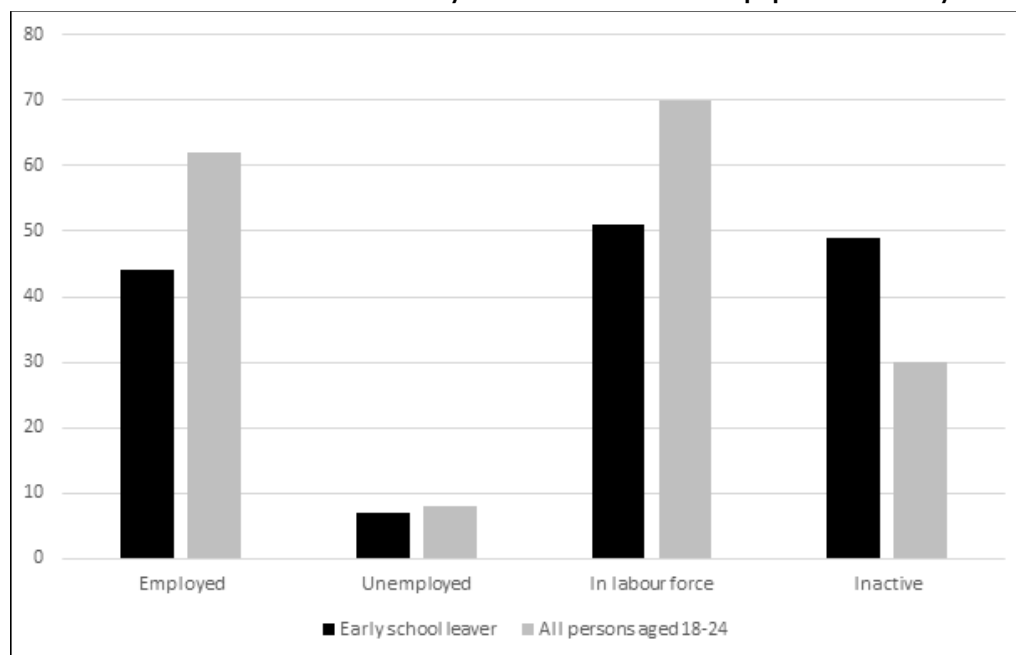


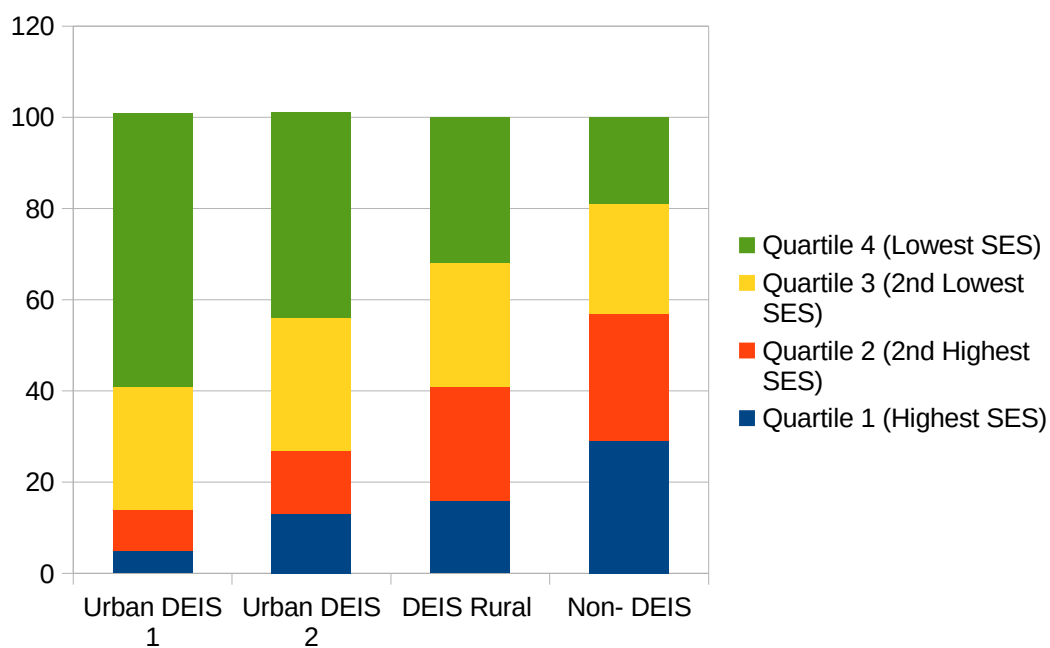
## Education

**Chart 3.1: Labour Market Status for Early School Leavers and total population 18-24 year olds Q2 2023, % in employment.**



Source: (CSO, 2023)

**Chart 3.2: Percentage breakdown by SES\* quartile within each DEIS-related school category (2021)**



Source: PIRLS 2021: Reading results for Ireland

Note: SES – Socioeconomic Status

## Education

### Early School Leaving



The PfG commits to tackling ‘all forms of disadvantage in education’.

Those exiting the system early need to be supported to remain in or return to education. Early school leavers are persons aged 18 to 24 whose highest level of educational attainment is lower secondary or below and are not currently in education. Ireland had the joint second lowest early school leaving rate in the European Union in 2023 at four per cent, compared to the EU average of 9.6 per cent. This downward trend of early school leaving is a welcome development, and Ireland surpassed the national target set under the Europe 2020 Strategy. Females are less likely than males to be classified as early school leavers, and in 2023 just under half of early school leavers aged 18-24 were not economically active (CSO, [2024](#)).

CSO data shows that (see Chart 3.1) an early school leaver is three times as likely to be unemployed than the general population aged 18-24. Only one in four of them are in employment compared to the general population for that age group and just under half (47 per cent) are not economically active. A previous report by the CSO analysed the outcomes for students who started second level education in 2011 – 2013 (CSO, [2019](#)). When comparing early school leavers to those who completed the Leaving Certificate, the report found that just 43.8 per cent of early school leavers were in employment compared to 74 per cent of their peers who finished school, and that the median earnings for early school leavers were €65 less than their peers (€345 per week compared to €410 per week). These figures are a cause of concern. The poor labour market status of early school leavers points to the need for a continued focus on this cohort and on addressing educational disadvantage.

As we move towards a future where digital transformation will disrupt the labour market, having the greatest impact on people with lower levels of education and skills, it is important that this cohort are not left behind. A wide range of access options to education and training is pertinent when it comes to dealing with the issue of early school leaving.

### Educational Disadvantage

We welcome the continued commitment to DEIS, and proposed enhancement of the programme. The improvement of educational outcomes for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and disadvantaged communities must remain a policy priority, with additional resources focused on addressing the persistence of educational disadvantage. Chart 3.2 highlights that socio-economic disadvantage plays a key role in children’s educational access. Government must continue to tackle core issues of child poverty and inequality.

One way is to reduce the pupil teacher ratio at primary level and we welcome Government commitment so deliver this during the next five years. *Social Justice Ireland* has consistently advocated for progress in this regard and looks forward to working with Government to look at specific policies and the necessary budgetary allocations required annually over the lifetime of the Government to ensure that this goal is achieved.

### Policy Priority

- Ensure better access to higher education for students from areas of socio-economic disadvantage, more diverse access routes for under-represented groups and improving lifelong and flexible learning.
- Invest in reducing class sizes and pupil teacher ratios at primary and post primary level.