

# Left Behind? Perceived Education Fairness Among Young Disabled Europeans

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This brief examines whether young Europeans with disabilities perceive educational opportunities as fair, using CRONOS-3 Make it Strong panel data (Wave 1, 11 countries, N=1,595, ages 16–34).

## Background

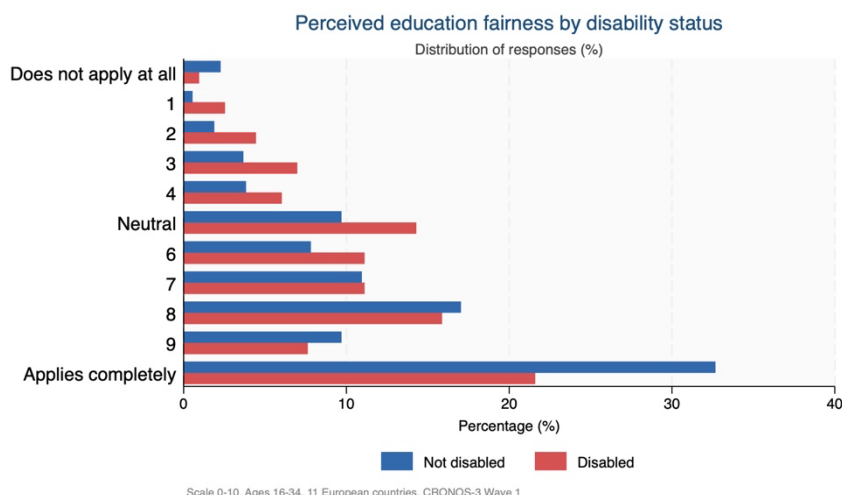
Ensuring equal access to education is a core EU commitment under Next Generation EU. Yet young people with **disabilities** remain systematically **disadvantaged**. Despite growing policy attention to disability inclusion in European education systems, **little is known** about how disability status relates to perceived fairness of one's educational outcomes.

This brief examines whether disabled youth perceive educational opportunities as **fair** and what this means for policy. Evidence on this is essential for **closing the opportunity gap**.

**Research Question:** Do young people with disabilities perceive their educational outcomes as less fair than non-disabled peers, and does this pattern vary across European countries?

## Data & Methods

- Data used from **CRONOS-3 Wave 1** (Make it Strong) linked to European Social Survey (ESS) Rounds 10-11. Ages 16-34, N = 1,595.
- Analyzed responses to: “Compared to other people in [country], I have had a fair chance of achieving the level of education I seek” (scale 0–10).
- Cleaned the data to define the **final sample** based on the disability variable, categorizing participants as **disabled** (N = 315) and **not disabled** (N = 1,280).
- Conducted the OLS regression analysis with **survey weights** and controls for education (3 cats), gender, urban/rural (2 cats), country on Stata 18.



## Findings

### 1. A clear disability gap

Across all countries, disabled youth rate education fairness at 6.69 on average vs 7.53 for non-disabled peers, a gap of **-0.84** ( $p < 0.001$ ). At the top of the scale, 32.7% of non-disabled youth rate education as fully fair, compared to **only 21.6%** of disabled youth.

### 2. An independent disadvantage

After controlling for education, gender, urban/rural and country, the gap widens to **-0.96** ( $p < 0.001$ ), confirmed by ologit ( $-0.67$  log-odds,  $p < 0.001$ ). Disability is not a proxy for other disadvantages; it is an **independent** predictor.

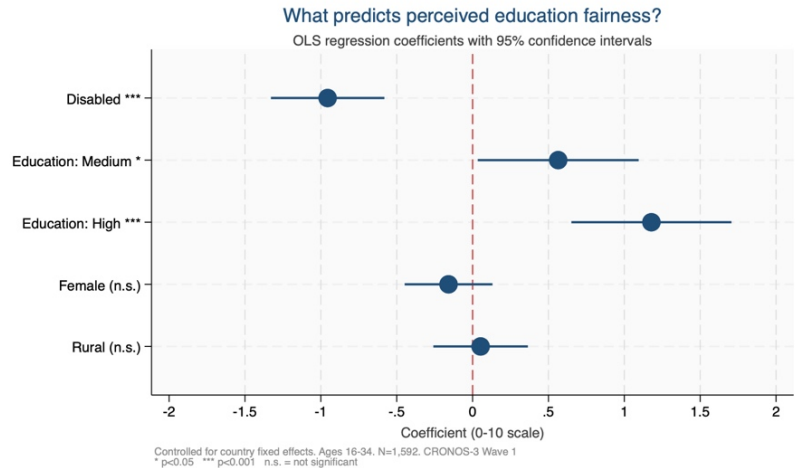
### 3. Disability, not gender or geography

The regression reveals traditional inequality drivers:

- **Education level:** high-educated youth score +1.18 pts above low-educated ( $p < 0.001$ ). A disabled low-educated young person faces a compounded ~2pt disadvantage.

- **Gender is no longer significant** ( $p=0.283$ ), gender equity in education perception has effectively been achieved among under-35s.
- **Rural residence is not significant** ( $p=0.740$ ), geographic disadvantage is not felt as unfair by rural youth or is partially compensated by national policy.

**Disability is the overlooked fault line.** Education level and disability are the two remaining drivers of perceived unfairness among young Europeans.



## Policy Recommendations

- Mainstream disability in EU education targets. **Include disability as an explicit equity dimension** in European Education Area monitoring indicators.
- Fund reasonable accommodation. **Prioritize accessible learning, assistive technology and individual support plans** through EU structural funds.
- Investigate the Nordic paradox. Large gaps in Iceland and Finland warrant country-specific research into **why strong welfare states fail disabled students**.
- **Oversample disabled youth in future data waves.** Current CRONOS-3 disabled sample (N = 415) limits country-level analysis.

## 4. A pan-European phenomenon

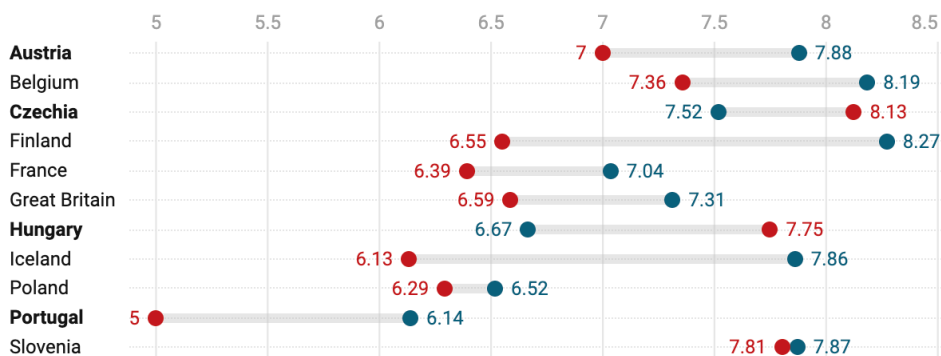
Country fixed effects are largely non-significant, the disability gap exists within every country surveyed, pointing to a structural EU-wide problem rather than a national outlier.

Portugal is the only country with a significant negative coefficient in both models; however, the sample size for disabled individuals in this country remains **small**. Iceland and Finland show the **largest disability gaps** (~2 pts) despite strong welfare states, a Nordic paradox.

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Data: CRONOS-3 & ESS Data Portal

## Perceived Educational Fairness by Disability Status & Country

"Compared to other people in [country], I have had a fair chance of achieving the level of education I seek"



Mean Score (0-10). Red: Disabled; Blue: Not disabled. Small samples for disabled: AT, CZ, HU, PT – interpret with caution.

Source: CRONOS-3 Wave 1 • Created with Datawrapper