

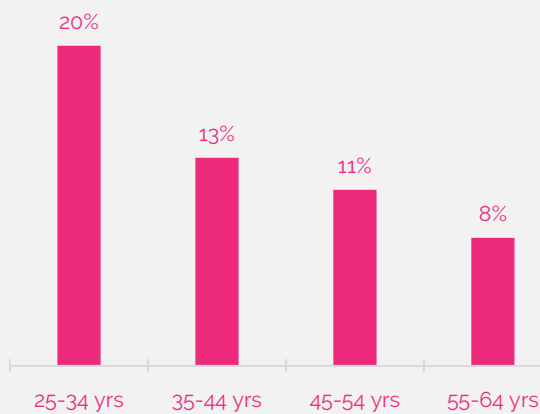
# Lifelong learning among adults in Ireland, Q4 2021

May 2022

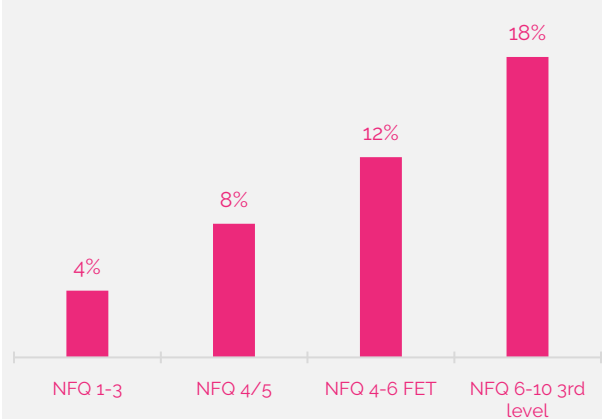
## 13%

The share of 25-64-year-old adults in Ireland who had participated in formal and/or non-formal learning activities in the preceding four weeks.

Lifelong learning rate by age group

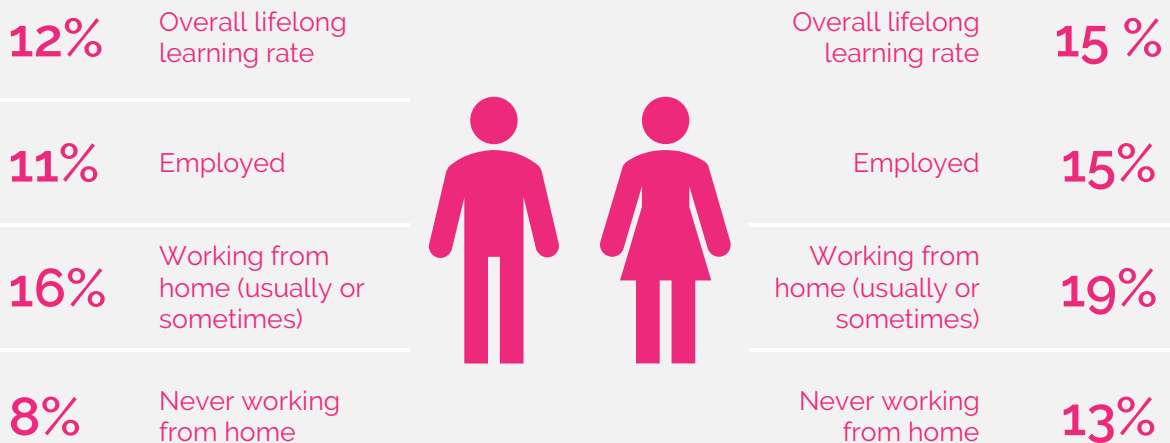


Lifelong learning rate by NQF level



The younger the age group and the higher the educational attainment, the greater the lifelong learning participation rate

Lifelong Learning Rates by Gender



## Introduction

This paper examines lifelong learning participation numbers and rates amongst adults in Ireland. While lifelong learning encompasses learning at all stages of life and includes all types of learning activities, measures of lifelong learning at national, EU, and international levels tend to focus on specific age cohorts and types of learning. The EU 2020 lifelong learning target (15%) and Ireland's National Skills Strategy target for 2020 (10%) were based on the number of 25-64-year-olds in learning activities in the preceding four weeks. Updated targets at EU level for the year 2030 aim to achieve a lifelong learning participation rate of 60%, based on engagement in lifelong learning activities within the previous 12 months instead of the previous four weeks. However, data for this new measure will be available from 2023 onwards only. Therefore, in this report (as in earlier SLMRU reports on lifelong learning), lifelong learning metrics are derived from the CSO's Labour Force Survey and are measured using the number of 25-64-year-olds who had engaged in formal and/or non-formal learning activities in the preceding four weeks<sup>1</sup>.

## Key message

In quarter 4 2021,

- approximately 343,000 adults had engaged in lifelong learning activities, translating into a lifelong learning participation rate of 13.1%
- although, when compared to quarter 4 2020, lifelong learning participant numbers and rates grew, they remain below their pre-pandemic levels (quarter 4 2019) when there were 381,000 lifelong learners corresponding to a rate of 14.7%
- of those participating in non-formal learning activities, more than one half did so for work-related reasons, although the share was higher for males (62%) than for females (49%)
- while participation rates had, in most cases, not yet recovered to their quarter 4 2019 levels, patterns in participation were similar to those observed in earlier years, with older and lower educated people participating less in lifelong learning; they comprised a smaller share of total lifelong learning participants and had lifelong learning participation rates that were considerably lower than their younger and better educated counterparts
- with 273,500 persons, the largest absolute number of lifelong learning participants was amongst the employed, reflecting the fact that most people aged between 25 and 64 years are in employment; this translates into a participation rate of 13% for employed persons
- of the 89,000 unemployed adults aged 25-64 years, 17,100 persons had participated in lifelong learning, giving a lifelong learning participation rate of 19% for the unemployed
- persons who worked mainly or sometimes from home had a higher lifelong learning participation rate (17%) compared to those who were employed but never worked from home (10%), with the rates for females being higher still at 19% and 13% respectively.

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<sup>1</sup> A new Integration European Social Statistics framework regulation came into force on 01 January 2021. The changes applied by the CSO to the LFS due to the implementation of IESS regulation had a minimal effect for most of the historic LFS series but they have resulted in some minor changes to the 2020 data. As a result, the quarter 4 2020 data reported here differs slightly to that reported in the 2021 edition of this report. The differences are small and do not affect overall patterns of participation observed in the data.

## Lifelong learning participants: who are they?

In quarter 4 2021, of the 2.6 million adults aged between 25 and 64 years, approximately 343,000 persons had engaged in lifelong learning activities in the preceding four weeks (Figure 1). Lifelong learning participant numbers declined considerably (by nearly 80,000 learners, or 21%) during the pandemic. While overall numbers grew again, by 40,500 (or 13%), between quarter 4 2020 and quarter 4 2021, the recovery was only partial, and the number of lifelong learners remained 10% lower in quarter 4 2021 relative to quarter 4 2019.

### Learning type:

- in quarter 4 2021, those who had engaged in non-formal learning activities outnumbered those in formal learning (Figure 1)
- contrary to a trend observed across most other variables in Figure 1, the number of adults who had engaged in **formal learning** activities grew over the period quarter 4 2019-quarter 4 2021 by 13,700 (+11%) learners; in contrast, while the number of **non-formal** learning participants grew (by nearly 30,000 persons, or 15%) between quarter 4 2020 and quarter 4 2021, they remained 19% lower than that observed in quarter 4 2019
- of those participating in **non-formal learning activities**, more than one half did so for work-related reasons; this translates into approximately 123,000 persons; males had a higher share participating for work-related reasons (62% vs 49% for females).

### Gender:

- as in earlier years, **females made up the greater share of participants**, accounting for 57% of all lifelong learners, or 195,000 persons, in quarter 4 2021
- while in absolute terms, the increase in lifelong learning participants between quarter 4 2020 and quarter 4 2021 was larger for females (there were 23,200 additional females compared to 17,200 additional males), it was not enough to compensate for the impact of the pandemic, which had been more severe for female lifelong learners (23% drop in numbers) than their male counterparts (18% fall); as a result, **the number of females** who were lifelong learners in quarter 4 2021 **was 12% lower than in quarter 4 2019** while the number of **male lifelong learners was just 7% lower**.

### Age group:

- lifelong learning **participants were concentrated in the younger cohorts**, with nearly two thirds, or 220,800 persons, aged less than 45 years in quarter 4 2021; approximately one fifth of 25-34-year-old participants stated that their main economic status was student
- during the pandemic (q4 2019-q4 2020), the number of participants in all age groups declined; subsequent growth was strongest for the youngest age group: between quarter 4 2020 and quarter 4 2021, **the number of 25-34 year-old learners grew by a fifth (or 20,000 persons), all but offsetting the fall** that occurred in the preceding year; for all other age groups, despite increasing between quarter 4 2020 and quarter 4 2021, numbers were lower in quarter 4 2021 relative to quarter 4 2019.

### NFQ level:

- with nearly 238,000 persons in quarter 4 2021, **the majority (70%) of lifelong learning participants held third level qualifications**, equivalent to NFQ levels 6-10
- compared to quarter 4 2019, the number of lifelong learning participants declined across each NFQ level group, and **the lower the NFQ level, the stronger, in relative terms, the fall**: the number of lifelong learning participants with qualifications at levels 1-3 fell by more than a third (35%), those with NFQ 4/5 (e.g. Leaving Cert) or NFQ 4-6 (FET) fell by 17% and 9% respectively, while those with NFQ 6-10 (3rd level) fell by just 5%.

**Figure 1.** Lifelong learning participants (000s)<sup>2</sup>, by type, gender, age group & NFQ level



Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (LFS) data

\*Excludes not stated

<sup>2</sup> A small number of learners had undertaken both formal and non-formal learning activities but are counted only once in the data; as a result, the total number of lifelong learning participants is slightly smaller than the sum of formal and non-formal learning participants.

## Employed lifelong learning participants: what do they do?

**Full & part-time employed learners:** in quarter 4 2021,

- four fifths of all lifelong learning participants (273,500 persons) were in either full- or part-time employment (Figure 2); of those in part-time employment, one fifth were students
- when compared to quarter 4 2019, there were 6% (or 14,900) fewer full-time employed and 20% (or 12,900) fewer part-time employed lifelong learners
- over the period quarter 4 2019-quarter 4 2021, **the fall in the number of employed female lifelong learning participants, at 11% (19,200 fewer learners), was greater than that for males which fell by 7%, amounting to 8,800 fewer learners.**

**Working from home:** in quarter 4 2021,

- approximately 145,000 (53%) of all employed lifelong learning participants worked either mainly or sometimes from home, nearly 42,000 more than in the same period in 2019 and 14,500 more than in quarter 4 2020; females outnumbered males in all working from home categories, but in terms of shares, male lifelong learning participants had a higher share working from home (mainly and sometimes), at 56%, compared to 50% for females.
- between quarter 4 2019 and quarter 4 2021, the number of lifelong learning participants who mainly worked from more than trebled (with 80,000 additional learners), reflecting the fact that there was an overall increase in the numbers who worked from home due to the pandemic.

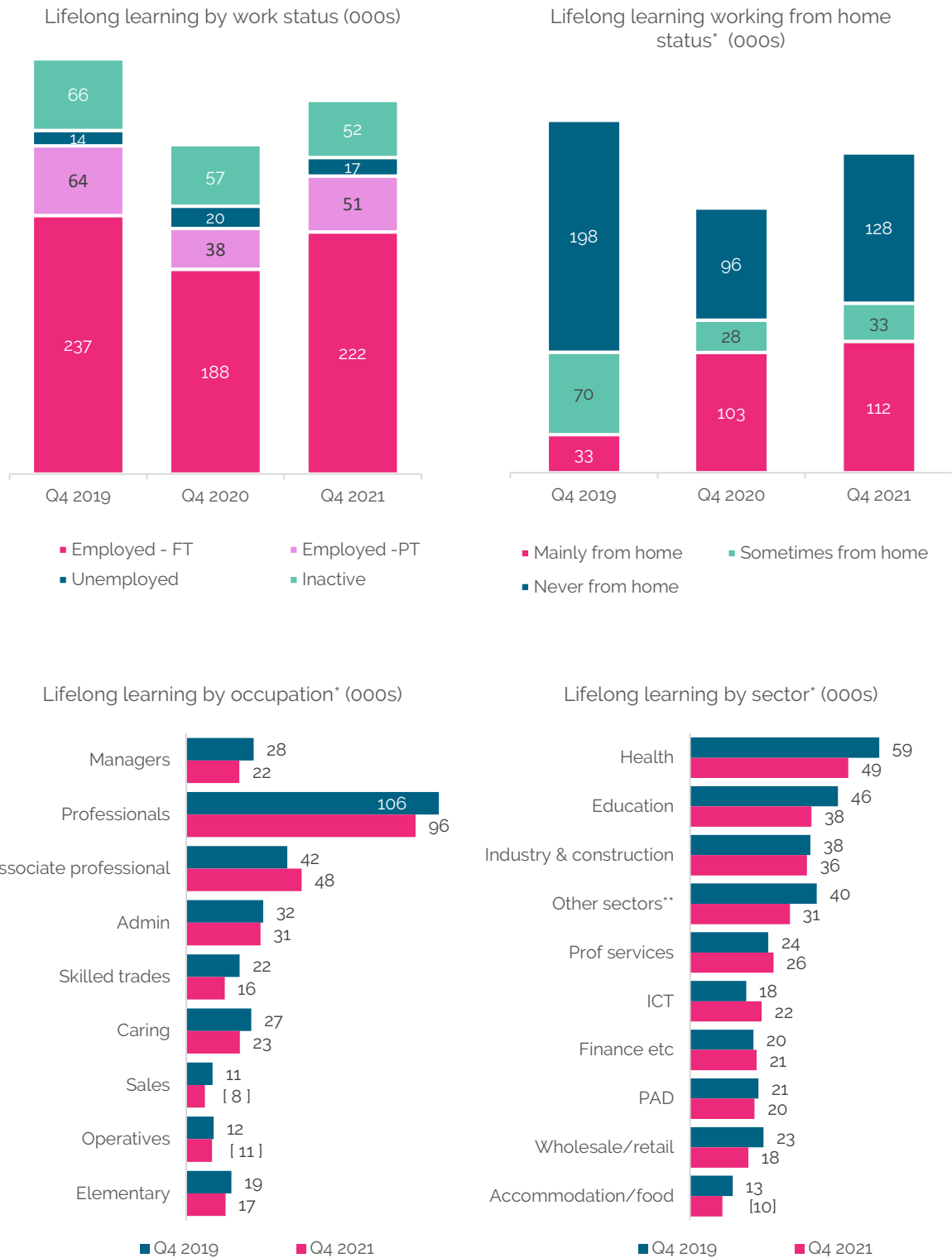
**Occupation:** in quarter 4 2021,

- more than one half of all lifelong learning participants were working in professional (96,100 persons) or associate professional (48,400 persons) occupations
- when compared to quarter 4 2019, associate professionals were the only occupation where the number of lifelong learners increased (by 6,000 persons).

**Sector:** in quarter 4 2021,

- with 49,300 and 37,800 persons respectively, the health and education sectors had the highest numbers of lifelong learning participants; combined, these two sectors accounted for approximately one third of all employed lifelong learners
- when compared to quarter 4 2019 (pre-pandemic), the number of lifelong learners declined for most sectors with the notable exceptions of professional services (+1,600 learners), ICT (+4,800 learners) and finance (+1,000 learners).

**Figure 2.** Lifelong learning participants by work status, working from home status, occupation and sector



Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (LFS) data

\*Excludes not stated

\*\*Other sectors comprise agriculture, transport, admin/support & other (NACE R-U)

[ ] numbers in square brackets are small and should be interpreted with caution

## Lifelong learning participation rates

Of the 2.65 million 25-64-year-olds in Ireland in quarter 4 2021, 342,800 had participated in lifelong learning activities in the preceding four weeks, translating into a **lifelong learning participation rate of 13.1%**, remaining below the pre-Covid level of 14.7% in quarter 4 2019. Approximately 5% had engaged in formal learning activities and 8% in non-formal learning.

### Gender:

- at 15% in quarter 4 2021, the lifelong learning participation rate for females was higher than for males (12%); while these rates are lower than those observed in quarter 4 2019 (17% and 13% respectively), they are higher than the quarter 4 2020 rates of 13% and 10%.

### Age group:

- at 8%, the lifelong participation rate among older persons (aged 55-64 years) was less than half that of the youngest cohort (20%)
- compared to quarter 4 2019, the lifelong learning participation rate fell for all age group except the youngest cohort (25-34-year-olds).

### NFQ level:

- while rates fell across all NFQ level groups during the pandemic, the pattern of greater participation with higher educational attainment, observed in earlier years, remained
- when compared to quarter 4 2019, the largest drop, in terms of percentage points, was for those with third level qualifications

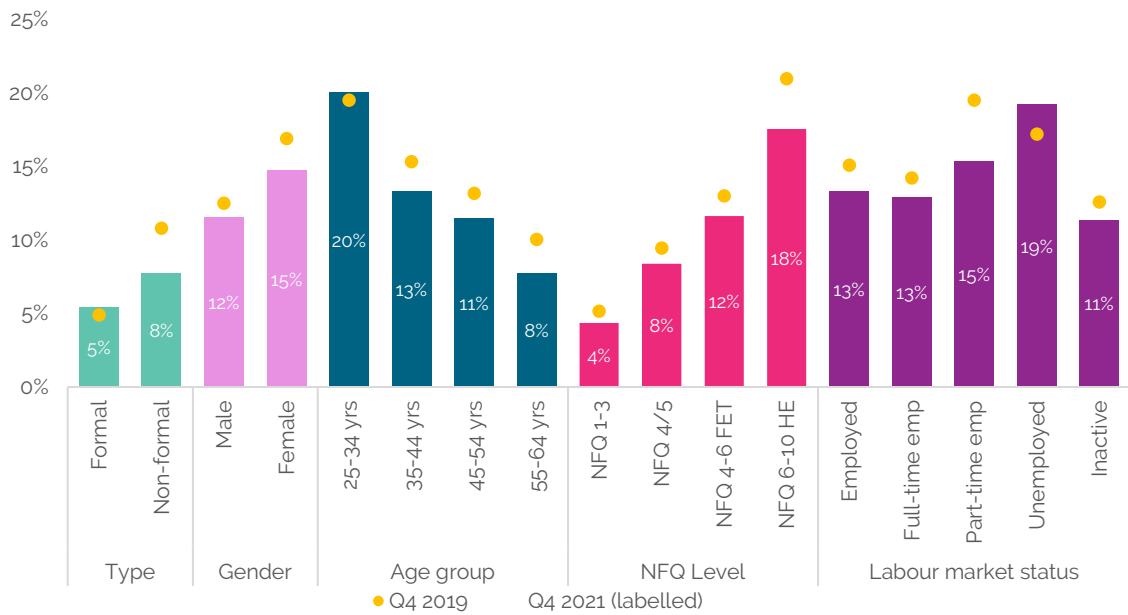
### Labour market status: in quarter 4 2021.

- at 19.2%, unemployed adults had the highest lifelong learning participation rate, although as shown earlier in Figure 1, they represent a relatively small number of persons
- unlike the employed and economically inactive, the participation rate for the unemployed grew (by two percentage points) between quarter 4 2019 and quarter 4 2021,
- over the same period, there was a sharp fall in the lifelong learning participation rate for the part-time employed (from nearly 20% to 15%) and a smaller decline for the full-time employed (from 14% to 13%) and economically inactive (from 13% to 11%)
- full-time employed persons had higher participation rates in non-formal learning activities compared to formal learning whereas the reverse was the case for those economically inactive

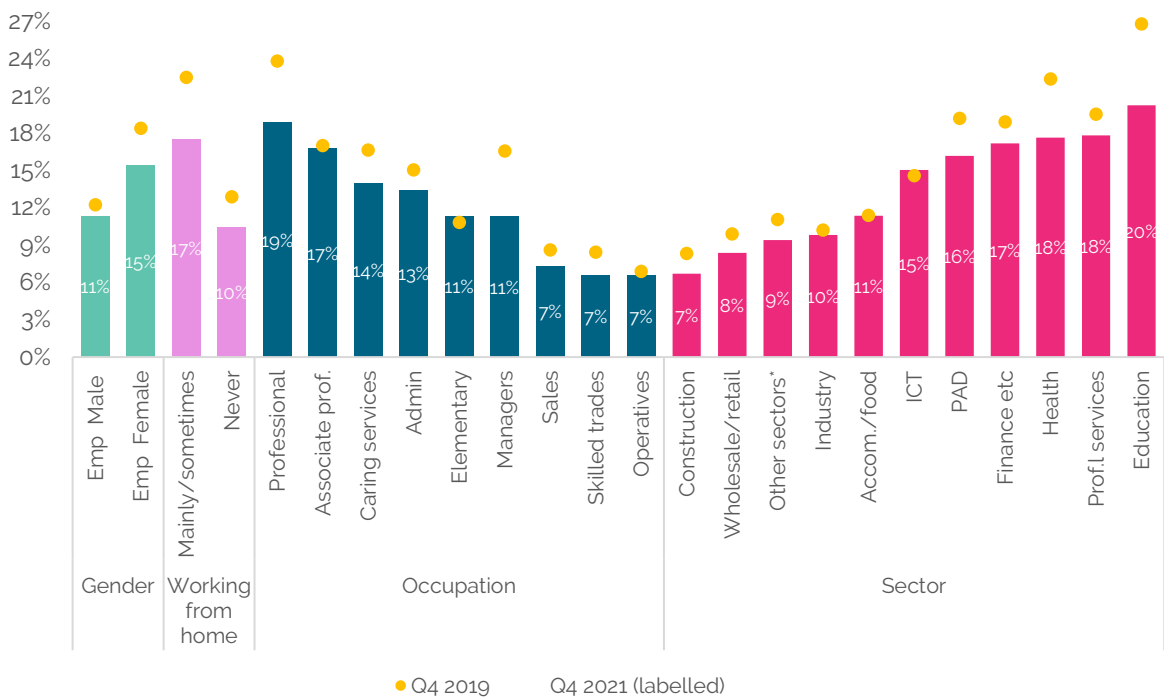
### Employed lifelong learners:

- amongst the employed, the highest participation rates were for persons working in the health, professional services and education **sectors** with rates of 18% or higher; participation rates were also above average for those working in professional, associate professional, caring/personal service, and administrative **occupations**
- those working from home had higher lifelong learning participation rates compared to those who never worked from home; in both categories female participation rates were higher, at 19% for those who worked sometimes or mainly from home and 13% for those who never worked from home (compared to males with 16% and 8% respectively).

**Figure 3.** Lifelong learning rates: employed persons by type, gender, age, Nfq and labour market status



**Figure 4.** Lifelong learning rates amongst employed persons by gender, working from home status, occupation & sector



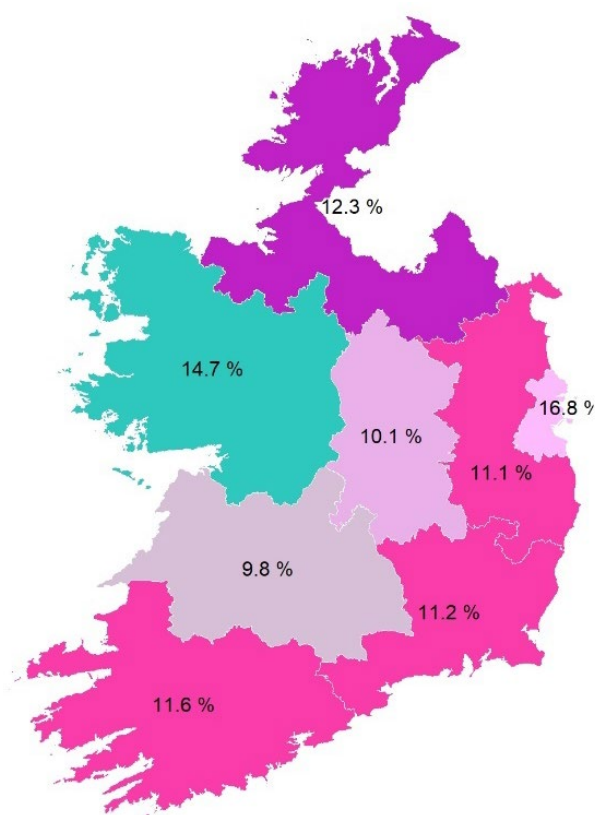
Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (LFS) data; \*\*Other sectors comprise agriculture, transport, admin/support & other (NACE R-U)



## Regional lifelong learning rates

- With 132,700 lifelong learning participants, the Dublin region had the highest lifelong learning participation rate at 16.8%, well above the national average of 13.1%; this was followed by the West region (14.7%) and the Border region (11.2%)
- The lowest lifelong learning rates were for the Mid-West and Midland regions, where approximately 10% of the relevant cohorts had participated in lifelong learning activities
- Once Dublin is excluded from the analysis, the average lifelong learning participation rate across the remaining seven regions was 12%
- It should be borne in mind that due to the small numbers involved, small changes in lifelong learning participant numbers can have comparatively large fluctuations in the rates year-on-year.

**Figure 5.** Lifelong learning participation rates by region, quarter 4 2021



Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (LFS) data

For further information, please contact [nora.condon@solas.ie](mailto:nora.condon@solas.ie) or [slmru@solas.ie](mailto:slmru@solas.ie)  
Skills and Labour Market Research Unit, SOLAS  
An tSeirbhis Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna  
Block 1, Castleforbes House, Castleforbes Road, Dublin D01 A8N0

+ 353 (0) 1 533 2500 / [www.solas.ie](http://www.solas.ie) / [info@solas.ie](mailto:info@solas.ie)

