3	33.0	115.69
	Self-employed	52.3	52.4	0.19
<b>Economic sector</b>	Agriculture, mining, quarrying	47.2	43.1	-8.69
	Manufacturing	14.5	30.6	111.03
	Utilities	18.2	45.6	150.55
	Construction	16.5	19.0	15.15
	Wholesale, retail, transport	11.1	17.2	54.95
	Accommodation, food	5.8	7.4	27.59
	Information, fin. services, real estate	37.3	79.4	112.87
	Professional. scientific, tech., admin.	26.8	50.5	88.43
	Public admin, educ., health, soc. work	19.5	32.6	67.18
	Entertainment, arts, other	20.0	29.6	48.00
<b>Occupation</b>	Armed forces	4.1	4.6	12.20
	Managers	39.4	51.7	31.22
	Professionals	37.1	59.1	59.30
	Technicians and associate professionals	18.1	48.2	166.30
	Clerical support workers	13.0	44.3	240.77
	Service and sales workers	5.9	8.9	50.85
	Skilled agriculture	51.9	44.6	-14.07
	Craft and related	11.7	14.4	23.08
	Plant and machinery	4.6	6.0	30.43
	Elementary occupation	3.2	4.0	25.00

*Contd.*

<sup>82</sup> In this report, we define 'remote workers' as those who said that they worked from home at least once in the previous four weeks.

**TABLE 4.2 (CONTINUED) CHANGES IN SHARE OF REMOTE WORKERS**

VARIABLE	CATEGORY	2019 (%)	2022 (%)	Percentage change 2019-2022
	Skilled agriculture	51.9	44.6	-14.07
	Craft and related	11.7	14.4	23.08
	Plant and machinery	4.6	6.0	30.43
	Elementary occupation	3.2	4.0	25.00
<b>Urbanisation</b>	Cities (dense)	21.50	43.33	101.53
	Towns and suburbs (intermediate)	15.97	32.20	101.63
	Rural areas (thinly populated)	20.76	29.57	42.44
<b>Region of residence</b>	Border	15.31	24.22	58.20
	Western	19.91	28.38	42.54
	Mid-West	18.14	28.62	57.77
	South-East	20.23	31.59	56.15
	South-West	18.20	32.12	76.48
	Dublin	23.04	45.80	98.78
	Mid-East	19.72	34.62	75.56
	Midlands	16.70	30.33	81.62

Source: LFS Q1-Q4 2019, Q1-Q4 2022.

Notes: Analysis based on all employed aged 18-64. 'Remote workers' are those who reported having worked remotely at least one hour over the four weeks preceding the interview.

#### 4.2.2 Did the change in WFH significantly differ across groups?

To decipher whether significant disparities emerged between the various categories of workers, we estimate a probit analysis controlling for economic sector, occupation, and nationality. We explore changes in WFH over time by region of residence, as well as changes by population density, on top of all the other previously observed equality groups. We note once again that the LFS data did not allow us to include a comparison in WFH opportunities by disability status. However, we refer to Box 3.1 in which we use SILC data to show that employment opportunities seem to have improved for disabled people who are somehow limited in their activities, potentially due to the increased use of remote work in many sectors. The opposite result is found for disabled people who are strongly limited in their activities, as their employment rate fell further post-pandemic.

Figure 4.2 illustrates the probabilities of working from home for each observed group, derived from the probit model shown in Appendix Table A4.7. While women were less likely to work from home prior to the pandemic, estimates show that the gender gap was

significantly reduced by 2022.<sup>83</sup> In 2019, the older the workers, the more likely they were to work from home. The disparity between 50- to 64-year-olds and 30- to 49-year-olds in particular was significantly reduced by 2022, as a higher share of 30 to 49-year-olds started working from home (see Figure 4.2). When separating by gender, the difference between the youngest age group and 30–49-year-olds is further enhanced for women by 2022. This seems to suggest that since the pandemic, remote work benefitted women who were established in their jobs relatively more than younger women.<sup>84</sup>

Parents were more likely than non-parents to work from home prior to the pandemic, but this disparity was significantly reduced by 2022. Separating the workers by gender shows that this trend was only significant for women. This is because women with no children under 18 experienced by far the greatest rise in the share of remote workers between all the ‘children status’ subgroups, for either gender.<sup>85</sup>

The more educated the respondents, the more likely they were to work from home in 2019, and this was even more the case by 2022. Thus, people with low education were the most likely to be excluded from this growing trend in remote working compared to the others.

Prior to COVID-19, the denser the population in the area, the less likely respondents were to work from home. This reflected the concentration of WFH among those in the farming sector who live and work in the same place, rather than engaging in remote or teleworking (see Chapter 1). However, the situation turned around post-pandemic, with those in more urbanised areas now more likely to work from home. This provides some evidence of digital exclusion for people living more rural places, with potentially weaker internet coverage. Finally, working from home was less likely in all other regions compared to Dublin prior to the pandemic, and this remained so in 2022 (see Figure 4.2). This mirrors the Census 2022 which found the highest rate of working from home in Dublin, the Greater Dublin area and other large urban centres and the lowest in the Border regions (WDC, 2023).

In summary, the modelled shares of remote workers confirm what the raw percentages showed in Table 4.2, namely that remote work increased for all observed equality groups.

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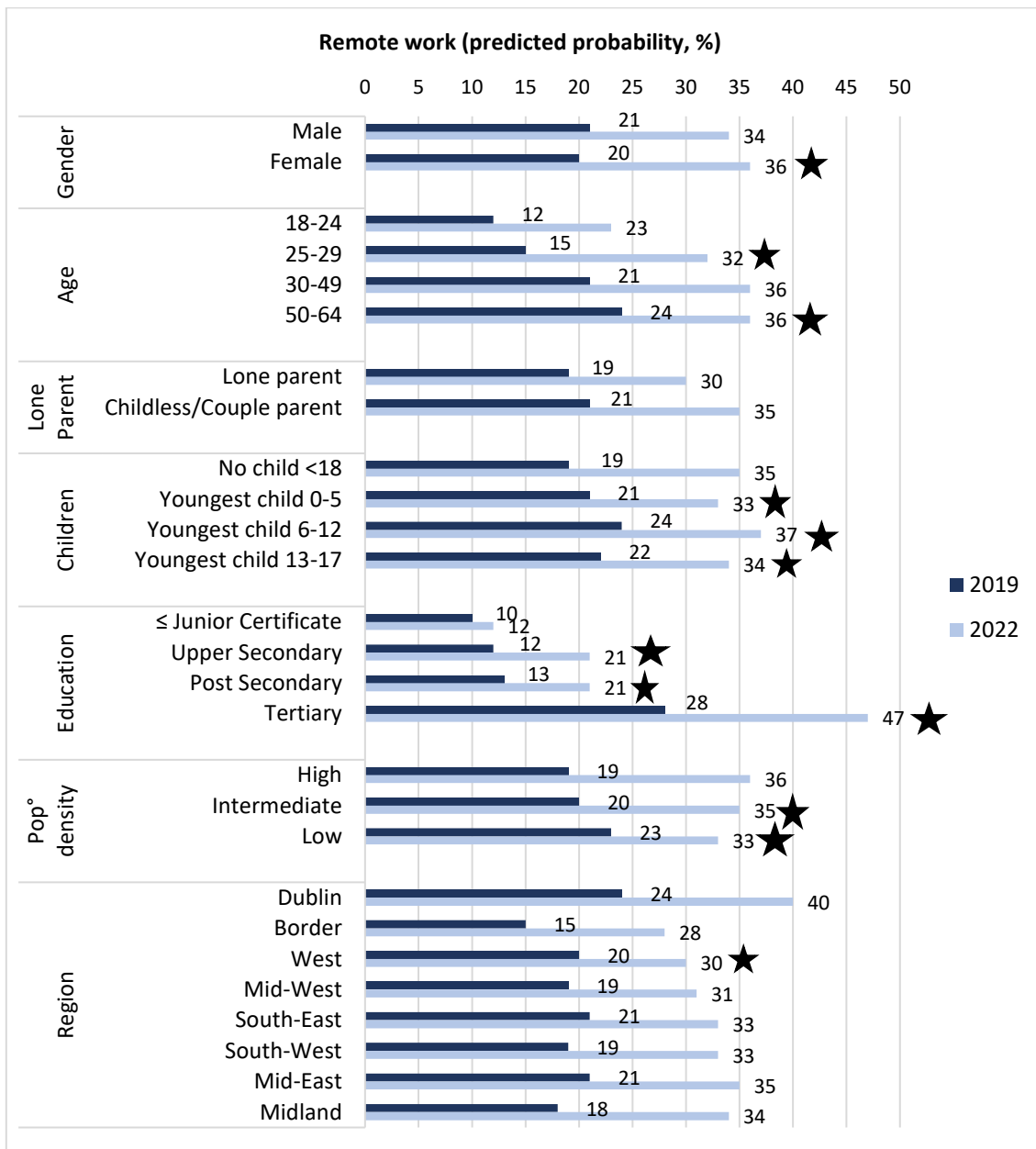
<sup>83</sup> See column ‘Change 2019-2022’ in Appendix Table A4.7.

<sup>84</sup> Results available from the authors upon request.

<sup>85</sup> Results available from the authors upon request.

Figure 4.2 shows that these rises were highest for women, 25–29-year-olds, couple parents and non-parents (i.e. not lone parents), people without children below 18, people whose highest degree is post-secondary or third level.

**FIGURE 4.2 PREDICTED SHARE OF WORKERS WHO WORKED FROM HOME, 2019 AND 2022 (CONTROLLING FOR JOB CHARACTERISTICS )**



Source:

LFS, 2019 and 2022.

Note:

Base = workers aged 18-64. Analysis by authors, based on estimated probit margins. Controls: Region of residence, nationality, occupation, economic sector, and self-employment status. See Appendix Table A4.7 for the full probit model underlying the above-represented margins. The stars illustrate a statistically significant change in the share of people who worked from home in each subcategory in comparison to their reference category between 2019 and 2022, when estimated by both the regression results and the contrasts of predictive margins. Reference category for each variable respectively: Male; Age 30-49; Family status: Childless/Couple parent; No child<18; Education - ≤ Junior Certificate; Lives in a rural area; Lives in Dublin region; Year of survey=2019. Total N of cases unweighted = 109,074.



## 4.3 QUALITY OF WORK

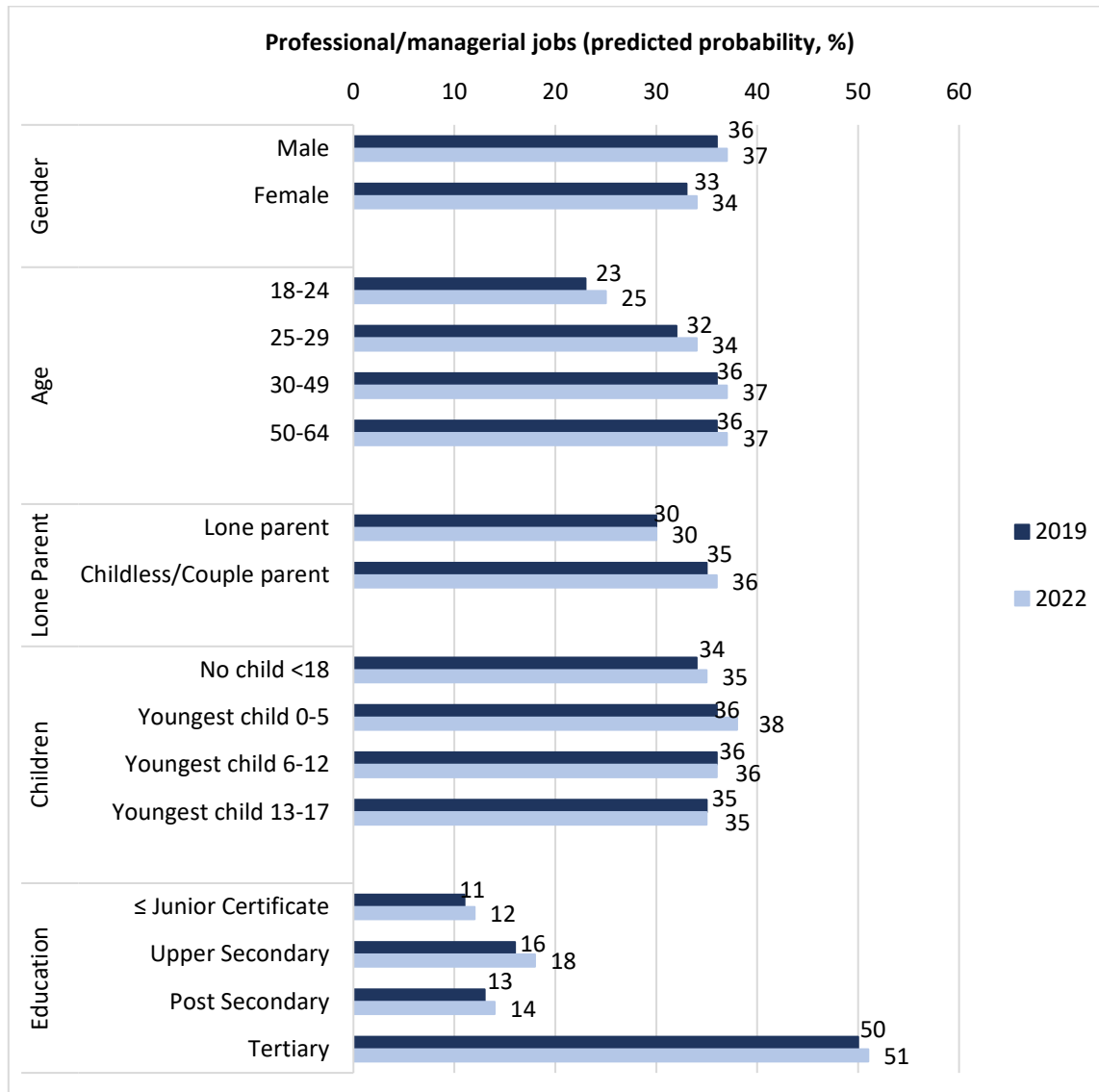
### 4.3.1 Professional/managerial occupations

To get a sense of the changes in job quality for each of the observed equality groups, we follow McGinnity et al. (2021) and use a professional or managerial occupation as a proxy for job quality. As explained by the authors, these occupations are at the top of the class distribution. Those workers typically have:

*higher wages and prestige, greater security of employment, more autonomy, better career prospects, training opportunities, working conditions and access to a wider range of employment-related benefits and entitlements, such as pensions (McGinnity et al., 2021).*

In 2019, 33 per cent of the employed sample were working in professional managerial occupations.

**FIGURE 4.3 PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF WORKING IN A PROFESSIONAL/MANAGERIAL JOB, 2019 AND 2022 (CONTROLLING FOR OTHER FACTORS)**



Source: LFS, 2019 and 2022.

Note: Base = workers aged 18-64. Analysis by authors, based on estimated probit margins. Controls: Region of residence, nationality, economic sector, and self-employment status. Tables with the full probit model underlying the above-represented margins available upon request. Total N of cases unweighted = 108,993.

We use a probit regression in which the outcome of interest is a binary variable equal to 1 if the respondent works in a professional/managerial occupation, and 0 otherwise. The results are illustrated in Figure 4.3. Women are less likely than men to work in these jobs than men (3 percentage points lower in both years). Younger workers, especially those under 25, are significantly less likely to work in these occupations than their reference groups prior to the pandemic. Differences by age of child are not marked in Figure 4.3, but if we separate by gender, men with children under 12 are more likely to have those occupations than non-fathers. Amongst women however, no difference is found between mothers and non-

mothers.<sup>86</sup> And for both genders, educational qualifications are key factor in working in high skilled job: in both years around half of those with third-level qualifications did so. Much lower proportions of all other education groups work in these jobs. The pandemic, however, does not seem to have changed any of these disparities, as for none of the groups is there a significant effect for change over time.

#### **BOX 4.2      CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS OF JOBS OCCUPIED BY DISABLED PEOPLE, 2019-2022**

Box 3.1 showed that employment rate improved for people who are ‘disabled, limited’ while it worsened for the disabled population who are strongly limited. We now use the SILC data to investigate if employment conditions (namely the usual weekly hours of work, the number of months worked in the previous year, and part-time work) also evolved over time for disabled people. No data are available on working from home in the SILC data. The sample is confined to those of working age who were in employment. Three specifications are used in each regression analysis: i) without any controls; ii) controlling for personal characteristics, namely age, educational attainment, nationality, and region; and iii) adding labour market controls, namely the work sector (NACE 2) and self-employment status. Figures 4.4 and 4.5 illustrate changes in the raw means. As most of the changes over time are found to be statistically insignificant in the regression analyses, we do not include the corresponding tables in the Appendix, but they remain available from the authors upon request.

**Average hours of work per week (amongst the workers):** Figure 4.4 shows a rise in the raw average weekly hours of work between 2019 and 2022 for the non-disabled and the ‘disabled, limited’ population. While the 2019 charts show that the strongly limited worked the least hours, we cannot comment on the 2022 results for that category as too few interviewees answered that question. Regression analyses show no significant change over time in terms of hours of work for either disabled group, compared to non-disabled workers.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Results available from the authors upon request.

<sup>87</sup> Results available from the authors upon request.

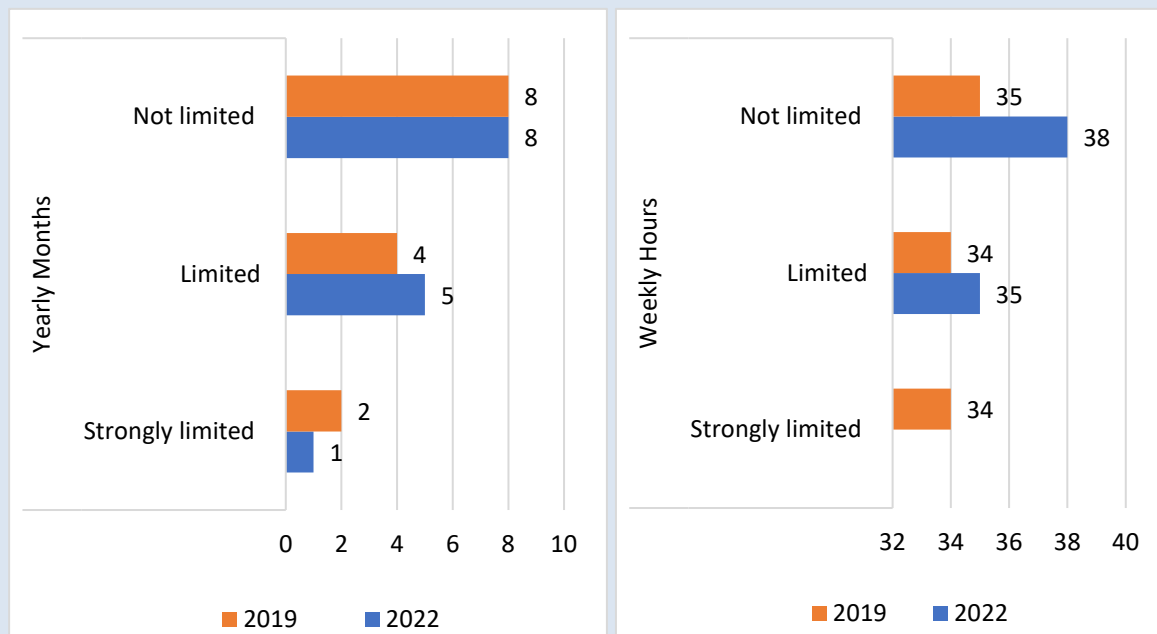
**Months of work in the last year:** The SILC data provide information on the number of months that each SILC interviewee worked (full- or part-time) in the past year. Figure 4.3 shows a rise in the overall number of months worked for the limited population from four months to five months, but a drop for the strongly limited population from two months to one month. The non-disabled group worked for eight months on average in both years. Statistical models show similar patterns although the changes over time between the groups are not statistically significant when controlling for personal and employment characteristics.

**Part-time work:** Figure 4.5 shows that the share of part-time workers amongst the working population grew for the non-disabled and the limited population. In 2019, the strongly limited group had the highest share of part-time workers (37 per cent) but again, as not enough people from that category answered that question in 2022, we cannot comment on the evolution of this share. Regression analyses show no significant change in part-time work rates for either category of disability in comparison to non-disabled workers.

**Quality of work (managers/professionals):** Figure 4.5 shows a rise in the share of the non-disabled and limited population whose ISCO-08 category is either managers or professionals. However, the share of managers/professionals amongst the strongly limited population, which was the lowest in 2019, at 16 per cent, remains the same in 2022. Again, no significant change is found in the regression analyses.

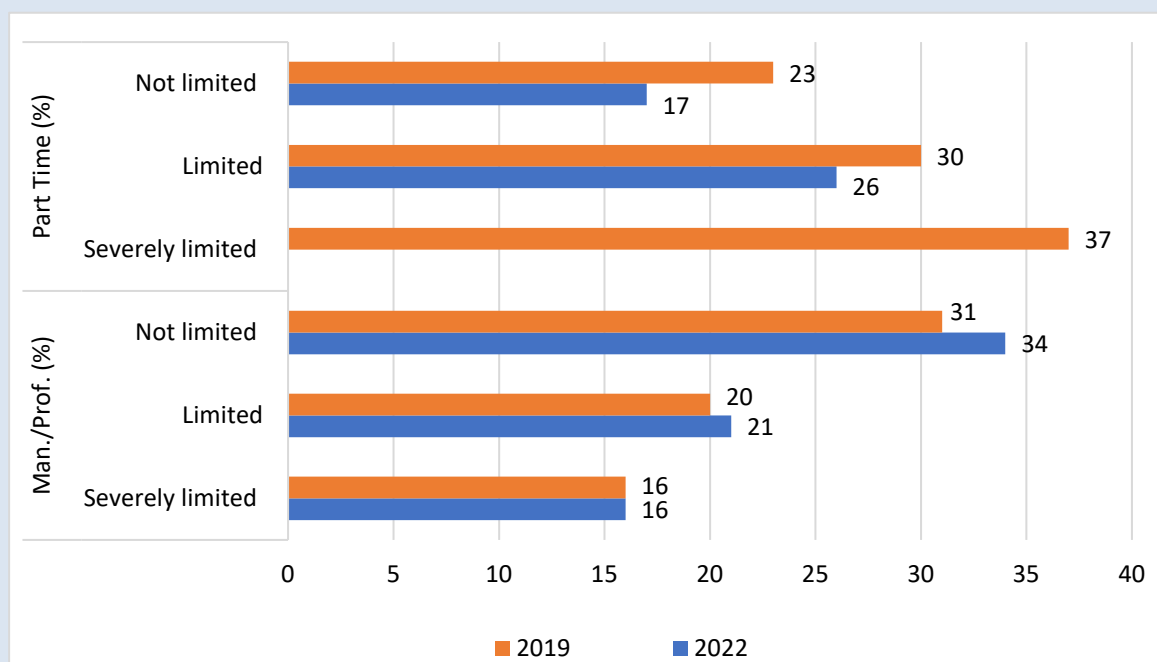
**Conclusion:** When looking at raw means, we see that the more disabled the population, the fewer hours of work they do, and the less likely they are to be managers or professionals. However, we find little change in the gap between disabled groups and the non-disabled groups in terms of working conditions, albeit with small numbers of disabled people at work. While we find some indications that the months worked increased for the disabled population who are somewhat limited but decreased for the strongly disabled, as the samples are small the findings are not statistically significant. This highlights the importance of analysis with a larger sample such as the Labour Force Survey.

**FIGURE 4.4 AVERAGE YEARLY MONTHS AND WEEKLY HOURS OF WORK BY ABILITY CATEGORY, 2019 AND 2022**



Source: EU-SILC, 2019 and 2022. Population aged 18-64 in employment. Weighted.

**FIGURE 4.5 SHARE OF WORKERS WORKING PART-TIME, AND SHARE OF WORKERS THAT ARE MANAGERS OR PROFESSIONALS, BY ABILITY CATEGORY, 2019 AND 2022**



Source: EU-SILC, 2019 and 2022. Population aged 18-64 in employment. Weighted.

Notes: In 2022, numbers of strongly limited who were in employment were too low to report average weekly hours, or part-time work rates.

#### 4.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter, we investigated whether differential changes in the nature of work could be found between various groups since the pandemic.

While women tended to work less than men prior to the pandemic, and were less likely to work from home, we find evidence of a reduction in this gender gap in terms of quantity of work, and in the possibility to work from home. Likewise, while parents were more likely to work remotely before, the gap with non-parents has been significantly reduced since the pandemic.

Lone parents do significantly fewer hours of paid work, and no significant changes to the gap with non-parents and couple-parents is observed post-pandemic for most observed measures. However, we do find a narrowing of this gap when analysing the share of workers with part-time jobs who wish they could work more hours (what we called the ‘underemployed’ part-time workers).

While younger age groups were significantly worse off than the 30–49-year-olds before, some evidence of a narrowing of the gap is found when analysing both detailed hours of work and part-time work status, suggesting the younger age group is in a better position post-pandemic. For women, remote work seems to have grown relatively faster for the middle-age group than for the below 25-year-old group. This could be because remote work might be more common amongst women who are more senior within their firms. It could also be that older women above 25 years of age are more likely to ask for remote work, especially if they have children.

The disparity between those with low education and those that completed higher education continued to rise when analysing usual hours of work and the possibility to work remotely. Thus, this chapter provides further evidence that people with lower education seem to carry the heaviest burden from the pandemic.

Although not in the ‘structurally vulnerable’ category, we note that the self-employed saw the sharpest drop in their hours of work, a trend that has also been seen in other EU countries (Eurostat, 2022).

Finally, while disabled people tended to work fewer hours and were less likely to be managers or professionals (our proxy for quality of work) pre-pandemic, we do not find any significant change to these trends post-pandemic. We note however that we could only use SILC data for that part of the analysis which contains less information on the nature of work.

## CHAPTER 5

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### Summary and implications

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown presented an unprecedented challenge to Irish society and the Irish labour market. Recessions and labour market shocks typically hit some groups harder than others, particularly groups who are already disadvantaged (Tahlin, 2013; McGinnity et al., 2014), and early evidence in the pandemic suggested some groups were much more likely to be displaced than others (McGuinness and Kelly, 2020). This chapter summarises what we have learned about the differential effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market in Ireland after the period of lockdowns (2022), some limitations of the analysis – including data gaps – and some broader implications of the findings. A key question is whether the pandemic exacerbated or reduced labour market inequalities in Ireland, among the structurally vulnerable groups we analysed. The analysis builds on insights and findings from the *Monitoring Decent Work in Ireland* report, which is based on data from 2019, though this report also uses a more limited number of indicators. The report also draws on earlier research on the equality impact of the last recession in Ireland (McGinnity et al., 2014).

#### 5.1 EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC FOR WHOM?

The findings on access to employment suggest a remarkable labour market recovery post-pandemic, particularly given the disruption caused during the pandemic. The availability of jobs and growth in the labour market is important for understanding different groups' ability to realise the right to work. Based on data available, overall this recovery has been fairly evenly spread across the equality groups considered: men and women; younger and older working-age groups; lone parents and other adults; parents and those without children under 18; and adults with different qualification levels. Interesting differences are found in employment and activity rates for disabled people between 2019 and 2022, depending on how limited they are by their health condition, albeit using a different data source. For access to employment, the report considered rates of employment and unemployment, labour market inactivity and group differences in these, primarily using the standard International Labour Organization (ILO) definition.



This definition is broad, counting someone who has done any paid work in the previous week as employed. In general, we found that on the eve of the pandemic (2019), after a period of sustained economic recovery, jobs were plentiful in Ireland and the working-age employment rate was high (73 per cent among those age 18 to 64 years). Post-pandemic, in 2022, this employment rate was even higher; 77 per cent of the working age population were employed. This is broadly consistent with overall EU figures, which mirror this trend of high employment post-pandemic.<sup>88</sup>

Overall employment rates masked significant differences between key groups in 2019. Generally, among working age adults, women, those aged under 25, those over 50, lone parents and the lower educated showed significantly lower rates of employment than other groups. Around half of those with Junior Certificate qualifications or less were in employment in 2019. For younger workers, though evidence suggests their employment rates were more negatively affected *during* the pandemic (see McGuinness and Kelly, 2020; also Chapter 2), post-pandemic the employment rate had risen more than other age groups, closing the gap (somewhat) between them and the prime age (30–49-year-old) age group, at least for young men if not for young women. For other groups – men and women, lone parents and other adults, parents, and those without children under 18 – pre-COVID-19 gaps were maintained in 2022. For all groups measured, in the labour force survey, employment rates rose.

In 2019 the unemployment rate, at 4.9 per cent of the labour market, was low particularly in historical perspective in Ireland, and by 2022 this had fallen slightly to 4.5 per cent. We did not find any statistically significant group differences in the change in unemployment rates pre- and post-pandemic. During the pandemic period, March 2020 to December 2021, there was considerable fluctuation in COVID-adjusted unemployment rates (taking account of those receiving the pandemic unemployment payment). However, as PUP recipients were not unemployed according to the international ILO definition, since they were not seeking

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<sup>88</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=EU\\_labour\\_market\\_-\\_quarterly\\_statistics#:~:text=Highlights&text=In%20the%20second%20quarter%20of,market%20slack%20stood%20a%2011.2%20%25.&text=Today%2C%20Eurostat%20published%20EU%20DLFS](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=EU_labour_market_-_quarterly_statistics#:~:text=Highlights&text=In%20the%20second%20quarter%20of,market%20slack%20stood%20a%2011.2%20%25.&text=Today%2C%20Eurostat%20published%20EU%20DLFS).

employment and do not appear in the Live Register unemployment data, unemployment did not fluctuate much over the course of the pandemic according to the usual definitions (see Figure 2.2). This is very different from the previous recession in Ireland where unemployment rose rapidly at the onset of recession in 2008 and remained high for a period of years; for those under 25 it peaked at 27 per cent of the youth labour market in 2012, but the youth unemployment rate was over 20 per cent for five years in Ireland (Bergin et al., 2020).

During the period we observed a fall in labour market inactivity among the working age population, from 23 per cent in 2019 to 21 per cent in 2022, consistent with the rise in employment rates. For the most part, group differences in inactivity rates were maintained – for example inactivity rates are higher for women than men and parents of young children compared to non-parents. Inactivity rates are also higher for the youngest and oldest working-age groups, though here we see that inactivity fell significantly between 2019 and 2022 for the 18–24-year-olds, as their employment rates rose. For the over 50s, we see no change in activity rates relative to the middle age group (30–49-year-olds).

Analysis shows employment opportunities seem to have improved for people that are disabled and limited in their activities for the period 2019-2022 (Box 3.1). Due to issues with the LFS data on disability this analysis relies on the SILC data, which has a smaller sample and slightly different definitions.

What about group differences in the nature of work? Chapter 4 considers the quantity, location, and quality of work and whether inequalities in these have changed between 2019 and 2022. While overall hours of work and the proportion of all jobs that were professional or managerial jobs has changed little between 2019 and 2022, there has been a remarkable rise in remote work since the pandemic. To limit the movement of people during the pandemic, non-essential workers were instructed to work from home if possible in Ireland, and even after restrictions on movement were eased, for many workers the practice of working from home has continued and new legislation has permitted the request for remote work (Williamson, 2022). In 2022, of all those in employment of working age in Ireland, 36 per cent worked from home either sometimes or all of the time, compared to 21 per cent in 2019.

Chapter 4 found some evidence of a modest reduction in gender inequality in terms of hours of work and the extent of voluntary part-time work. While men's average hours of work decreased by 1.4 per cent between 2019 and 2022, women's increased by 1.1 per cent. While beneficial for women in terms of economic inequality, this might lead to greater work-family conflict if there is no attendant reduction in unpaid work or a change in the take-up of caring and housework by men. This underscores the importance of collecting data on unpaid work in Ireland, given its role in understanding gender equality in the labour market, and the dearth of evidence on unpaid work in Ireland. Gender differences in remote work also changed, with remote work rising more for women than men over the period. In fact, by 2022 women were slightly more likely to be working from home regularly than men.

Younger workers had lower hours of work prior to the pandemic, though there is some evidence that their working hours have increased post-pandemic (as well as remote work for young men). For women, it is the 30–49-year-old group where remote work has grown, not for younger women.

While there was evidence of an increased caring burden for parents, particularly mothers, during the pandemic, this has not translated into reduced volume of work (or indeed employment rates) post-pandemic for parents. Parents were more likely to work remotely pre-pandemic, though the gap with non-parents has closed post-pandemic.

Lone parents experienced no change in hours, though are less likely to be underemployed (part-time work and wanting to work more) in the post-pandemic period. Remote working increased among lone parents post-pandemic, to a lesser extent than other parents and childless workers, though this is explained by the sectors and occupations in which they work.

Education differences have widened somewhat in terms of the nature of work. Remote work is much more common among those with a third-level degree, around half of whom work from home in 2022 (see Table 4.2) compared to 12 per cent of the lower educated. The gap in usual hours worked between these two groups also widened during the period. Combined with suggestive evidence that inactivity for the lower educated rose during the period, this suggests that this group may have been disproportionately negatively affected

by the pandemic – both in terms of labour market participation and the nature of work – compared to more educated groups.

Analysis of working conditions for disabled people using SILC data (hours of work, months of work and occupational position) shows little change in the gap between the disabled groups and the non-disabled groups in the period, albeit with a small number of disabled people at work, partly due to their low employment rates, but also a smaller sample size.

## 5.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Jobs are important, as a source of income, identity, well-being, and participation in society. Yet they only comprise one aspect of the impact the pandemic has had on peoples' lives; other disparate impacts include health, well-being, social connectedness and income, which are not measured here.

Firstly, the groups considered were those well captured in the Labour Force Survey, as we have identical measures before and after the pandemic. As noted by McGinnity et al. (2021), this survey is excellently suited to monitoring employment outcomes in Ireland. The sample size is excellent, the survey is representative of the population in Ireland, it is conducted very regularly, definitions are typically consistent over time, and it is accessible for research and policy analysis. For indicators that it measures and groups that it distinguishes, it is well suited to monitoring equality in the labour market in Ireland over this period. However, there are important groups that it does not collect data on. For example, ethnicity is not measured in the Labour Force Survey, meaning that we cannot monitor the labour market impact of COVID-19 on ethnic minorities, including Irish Travellers, though we know from Census data that employment rates of some groups are very low indeed (McGinnity et al., 2021). Measuring ethnicity is a key policy imperative – it is an action in the National Action Plan Against Racism (DCEDIY, 2023) and an important part of the forthcoming Equality Data Strategy in Ireland. Without ethnicity measurement, progress on the labour market inclusion of Travellers, a core part of the *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy* (2017-2021) cannot be measured.<sup>89</sup> The Labour Force Survey also does not collect data on

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<sup>89</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c83a7d-national-traveller-and-roma-inclusion-strategy-2017-2021/>.

gender identity or sexual orientation, which are protected under the equality legislation and crucial for monitoring the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021.

In principle the survey does collect data on disability, and this was originally to be included in this analysis, but the previous disability question was not fielded in 2022 at all, rather a question on general health and limitations on activities because of health problems. While SILC data showed interesting changes in employment patterns for groups limited by health problems, the sample is smaller and some labour market indicators, for example remote work, are not measured, as SILC is primarily a survey about income and poverty. It is essential that consistent data on disability are available in subsequent Labour Force Surveys to allow the pandemic impact to be fully captured for this group, particularly given the change in employment observed over the period using SILC data. Monitoring the labour market outcomes of disabled people is critical to IHREC's mandate as the Independent Monitoring Mechanism for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>90</sup> It also an important part of monitoring the successor to the *National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2022* and the implementation of other national equality strategies where the intersection between disability and other protected characteristics is considered.

The survey does collect information on place of birth and nationality, permitting an analysis of the outcomes of the migrant population. However, given ongoing research on migrant integration (McGinnity et al., 2023) and previous research on the impact of COVID-19 (Enright et al., 2020), nationality/place of birth was a focus of this report (though it is included in all the models). It is only by disaggregating data that inequalities can be investigated. As noted by the European Commission (2018) in their guidelines on the collection and use of equality data, there is a serious imbalance in the collection of data across different equality grounds – this is also true in Ireland.<sup>91</sup> The forthcoming Equality

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<sup>90</sup> See CRPD Article 33 National implementation and monitoring. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-33-national-implementation-and-monitoring.html>; CRPD Article 27 Work and employment <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-27-work-and-employment.html> and UN CRPD General Comment 8 (2022) on the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/crpdgc8-general-comment-no-8-2022-right-persons>.

<sup>91</sup> See <https://www.cso.ie/en/methods/methodologicalresearch/rp-eda/equalitydataaudit2020/> for the report on the equality data audit. See also Equality Data Audit July 2020 Audit File (XLS 416KB) for the data audit itself.

Data Strategy (anticipated to run from 2024 to 2028) in Ireland offers an opportunity to redress this balance.

This report does not consider poverty and deprivation, or income effects of the pandemic more broadly. Initial estimates are that, by and large, pandemic-related income subsidies shielded the population from the income effects of the pandemic (Doorley et al., 2020). There was a small decline in the at-risk-of-poverty rate between 2020 and 2021, but there was a rise between 2021 and 2022 (CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2022; Roantree and Doorley, 2023).<sup>92</sup> Material deprivation also increased between 2021 and 2022 (ibid). Jobs are a key protective factor in terms of poverty, so the fact that employment is currently high for most groups in Ireland is helpful; however the cost of living crisis is exerting a counteractive effect. Here of course it is difficult to separate out the impact of the pandemic from the cost-of living crisis (see IHREC, 2024, for an in-depth analysis on the topic).

Health inequality within and across countries was a major feature of the pandemic (Bambra et al., 2021; Berchet et al., 2023). Physical health risks of the COVID-19 virus were strongly related to age, with only 10 per cent of deaths among those under 65 (HPSC, 2023). Duffy et al. (2022) show that deaths were somewhat less prevalent among those in professional/managerial occupations, though effects are most marked for those under 65. Given ill-health is more prevalent among disadvantaged communities, it is possible that the effects of health resources being directed to fighting the pandemic, such as missed appointments, may have been disproportionately borne by disadvantaged individuals. Challenges to well-being and mental health as result of the pandemic are receiving increasing attention. Young people have seen a particularly sharp decline in well-being and increase in depressive symptoms, and this effect was greater among young people who had already entered the labour market (Smyth and Nolan, 2022). Interruptions to schooling and training may have a longer term impact on young people's careers that has not yet been captured by 2022 (Darmody et al., 2020). The mental health effects of the pandemic among parents were greater among those living in areas with higher levels of social disorder and who lacked community resources (Laurence et al., 2023). Those affected by physical and mental health

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<sup>92</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2022/>. Data on poverty come from the SILC survey and for income poverty the reference period is the previous calendar year.

problems linked to the pandemic may of course find it challenging to sustain a job (Kelly and Maître, 2021), and a longer-term negative impact of the pandemic on the labour market outcomes and life chances may operate in this way.

### 5.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

Given the severity of restrictions in Ireland and the impact on the labour market during the pandemic, it is remarkable that there has been such a rapid recovery in 2022, though this is in line with evidence from other EU countries. As such, the immediate labour market impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been very different from the previous recession in Ireland. In the previous recession period when – as noted above – employment fell, unemployment rose rapidly, was persistently high for many years, and some groups were disproportionately affected i.e. young people, low-educated workers and men (McGinnity et al., 2014; Kelly and McGuinness, 2015).

What were the mechanisms underlying this rapid recovery? Was it a result of a pre-existing trend or linked to the labour market response to the pandemic? As noted in McGinnity et al. (2021), the working-age employment rate had been increasing in Ireland in the years preceding the pandemic, a period of labour market recovery: the overall employment rate rose from 60 per cent in 2013 to 69 per cent in 2019 (ibid. Figure 1.1).<sup>93</sup> Therefore employment rates were high in Ireland when the pandemic and associated lockdown struck. Yet employment was also high before the global financial crisis in Ireland.

However, the policy response was very different. It may be that the massive subvention of incomes of those displaced by their jobs may have helped not only protect individuals from the income consequences of the pandemic, but also from the labour market consequences. The scale of welfare supports for those who lost their jobs was substantially more generous than previous supports in coverage and payment rates. Workers employed in firms supported by the TWSS/EWSS, continued to be paid by the employer and had their employment relationship protected, which can be seen as a type of temporary lay-off scheme. A significant proportion of PUP recipients also returned to their previous employer

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<sup>93</sup> This report also finds no evidence that growth in employment rates between 2014 and 2019 was unequally spread between the different groups measured (see McGinnity et al., 2021, Section 3.5),

(Dawn-O'Reilly and McNeil, 2022).<sup>94</sup> Supports offered to employers also helped to maintain businesses. As OECD (2021) notes, job retention schemes were the main instrument used in most OECD countries for reducing the labour market impact of COVID, to a much greater extent than in the global financial crisis of 2008-2009. These authors conclude that well-designed job retention schemes can be an effective policy tool to help manage an economic crisis. While individual country schemes and eligibility criteria varied, Eurofound (2021) also note how widespread temporary lay-off schemes were in Europe. One of the policy learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic in Ireland may indeed be that while they required significant spending and mobilisation of resources, government income and labour market supports used during the pandemic helped mitigate the worst effects of the labour market crisis. There may also be potential to activate such schemes in future crises (see also Eurofound, 2021).

What has changed rapidly and in a previously unanticipated way in terms of the nature of work in Ireland is the prevalence of remote working. This brings opportunities and challenges to those at work. There is evidence that employment rates rose for those with a disability between 2019 and 2022, although this is in the context that prior to the pandemic, disabled people in Ireland had some of the lowest employment rates in Europe (Kelly and Maître, 2021). Furthermore, this evidence is only found amongst disabled people who are not severely limited in their activities. We have no data on place of work for the disabled group, but international literature suggests that long-term structural changes, particularly the rise in remote working, may facilitate the inclusion of disabled people in the labour market (Ne'eman and Maestes, 2023). This will require further investigation and will only be one part of facilitating employment for the group (see OECD, 2020b). The evolution of organisational policies on working from home policies, including any return to office mandates, will be of continued relevance from an equality perspective.

Certainly, there has been an acceleration of the digital revolution, with the potential to leave low-skilled workers behind. In 2022, there is no evidence that those disadvantaged groups in the labour market have disproportionately lost their jobs – with the exception of those with lowest educational qualifications. But it is also clear that levels of remote work

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<sup>94</sup> Dawn-O'Reilly and McNeil (2022) found that circa 71 per cent of those who had exited PUP to employment were observed to have returned to their pre-COVID employer.



are strongly stratified by education, and access to digital training may need to be prioritised for this group of workers and the companies they work for, potentially through the Skillsnet Ireland training networks,<sup>95</sup> as well as through other avenues for upskilling for workers.

As noted above, the structurally vulnerable groups considered were limited by the available data. This underscores the need for continued efforts to widen the scope of equality data available in Ireland. Incorporating more structurally vulnerable groups would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the equality impact of the pandemic in Ireland.

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<sup>95</sup> <https://www.skillnetireland.ie/>.

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