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European Disability Expertise (EDE) provides independent scientific support to the Commission's policy Unit responsible for disability issues. It aims to mainstream disability equality in EU policy processes, including implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

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¹ For an introduction to the Semester process, see:
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1 Executive summary and recommendations

1.1 Key points and main challenges for Lithuania in 2022

In 2022 the main problems and challenges in relation to disability in Lithuania remain unchanged:

- the difference between the unemployment rates of people with disabilities and people without disabilities in Lithuania is one of the largest in the EU;
- social services in Lithuania are not targeted to meet the individual needs of people with disabilities;
- in order to reduce poverty during 2021 Lithuania mainly relied on raising social benefits;
- the number of children in special schools is decreasing slowly and it is far from the stated goal;
- social security and social protection are not a major element of the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the National Progress Plan.

Disability and the labour market

No breakthrough was achieved in the employment of people with disabilities. At the end of 2021, 42 918 registered persons with disabilities were employed. This indicates that only 29.1 % of all working age people with disabilities were employed. The employment rate indicator remains on similar level each year and has shown no tendency to increase. Government commitments to develop and implement efficient strategies and programmes to increase the number of working people with disabilities are lacking.

Disability, social policies and healthcare

In order to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and the high rate of poverty risk, the Government increased the salaries in the public sector, old-age pensions and other benefits during 2021-2022. It also increased the basic social allowance and introduced a new single person benefit for elderly people and persons with disabilities. It is expected that increased benefits will reduce the poverty risk.

Disability, education and skills

All declared reforms promote inclusive education, lifelong learning and seek to raise the qualification of education specialists. However, according to 2022 data, out of a total of 1 163 schools, only 117 (less than 10 %) are fully accessible for children with a mobility impairment. Trends suggest that there will be a real shortage of psychological, social pedagogical and special pedagogical assistance for children with special educational needs in the near future. Tertiary education is still hardly accessible for students with disabilities because there is more emphasis on academic achievements than on individual support.

Investment priorities for inclusion and accessibility

On 9 March 2022, the Government approved the Programme for the European Union funds' investments in 2021-2027. In this programme the Government declares that with EU funds' investments it will implement the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and will take into account its action plan and Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030. This alignment should be actively monitored.

1.2 Recommendations for Lithuania

These recommendations are based on the evidence and analysis presented in the following chapters of our report.

Recommendation: Pay primary attention to the employment of persons with disabilities in the open labour market when formulating policies, assess active labour market policies and their effectiveness, improve and increase usage of supported employment services and harmonise different periods set for wage subsidies of people with disabilities in the Law of Employment and the Law of Social Enterprises.

Rationale: The integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market is not increasing and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) Committee recommendations have not been met.

Recommendation: Lithuania must accelerate transition of delivery of social services from one-size-fits-all to personalised services tailored to individual needs and groups of people.

Rationale: Social services in Lithuania are not aimed at the individual needs of people with disabilities, as required by Article 19 of the UN CRPD. Public spending on social protection is relatively low. Increasing social sector funding should be a priority.

Recommendation: Pay more attention to adapting healthcare institutions, environments and medical equipment for persons with disabilities, thereby increasing their opportunities to receive quality medical treatment (including dental) and rehabilitation services on an equal basis with other persons.

Rationale: Lithuania is struggling with the implementation of the recommendations of the UN CRPD Committee. Old healthcare institutions remain partly accessible for people with disabilities and no significant steps have been taken in order to change the situation. Too few healthcare specialists are qualified to work with people with disabilities.

Recommendation: Develop inclusion in education in all general schools, providing all children with disabilities with the necessary support to meet individual needs of learning and education: psychological, special pedagogical, special or social pedagogical support.

Rationale: Without ensuring accessibility for various disabilities of the school environment, Lithuania directly violates the provisions of the UN CRPD. There is no systematic regulation on how a school environment must be adapted for children with various disabilities.

2 Mainstreaming disability equality in the 2022 Semester documents

2.1 Country Report (CR) and Country Specific Recommendation (CSR)

The following key points highlight where a disability perspective was considered, or should be considered, in the CR/CSR. We address the most relevant of these in the next chapters.

In the Country Report the Commission highlights income inequality and social exclusion as the main issues from a disability perspective that Lithuania is facing. In the report, the Commission notes that despite improvement of the general situation, income inequality in Lithuania remains among the highest in the EU. Social exclusion has been decreasing since 2016 but remains well above the EU average (24.5 % in Lithuania compared to 21.9 % in the EU in 2020). Public expenditure on social protection is persistently low while the rates of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion remain among the highest in the EU, especially for vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities.

In 2022, the Country Report for Lithuania included the following direct references to disability issues:

- p. 9: 'Public expenditure on social protection is persistently low while the rates of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion remain among the highest in the EU.'
- p. 45: 'While the share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion decreased, it remains well above the EU average, especially among vulnerable groups.'

On the other hand, Country Report includes information about the steps taken to reduce inequality and social exclusion. The Government announced reforms on the accreditation scheme for social care and additional benefit for persons with disabilities and elderly single persons. These reforms are declared as completed but a uniform system of accreditation of social care services hardly makes social services more accessible for people with disabilities. The Commission highlights in the Country Report the main failings in the availability of social services:

'The planning, organisation and delivery of social services and the awarding of benefits are fragmented and inefficient. Municipalities do not involve local communities and non-governmental organisations enough in annual social services planning, which leads to gaps in knowledge about people's real needs.'²

In order to reduce income inequality, the Lithuanian Government increased basic social allowance and introduced single persons benefit. The basic social allowance increased from EUR 40 (2021) to EUR 46 (1 June 2022). From 1 January 2022, a single person benefit amounts to EUR 32.

To conclude: during 2021-2022 the main problems and challenges in relation to disability in Lithuania remained unchanged. This was also noticed in the 2022 Country

² 2022 Country Report Lithuania, p. 10, https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-05/2022-european-semester-country-report-lithuania_en.pdf.

Report. Lithuanian Government policy does not have sufficient impact to reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion of people with disabilities in Lithuania.

In the next policy cycle the Commission staff should specifically target data about changes in the number of people with disabilities receiving social care services in municipalities. Demand for social care services is constantly increasing. It is a big risk that the gap between those who need social care services and those who receive it will increase due to the accreditation of social care services reform. It is important to report on measures taken by the Lithuanian Government to ensure inclusive education and individualised assistance support services for people with disabilities. From publicly available information, it is known that a few local municipalities have plans to ensure inclusive education. In addition, the number of pupils in special education schools has not decreased. Another topic should be poverty and income inequality. Despite previous Government reforms, poverty and income inequality are still a challenge in Lithuania.

In the Country Specific Recommendations (CSR) for Lithuania there is no direct reference to disability. However, it is noted that: ‘Lithuania faces a number of additional challenges related to primary and preventive care, weaknesses in the planning and delivery of social services and a lack of strategy on social housing’.³ This leads to the third recommendation that Lithuania must take action in 2022 and 2023 to: ‘Strengthen primary and preventive care. Reduce fragmentation in the planning and delivery of social services and improve their personalisation and integration with other services. Improve access to and quality of social housing’.⁴ These measures will be particularly relevant to people with disabilities and should be monitored accordingly.

2.2 National Reform Programme (NRP) and Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP)

The following key points highlight where the situation of people with disabilities or disability policies are relevant to the NRP/RRP. We analyse the most relevant of these in the next chapters.

By the end of 2021 the Government adopted national development programmes⁵ for all ministries, including the Ministry of Social Security and Labour⁶ and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.⁷ These programmes were prepared in accordance with the CR and CSRs for Lithuania. Also national development programme measures

³ 2022 Country Specific Recommendations for Lithuania, p. 8, https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2022-european-semester-country-specific-recommendations-commission-recommendations_en.

⁴ 2022 Country Specific Recommendation for Lithuania, p. 10.

⁵ Government approved National Progress Plans, <https://lrv.lt/lt/strateginis-valdymas-1/strateginis-valdymas/nacionalines-pletros-programos>.

⁶ Ministry of Social Security and Labour strategic plans, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/veiklos-sritys/strateginis-valdymas/aktualus-strateginiai-dokumentai/pletros-programu-pazangos-priemones>.

⁷ Ministry of Education, Science and Sport strategic plans, <https://smsm.lrv.lt/lt/administracine-informacija/planavimo-dokumentai/Pprogramos20200519/svpp-priemones>.

implement goals formulated in the National Progress Plan 2021-2030.⁸ This plan has some goals directly related to disability, which seek to:

1. increase the index of the quality of life of people with disabilities;
2. increase accessibility of physical and information environments for people with disabilities;
3. raise employment levels of people with disabilities;
4. increase the share of children with disabilities in general education schools who are studying in an inclusive education model.

In the Recovery and Resilience Plan's key measures related to disability can be singled out:

- The RRP seeks to improve the population's digital skills and declares accessibility of digital public services as priority. Three reforms are allocated for this purpose (Component 3). The reforms connect with the European flagship area declared in Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021 – to modernise key digital public services.⁹ From a disability perspective in the accessibility field, the most important reform is on 'Customer orientated public services' described in Chapter 3.6. One of the reform's goals is to develop and validate methodological standards for the provisions of information for people with disabilities. It is expected that the reform will increase accessibility and the number of independent public services users among people with disabilities.
- In the field of education and skills, the RRP provides four reforms (Component 4). From a disability perspective, it is important that all reforms promote inclusive education, lifelong learning and seek to raise the qualification of education specialists. These reforms also connect with European Sustainable Development Goal No. 4 principles. However, the biggest drawback is that the reforms do not seek the adaption of schools environments and psychological, social pedagogical, special pedagogical assistance for children with special educational needs.
- Poverty and income inequality are still a challenge in Lithuanian policy. In order to change this situation the RRP provides two reforms (Paragraph 7). From a disability perspective it is important to highlight the Government commitment to provide social services according to individual needs. However, the reforms do not set a target for individualised assistance in support services. In order to reduce poverty and income inequality, the Government mainly relies on raising social benefits.
- The difference between the unemployment rates of people with disabilities and people without disabilities in Lithuania is probably the largest in the EU. In order to increase the employment rate of persons with disabilities, in the RRP (Paragraph 7) the Government relies on active labour market policy measures. However, from a disability perspective there is a lack of commitment to developing and implementing efficient strategies and programmes to increase the number of working people with disabilities.

⁸ National Progress Plan for 2021-2030, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/d492e050f7dd11eaa12ad7c04a383ca0>.

⁹ Communication from the Commission, Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LT/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0575>.

In the 2022 National Reform Programme (NRP), development of a model for the delivery of long-term care services that includes outpatient and inpatient (nursing and social care) in all municipalities is a strategic reform directly related to RRP strategic targets (Paragraph 1). This reform is relevant to disability but aimed at the whole society (everyone who needs long-term care) without being targeted.

The NRP also introduced the single person benefit that came into force on 1 January 2022. This benefit is directly related to the RRP reform 'Guaranteed minimum income protection' measures (Paragraph 7). The goal of this benefit is to reduce poverty or social exclusion. It is of significance considering the high poverty risk facing people with disabilities in general.

2.3 Semester links to CRPD and national disability action plans

It is important that Semester plans align with national disability strategies. In Lithuania, this refers to the action plan for the Social Integration of the Disabled for 2021-2023.¹⁰ A National Programme for the Social Integration of the Disabled 2013-2020 was adopted in 2012.¹¹ The current action plan was approved in 2020 for the period 2021-2023. This national action plan is not mentioned in the 2022 NRP.

Relevant recommendations arising from participation in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) are highlighted in the following chapters. The last UN CRPD Committee recommendations to Lithuania were in 2016, the most recent submission by Lithuania was in 2020 and the most recent response from the Committee was the 2016 Concluding Observations.

¹⁰ Action Plan for the Social Integration of the Disabled for 2021-2023, available (in Lithuanian) at: <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/8c27c230f1b211eaa12ad7c04a383ca0>.

¹¹ National Programme for Social Integration of the Disabled for 2013-2020, available (in Lithuanian) at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.437985/asr>.

3 Disability and the labour market – analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies

In 2016, the UN CRPD Committee made the following recommendations to Lithuania:

[Article 27 UN CRPD](#) addresses Work and Employment.

‘52. The Committee recommends that the State party, in close collaboration with representative organizations of persons with disabilities, eliminate the concept of ‘working incapacity’ of persons with disabilities and develop and implement efficient strategies and programmes aimed at increasing the employment rate of persons with disabilities in the open labour market, by eliminating segregated work environments and investing in promoting vocational training, access to appropriately adjusted workplaces, the provision of reasonable accommodation and the training of private and public employers, as set out in target 8.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals.’

The most recent CRPD development is the 2016 Concluding Observations and the state’s submission in 2020.

3.1 Summary of the labour market situation of persons with disabilities

According to the Social Scoreboard indicator, cited in the Semester package, the disability employment gap in Lithuania is considered ‘Better than average’.

Data from EU-SILC indicate an employment rate for persons with disabilities in Lithuania of 57.5 % in 2020, compared to 81.1 % for other persons. This results in an estimated disability employment gap of approximately 23 percentage points (estimated EU27 average gap 24.5 (see Tables 2-4) or an employment chances ratio of 0.7. Statistics published on the Eurostat database indicate a disability employment gap of 22.7 percentage points in 2020, using a slightly different methodology, but have not been updated for 2021.¹²

We can see that the employment rate for persons with disabilities increased by 7.7 percentage points from the 2018 level and that the employment gap is very close to the EU27 average. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on employment in 2020-2021, some caution is needed when interpreting trend data.

The same data indicate unemployment rates of 17.3 % and 8.9 %, respectively in 2020 (see Tables 5-7) and the economic activity rate for persons with disabilities in Lithuania was 69.5 %, compared to 89.0 % for other persons (see Tables 8-10). These indications are broken down by gender and age in the respective tables in the Annex.

According to administrative data from the Department for the Affairs of Disabled under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, at the end of 2021, 42 918 persons with disabilities were employed (see Table A). This indicates that only 29.1 % of all working age people with disabilities were employed. The employment rate indicator, among this group, remains on similar level each year and does not show a tendency to

¹² Eurostat, Disability employment gap by level of activity limitation and sex (source EU-SILC), 2022 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/hlth_dlm200/default/table.

increase. This is in contrast to the headline indicator derived from EU-SILC survey data, which represents all people reporting activity limitations and indicates a slow increase in the disability employment rate over the past decade (with a narrowing disability employment gap). It is interesting to note that during the COVID-19 crisis, the employment rate of registered people with disabilities increased marginally by 0.3 percentage points compared to 2019, although it may have fallen back again now (see Table A).

The number of social enterprises is decreasing every year, resulting in 105 enterprises in 2021. Due to this fact, the number of people with disabilities working in social enterprises also decreased to 14.6 % of all working people with disabilities registered in 2021 (see Table B). Despite this, funding allocated to social enterprises is disproportionately larger than for active labour market policies. In 2021, 64.7 % of the funding allocated to support the employment of people with disabilities was allocated to social enterprises, leaving 35.3 % for active labour market policies.

The number of employed people with disabilities (registered in Employment Services) is increasing, in 2021 7 800 were employed, an increase of 32.2 % from 2019 (see Table C). Although, as an indicator of effectiveness of Employment Services activity, there are no significant changes in outcome: the number of employed people with disabilities from all registered people (with disabilities) during 2021 was 57.6 % and increased by 0.7 percentage point from 2019. Participation in active labour market policies (ALMP) started to increase in 2021. Comparing the first half of 2022 to the first half of the previous year, participation in supported employment almost doubled, supported learning increased 2.7 times and mobility support by 10 times.¹³ On the other hand, participation in ALMP is low when comparing how many people with disabilities participated in the policies from all persons with disabilities registered in Employment Services at the end of the year, and it was 11.5 % in 2021.

3.2 Analysis of labour market policies relevant to the Semester

For reference, see the National Reform Programme 2022, the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Lithuania and the Action Plan for the Social Integration of the Disabled for 2021-2023.

In January 2020, changes in the Law of Employment entered into force and started assisted (supported) employment as a new labour market service for people with disabilities.¹⁴ These services consist of assistance in employment procedures and accompanying assistance upon employment. Services are restricted to a maximum of 8 hours for one employer and one hour wage cannot exceed 0.1 amount of the basic social benefit. In 2022 the Forum of Lithuanian Disability Organisations noted that it 'is flawed because it limits the possibility of consideration to the individual needs of the person, the severity of the disability and the professionalism of the assistance

¹³ Employment Service information: https://uzt.lt/data/public/uploads/2022/08/d2_asmenu-su-negalia-situacija-darbo-rinkoje-2022-08.pdf.

¹⁴ Addition to Law on Employment: <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/legalAct.html?documentId=d248ec30ea9211e99681cd81dcdca52c>.

provided.¹⁵ In addition to this, the Lithuanian Parliament (the Seimas) agreed to the upcoming changes to the Law of Employment for establishing new rates for assisted employment services.¹⁶ According to data from Employment Services under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, assisted employment services started to be provided only in 2021 and the usage is low: 150 people with disabilities got the services in 2021 and 58 in the first half of 2022.

In September 2019 some changes to the Law on Social Enterprises were agreed upon.¹⁷ These changes entered into force during 2020. Some examples include: wage subsidies can be allocated only for people with disabilities registered in the Employment Services; the maximum amount of subsidies was reduced for different groups of work capacities and equated with the ones in the Law of Employment; not less than 75 % of the annual profit of enterprises must be used for the goals related to the return of people with disabilities to the labour market and the promotion of their social integration.¹⁸ Additionally, subsidies can be allocated only for people with disabilities, not less than 50 % of all employees in social enterprises must be with disabilities and should amount to no less than six people. However, discrimination can be still seen in different periods set for wage subsidies of people with disabilities. According to the Law of Social Enterprises, subsidies for persons with disabilities and having working capacity between 30 % and 40 % can be given continuously, whereas in the Law of Employment it is restricted to a maximum of 24 months.

One of the National Progress Plan (NPP)¹⁹ programmes is directly related to disability in labour market and is called the 'Inclusive Labour Market Development Programme'.²⁰ The main aim of this programme is to increase the employment of vulnerable groups and it is related to the principle of equal opportunities in employment regardless of disability in the European Pillar of Social Rights. The programme's target 2.3. is to increase the employment opportunities of jobseekers. The section on effectiveness and efficiency of the employment support system mentions the main reasons that limit the employment of people with disabilities: limitations and health disorders caused by disability, lack of appropriate education, low qualification, limited communication and infrastructure, unsuited workplaces and others.²¹

In order to solve this problem the measure is set to increase the employment of vulnerable groups and there are two goals agreed under it that directly relate to the situation of people with disabilities on the labour market. The first goal is to increase

¹⁵ Lithuanian Disability Organisations publication 'Rights of People with Disabilities in Lithuania – Analysis of Disability Policy', https://www.lnf.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/neigaliu_su-turiniu_Be-ISBN.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1tTevH1k5Hj78vcysrZcb10gVW-inwdmc33tTZLHK1XQ5MNUjTsbSfWqc.

¹⁶ Article in newspaper, *Kauno Diena*, about changes in Law on Employment, 24 May 2022, <https://m.kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/verslas/ekonomika/seimas-prite-uzimtumo-istatymo-pakeitimams-siekiant-aktyviau-itraukti-neigaliuosius-i-darbo-rinka-1079542>.

¹⁷ Law on Social Enterprises, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.235368/asr>.

¹⁸ Article about Law on Social Enterprises, <https://www.musuzodis.lt/mz/201911/str05.htm>.

¹⁹ On 9 September 2020, the Lithuanian Government adopted a National Progress Plan for 2021-2030. It aims to identify the main changes to be achieved over the next decade, to ensure progress in the social, economic, environmental and security fields.

²⁰ European Pillar of Social Rights implementation report, 2022, https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-04/nrp_2022_lithuania_annex_lt_0.pdf.

²¹ Ministry of Social Security and Labour 'Inclusive labour market development programme', <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/2333b210438311ec992fe4cdfceb5666>.

the share of working age people with disabilities employed in the labour market, among all working age registered people with disabilities, from 28.4 % in 2020 to 47 % in 2030. The second goal is to increase the number of participants with disabilities who have successfully completed vocational rehabilitation programmes from zero²² in 2021 to 4 554 in 2030.

To sum up, the recommendations are: when formulating policies pay attention to the employment of persons with disabilities in the open labour market, perform an assessment of active labour market policies and their effectiveness, improve and increase usage of assisted employment services and harmonise different periods set for wage subsidies of people with disabilities in the Law of Employment and the Law of Social Enterprises.

²² It is assumed that the estimate of the indicator at the beginning of the implementation of the measure is zero.

4 Disability, social policies and healthcare – analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies

In 2016 the UN CRPD Committee made the following recommendations to Lithuania:

[Article 28 UN CRPD](#) addresses Adequate standard of living and social protection.

'54. The Committee recommends that the State party adopt new policies that secure income levels among persons with disabilities and their families that are adequate and equal to the income levels of others, and that take into account additional disability-related costs.
56. The Committee recommends that the State party take steps to ensure that persons with disabilities and their families are not disproportionately affected by budget cuts and to ensure an adequate standard of living through income support and social security, taking note of target 1.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which calls on States to implement appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors.'

[Article 19 UN CRPD](#) addresses Living independently in the community.

'40. The Committee recommends that the State party, in close collaboration with organizations of persons with disabilities:
(a) Adopt an adequately funded strategy for deinstitutionalization ensuring a range of community-based services for the social inclusion of persons with disabilities, including for children with intellectual and/or psychosocial impairments, including their right to live independently in the community, with the possibility of individualized personal assistance support services in their home;
(b) Effectively implement the action plan for the implementation of the national programme for the social integration of persons with disabilities for the period 2013-2019 at all levels of the State;
(c) Adopt a moratorium on new admissions of children into institutionalized care;
(d) Eliminate excessive waiting time for receiving support services by investing in developing new services and rendering existing services accessible and inclusive and ensure that persons with disabilities have access to sufficient financial resources for independent living and improved access to accessible services in the community.'

[Article 25 UN CRPD](#) addresses Health.

'50. The Committee recommends that the State party: (a) Take appropriate legislative measures to secure access for persons with disabilities to free and affordable health-related habilitation and rehabilitation goods and services; (b) Train health personnel on the human rights model of disability, including on the right to free and informed consent, and ensure the accessibility of healthcare facilities and equipment to ensure that all such facilities and equipment, including in hospitals and in the practices of dentists, gynaecologists and obstetricians, are accessible to persons with disabilities, regardless of their impairments; (c) Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, including family planning, information and education, and ensure also the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes as set out in target 3.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals.'

The most recent CRPD development is the 2016 Concluding Observations and the state's submission in 2020.

4.1 Summary of the social situation of persons with disabilities

Data from EU-SILC indicate the poverty risk rate for working age persons with disabilities. In Lithuania it was 23.5 % in 2020, compared to 14.6 % for other persons of similar age – an estimated disability poverty gap of approximately 9 percentage points (see Table 14). For people aged over 65, the disability poverty gap was 12.6 points (40.6 % for older persons with disabilities and 28.0 % for other persons of similar age). The tables in the Annex also indicate the respective rates of risk of poverty or social exclusion and break these down by gender as well age. Recently updated data from Eurostat indicates that this relative risk remained static for the working age disabled population (23.5 %) and increased again for the older age group (41.9 %) in 2021.²³

For persons with disabilities of working age in Lithuania (aged 18-64) the risk of poverty before social transfers was 44.8 % and 23.5 % after transfers. The in-work poverty rate for persons with disabilities in this age range was 8.4 % (no indicator was available from Eurostat for 2021).

Regarding health policy, there are the data on self-reported unmet needs for medical examination (too expensive, too far to travel or waiting list). Disability equality gaps are evident here too and, on this basis, the rate for persons with disabilities in Lithuania was 3.0 %, compared to 1.1 % for other persons (see Table 15).

Adequate standard of living and social protection

The Commission 2022 Country Report noted that income inequality and the poverty rate in Lithuania remain among the highest in the EU and was reported as ‘critical’ in the Social Scoreboard. This trend remains almost the same from 2012. In order to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and the high poverty rate, the Government increased salaries, old-age pensions and other benefits in the public sector during 2021-2022. The Government also increased the basic social allowance and introduced a new single person benefit to the elderly and persons with disabilities. It is expected that the increased benefits will reduce the poverty risk.

On 10 November 2021, the Government adopted the income inequality reduction programme, implemented by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour.²⁴ In this programme the Government seeks to reduce income inequality and poverty. The programme measures focus on two goals:

- increasing income through benefit; and
- increasing the employment of people.

²³ Eurostat, People at risk of poverty by level of activity limitation, sex and age, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/HLTH_DPE020_custom_3348056.

²⁴ Income inequality reduction programme for the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/9eda6660438411ec992fe4cdfceb5666>.

The income inequality reduction programme is directly related to goal 2.1. of the NPP,²⁵ ‘Reduce income inequality’.²⁶ Summarising these facts, the issue of social exclusion remains a key challenge for Lithuania’s social policy:

- state supported income increased from EUR 128 (2021) to EUR 129 (2022);
- the monthly basic social benefit increased from EUR 40 (2021) to EUR 42 (2022);
- the minimum monthly wage increased from EUR 642 (2021) to EUR 730 (2022);
- lost working capacity pension increased by 5 % (2022).²⁷

Living independently in the community

The amendment to the Law on Social Services of the Republic of Lithuania entered into force on 30 December 2021.²⁸ The amendment seeks to increase the quality of social services. Only accredited social care will be provided from the beginning of 2022. Also a new type of preventive social services was established. It is anticipated that these services will help to provide qualitative complex assistance to people, addressing their life problems before they turn into a social risk. These services will be organised and provided through the community family homes that will be coordinated according to the single-window principle. Each municipality will have to ensure the operation of at least one community family home on its territory and the availability of preventive complex services to the family to all in need of them.²⁹

From 2023, social rehabilitation for persons with disabilities in the community will be continued by maintaining the same quality as other social care services. The accredited providers of social rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities in the community will be able to render social rehabilitation services.

During 2021-2022 the deinstitutionalisation process in Lithuania continued. At the end of 2021, there were 5 727 adults living in social care facilities for adults with disabilities. This number is slightly decreasing every year (see table D in Annex 7.2.1). In Lithuania there were 34 group living homes in total³⁰ of which 26 are established by the state.³¹ The number of recipients of social services at home decreased from 22 100 (2020) to 21 229 (2021).³²

²⁵ On 9 September 2020, the Lithuanian Government adopted a National Progress Plan for 2021-2030. It aims at identifying the main changes to achieve over the next decade, to ensure progress in the social, economic, environmental and security fields.

²⁶ Approved impact indicators for National Progress Plan, https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/rs/lasupplement/TAD/c1259440f7dd11eab72ddb4a109da1b5/804541c22b6011ec99bbc1b08701c7f8/format/ISO_PDF/.

²⁷ Ministry of Social Security and Labour information, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/dideja-parama-zmonems-su-negalia-ka-svarbu-zinoti>.

²⁸ Amendment to the Law on Social Services of the Republic of Lithuania, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/ebfcfdb3689e11ecb2fe9975f8a9e52e?jfwid=xol36pkbt>.

²⁹ Ministry of Social Security and Labour information about social services, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/en/news/social-services-what-changes-are-to-be-expected-in-2022>.

³⁰ Lithuanian Official Statistics data: https://osp.stat.gov.lt/EN/statistiniu-rodikliu-analize?hash=fe2f1e82-7e19-4a25-8903-334da41127b2#.

³¹ Ministry of Social Security and Labor in 2020 activity report, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/veiklos-sritys/ataskaitos/ministerijos-veiklos-ataskaitos>.

³² A table about the number of recipients of social services at home can be found in the Database of Indicators, https://osp.stat.gov.lt/statistiniu-rodikliu-analize#.

Health

There are no significant changes related to disability in the Lithuanian health system in the period 2021-2022. However, the RRP seeks improvements in the quality and accessibility of health services. Strengthening the health and long-term care systems is the major goal. These targets come from previous years following the 2021 CSR recommendation to give priority to structural reforms that will help to provide adequacy and sustainability of health and social protection systems for all.

4.2 Analysis of social policies relevant to the Semester

For reference, see the 2022 National Reform Programme, the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Lithuania and the Action Plan for the Social Integration of the Disabled for 2021-2023.

Adequate standard of living and social protection

Poverty and income inequality is still a challenge for Lithuanian policy. In 2021 the Human Rights Monitoring Institute (HRMI) ordered a representative social survey of public opinion about human rights. According to the survey, 60 % of the respondents said that they did not feel that people with disabilities in Lithuania could participate equally with everyone in the economic, social and cultural life of the country and 77 % of the respondents believed that the environment, such as streets and buildings are not suitable for adapting to the needs of people with disabilities.³³

In order to address the poverty challenge, the RRP provides two reforms (Paragraph 7) directly related to poverty and income inequality reduction. The Lithuanian Government seeks to reform a guaranteed minimum income protection scheme and to create a customer-oriented employment system. However, the income of the most vulnerable groups in society, like people with disabilities, is expected to be increased through social benefits and the restructuring of taxation and the social insurance system. In the opinion of the authors of the HRMI report, a new type of social benefit for single persons³⁴ will likely not have a notable impact because from 1 January 2022 it amounts to only EUR 32.

The National Audit Office noted in a press release on 16 December 2021 that:

‘While benefits have recently been increasing, their ratio to GDP is limited as the economy improves. This means that the benefits are used to maintain a constant at-risk-of-poverty rate [...] Social protection expenditure on benefits amounted to around EUR 8.9 billion last year, while the impact of social benefits on the at-risk-of-poverty rate decreased slightly between 2019 and 2020. This means that

³³ Human Rights Monitoring Institute overview ‘Human Rights in Lithuania 2020-2021’, p. 66, https://hrmi.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Human-Rights-Overview_2020-2021_HRMI.pdf.

³⁴ From 2022 the single-person benefit is automatically granted for single elderly persons (who attained old-age pension age) and persons with disabilities. From 2022 in order to receive single-person benefit is not required for a single person to be entitled to social assistance or social insurance pension.

without social benefits, Lithuania's at-risk-of-poverty rate would be 9.5 percentage points higher in 2019 and 8.7 percentage points higher in 2020.³⁵

The Government should implement changes to achieve sustainability in the social security system by increasing the availability of services to fit individual needs. In 2021, the number of people with disabilities receiving social care services at home decreased in 2021 by 4.1 %.³⁶ In July 2019, the National Audit Office³⁷ reported on social assistance that:

- assistance is provided without having regard to the individual needs of persons, and different types of assistance are not coordinated;
- municipalities fail to dedicate sufficient attention to the provision of social services;
- municipalities fail to make use of available measures to promote employment.

In order to reach a breakthrough in reducing income inequality and poverty, complex measures are needed. The Government should promote integration into the labour market. Additionally, it should increase the accessibility of social assistance and ensure the provision of clear and easy-to-understand information to the public. It is also important to implement evidence-based social policies, make justified decisions and analyse the impact of the implemented measures and investment on social well-being.

Health

The UN CRPD Committee recommended in 2016 that Lithuania ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, train health personnel on the human rights model of disability and take appropriate legislative measures to secure access for persons with disabilities to free and affordable health-related habitation and rehabilitation goods and services. None of these targets were implemented in 2021-2022.

According to the latest available data, among 340 healthcare institutions only 19 % are fully accessible for people with disabilities.³⁸ This situation has slightly changed since 2017. Two country studies were prepared by the ANED network concerning access to and the accessibility of healthcare to persons with disabilities in Lithuania in 2014.³⁹

³⁵ National Audit Office, 16 December 2021 press release, <https://www.valstybeskontrole.lt/EN/Post/16972/national-audit-office-at-risk-of-poverty-rate-in-lithuania-remains-one-of-the-highest-in-europe>.

³⁶ Official Statistical Portal press release 'Social services 2021', <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/informaciniai-pranesimai?articleId=10174958>.

³⁷ National Audit Office of Lithuania, 'Does Social Assistance Ensure the Minimum Consumption Needs of People Living in Poverty and Promote the Labour Market Integration', <https://www.valstybeskontrole.lt/EN/Product/23858/does-social-assistance-ensure-the-minimum-consumption-needs-of-people-living-in-p>.

³⁸ The Department for the Affairs of Disabled under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour 2019 data: <http://www.ndt.lt/statistiniai-rodikliai/>.

³⁹ ANED (2014) Health, Lithuania, <https://www.disability-europe.net/theme/health?country=lithuania>.

Incoming reforms in the healthcare system focus on investments in healthcare infrastructure (five infectious disease clusters; seven regional emergency and resuscitation and intensive care divisions; tools to provide healthcare services electronically). This is expected to improve the territorial coverage of emergency and acute care of people with infectious diseases and ensure affordable, high-quality and safe diagnostic and treatment services for the whole Lithuanian population. However, strategic documents lack obligations to improve the infrastructure of existing health facilities by adapting it to people with disabilities.

Additionally, according to statistical data of the Ministry of Health, during 2020 only 341 healthcare specialists were gaining qualifications for working with persons with disabilities.⁴⁰

To sum up, Lithuania is struggling with the implementation of UN CRPD Committee recommendations. Judging by the RRP and CSR, existing reforms do not appear to give priority to the problems of people with disabilities. Old healthcare institutions remain partly accessible for people with disabilities and no significant steps are being taken to change the situation. Moreover, too few healthcare specialists are qualified to work with people with disabilities.

Policy makers must pay more attention to adapting healthcare institutions' environment and medical equipment for persons with disabilities, thereby increasing the opportunities of persons with disabilities to receive quality medical (including dental) and rehabilitation services on an equal basis with other persons.

The Government needs to create a monitoring mechanism for healthcare institutions on the modification of the environment to meet the needs of people with disabilities and statistical data about progress should be publicly available.

Living independently in the community

It should be highlighted that social services in Lithuania are not aimed at the individual needs of people with disabilities, as required by Article 19 of the CRPD. However, the Eighteenth Lithuania Government programme⁴¹ declared the goal to introduce and set a new standard of social services. In order to reach that goal, the Government has an initiative to shift the delivery of social services from a one-size-fits-all to personalised services tailored to individual needs and groups of people, to increase availability of social services and introduce a quality standard for social services.

In March 2021, the Government adopted a plan to implement programme provisions.⁴² In this plan, new standard social services have 12 measures. Most of these measures are targeted in key social services regulation gaps (poor quality of services, limited availability, lack of inter-institutional cooperation etc.).

⁴⁰ UN CPRD implementation monitoring report 2020, <https://www.ndt.lt/wp-content/uploads/ZTSI-Stebešenos-Ataskaita-9.pdf>.

⁴¹ Approved by the Lithuanian Parliament Seimas on 11 December 2020.

⁴² Lithuanian Government information: <https://lrv.lt/en/relevant-information/eighteenth-government/plan-for-the-implementation-of-the-provisions-of-the-programme-of-the-eighteenth-government>.

The Government's commitment to shift the delivery of social services to personalised services links with the EU disability strategy goal 4.1. 'Developing independent living and reinforcing community-based services' because personalised social services strengthen the transition from institutional care to services providing support in the community, which is one of biggest EU disability strategy goals.

The Government's commitment to provide social services according to the individual person's requirements is also highlighted in the RRP (Chapter 9.2, Paragraph 7). The RRP notes that the Ministry of Social Security and Labour is implementing the project 'Creation for Lithuania of a unified model for the provision of personalised services to individuals belonging to specific vulnerable groups'⁴³ which has the goal to set guidelines for personalised social services. A Lithuanian National Anti-Poverty Network review in 2020 pointed out that:

'in terms of state aid, social services and adequate financial support are lacking the most: 57 % of organisations mentioned that one of the biggest problems is underdeveloped social services, 53 % of organisations singled out inadequate financial support.'⁴⁴

In order to increase the quality of social services from the beginning of 2022, only accredited social services can be provided. The requirements for accrediting staff, training and the premises needed to provide social care have been already approved. However, at the moment it is hard to predict if accreditation of social services will solve the underlying issue, namely the great lack of personalised services. No major changes in social policy are envisaged to shift the delivery of social services to personalised services.

The Government must accelerate transition delivery of social services from a one-size-fits-all to personalised services tailored to individual needs and groups of people. Public spending on social protection remains a relatively low priority, whereas increasing social sector funding should be the first priority.

⁴³ Ministry of Social Security and Labour information, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/veiklos-sritys/es-investicijos/sadm-igyvendinami-projektai>.

⁴⁴ Lithuania Poverty Watch 2020 Report, <https://www.eapn.eu/poverty-watch-lithuania-poverty-watches-overview-2020/>.

5 Disability, education and skills – analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies

In 2016 the UN CRPD Committee made the following recommendations to Lithuania:

[Article 24 UN CRPD](#) addresses Education.

‘46. The Committee recommends that the State party adopt and implement a coherent strategy on inclusive education in the mainstream educational system in accordance with article 24 of the Convention and with reference to Sustainable Development Goal 4, especially its targets 4.5 and 4.8. Through such a strategy, the State party should: (a) Ensure the accessibility of school environments, the provision of reasonable accommodation, accessible and adapted materials and curricula, and the compulsory pre-service and in-service training of all teachers on inclusive education; (b) Secure a sufficient number of accessible means of transport to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities; (c) Set clear timelines, targets, baselines and indicators to secure time-bound and measurable progress; (d) Allocate effective and adequate financial, material and adequately trained human resources.

47. The Committee recommends that the State party guarantee a legally enforceable right to inclusive, quality and free primary education and to affordable secondary education on an equal basis with others.

48. The Committee also recommends that the State party facilitate access for persons with disabilities to tertiary education and vocational training, including through the provision of reasonable accommodation in higher education.’

The most recent CRPD development is the 2016 Concluding Observations and the state’s submission in 2020.

5.1 Summary of the educational situation of persons with disabilities

The EU-SILC 2020 estimates concerning educational attainment should be treated with caution due to relatively wide confidence intervals but they consistently indicate disability equality gaps (an average of 2-3 years provides a more stable indication). Table 16 indicates early school leaving rates disaggregated by disability status in Lithuania. Youths with disabilities (aged 18-24) are significantly more likely to leave school than non-disabled peers of the same age groups (and this is reinforced by widening the sample size to aged 18-29). Table 17 shows completion rate of tertiary education disaggregated by disability and age group. Persons with disabilities (aged 30-34) are less likely to complete tertiary education than their peers (and this is reinforced in the wider age range 30-39).

The number of pupils with disabilities recorded during the period 2021-2022 in vocational schools increased quite significantly (26.79 %),⁴⁵ but in colleges and universities there was a decrease of 9.17 % and 31.86 % respectively during the period 2021-2022 (see Table E).

According to the Lithuanian Official Statistics data, the number of pupils with disabilities in mainstream classes is increasing every year and in 2022 made up 1.31 % of all pupils in mainstream education schools. Pupils with disabilities in special

⁴⁵ According to the data of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, in 2017, 31 out of 78 vocational schools (42 %) were adapted for persons with disabilities.

classes in mainstream schools make 0.35 % out of all pupils in mainstream education schools in 2022 and in special schools 1.12 % (see Table F). Moreover, the number of pupils with disabilities is increasing every year and in 2022 accounted for 2.78 % of the general number of pupils.

Order No.V-527 on the Approval of the Action Plan on the Inclusion of Children in Education and Multidimensional Education 2017-2022, adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science on 27 June 2017, set the goal to reduce the number of children in special schools from 0.8 % of all children in education to 0.6–0.5 % in 2020-2022. We can see from statistical data that during the 2021/22 school year, the number of pupils in special schools increased by 0.11 percentage points and it is still far from the stated goal. The number of pupils with disabilities attending special education or integrated in mainstream classes in schools is increasing every year (see Table F).

During the 2021/22 school year, there were significant changes in the number of pupils with special needs transported by yellow buses (see Table G).

Additionally, the share of children with special needs in preschool out of all children in preschool is quite stable and accounts for 18-20 % (see Table H). Children in special groups in preschool education make up 0.94 % of all children in preschool, which is a decrease of 0.2 percentage point from 2020. Statistical data indicates that the number of children with special needs is increasing every year by approximately 2 %. Please note that special educational need (SEN) classification of children is not necessarily synonymous with children with disabilities.

5.2 Analysis of education policies relevant to the Semester

For reference, see the 2022 National Reform Programme, the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Lithuania and the Action Plan for the Social Integration of the Disabled for 2021-2023.

One of the main RRP components is education. EUR 512 million (23 % of the whole EU 2021-2027 investment budget) is allocated to improving the education system. From the entire amount, EUR 311.5 million is directed at consolidating the school network, improving pre- and general education, vocational education and training, as well as adult learning. EUR 200.2 million is targeted at gearing the funding model of the higher education system towards a contract-based system; increasing students' admission standards; promoting research and internationalisation of universities; and setting higher qualitative standards for colleges and universities.⁴⁶ Disability equality is not mentioned specifically.

Quality and educational access for the entire life-cycle is the main objective of the majority of RRP measures related to education and is covered by four reforms (Component No. 4). From a disability perspective, it is important that all reforms promote inclusive education, throughout lifelong learning, and seek to raise the qualification of education specialists. Reforms also connect to Sustainable Development Goal 4 principles.

⁴⁶ Commission Staff Working Document Analysis of the recovery and resilience plan of Lithuania, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021SC0187&from=EN>.

On 1 September 2021, political parties represented in the Parliament, together with the Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania and the National Education Council, signed the Agreement on the new National Education Policy (2021-2030).⁴⁷ In this Agreement all parties agreed to take integrated action and provide for preschool education for all children and to develop by 2024 a single quality standard for general education accessible to all children.

One of the goals of the National Progress Plan 2021-2030 is directly related to disability in education and is called the 'Educational development programme'.⁴⁸ The main aim of this programme is to implement inclusive education and it is related to the principle of education, training and lifelong learning in the European Pillar of Social Rights.⁴⁹ The relevant progress indicator is to increase the share of children with disabilities in general education schools who are studying in an inclusive education model (from 48.9 % in 2020-2021 to 90 % in 2030). However, there is no monitoring mechanism for inclusive education in general schools. It is not clear how the share of children is calculated. In the Agreement, the Government is committed to piloting and rolling out inclusive education measures in five municipalities by the end of 2023.

On 31 June 2020, the Parliament adopted the amendment to the Law on Education⁵⁰ (which will come into force on 1 September 2024). The changes finally eliminated discriminatory provisions, which had allowed educational institutions not to accept children who need psychological, special pedagogical, special or social pedagogical assistance. This change is a step towards an inclusive education system and connects with the European Pillar of Social Rights principles on education.

On 14 October 2021, the Minister of Education, Science and Sports adopted order No. V-1879.⁵¹ The goal of this order was to approve the Action Plan for the Law on Education changes, which will come into force on 1 September 2024. In order to ensure inclusive education for every child from 2024 the action plan has five goals:

1. strengthen the readiness of schools to receive and educate children with various educational needs;
2. improve the organisation of educational assistance at national and regional level;
3. strengthen the training of pedagogues and educational support specialists and their competences in the field of inclusive education;
4. strengthen positive attitudes of school communities and society regarding inclusion in education; and
5. monitor the development of inclusion in education.

⁴⁷ Agreement on National Education Policy (2021-2030), <https://smsm.lrv.lt/en/legal-information/agreement-on-national-education-policy-2021-2030>.

⁴⁸ Report on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-04/nrp_2022_lithuania_annex_lt_0.pdf.

⁴⁹ The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en.

⁵⁰ Republic of Lithuania, Law on education, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/a396c630c07711eaae0db016672cba9c> (in Lithuanian).

⁵¹ Action plan for Law on Education changes, which will come into force on 1 September 2024, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/12f3fd202cb711ecad73e69048767e8c>.

Various measures are directed to achieve these goals. However, school environment accessibility is not singled out in this Action Plan or in the RRP. According to 2022 data, out of 1 163 schools, only 117 (less than 10 %) are fully accessible for children with a mobility impairment.⁵² In order to change this situation, on 28 January 2020 the Lithuanian Disability Forum, together with the Minister of Health, the Minister of Education, Science and Sport and the President of Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania, signed a memorandum in which all sides declared a commitment to fully adapt at least one healthcare and education institution every year.⁵³ However, a year later, parliamentary scrutiny revealed that the goals had not been achieved and the situation has not changed much since that date.⁵⁴ One of the reasons why breakthrough did not succeed in this area is regulation. There is no systematic regulation on how the school environment must be adapted for children with various disabilities. School environment adaption is an important factor in achieving inclusive education. By not ensuring school environment accessibility for various disabilities, Lithuania directly violates the provisions of the UN CRPD.

In order to prepare for greater inclusion of pupils with special educational needs during 2021, the Government allocated an additional EUR 3.7 million funding to municipalities for hiring teaching assistants. Additional funding allowed the number of assistants to increase from 2 696 (2021) to 3 415 (2022).⁵⁵ However, trends suggest that there will be a real shortage of psychological, social pedagogical, and special pedagogical assistance for children with special educational needs in the near future (Table I). In order to address this situation, special pedagogical assistance studies are included in the list of priority studies starting in 2022. Students on these courses will receive a bigger scholarship (almost EUR 300 per month), increased to EUR 500 if they sign contract with a municipality or a school and work there for at least three years after graduation.⁵⁶

⁵² According to data from the school accessibility questionnaire in Education Management Information System only three schools are fully accessible for children's with visual impairment, <http://svis.emokykla.lt/mokyklu-pritaikymo-neigaliesiems-anketos-duomenys/>.

⁵³ Lithuanian Disability Forum information, <https://www.lnf.lt/8385/>.

⁵⁴ Newspaper article about memorandum and public places accessibility for people with disabilities, 24 May 2021, <https://lsveikata.lt/aktualijos/pecius-sureme-keturios-istaigos-bet-problemos-nei-is-vietos-13678>.

⁵⁵ Ministry of Education, Science and Sport information, <https://smsm.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/mokytojo-padejeju-skaicius-mokyklose-isaugo-ketvirtadaliu>.

⁵⁶ Ministry of Education, Science and Sport information, <https://smsm.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/itraukusis-ugdymas-mokykloms-ir-vertybe-ir-issukis>.

Recommendations

Ensure the physical accessibility of schools for everyone. In order to achieve this goal all Government policy documents need reasonable adjustment in relation to inclusive education. The school environment must be adapted systematically, while taking into account various disabilities. In cooperation with NGOs the Government could prepare guidance on ways of designing and managing school buildings to improve the accessibility for students with disabilities.

Develop inclusion in education in all general schools, providing all children with disabilities with the necessary support to meet the individual needs of learning and education: psychological, special pedagogical, special or social pedagogical support. A monitoring mechanism for inclusive education in general schools must be created.

Create conditions for students who studied according to an individualised education programme to complete the secondary education programme without preventing their opportunities to continue studying in higher education. This could be done by modifying non-essential academic requirements (i.e. allowing a student to complete an exam orally rather than in writing or have additional time to complete exams).

6 Investment priorities in relation to disability

In the funding period 2021-2027, EU cohesion policy funds will support long-term development objectives in Lithuania by investing EUR 6.81 billion. The total budget of the new EU investment stage is almost EUR 8 billion. Investments in 2021-2027 will focus on the following key areas:

- innovation and digitisation, cooperation between science and business, commercialisation of knowledge;
- education, capacity building, a skilled workforce able to innovate and respond to changing needs while addressing the challenges of social exclusion;
- green transformation: promotion of renewable energy sources, sustainable mobility and circular economy;
- strengthening the resilience of health systems;
- smart, safe and intermodal connectivity, including the improvement of cross-border, national and regional mobility;
- sustainable and integrated urban and regional development, based on regional solutions to increase attractiveness and economic potential, to attract investments and to improve the quality of life.⁵⁷

It has been decided that 30 % of the programme funds will be targeted to the strengthening of human capital, solving the challenges of social inclusion and improving achievements in the fields of education, health, culture and ensuring high employment rates in the labour market.

On 9 March 2022, the Government approved the Programme for the European Union funds' investments in 2021-2027. In the programme the Government declares that EU fund investments will implement the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, taking into account its Action Plan and Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, although the investments are spread across all groups in society and aim to prevent any form of exclusion. The fourth Programme policy objective 'More socially responsible Lithuania' is directly relevant to disability. This objective will promote investments in people and systems in the fields of employment, education, health, social inclusion and cultural policies.

Lithuania will strongly promote social cohesion, with more than EUR 1.8 billion (corresponding to about 29 %) allocated to this objective. The funds will help implement the country-specific recommendations to Lithuania of 2020, in the context of the European Semester. These include recommendations on reducing poverty and income inequality by improving the design of the tax and benefit system and providing better access to good quality social and health services. These investments need to be targeted to address the key challenges identified in our report, such as the disability poverty gap and the lack of individualised social services available.

⁵⁷ Press release of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Lithuania, 9 March 2022, 'The Government Welcomes the Launch of the New EU Financial Perspective', <https://finmin.lrv.lt/en/news/the-government-welcomes-the-launch-of-the-new-eu-financial-perspective>.

Lithuania will also improve access to inclusive education services, especially for those most in need. It plans to use EU funds to continue the transition from institutional to community-based care services. The investments will allow more people to acquire labour market-relevant skills necessary for the digital and green transition.⁵⁸

However, the issues of poverty and social exclusion, inclusive education, and the disability employment gap have been key challenges for Lithuania's social policies for a long time. The measures that have been adopted up to today were insufficiently successful. The poverty of persons with disabilities remains a challenge that is still not effectively addressed in Lithuanian policy, even though the Government declares poverty reduction and education reform as its priority reforms. In order to support measures addressed to solve these problems, Lithuania relies heavily on EU funds support. From the priority areas identified so far for 2021-2027 we can conclude that social policy, impacting on people with disabilities, is not yet adequately targeted. There is a danger that, without well-targeted EU funds investment, people with disabilities in Lithuania will face even greater social exclusion.

Update from 2014-2020 EU investment period

Measure No. 08.4.1-ESFA-V-405 'Reorganisation of Institutionalised Care'

Implementation progress of the measure: the measure includes one project 'Development of environment for smooth transition from institutionalised care to the system of family – and community-based services in Lithuania', with the relevant agreement signed on 3 November 2015. The project is implemented by the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour together with the partner, the Department for the Affairs of Disabled under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. In stage 1, methodologies for the establishment of individual needs of persons of target groups residing in foster care institutions, guidelines on personalised plans, methodologies on motivation and assessment of skills of staff were developed, professionals on the training and consulting of guardians and foster parents were trained in dealing with relatives planning to take care of their loved ones, along with a number of training sessions intended for staff engaged in the field of reorganisation, as well as leaders of regions, municipalities and local communities, etc. From 2015 to 2020, in the course of the project, 34 032 staff of the social service system attended skills improvement activities, 6 619 people received social services, and 11 181 individual transition plans from institutional care to community-based services were prepared. However, the second institutional project phase started after a delay of two years, and we have not seen significant changes yet.

During 2020, after two years delay, Lithuania started its second institutional care system reorganisation project phase. Reorganisation includes six regions of Lithuania. In total, 11 social care institutions are reorganising themselves. However, during 2022 the project was still ongoing. There is now a big risk that due to delays Lithuania will

⁵⁸ European Commission press release 'Commission adopts EUR 6,4 billion Partnership Agreement with Lithuania for 2021-2027', 22 April 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2022/04/22-04-2022-commission-adopts-eur6-4-billion-partnership-agreement-with-lithuania-for-2021-2027#:~:text=Commission%20adopts%20%E2%82%AC6.4%20billion%20Partnership%20Agreement%20with%20Lithuania%20for%202021%2D2027.

lose financing from the European Structural Funds because the projects will not be implemented in due time.

According to the U.S. Department of State report on human rights practices in Lithuania: ‘deinstitutionalization has been slow in the country, with too little attention paid and inadequate funding devoted to the creation of independent living arrangements for individuals with disabilities.’⁵⁹

Project web link: <http://www.pertvarka.lt/> (in Lithuanian).

Projects related to the 2021-2027 EU investment period

The Ministry of Social Security and Labour started to implement the project ‘Preparation of the adequacy study of the minimum income system’ from July 2022. The purpose of the project is to comprehensively evaluate the minimum income system in Lithuania, identify directions for its improvement in order to reduce poverty and ensure more efficient use of funds, prepare a list of recommended measures and perform an assessment of the expected impact of these measures.

Project web link: <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/veiklos-sritys/es-investicijos/sadm-igyvendinami-projektai>.

⁵⁹ U.S. Department of State report ‘2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Lithuania’, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/lithuania/>.

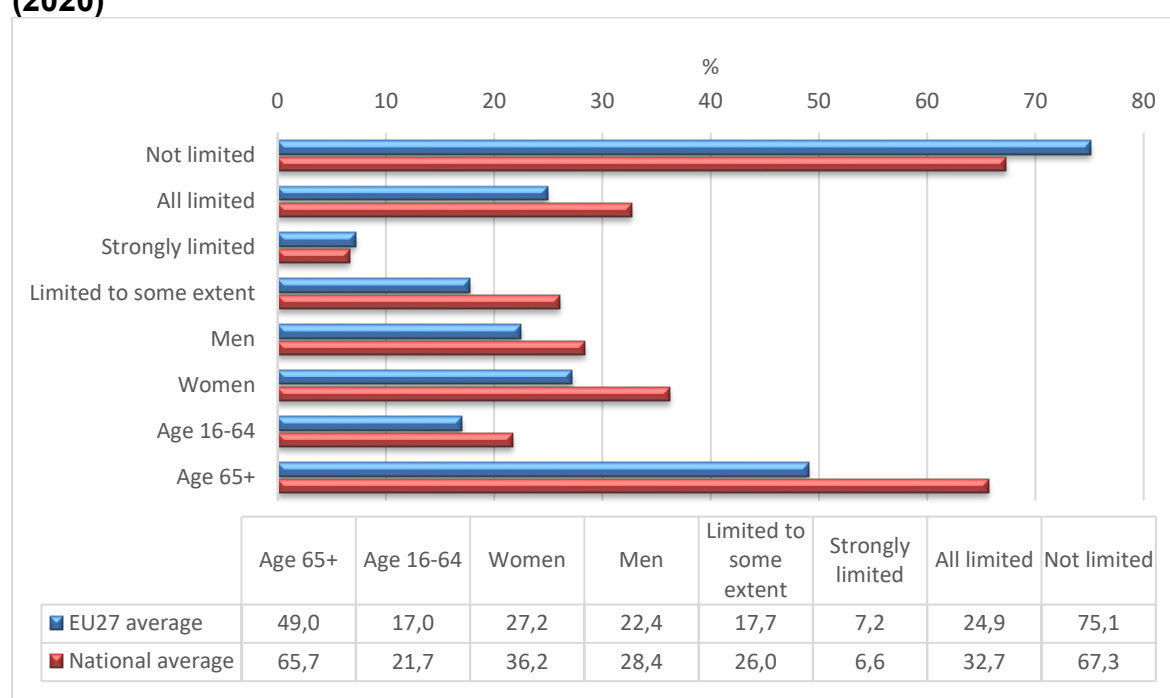
7 Annex: disability data relevant to the Semester

See also disability data published in the Eurostat database⁶⁰ and statistical reports.⁶¹

Unless specified, the summary statistics are drawn from the most recent EU-SILC data available to researchers from Eurostat. The EU-SILC sample includes people living in private households and does not include people living in institutions (congregative households). The sampling methods vary somewhat in each country.

The proxy used to identify people with disabilities (impairments) is whether ‘for at least the past 6 months’ the respondent reports that they have been ‘limited because of a health problem in activities people usually do’.⁶²

Table 1: Self-reported ‘activity limitations’ as a proxy for impairment / disability (2020)



Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022

In subsequent tables, these data are used to indicate ‘disability’ equality gaps and trends relevant to the analytical chapters – for the labour market, social policies and healthcare, and education – by comparing outcomes for persons who report and do not report ‘activity limitations’.⁶³ National estimates for Lithuania are compared with EU27 mean averages for the most recent year.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Eurostat Health Database: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

⁶¹ Eurostat (2019) Disability Statistics: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Disability_statistics.

⁶² The EU-SILC survey questions are contained in the Minimum European Health Module (MEHM), [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Special:WhatLinksHere/Glossary:Minimum_European_Health_Module_\(MEHM\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Special:WhatLinksHere/Glossary:Minimum_European_Health_Module_(MEHM)).

⁶³ This methodology was developed in the annual statistical reports of ANED, available at: <http://www.disability-europe.net/theme/statistical-indicators>.

⁶⁴ The exit of the United Kingdom from the EU changed the EU average. EU27 averages have also been affected by time series breaks in other large countries, such as Germany.

7.1 Data relevant to disability and the labour market

Table 2: EU and Lithuania employment rates, by disability and gender (aged 20-64) (2020)

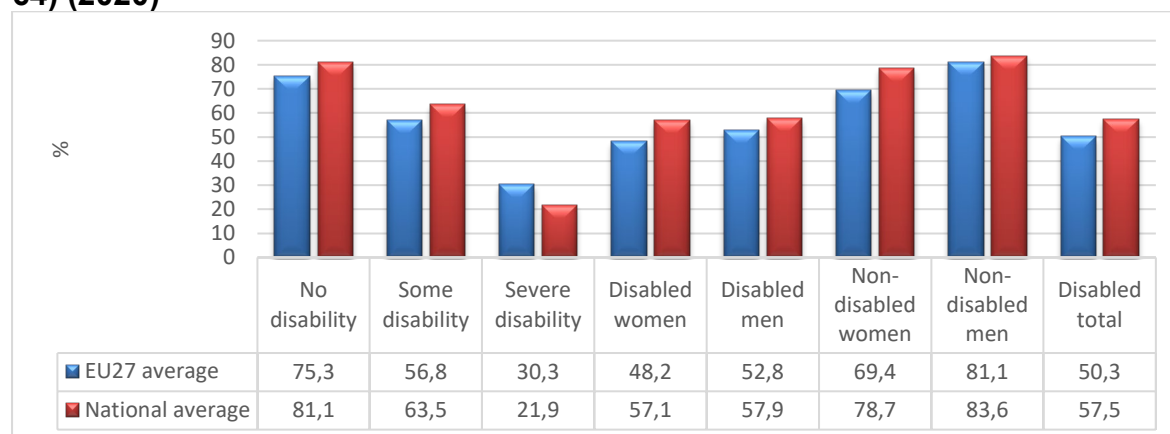


Table 3: Employment rates in Lithuania, by disability and age group (2020)

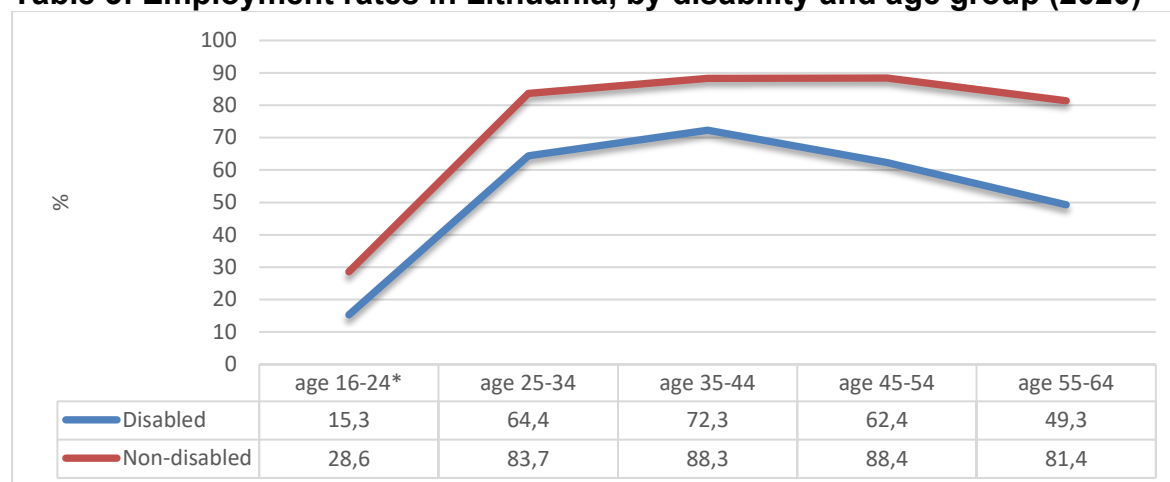
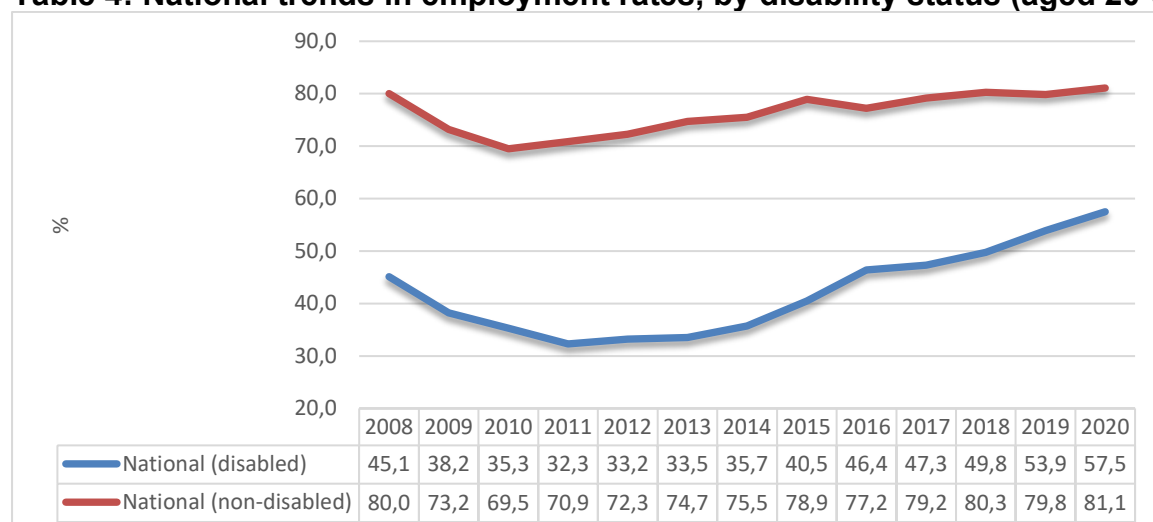


Table 4: National trends in employment rates, by disability status (aged 20-64)



Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022 (and preceding UDBs)

Note: Microdata concerning employment status was not available for Germany and Italy in this data release, which affects the EU27 average (which is therefore estimated).

7.1.1 Unemployment

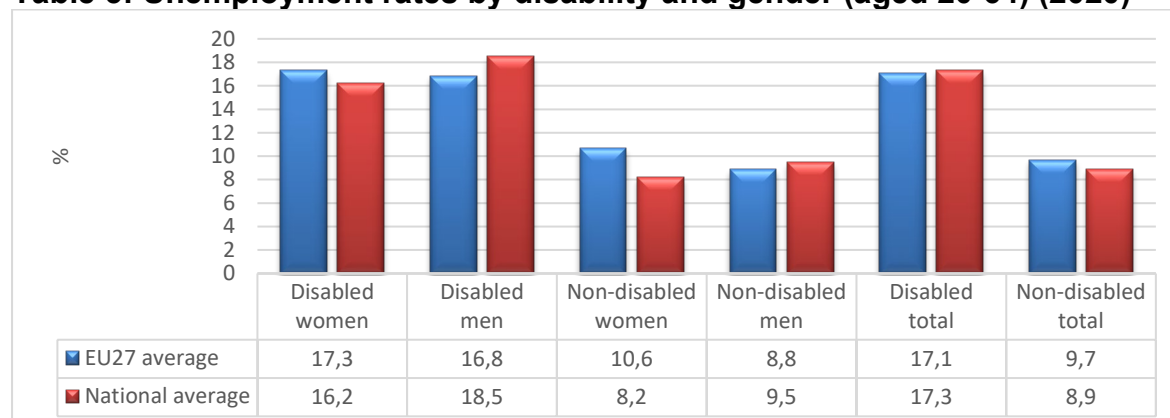
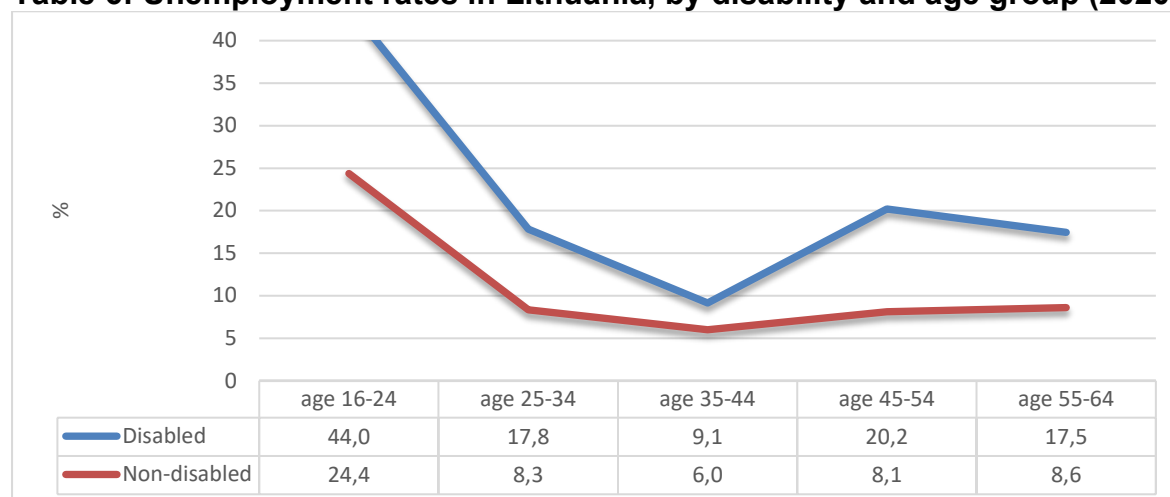
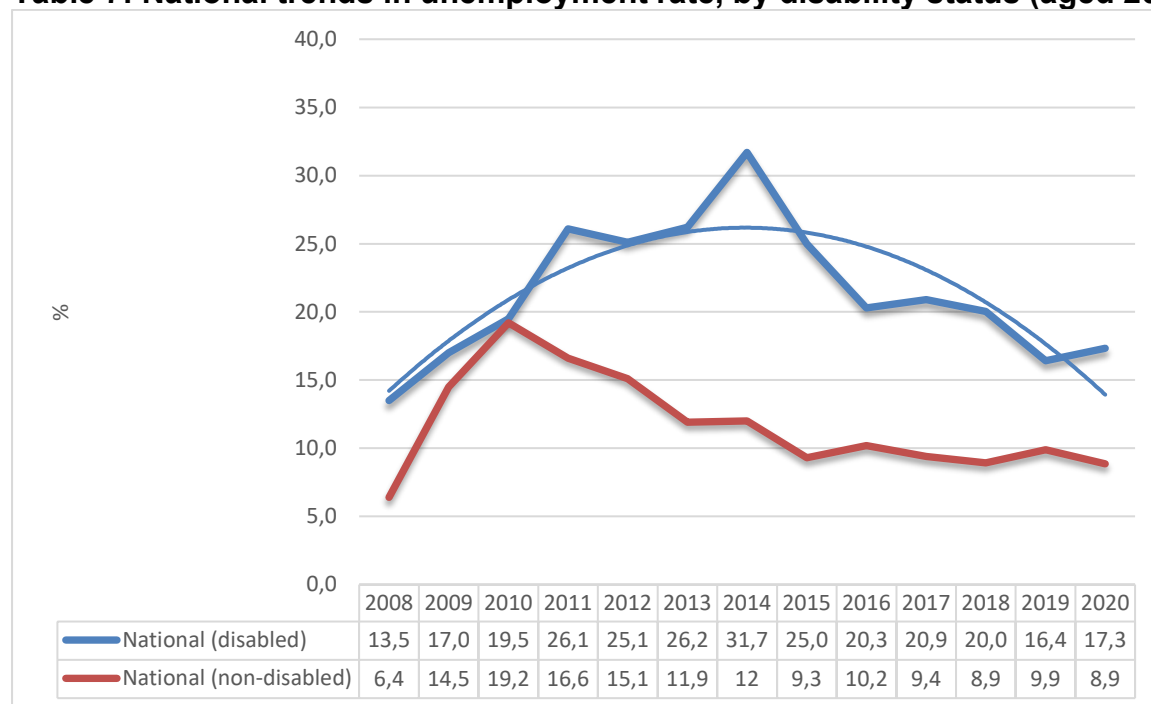
Table 5: Unemployment rates by disability and gender (aged 20-64) (2020)

Table 6: Unemployment rates in Lithuania, by disability and age group (2020)


Table 7: National trends in unemployment rate, by disability status (aged 20-64)


Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022 (and preceding UDBs)

7.1.2 Economic activity

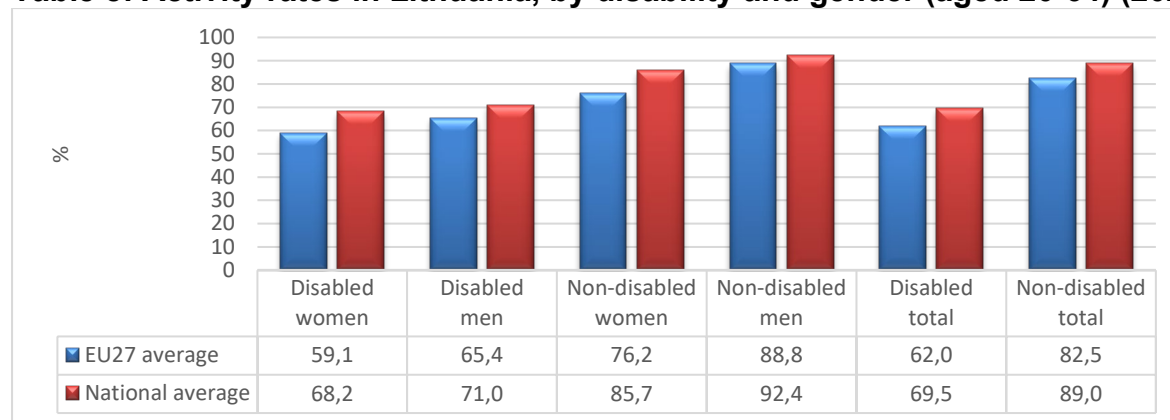
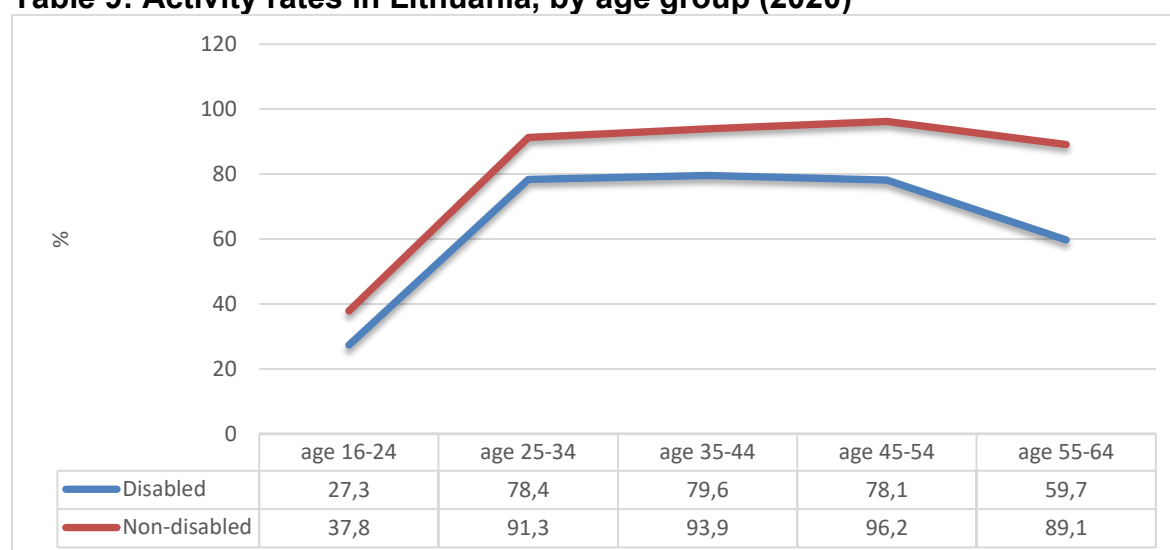
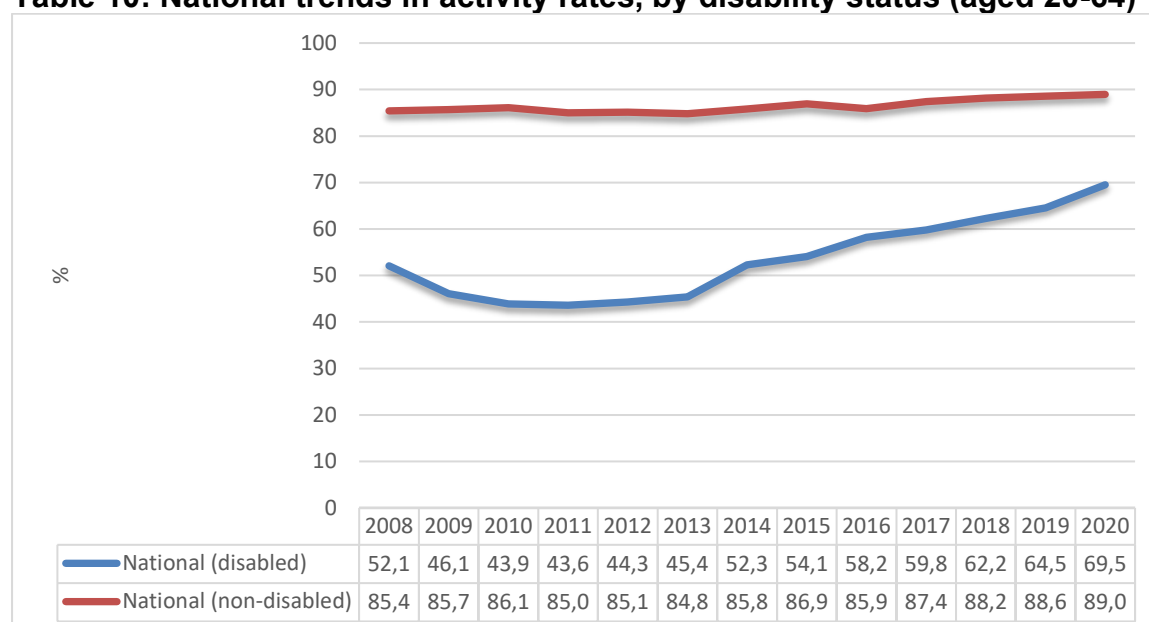
Table 8: Activity rates in Lithuania, by disability and gender (aged 20-64) (2020)


Table 9: Activity rates in Lithuania, by age group (2020)**Table 10: National trends in activity rates, by disability status (aged 20-64)**

Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022 (and preceding UDBs)

7.1.3 Alternative sources of labour market data in Lithuania

Disability data is not yet available from the core European Labour Force Survey but labour market indicators for Lithuania were disaggregated from ad hoc modules conducted in 2001 and 2011. These can be found in the Eurostat disability database.⁶⁵

Statistical data about people with disabilities in the labour market in Lithuania is limited. The main information is collected by the Department of Statistics and Department for the Affairs of Disabled under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. The main attention in such surveys is paid to the collection of statistical information that is relevant to the implementation of UN CRPD articles in Lithuania. Data is displayed by

⁶⁵ Eurostat Health Database: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

UN CRPD articles. General administrative data is available on the number of unemployed and employed persons with disabilities, the number of institutions providing professional rehabilitation services, and the number of people who finished professional rehabilitation programmes. There is a national Labour Force Survey but its attention to people with disabilities is limited.⁶⁶

In addition there is administrative data concerning persons assessed as having reduced work capacity and thereby registered with the public employment services.

Table A: Employment rate of people with disabilities

	2018	2019	2020	2021	January – June 2022
People with disabilities of working age	158,812	158,729	153,651	147,456	147,331
Working people with disabilities	47,770	45,675	43,817	42,918	41,742
Employment rate %	30,1	28,8	28,5	29,1	28,3

Source: Department for the Affairs of Disabled under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour

Note: Number of persons refers only to those assessed as having reduced working capacity.

Table B: People with disabilities working in Social Enterprises

	2018	2019	2020	2021	January – June 2022
Number of Social Enterprises	180	173	125	105	105
People with disabilities working in Social Enterprises	7,983	10,020	9,156	6,275	5,425
% of all working people with disabilities in Social Enterprises	16,7	21,9	20,9	14,6	13,0
Funding allocated for Social Enterprises support mill. EUR	31,3	32,8	23,7	15,4	8,2
Funding allocated to support the employment of the people with disabilities by implementing active labour market policy measures mill. EUR	4,6	5,7	5,0	8,4	3,5

Source: Employment Services under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour and Ministry of Health and Labour

⁶⁶ Statistics Lithuania <http://www.stat.gov.lt>, Department of Statistics and Department for the Affairs of Disabled under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour statistical data: <https://www.ndt.lt/statistiniai-rodikliai/> (in Lithuanian).

Table C: People with disabilities employed and ALMP participants

	2018	2019	2020	2021	January – June 2022
Persons with disabilities registered in Employment Services at the end of year	10,712	10,297	19,419	13,506	11,959
Persons with disabilities employed during the year	5,634	5,861	5,778	7,776	3,571
Participated in Active Labour Market Policy Measures	2,632	1,531	1,438	1,551	1,638

Source: Employment Services under Ministry of Social Security and Labour

The Department for Disability Affairs under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour provides numbers (frequencies instead of percentages) on unemployment of persons with disabilities (but not disaggregated by disability, age, or sex):

Table D: Number of persons who are in employment or registered with employment services

Years	Total number of persons with disabilities who are working age	Number of persons with disabilities who are working	Employment rate	Number of ALMP participants
2019	158,729	45,675	28,77 %	1,531
2018	158,812	47,770	30,07 %	2,362
2017	162,575	47,133	28,99 %	2,365

Years	Total number of persons with disabilities who are registered in Employment Services	Number of persons with disabilities who are employed during this year	Number of persons with disabilities who are employed during this year by percent	Funds have been allocated to support the employment of persons with disabilities, EUR
2018	11,018	4,583	41,6 %	4560000
2017	10,521	5,502	52,3 %	3016950
2016	11,380	5,700	50,1 %	4262800

Source: Department for the Affairs of Disabled under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour

Note: Number of persons here refers to those assessed with reduced work capacity.

7.2 EU data relevant to disability, social policies and healthcare (2020)

Table 11: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by disability and risk (aged 16-64)⁶⁷

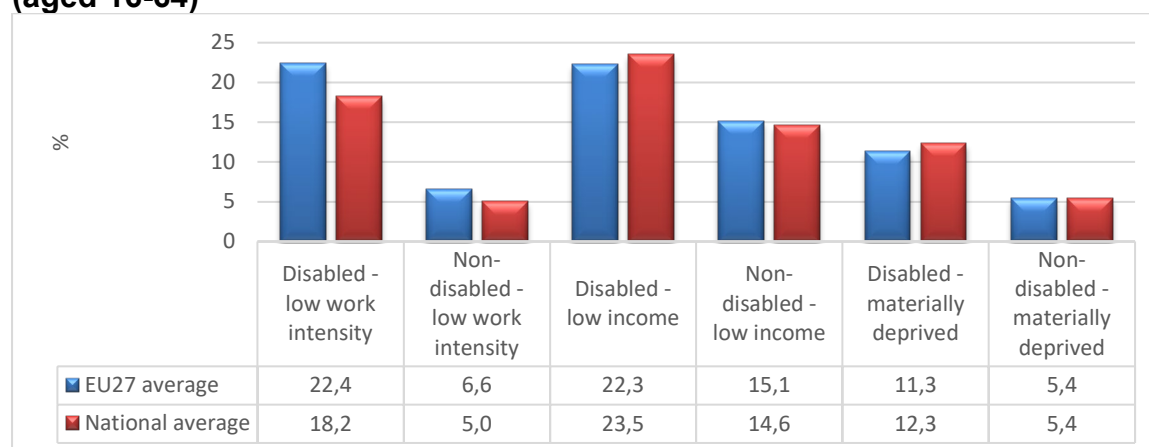


Table 12: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by disability and gender (aged 16+)

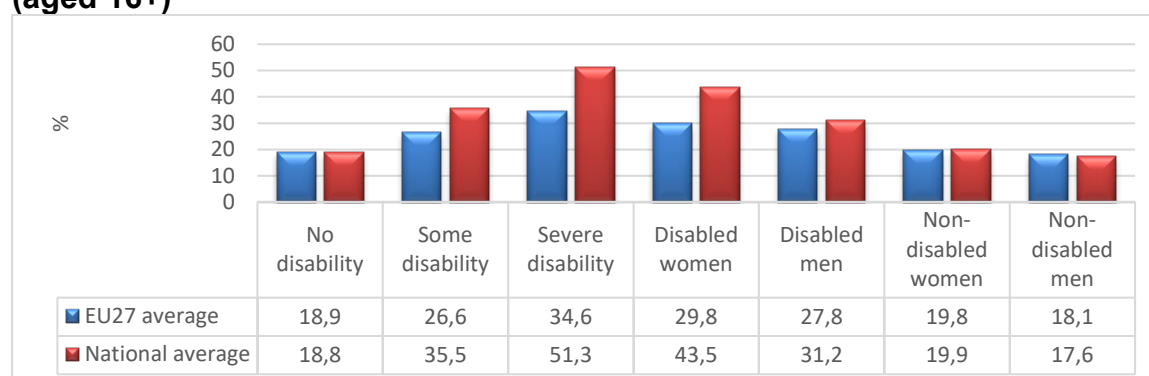
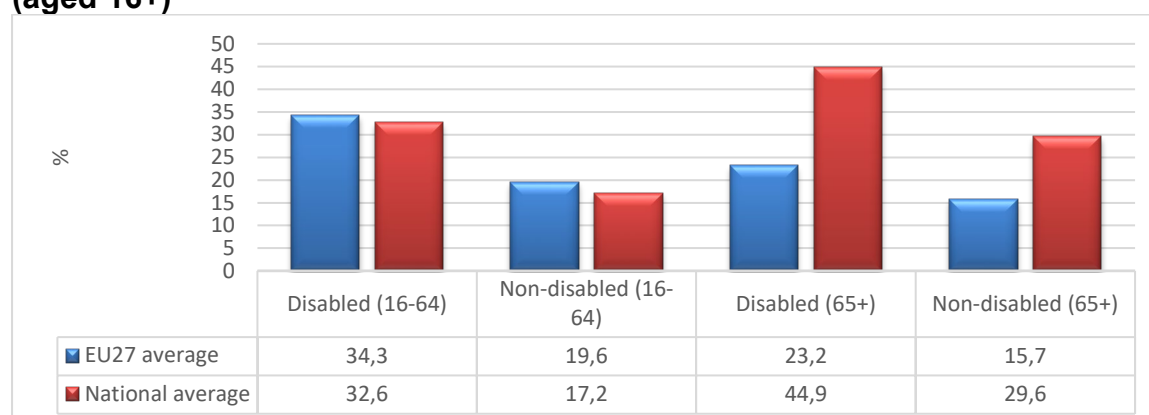
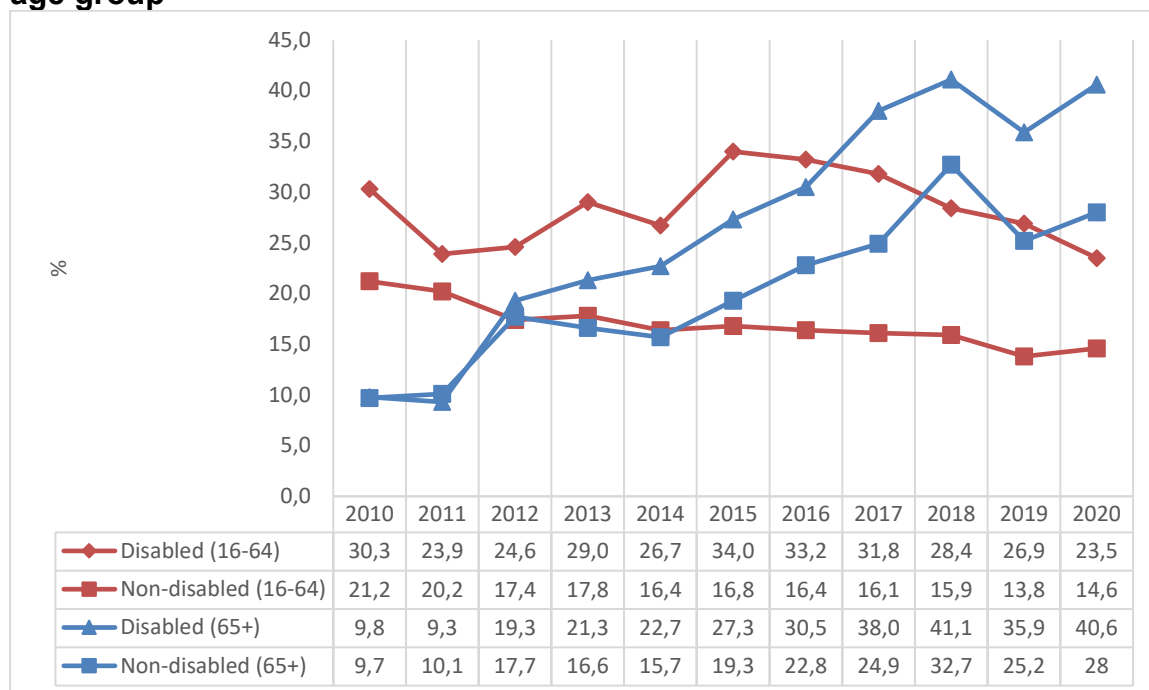


Table 13: Overall risk of household poverty or exclusion by disability and age (aged 16+)



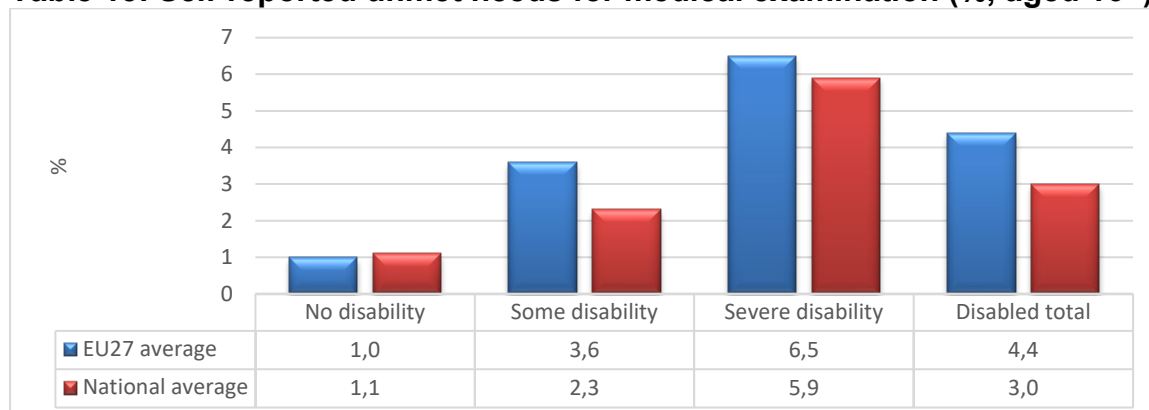
Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022 (and previous UDB)

⁶⁷ Aged 16-59 for Low work intensity.

Table 14: Trends in the risk of poverty after social transfers, by disability and age group


Source: Eurostat Health Database [[hlth_dpe020](#)] – People at risk of poverty

Note: This table shows national trends in financial poverty risk, rather than the general AROPE indicator (which is not as comparable between age groups due to the effect of paid employment); the survey does not distinguish 'activity limitation' for children under 16.

Table 15: Self-reported unmet needs for medical examination (% , aged 16+)


Source: Eurostat Health Database [[hlth_dh030](#)] – 'Too expensive or too far to travel or waiting list'

Note: EU mean averages are also skewed by high values in a minority of countries within disability groups but median averages for the total disability and no disability groups in 2020 are consistent with the 3-year mean values.

7.2.1 Alternative sources of poverty or healthcare data in Lithuania

The EU-SILC data provides a comprehensive and reliable source concerning poverty or social exclusion rates. In addition to the summary tables presented so far, the Eurostat disability database also contains breakdowns concerning disability and poverty before and after social transfers, as well as in-work poverty.⁶⁸

Generally, the Department of Statistics only collects information on the following topics:

- number of persons entitled to benefits;
- number of persons who received social services;
- places in care institutions.⁶⁹

The Department of Statistics and Department for the Affairs of Disabled under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour collect statistical information, which is reported annually in relation to the implementation of UN CRPD articles in Lithuania.⁷⁰

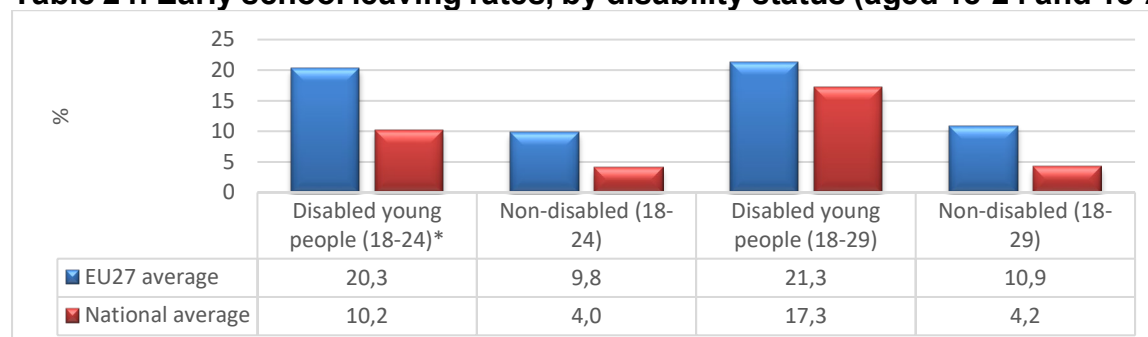
Table D: Number of places in care institutions for persons with disabilities

Years	2019	2020	2021
Places in social care institutions	5,959	5,727	5,567

Source: The Department for the Affairs of Disabled under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour

7.3 EU data relevant to disability and education

Table 24: Early school leaving rates, by disability status (aged 18-24 and 18-29)⁷¹

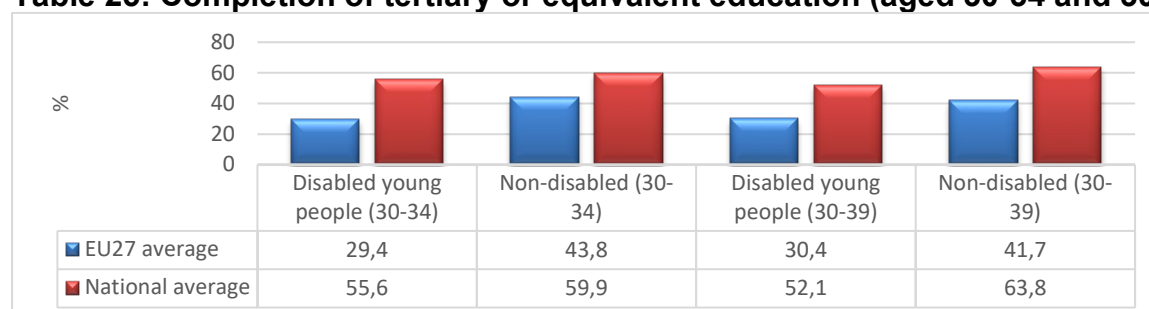


⁶⁸ Eurostat Health Database: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

⁶⁹ See: <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/statistiniu-rodikliu-analize#/>.

⁷⁰ See: <http://www.ndt.lt/statistiniai-rodikliai/>.

⁷¹ There was a change from ISCED 1997 to ISCED 2011 qualification definitions in 2014 although some Member States continued to use the older definition after this time.

Table 25: Completion of tertiary or equivalent education (aged 30-34 and 30-39)

Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022 (and preceding UDBs)

Note: Confidence intervals for the disability group are large and reliability low (due to the small sample size in the target age group). An average of several years may be needed to establish trends or to compare breakdowns by gender.

7.3.1 Alternative sources of education data in Lithuania

Disability data is not included in the core European Labour Force Survey but education and training indicators were disaggregated from ad hoc modules conducted in 2001 and 2011. These can be found in the Eurostat disability database.⁷² Similar caution is needed with this data.

Some administrative data is also provided in the European Agency's Statistics on Inclusive Education (EASIE), concerning the population of enrolled students identified with special educational needs in Lithuania.⁷³

Data from the Education Management Information System under the Ministry of Education and Science indicates the general number of children who left the education system early.⁷⁴ Information is not disaggregated by general criteria such as age, gender or disability.

Table E: Number of pupils and students with a disability in educational institutions

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Vocational school	1,283	1,085	1,034	1,311
College	141	108	120	109
University	279	244	295	201

Source: Lithuanian Official Statistics

Table F: Number of pupils in mainstream education schools with disabilities

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Attending special schools	3,409	3,347	3,298	3,685
Attending special classes in mainstream schools	979	1,010	1,093	1,162
Attending mainstream classes	3,870	4,036	4,105	4,336

⁷² Eurostat Health Database: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

⁷³ European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Statistics on Inclusive Education: <https://www.european-agency.org/data/data-tables-background-information>.

⁷⁴ See: <https://www.svis.smm.lt/bendrasis-ugdymas-2/> (in Lithuanian).

Total number of pupils with disabilities in mainstream / special schools	8,258	8,393	8,496	9,183
Total number of pupils in mainstream education schools	322,344	325,677	327,022	330,262
% of pupils in special schools compared to all pupils in mainstream schools	1.06	1.03	1.01	1.12

Source: Lithuanian Official Statistics

Table G: Number of pupils with special needs in mainstream education schools being transported by yellow buses to/from school

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Transported from home to school	5,624	5,620	5,319	5,887
Transported from school to home	6,109	6,078	5,767	6,340

Source: Lithuanian Official Statistics

Table H: Number of children with special needs participating in preschool education

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Attending special groups in preschools	1,338	1,245	1,180	1,162
Integrated in mainstream groups	22,784	21,734	23,123	23,604
Number of children with special needs in preschool education	24,122	22,979	24,303	24,766
Total number of children in preschool education	120,852	121,717	122,583	124,028
% of children in special groups compared to all children in preschool education	1.11	1.02	0.96	0,94

Source: Lithuanian Official Statistics

Table I: Number of speech therapists, special pedagogues and surdologist in general education schools

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Special pedagogues	456	447	433	449
Speech therapists	451	433	435	454
Surdologist	17	14	15	18

Source: Lithuanian official statistics⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Ministry of Social Security and Labour information – Lithuanian Official Statistics data: <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/statistiniu-rodikliu-analize?hash=b331cbcd-c8ae-4560-b695-f7380924efcc#/>.

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