

Lifelong learning in Ireland

June 2023

316,600

Lifelong learning participants
In quarter 4 2022

Comprising

179,400
(57%)



Females

105,800
(33%)



25-34
year-olds

218,000
(69%)



3rd level
graduates

254,600
(80%)



Employed
persons

11.8%

Lifelong learning participation rate
In quarter 4 2022

Highest rates for

NFQ 9-10 qualification
holders

19%

Workers in education &
health

18%

Professionals

17%

25-34-year-olds

17%

Compared to quarter 4 2021

8%



26,200 fewer learners

Largest absolute declines for

- **employed** persons (-18,800 fewer learners)
- those with 3rd level qualifications (-18,800)
- **younger age cohorts**: the number of learners aged 25-44 fell by 25,800

The overall lifelong learning **participation rate also fell** (down from 13.1%)

Lifelong learning in Ireland, Quarter 4 2022

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Introduction

Measuring lifelong learning, targets & time frame

Lifelong learning comprises formal, non-formal and informal learning activities that individuals may undertake throughout their lives. In terms of targets for lifelong learning participation (both national and EU), only formal and non-formal learning activities amongst 25-64-year-old adults are considered. While Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 and the EU's goals for Education and Training for 2020 each set a target for adult participation in learning activities in the preceding **four weeks**, the more recent EU Pillar of Social Rights 2030 target for adult participation in learning focuses on learning activities in the preceding **12 months**. Partly as a result of this difference in timeframes (4 weeks versus 12 months), the current EU target, at 60%, is considerably higher than the earlier EU 2020 and National Skills Strategy targets (15% for 2020 and 2025 respectively). However, it should be borne in mind that these lifelong learning measures are not comparable.

Data

Based on quarter 4 data from the CSO's Labour Force Survey (LFS), we provide a profile of lifelong learning participants in Ireland and identify the extent to which different population cohorts vary in terms of the share that engage in lifelong learning (participation rate). In addition, an EU comparison is also included, using Eurostat's LFS annual average data. Both dataset (quarterly from the CSO and annual average from Eurostat), measure lifelong learning participation in terms of adult engagement in formal and non-formal learning activities in the preceding four weeks¹.

Findings

In quarter 4 2022, **approximately 316,600 adults** aged 25-64 years had participated in formal and/or non-formal learning in the preceding four weeks, **an 8% decline** (or 26,200 fewer learners) compared to quarter 4 2021. This translates into a lifelong learning participation rate of **11.8%** in quarter 4 2022 (down more than one percentage point on the 13.1% observed in quarter 4 2021).

¹ An analysis of lifelong learning participation based on the 12-month timeframe is expected to be available later this year, following the release of the Adult Education Survey.

As shown in Figure 1, in quarter 4 2022, of the 316,500 lifelong learning participants,

- more than half were **female** (179,400 persons, or 57% of all lifelong learning participants)
- most were in **younger age cohorts**: a third were aged 25-34 years
- nearly three quarters (218,800 persons) **held third level qualifications** at levels 6-10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (excludes those who did not state a level)
- 44% lived in densely populated areas
- nearly two thirds (206,200) were in full-time employment; of those learners in employment (part-time and full-time)
 - **34% were in professional occupations**; 17%, in associate professional occupations
 - the top three sectors were **health** (21%), **education** (13%), and industry (10%)
 - more than one half never worked from home (51%)
- more than two thirds of learners had engaged in non-formal learning activities
 - with 112,200 persons, those engaging in learning for **job related reasons** only marginally outnumbered those engaging for **non-job related reasons** (107,100 persons).
 - 22,000 persons had engaged in both formal and non-formal learning²

When compared to quarter 4 2021, the 8% fall in the total number of lifelong learners was reflected across most cohorts examined (Figure 2). The largest falls in absolute terms were for

- those engaging in formal learning (22,400 fewer learners)
- younger age cohorts: the number of learners aged 25-34 years fell by 13,700
- those with third level qualifications, especially at NFQ levels 6-8 (-17,400 persons), representing nearly two thirds of the total decline in learner numbers
- employed persons (-18,800 fewer learners)
- those working mainly from home (40,600 fewer learners), although this was partly offset by an increase in the number of learners working sometimes from home³.

Despite the overall decline, however, there were increases, albeit relatively small, for

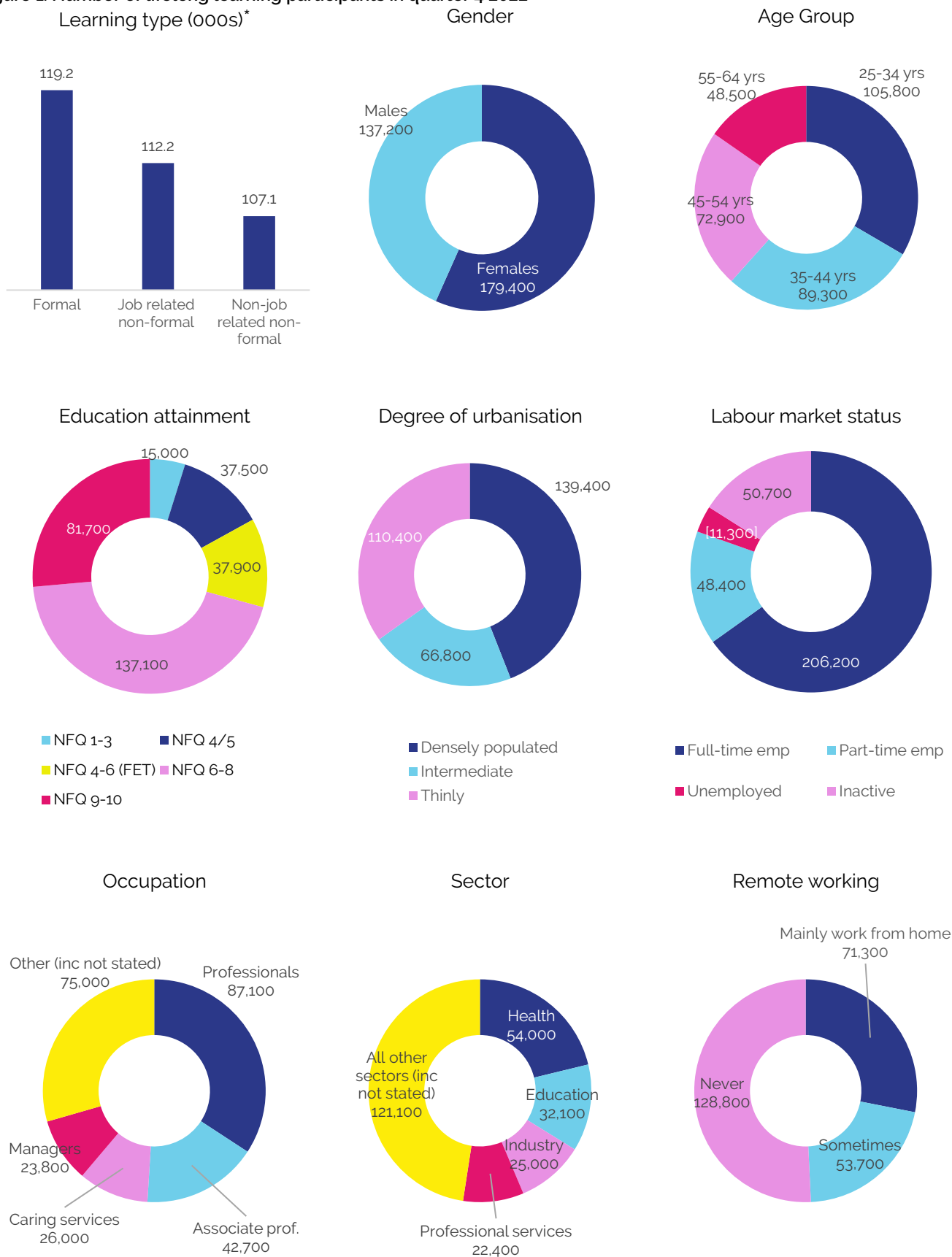
- older persons: the numbers aged 55-64 grew by nearly 5,000
- those with level 1-3 qualifications (+1,400 persons)
- those in non-formal lifelong learning for non-job related reasons (+4,900 persons)
- workers in skilled trades (+4,600), caring services (+3,500), and managerial (+1,500) occupations and in the health sector (+4,700 persons).

² As a result, the total number of lifelong learning participants was smaller than the sum of formal and non-formal learners.

³ The fall in the number of learners working *mainly* from home is, in part, related to the broader shift in post-COVID work patterns: between quarter 4 2021 and quarter 4 2022, the number of persons aged 25-64 working *mainly* from home fell by 22%, but grew more than a half for those working *sometimes* from home.

Profile of Ireland's 316,600 lifelong learning participants: who are they?

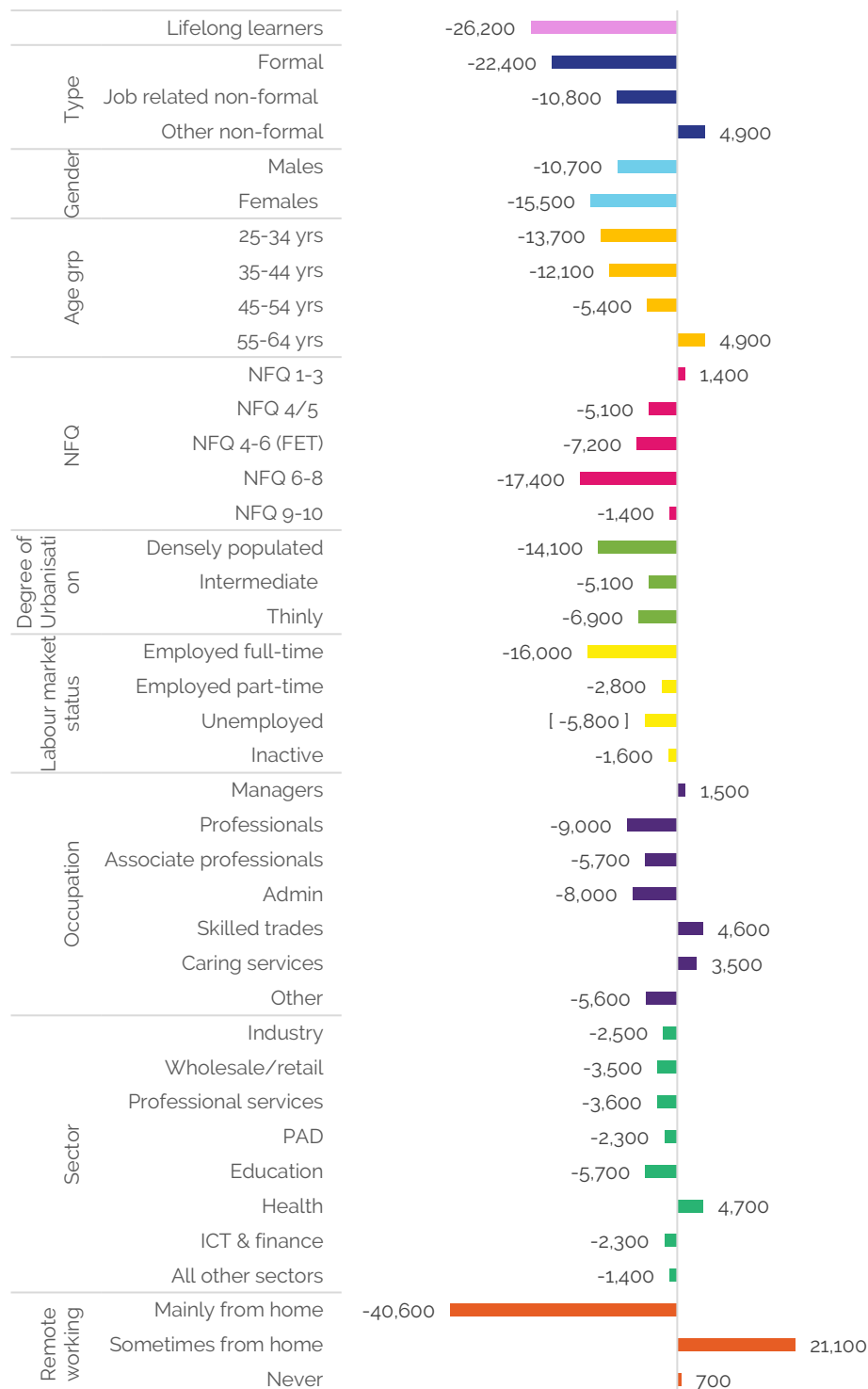
Figure 1. Number of lifelong learning participants in quarter 4 2022



Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (LFS) data; [] Numbers in square brackets are small and should be interpreted with caution. *The lifelong learning total (316,600) is less than the sum of the different types, as some learners undertake more than one learning type.

What has changed compared to quarter 4 2021?

Figure 2. Quarter 4 2021-Quarter 4 2022 change in LLL participant numbers⁴



Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (LFS) data

⁴ Numbers in square brackets are small and should be interpreted with caution.

Who is most likely to participate in lifelong learning?

As shown in Figure 3, cohorts with the highest lifelong participation rates in quarter 4 2022 were

- females (with a lifelong learning participation rate of 13%)
- young people aged 25-34 years (17%)
- persons with third level qualifications, especially those with postgraduate (i.e. NFQ level 9/10) qualifications (19%)
- those living in densely populated areas (14%)
- unemployed (15%).

Nonetheless, with the exception of postgraduate (NFQ 9/10) qualification holders, these cohorts had amongst the largest percentage point falls in participation rates when compared to quarter 4 2021 (pink triangles in Figure 3), with unemployed persons having the largest fall of nearly five percentage points year-on-year, although, as shown earlier in Figure 1, the number of unemployed persons who were lifelong learners in quarter 4 2022 was small and this number should be interpreted with caution.

In contrast, the lifelong learning participation rate for those aged 55-64 years and those with lower levels of education (NFQ 1-3) remained almost unchanged.

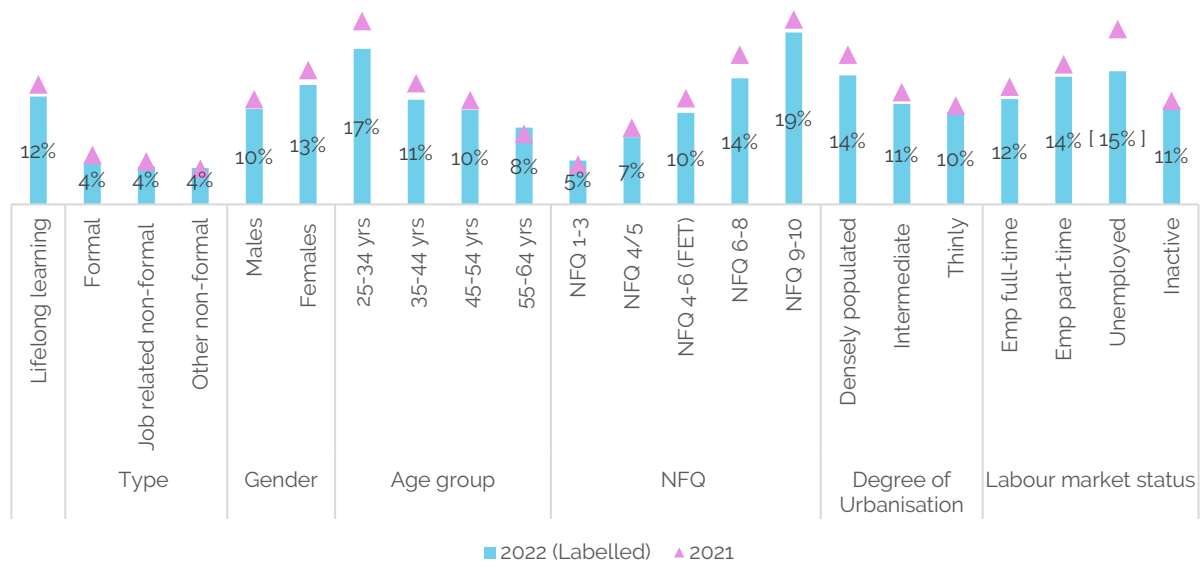
Figure 4 shows lifelong learning rates amongst the employed; the highest lifelong learning rates were for those working

- in professional (17%) or caring services (15%) occupations
- in the health (18%), education (18%), or professional services (16%) sectors
- sometimes from home (18%)

When compared to quarter 4 2021, the lifelong learning participation rates declined for most groups of employed persons, with the exception of

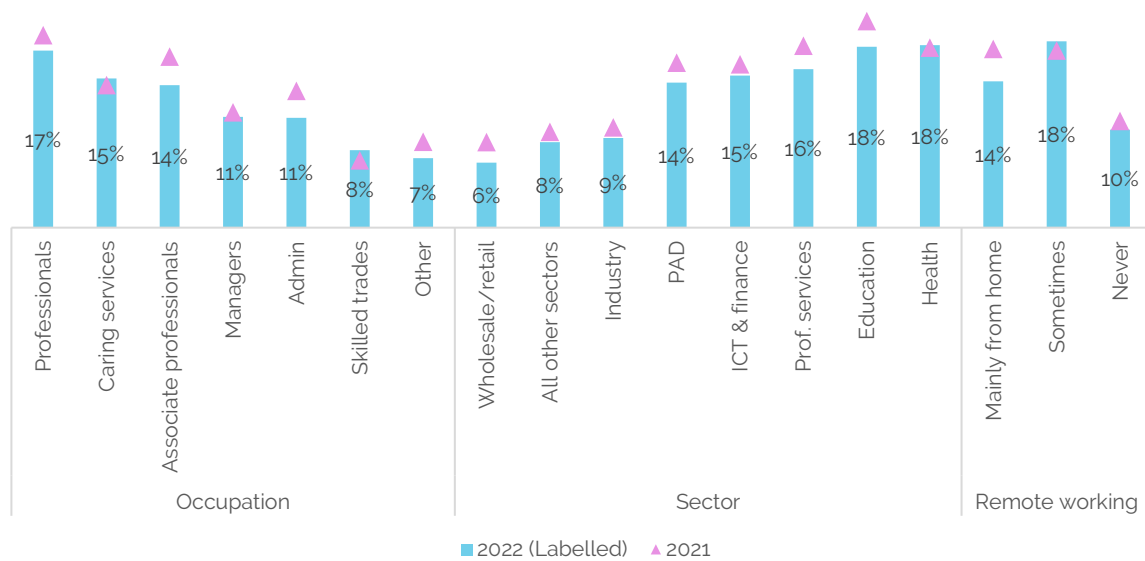
- caring services workers and skilled trades workers (where lifelong learning rose slightly by approximately one percentage point each)
- those who worked sometimes from home, where the rate rose by one percentage point
- those in managerial occupations and those in the health sector, where the lifelong learning rate remained unchanged year on year.

Figure 3. Lifelong learning participation rates by learning type, gender, age, NMQ level, degree of urbanisation, and labour market status quarter 4 2021 and quarter 4 2022



Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (LFS) data
 Note: numbers in square brackets are small and should be interpreted with caution.

Figure 4. Lifelong learning participation rates of the employed by occupation, sector and remote working, quarter 4 2021 and quarter 4 2022.



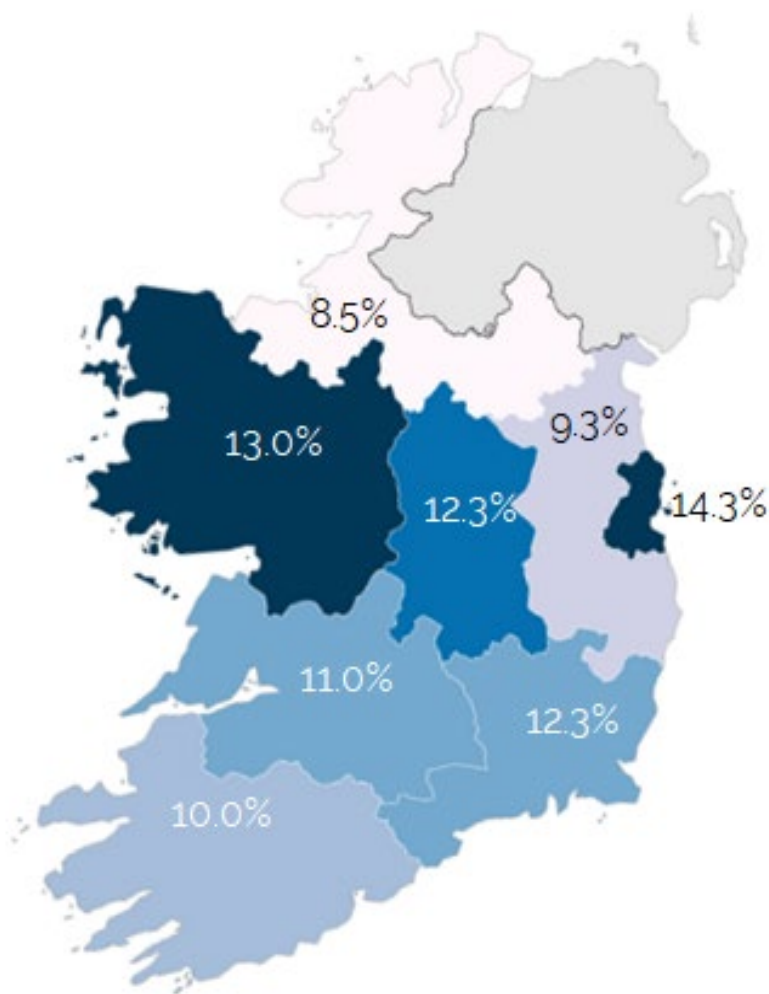
Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (LFS) data

Regional lifelong learning rates

Figure 5 shows how lifelong learning participation rates varied by region in quarter 4 2022. Dublin had the highest participation rate, at 14%, followed by the West, at 13%.

When compared to quarter 4 2021, lifelong learning participation rates declined in all regions except the Midland region (where the rate grew by 2 percentage points) and the Mid-West and South East regions (where the rate grew by 1 percentage point each).

Figure 5. Lifelong learning rates by region, quarter 4 2022

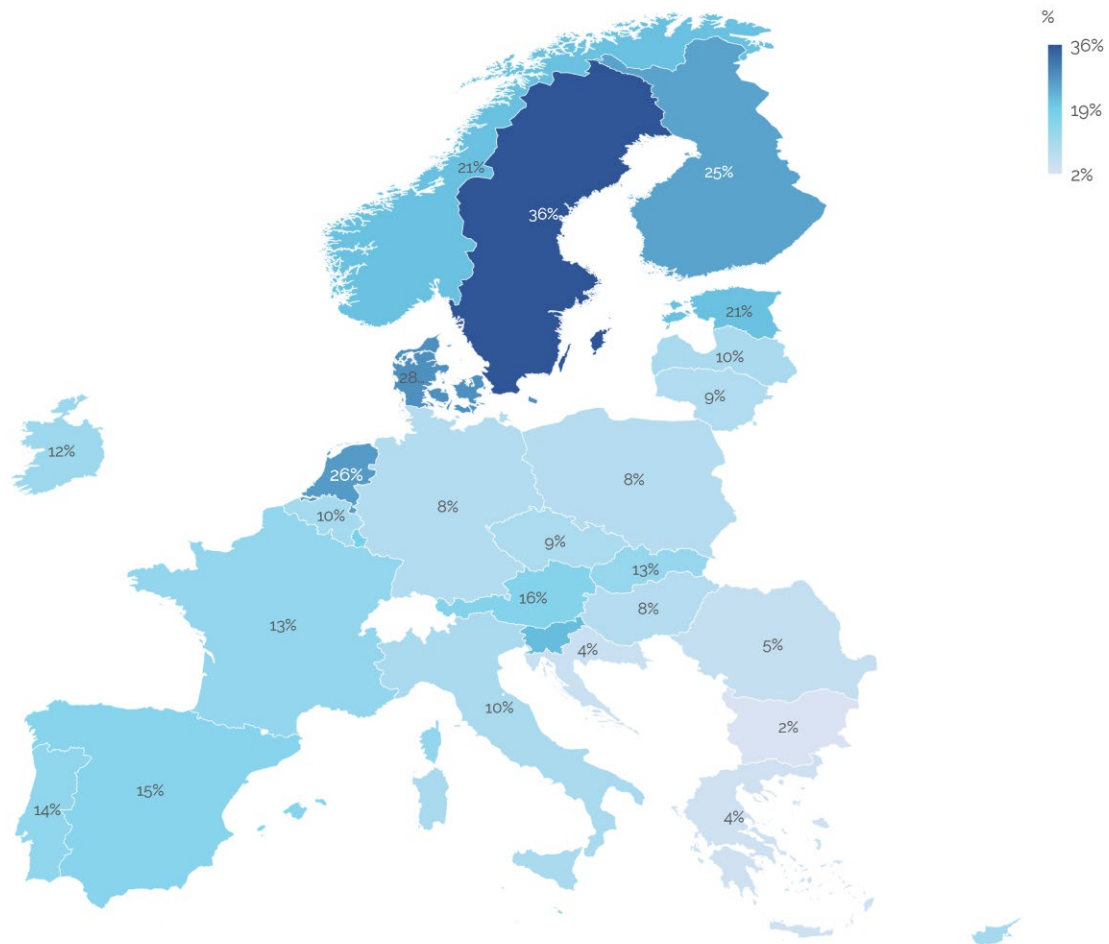


Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (LFS) data

How does Ireland compare at EU level?

- With an **annual average rate of 11.8%**, Ireland's lifelong learning participation rate was almost at the EU-27 average (11.9%) in 2022, placing Ireland **15th** out of 27 EU countries (Figure 6), **down from 4th in 2021**.
- The highest rates were for the Nordic countries, including Sweden (36%), where the lifelong learning rate was three times that of Ireland and the EU-27 average.
- When compared to 2021, the EU-27 rate increased slightly (up from 10.8%). However, it declined in eight countries, with the largest fall in Finland (-5.3 percentage points), followed by Ireland (-1.8 percentage points).

Figure 6. Lifelong learning participation rates in the EU, 2022



Source: EUROSTAT

Gender (Figure 7)

- In 2022, lifelong learning participation rates in Ireland were **slightly higher than the EU-27 average for females** (13.2% compared to 12.9%) but were **lower for males** compared to their EU counterparts (10.3% compared to 10.8%).
- While lifelong learning rates for both females and males in Ireland declined between 2021 and 2022, they increased across the EU-27 on average.
- The gender gap in Ireland (2.9 percentage points) was slightly larger than the EU-average (2.1 percentage points).

Age group (Figure 8)

- For both Ireland and the EU-27 average, lifelong learning rates declined with age.
- However, while Ireland's lifelong learning participation rates were below the EU-27 average for the younger age groups (i.e. people aged between 25-34 and 35-44), **Ireland's 45-54-year-olds and 55-64-year-olds had higher than the EU-27 average participation rates**, driven mainly by higher rates for Ireland's females in these older cohorts.

Education level (Figure 9)

- For adults with third level educational attainment, Ireland's rate, at 15.7% in 2022, was well below the EU-27 average (19.8%).
- The participation rates for the remaining educational attainment categories were broadly similar for Ireland and the EU-27 average.
- When compared to 2021, the lifelong learning participation rate for those with third level education increased for the EU-27 average, it but declined strongly (by nearly three percentage points) for Ireland.

Learning type (Figure 10)

- Ireland's participation rates in formal learning activities and non-job related non-formal learning activities were each more than one percentage point higher than the corresponding EU-27 averages.
- In contrast, at just 4.2%, the share of adults in Ireland who engaged in **job related non-formal learning** was lower than the EU-27 average (6.6%).

Labour market status (Figure 11)

- Ireland's lifelong learning participation rates for the inactive and particularly for the unemployed populations were higher than the EU-27 average.
- In contrast, at 12% in 2022, lifelong learning participation amongst Ireland's employed was slightly below the EU-27 average (12.6%).

Occupation (Figure 12)

- Ireland's lifelong learning participation rate was smaller than the EU-27 average for all occupational groups, except for
 - service and sales workers (this ISCO category includes healthcare assistants, childcare workers, and cooks, among others), where Ireland's rate, at 12.7%, was considerably higher than the EU-27 average of 10.6%.
 - elementary workers (this ISCO category includes cleaners, elementary construction workers, and food preparation assistants, among others), where Ireland's rate was 1.5 percentage points higher than the EU average.
 - plant/machine process operators, for whom Ireland and EU lifelong learning participation rates were identical (5.3%).

Sector (Figure 13)

- Compared to the EU-27 average, Ireland's lifelong learning participation rates were lower for almost all sectors for which numbers were large enough to report. The exceptions included
 - the **accommodation/food** sector, where at 11.3% Ireland's participation rate was nearly 3 percentage points higher than the EU-27 average (8.4%)
 - **construction** – at 9.5% in Ireland compared to 7% across the EU-27 on average
 - **manufacturing**, at 8.6%, Ireland's rate was marginally higher than the EU-27 average of 8.3%.
 - Nonetheless, each of the three above-mentioned had lifelong learning participation rates that were below the average for employed persons overall (12.5%).
- The largest gaps in participation rates were for ICT, finance and professional activities, where Ireland's rates were at least four percentage points below the EU-27 average.

Figure 7 Lifelong learning (%) in EU-27 and Ireland by gender, 2021 and 2022

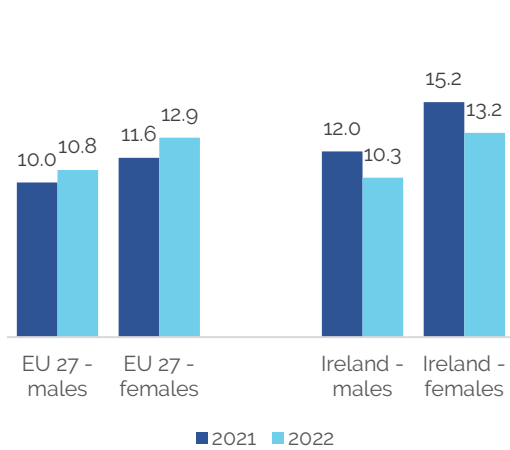


Figure 8 Lifelong learning in EU-27 and Ireland by age group, 2022

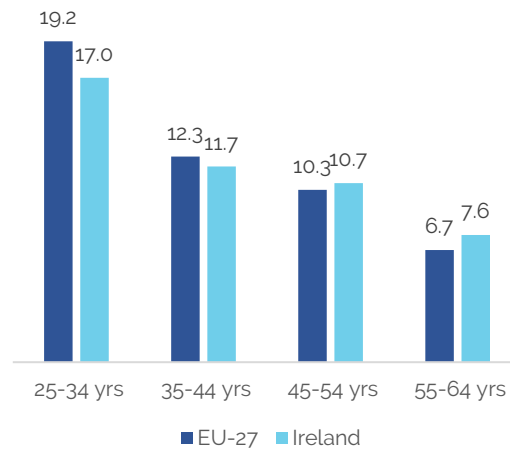


Figure 9 Lifelong learning (%) in EU-27 and Ireland by education level, 2022

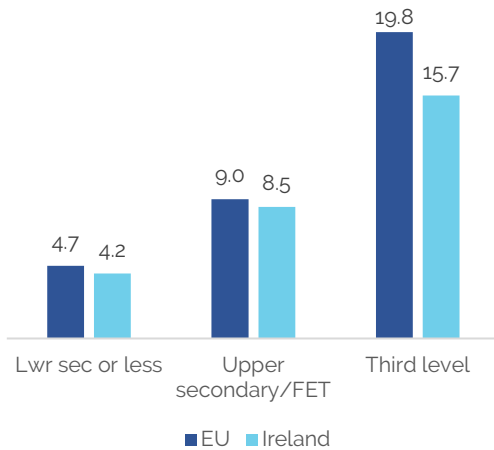


Figure 10. Lifelong learning (%) by learning type, 2022

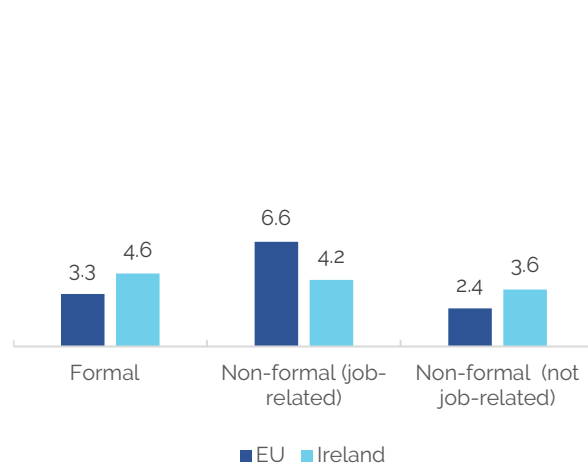


Figure 11 Lifelong learning (%) in EU-27 and Ireland by labour market status, 2022

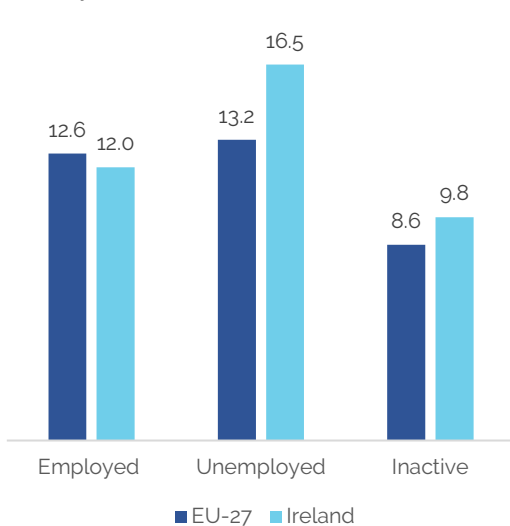
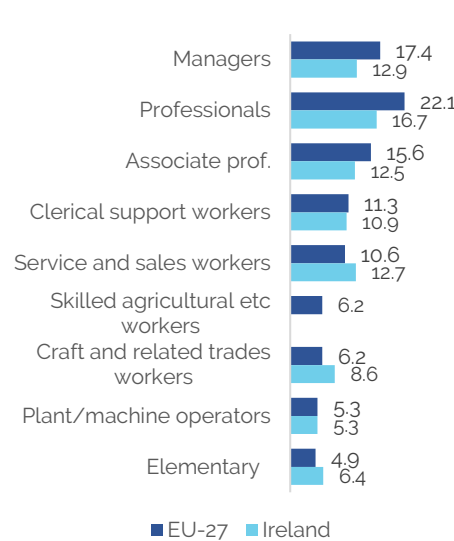


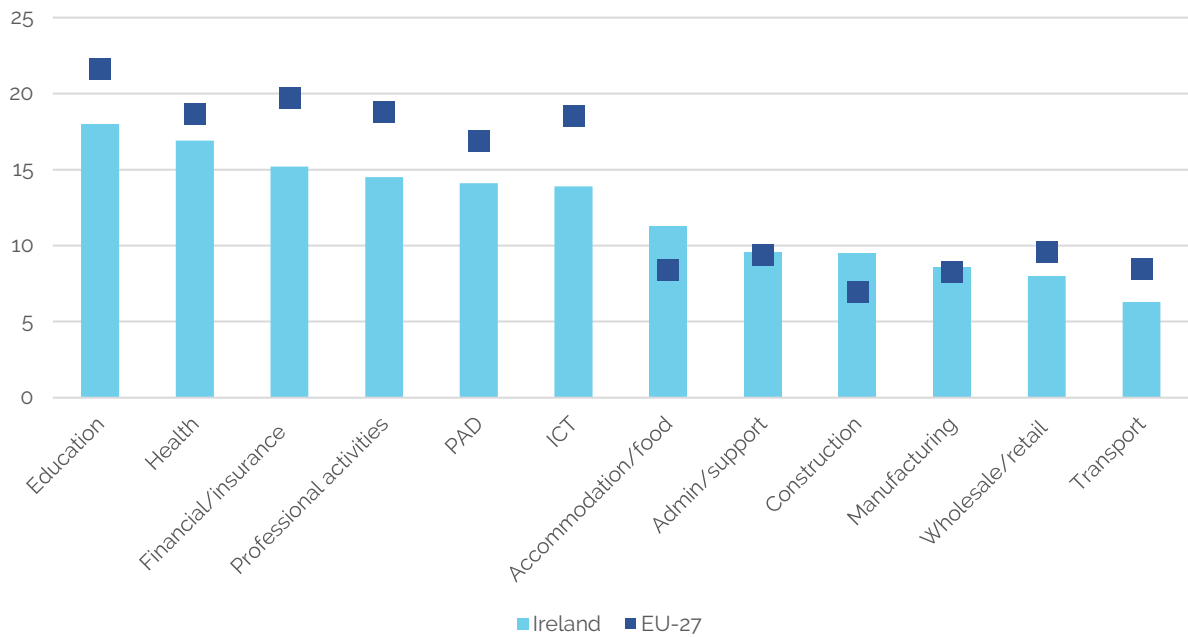
Figure 12. Lifelong learning (%) by occupation (ISCO)⁵, 2022



Source: Eurostat

⁵ Although similar, the ISCO occupational classification is not directly comparable with the SOC classification used in Figures 1, 2 and 4; lifelong learning participants for Ireland's skilled agricultural workers were too small to report.

Figure 12. Lifelong learning (%) by sector, 2022



Source: Eurostat

Excludes persons who did not state a sector and all sectors for which rates in Ireland were too small to report.

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