

## How Did the COVID-19 Pandemic Affect the Transition to Post-Secondary Education for Students with Disabilities?



In Chile, students with disabilities experienced greater difficulties in accessing well-established post-secondary institutions during the pandemic than did their peers without disabilities.



For students with disabilities, the pandemic disproportionately reduced the probability of taking the general admission test for tertiary education and the probability of enrolling in a high-quality institution. This increased inequality in tertiary education.



These results are consistent with students with disabilities not receiving the support they needed in their last year of secondary school due to the pandemic. Difficulties might include limited availability of reasonable accommodations for taking the general admission test, or other related barriers.

### CONTEXT

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Individuals with disabilities have lower employment rates and wages than individuals without disabilities, and this is partially due to limited access to education. Moreover, while the potential effect of the pandemic on student learning and student motivation is widely recognized, the education gap for students with disabilities may have widened as programs promoting reasonable accommodations and inclusion were implemented differently under school closures.

### PROJECT

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This project investigates if the COVID-19 pandemic had a differential impact on the post-secondary educational trajectory of students with disabilities in Chile. Using administrative secondary and tertiary educational records for students over the period 2014 to 2021, we compare trends that occurred over the pandemic with pre-pandemic trends for students with and without disabilities. We identify students with disabilities as those participating in a School Integration Program (PIE), through which students with disabilities attend mainstream schools in Chile. This paper is the first that quantitatively identifies effects of the pandemic on students with disabilities.

## RESULTS

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In 2021, 17.6% of students enrolled in preschool, primary or secondary education had a disability in Chile. While there had been a steady increase in enrollment of PIE students in tertiary education from 28.4% of PIE students in 2014 to 35.9% in 2019, the enrollment decreased to 33.2% in 2020.

While the pandemic affected the transition to tertiary schooling for all students, our findings suggest that students with disabilities were disproportionately affected. Compared with students without disabilities, the pandemic had an additional negative impact on taking the exam of 1 percentage point and on enrolling in a high-quality institution of 1.4 percentage points for students with disabilities. The overall impact of the pandemic on students with disabilities was thus an 8.4 percentage point decline in the probability of taking the tertiary admission test and a 3.6 percentage point decline in the probability of enrolling in a high-quality institution (see [Figure 1](#)). This effect is in the opposite direction of the increasing trend prior to the pandemic.

### Key Concept



#### SCHOOL INTEGRATION PROGRAM (PIE)

Program offered in primary and secondary education that provides resources for inclusion in mainstream schools to students with disabilities in Chile.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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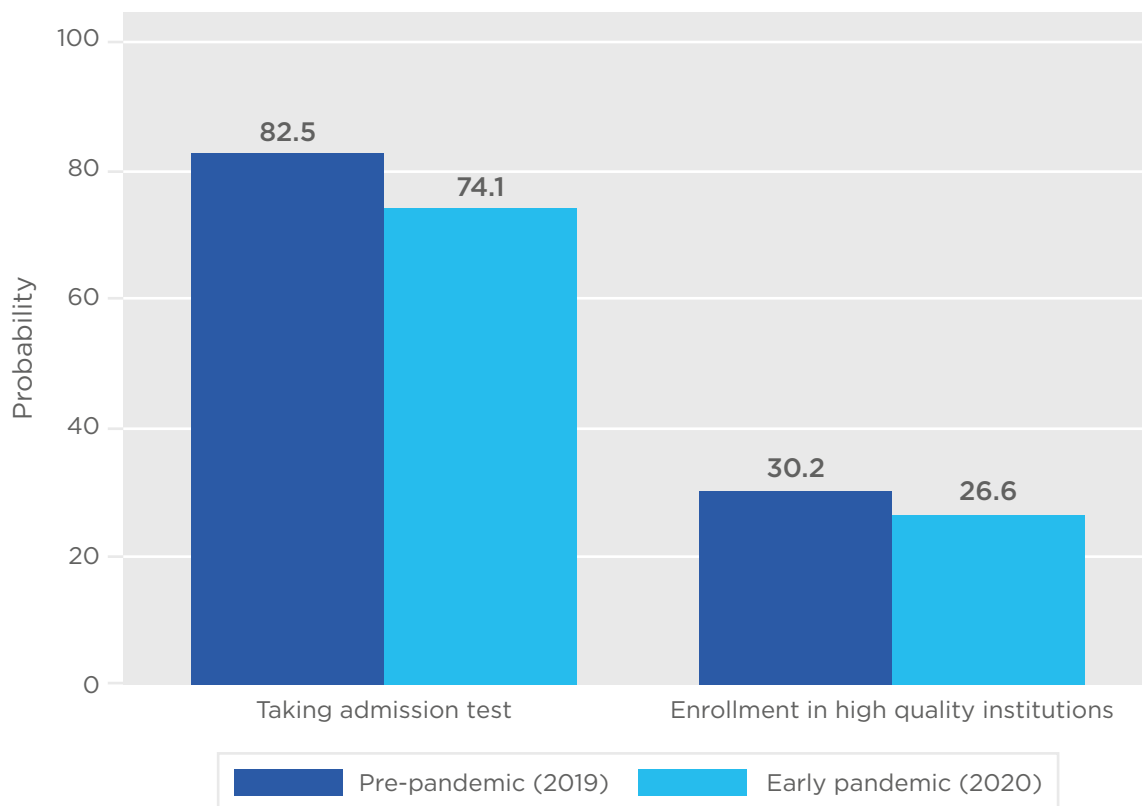
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Understanding how the pandemic has affected the educational trajectories of students with disabilities is crucial for informing policies of inclusion, not only in Chile but also in the rest of the region. Our results highlight the importance of considering barriers to learning and participation for students with disabilities, which may be exacerbated in a crisis, even in the presence of a strong program for inclusion.

The PIE program provides support to students with disabilities in mainstream public schools in Chile, which has one of the region's highest rates of disability inclusion in basic education. However, there is no national program focused on the inclusion of students with disabilities in tertiary education. While students with and without disabilities attend primary and secondary school at similar rates, students with disabilities are 15.7% less likely to transition to post-secondary education. Moreover, our results show that the gap has widened with the pandemic.

The transition to tertiary education is crucial in a context of high returns to education and where access to quality jobs is highly correlated with post-secondary education. The results suggest the need for policies that more generally support the transition of students with disabilities from basic schooling to next steps in education, training programs or internships where they can acquire capacities that facilitate personal and financial autonomy. In the post-pandemic era, it is necessary to pay additional attention to the needs of students with disabilities.

**Figure 1. Probability of Taking Admission Test and Enrollment in High Quality Institutions for Students with Disabilities**



## IDB RESEARCH ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

This research was financed by the Gender and Diversity Division of the IDB's Social Sector as part of a project on the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper is being used as an input in a new technical group formed by Gender and Diversity Division and the Education Division, also part of the Social Sector, to support operational work in inclusive education.



### FULL STUDY

[Contreras, M. Ignacia, Suzanne Duryea, and Claudia Martínez. 2023. "The Effect of the Pandemic on the Transition to Tertiary Education in Chile: A Focus on Students with Disabilities." IDB Working Paper No. 1416. Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank.](#)

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