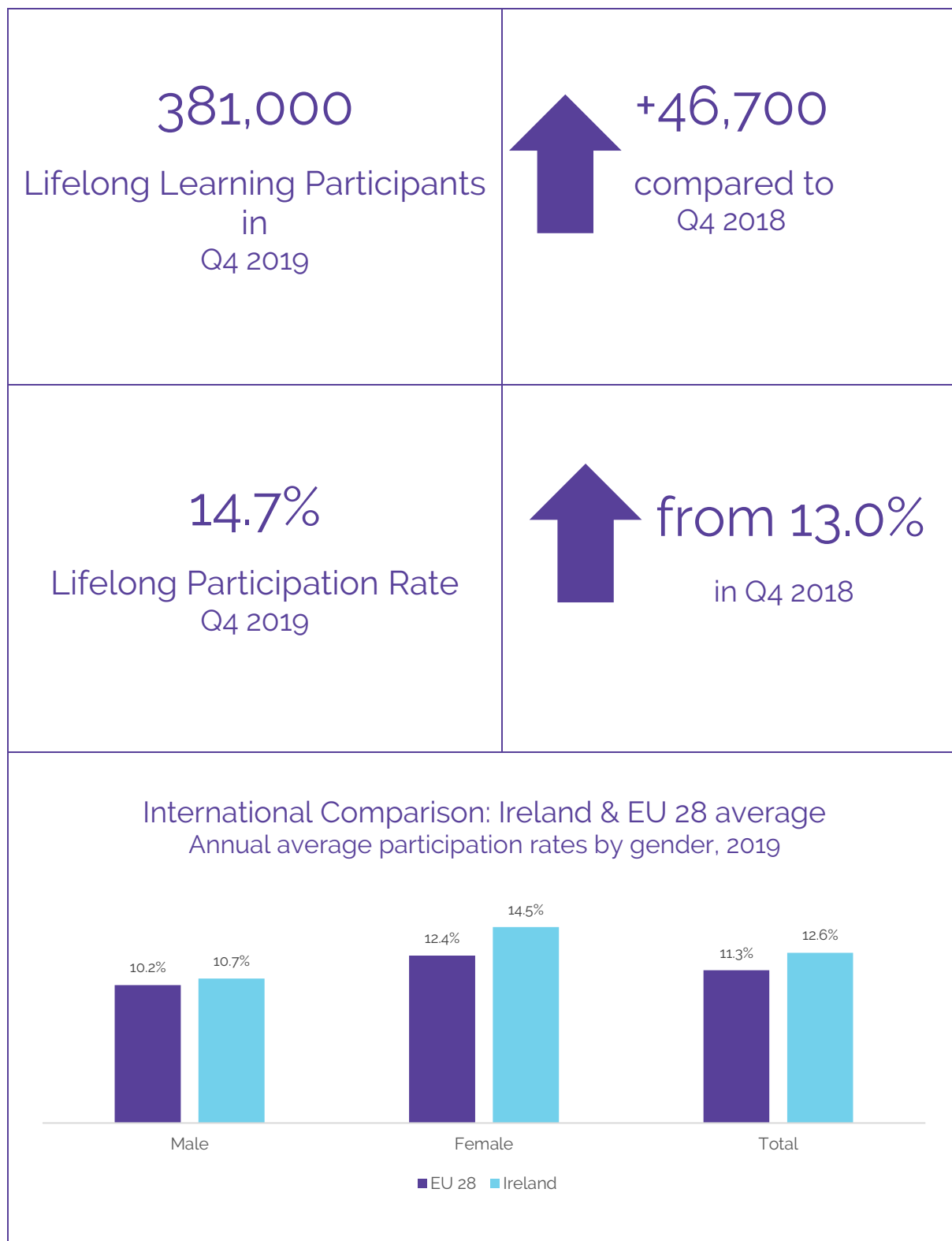


Lifelong Learning Among Adults in Quarter 4 2019

July 2020



Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (LFS) data

Eurostat report on lifelong learning rates as an average of the four quarters in any given year, whereas Ireland's targets for lifelong learning are set using quarter 4 data. As a result, when reporting for Ireland, we use quarter 4 data only; when comparing Ireland's performance with EU 28-average, we use the 2019 annual average data.

Introduction

Lifelong learning plays an important role in a range of policy areas, including well-being, active citizenship, health and employment, among others (Aontas¹). In particular, due of the rapid pace of change in the world of work, continued skills development amongst those in employment is seen as increasingly critical to aligning the skills of Ireland's workforce with the skills needs of the economy and ensuring that individuals remain employable in good quality, sustainable jobs.

This paper, produced by the Skills and Labour Market Unit in SOLAS on behalf of the National Skills Council, aims to monitor Ireland's progress in relation to the participation of adults in learning activities.

Data

This paper draws on a two separate but related data sources: lifelong learning data is based on an analysis of the CSO's Labour Force Survey (for Ireland) and Eurostat (the EU statistical agency) data for an EU comparison.

Measuring Lifelong Learning: in this paper, we use the EU measure of lifelong learning; this is based on the number of adults aged between 25-64 years who had participated in formal and/or non-formal learning activities in the four weeks prior to the survey. The measure excludes participation in informal learning activities. Lifelong learning, as used by Eurostat, is defined as follows:

Lifelong learning comprises formal, non-formal and informal education and training; however, statistics presented in the CSO's Labour Force Survey as well as in the Eurostat data do not cover informal learning and the data presented here refers to individuals aged 25-64 years who had engaged in formal and/or non-formal learning activities only.

Formal education corresponds to education and training in the regular system of schools, universities, colleges and other formal educational institutions that normally constitute a continuous 'ladder' of full-time education for children and young people.

Non-formal education and training is defined as any organised and sustained educational activities that do not correspond to the definition of formal education. It may or may not take place in educational institutions and cater to persons of all ages. It may cover educational programmes to impart adult literacy, basic education for out-of-school children, life skills, work skills and general culture

Timeframe: this paper reports on lifelong learning participation in Ireland in quarter 4 2019 and draws a comparison with quarter 4 2018. The EU's statistical agency (Eurostat), however, reports lifelong learning participation rates in terms of annual averages. Therefore, there will be differences between rates reported for Ireland when discussing quarterly data and those reported at EU level.

¹ <https://www.aontas.com/assets/resources/Lifelong%20Learning/Life%20Long%20Learning%20for%20All%20-%20Intro.pdf>

Who were Ireland's lifelong learning participants in Q4 2019?

As shown in Figure 1. of the 381,000 persons participating in lifelong learning (LLL) in Ireland in quarter 4 2019

- Over half (58%) were female
- Most (71%) were third level graduates; almost a quarter (23%) had either upper secondary or FET qualifications
- They tended to be in the younger age cohorts, with 25-34-year-olds and 35-44-year-olds making up the bulk of lifelong learning participants
- The majority were in employment, predominantly in full-time employment
- The type of learning LLL participants engage in depends on age: overall, non-formal learning participants outnumber formal learning participants by a factor of approximately two to one (69% vs 31%); however, the share of LLL participants who had undertaken formal learning tends to increase with age: more than four fifths of 55-64 year-old LLL participants had undertaken non-formal learning, compared to just over half of 25-34 year-olds.

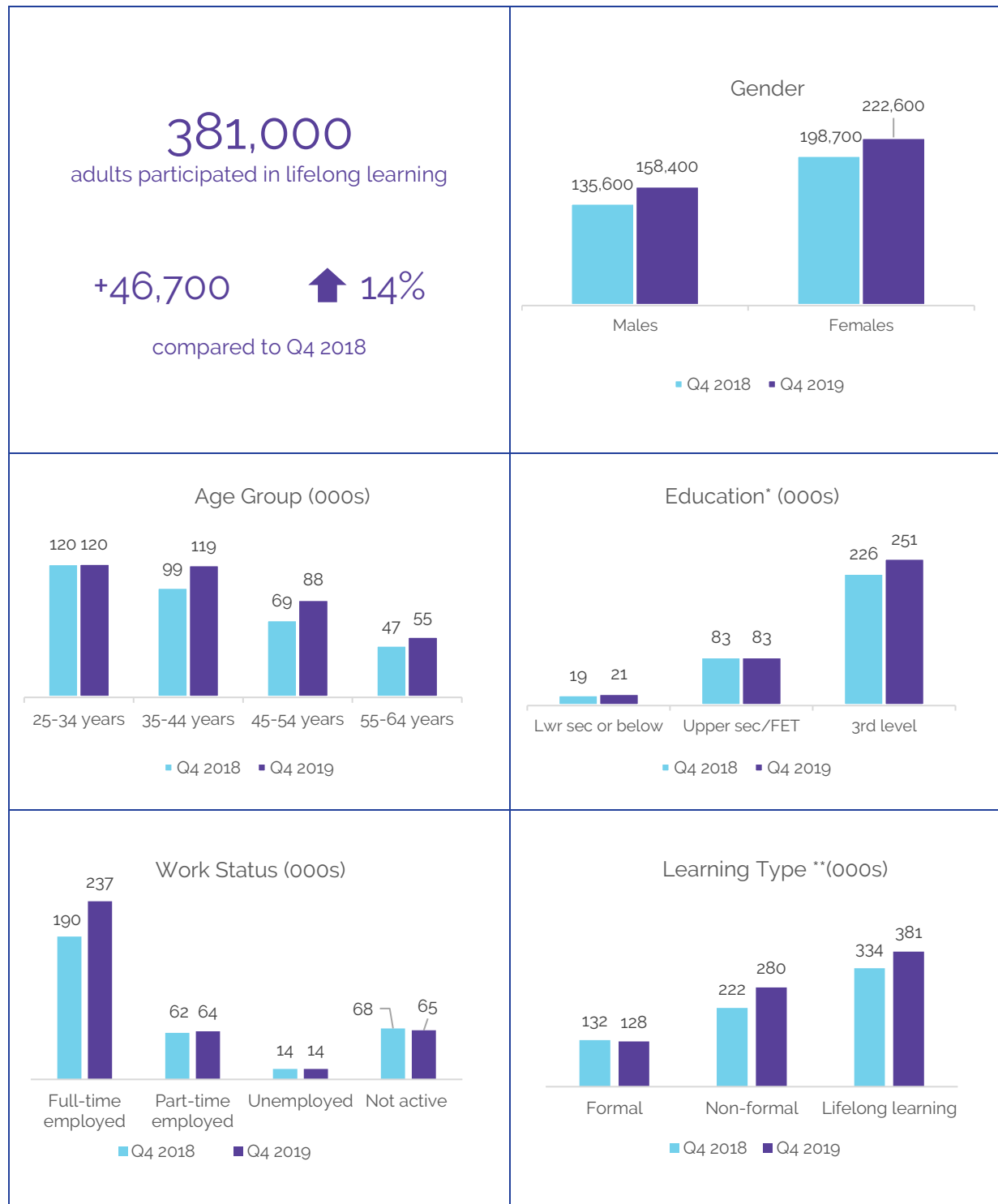
How does this compare to the preceding year?

- Between quarter 4 2018 and quarter 4 2019, there were **almost 47,000 additional persons** participating in lifelong learning, representing a 14% rise year-on-year.
- **Gender:** the increase, in absolute terms, was almost equally distributed between males and females, with the number of males and females growing by 22,800 and 23,900, respectively (amounting to a growth of 17% and 12% respectively in relative terms).
- **Age:** there were increases in the number of lifelong learning participants in all age groups, although the growth was just 200 additional persons for the youngest age cohort. In relative terms, growth was strongest for 45-54 year-olds where numbers grew by more than a quarter.
- **Education attainment:** by far the largest absolute increase occurred for third level qualification holders, where numbers increased by 25,600; however, at 13%, the strongest relative growth was for persons with, at most, lower secondary education (e.g. Junior Cert), although this amounted to fewer than 2,500 additional learners.
- **Work status:** the largest increase occurred for those in full-time employment, with the number of participants increasing by almost 40,000 persons
- **Learning type:** the number of non-formal learning participants rose by one fifth (almost 60,000 additional learners), which more than offset the 3% decline observed for formal learning.

The recent growth in the number of lifelong learning participants reflects the Government's increased focus on work-place learning (e.g. National Skills Strategy: DES). Greater engagement between employers and education providers, facilitated for example by the Regional Skills Fora, the development of new programmes aimed at vulnerable workers (e.g. Explore, Skills to Advance), and the expansion of existing programmes (SpringBoard+, Skillnets), have all undoubtedly contributed to the 14% rise in lifelong learning participants in Ireland.

Lifelong Learning Participants, Q4 2018-Q4-2019

Figure 1. Lifelong learners in Ireland by gender, age group, education attainment, work status & learning type



Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (LFS) data

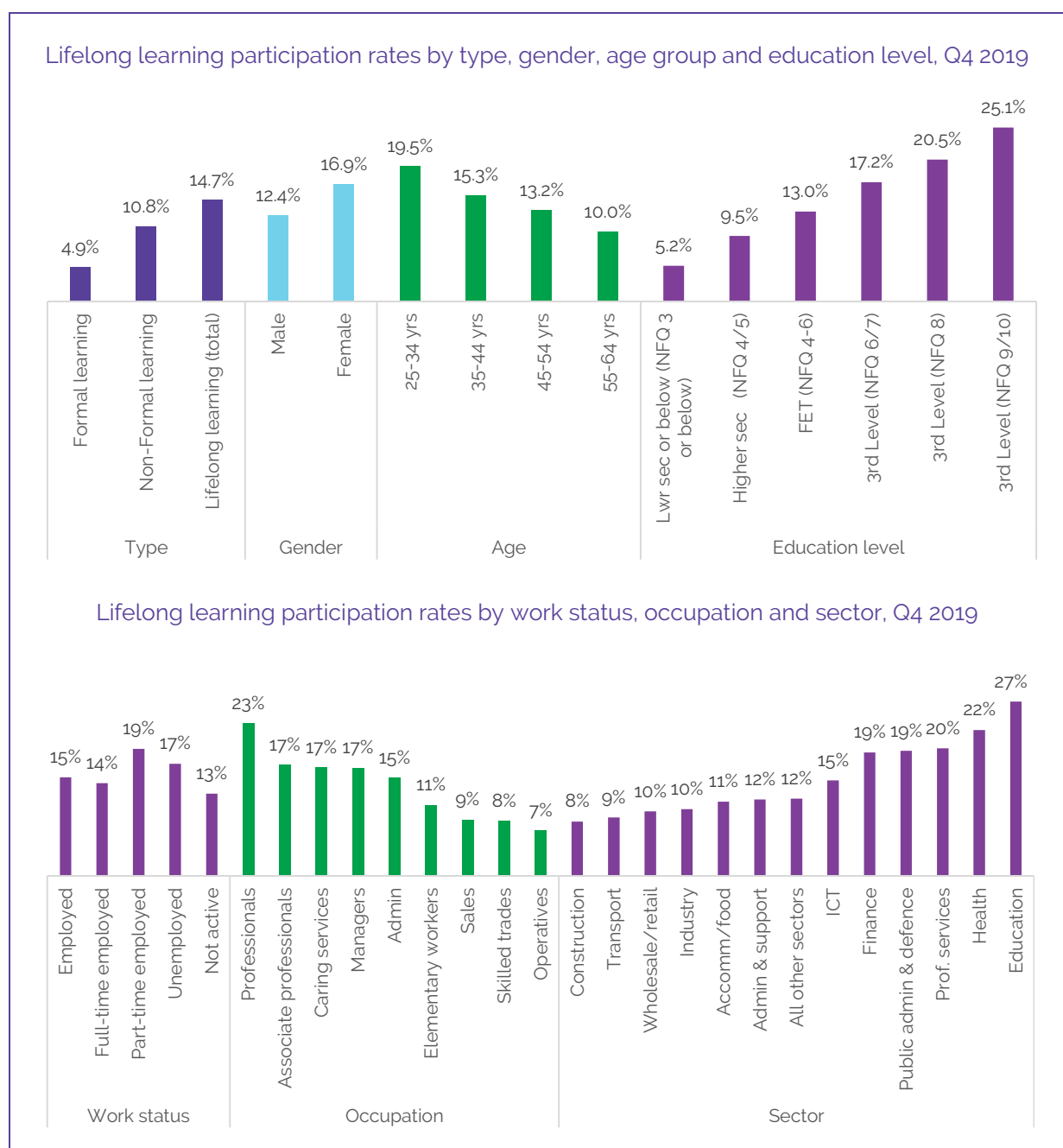
*Excludes not stated

** Some learners undertake both formal and non-formal learning, but they are counted only once in the data. As a result, the total number of lifelong learning participants is less than the sum of formal and non-formal learning.

Who was most likely to participate in lifelong learning?

- Participation in lifelong learning activities tended to **decline with age but increase with greater levels of education** attainment.
- **Gender:** Females were more likely than males to participate in lifelong learning, with a gap of over four percentage points
- **Work status:** those working part-time had the highest rate, and while the unemployed had the second highest rate, the number of unemployed are relatively small
- **Employed persons:** those in the education and health sectors or working in professional occupations had the highest participation rates (at 22% or higher); rates were lowest for those working in construction and transport or as operatives.

Figure 2. Lifelong learning participation rates in Ireland, quarter 4 2019

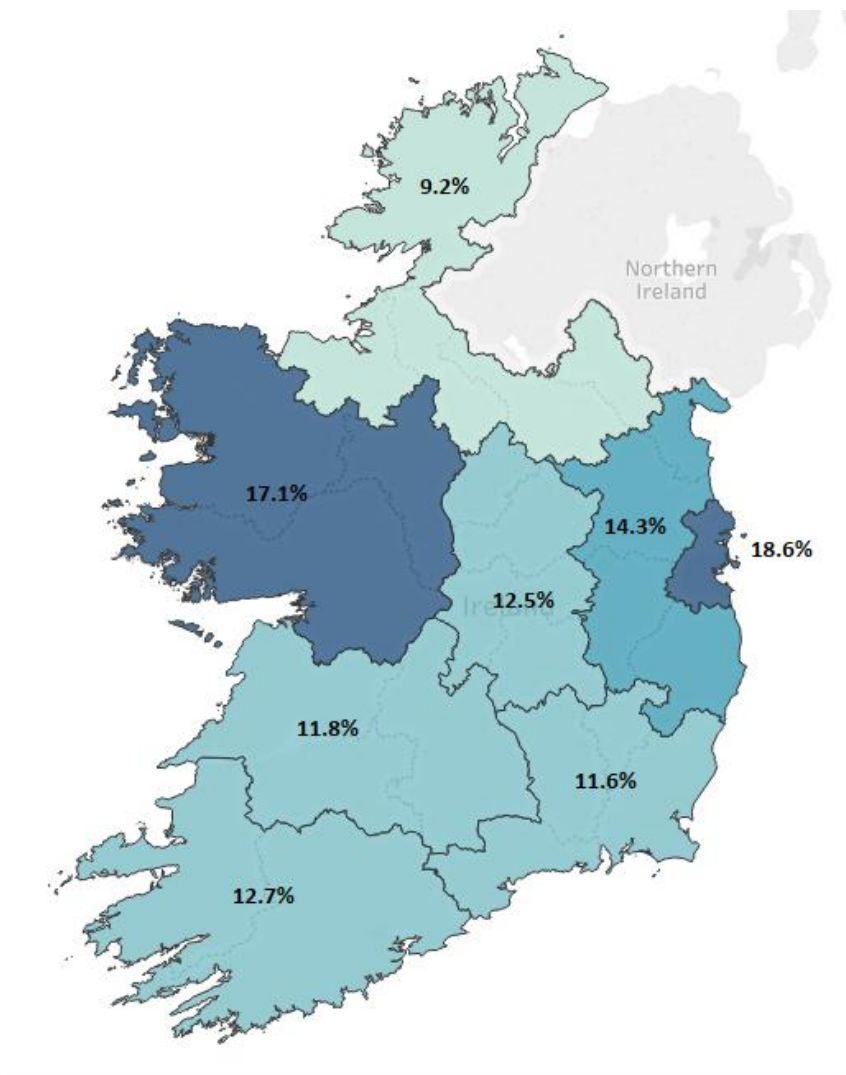


Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (LFS) data

Lifelong learning participation rates by region

- In quarter 4 2019, participation in lifelong learning activities was highest in the Dublin and West regions (18.6% and 17.1% respectively)
- Participation was lowest in the Border region at less than 10%
- When compared to the preceding year, the lifelong learning participation rate increased in each of the regions: the largest increase in participation rates occurred for the West region and the Midland region, which increased from 13% and 10% respectively.

Figure 3. Lifelong learning participation rates by region, quarter 4 2019



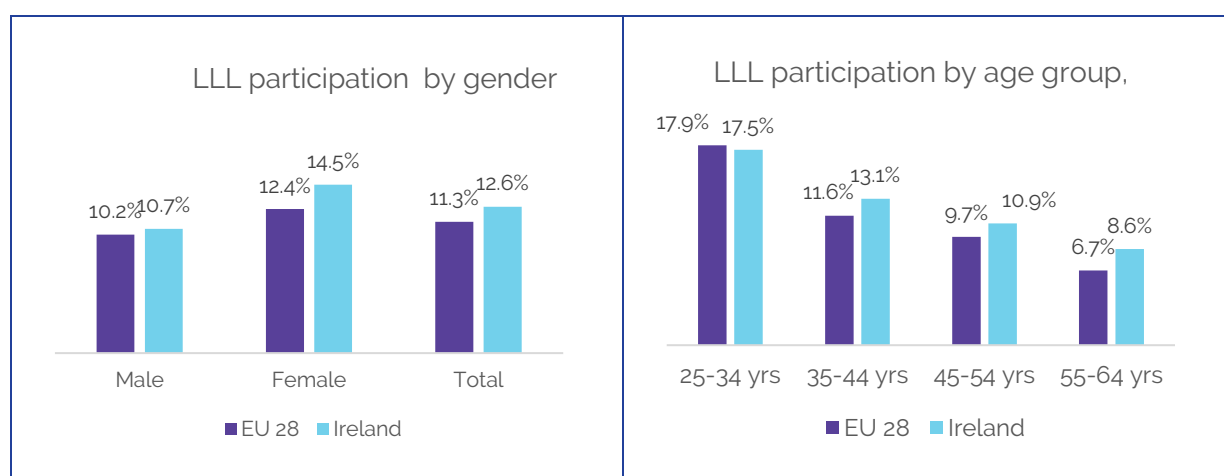
Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (LFS) data

EU Comparison: Ireland & EU 28 (annual average 2019)²

Although the lifelong learning rates for Ireland tended to be slightly higher than the EU 28 average, similar patterns were observed across most, although not all, variables (Figures 3 and 4).

- Females across both the EU 28 average and Ireland were more likely to participate in lifelong learning; however, **the gap between Ireland and the EU is wider for females** (2 percentage points.) than males (0,5 percentage points)
- The older the age cohort, the lower the participation rate; however, while the gap between Ireland and the EU is negligible for the youngest cohort, there is almost **a two percentage-point. gap for those in the oldest age cohort**
- In terms of education attainment, Ireland and the EU 28 average had broadly similar rates
- Occupation: Although the EU's rates were higher than those for Ireland for high skilled occupations (managers, professionals and associate professionals), **Ireland had higher participation rates for medium** (clerical, services & sales) **and low skilled occupations** (operatives etc). Data for elementary occupations was unavailable.
- Sector: The largest differences between Ireland and the EU were in the accommodation & food sector (where the lifelong learning participation rate was higher for Ireland) and the ICT, finance and health sectors, where the EU 28 average rate was higher (by at least 1.8 percentage points). All other differences were less than one percentage point
- Contrary to the case in Ireland, the highest rates across the EU 28 average are found amongst the employed. While **the largest gap between Ireland and the EU is for the unemployed (almost a 7 percentage-point gap)**, it should be borne in mind that the number of unemployed (and unemployed lifelong learning participants) in Ireland was particularly small in 2019.

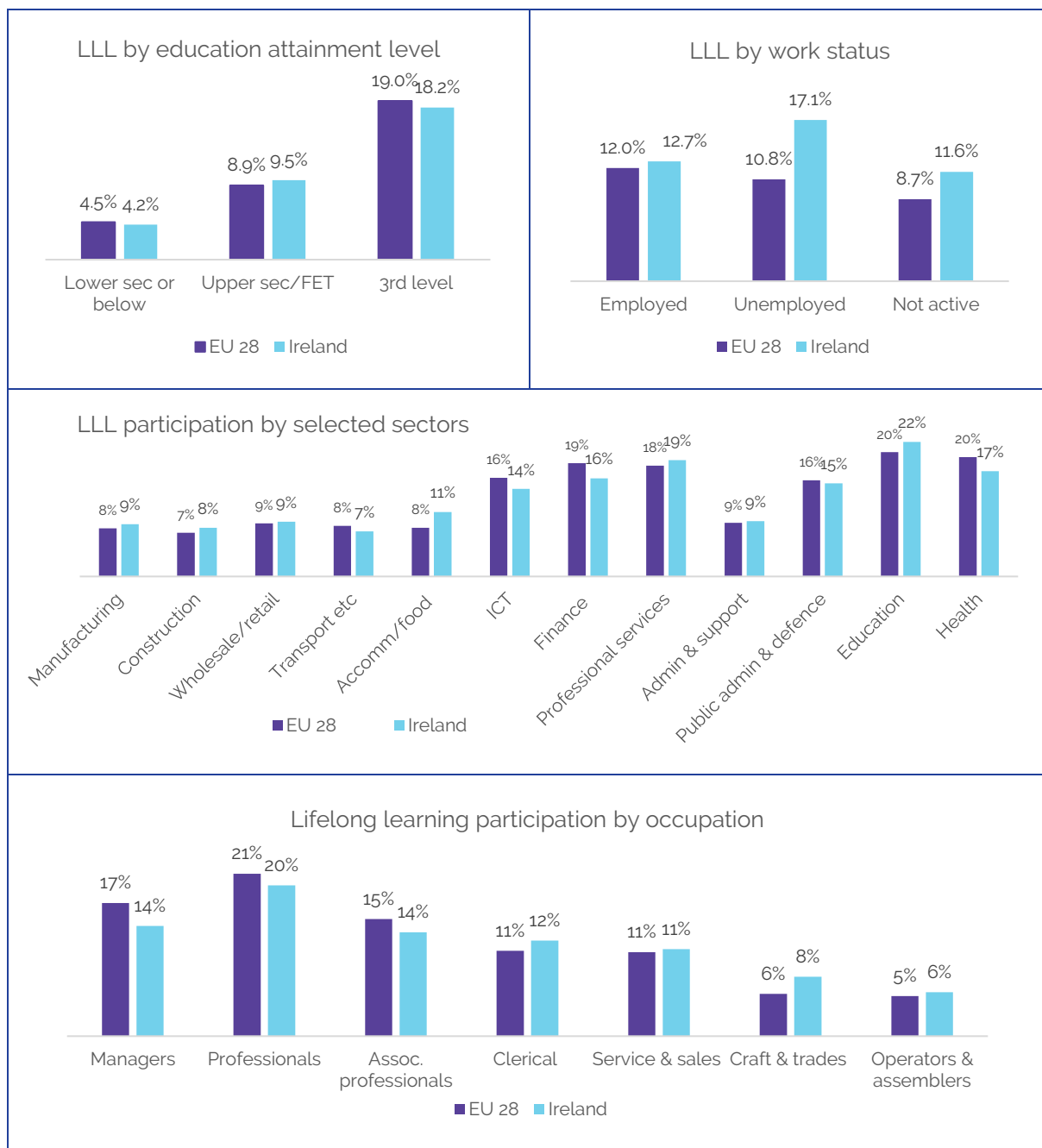
Figure 3. Participation rates in Ireland and the EU 28 average, by gender and age group, 2019



Source: Eurostat

² EU averages for 2019 include the UK reflecting the situation in the EU before the UK's exit on Jan 31st 2020.

Figure 4. Lifelong learning participation rates in Ireland and the EU 28 average, by education, work status, selected economic sector and occupational group, 2019



Source: Eurostat (Data downloaded 06.08.2020)

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