**European Election Manifesto**

**An Inclusive and Equitable Europe for All**

March 2024

# **Summary**

The future for disabled people is as much in the hands of a strong democratic Europe as national lawmakers. The Disability Federation of Ireland, DFI values being part of the European Union and its human rights-based approach. In a world where respect for human dignity and rights is constantly attacked the European Union is a vital guarantor to progress the full and equal participation of disabled people.

Ahead of the 2024 European Elections, an Irish delegation, led by the DFI travelled to the 5th European Parliament of Persons with Disabilities in May 2023. This Irish delegation reinforced the strong link between Ireland, disability, and the EU.

Persons with disabilities are the largest minority group in Europe. More than a quarter (27%) of the EU population aged 16 years and over have a disability[[1]](#footnote-2). This is reflected in the population of people in Ireland who report experiencing a long-lasting condition or difficulty to any extent, at 22%.

Election 2024 is an opportunity to move closer to the realisation of a Union of Equality for persons with disabilities, with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN CRPD as its compass. We are asking you to be an ally to us in this human rights approach to realise the implementation of the UN CRPD in your role as a political representative in Europe. Remembering that disability is only one part of a person’s identity. People are intersectional beings - partners, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, parents. We are trans/nonbinary, gay, poor, Travellers, migrants etc. Anyone can acquire a disability at any point in life, or as we age - **‘ME TODAY, IS YOU TOMORROW’** - it is therefore everyone’s business.

We are therefore calling on all candidates to the European Parliament to pledge their support, to act and redress the balance for persons with disabilities. And as Members of the European Parliament to champion, and work for, an inclusive future for disabled people and their families.

Specific actions to achieve this are to:

* Work together with the disability movement to ensure the **fulfilment of the European Union’s Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.**
* Re-establish, and join the **Disability Intergroup of the European Parliament[[2]](#footnote-3).**
* Adopt measures to maximize the **accessibility of the electoral process** to facilitate people to vote independently and in secret.
* Promote the participation of disabled people and their representative organisations in the political and public life of the EU – including increasing the number of **persons with disabilities working in EU institutions**.
* Adopt measures to support the development of a range of **person-centred support services in communities for independent living.**
* Ensure preventative **measures against institutionalisation.**
* Introduce **policies and a new EU budget** aimed at a more social Europe, supporting inclusion and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in all areas of life.
* Adopt further legislation ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities and realising their **right of free movement** in the EU.
* **Strengthen the protection** of persons with disabilities in the EU and beyond, particularly in areas of conflict and by supporting the EU in becoming a stronger promoter of the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN CRPD worldwide.

The remainder of this document explores these and other actions in more detail. It provides information on the link between the European Parliament and disability and the potential to bring real and meaningful change to the lives of people across Europe. Much of the content is a mirroring of the European Disability Forum’s European Manifesto which was unanimously approved at the 5th European Parliament for Persons with Disabilities in May2023.

**Background: ‘Disability rights are human rights’**

Many of the issues facing persons with disabilities in Europe are due to misunderstandings of disability on the part of policymakers. There is a need to build greater awareness of the lived experience of disability, and crucially, the importance of persons with disability being directly involved in policy and decision-making. Having increased and improved representation informing policy positions, would build greater understanding.

In our Election Manifesto we have adapted five themes from the European Disability Forum (EDF) EU election manifesto. Specifically, we are asking candidates seeking to represent Ireland, if elected to:

1. Guarantee the participation of persons with disabilities in the political and public life of the EU
2. Realise a Union of Equality for persons with disabilities with the UN CRPD as its compass
3. Become a more social Europe
4. Embrace accessibility – allocating free movement in Europe
5. Protect persons with disabilities in Europe and beyond

We need you to prioritise a range of interwoven measures across these five themes, to give disabled people the opportunity to live independently in their communities, with choices equal to others (Article 19, UN CRPD), specifically:

* Political participation
* UN CRPD implementation
* An adequate income and support services
* Freedom of movement, and
* Protection in times of crisis will all help to support independent living for persons with disabilities.

These areas are inherently interlinked - political participation for example is impossible without accessible travel and transport and supports such as Personal Assistants.

# **1. Guarantee the participation of persons with disabilities in the political and public life of the EU**

The fundamentals of democracy are the rights and ability to a free vote and to stand for election and represent your community. Obvious barriers continue to prevent persons with disabilities from this realisation. We ask all Candidates, if elected to:

* Remove the barriers impacting on the right to vote and the right to stand as candidates for persons with disabilities across all EU countries regardless of legal capacity status.
* Adopt measures to maximize the accessibility of the whole electoral process (procedures, facilities, materials and information) to facilitate the possibility of voting independently and in secret through reasonable accommodation; for example, providing alternative means of voting, advanced voting, tactile stencils, QR codes, or guidance in easy to read, sign language or Braille), and to allow free choice of assistance to cast one's vote.
* Promote and advocate for the increased participation of candidates with disabilities.

# **2. Realising a Union of Equality for persons with disabilities, with the UN CRPD as its compass**

The UN CRPD applies established human rights principles from the UN Declaration on Human Rights to the situation of persons with disabilities. It covers civil and political rights to equal treatment and freedom from discrimination, and social and economic rights in areas like education, health care, employment, and transport. This is the document, further supported by the European Union’s Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, that should direct all approaches in the European Union to the realisation of equality for persons with disabilities.

We ask all candidates, if elected to:

* Re-establish the disability intergroup focused on UN CRPD implementation in the European Parliament, one that actively involves the European disability movement and join this group.
* Maintain the position of the European Commissioner for Equality with the specific mandate to implement the UN CRPD and mainstream equality in all EU policies, including the next EU budget.
* Increase the number of persons with disabilities working in the EU institutions through targeted employment programmes. Quotas are also best practice[[3]](#footnote-4).
* Put forward specific measures to realise the rights enshrined in the UN CRPD for those persons with disabilities at higher risk of exclusion, such as persons with disabilities living in segregating institutions, in rural areas, living in poverty or with higher support needs.
* Provide guidance and support to EU member States on improving disability assessment methodologies, to ensure alignment with the UN CRPD and that no one with a disability, visible or invisible, is left behind when accessing social protection, independent living schemes, and other supports for persons with disabilities.

# **3. Becoming a more social Europe**

For persons with disabilities to finally be full and equal European citizens two things need to be in place. People need a sufficient income to live and an accessible society to live in. Now we live in poverty and experience barriers daily. Set out here is what will make the difference.

Independent living is a cornerstone of inclusion in the community, blending the need for accessible affordable transport, employment, support services, and the ability to afford to live in the community.

Income adequacy is a key element of independent living. Yet persons with disabilities in the EU are at a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion: 29.7% of the EU population age 16 or more with a disability were at risk of poverty or social exclusion compared to 18.8% of those with no disability. There are also considerable additional disability-related costs. In Ireland, these range from €8,700 to €12,300 a year[[4]](#footnote-5). This has been exacerbated in recent years by the ongoing cost of living and inflation crisis, with disabled people also at much more risk of energy poverty.

Ireland ranks poorly in the EU in relation to poverty and employment rates of persons with disabilities. 39.3% of persons with disabilities in Ireland are at risk of poverty, the fourth worst in the EU[[5]](#footnote-6). Moreover, recent data shows that Ireland ranks lowest in the EU for both its disability employment rate and disability employment gap. These poor employment statistics disproportionately affect disabled women, with only 15% of women with disabilities in full-time employment in Ireland (the lowest in the EU) compared to 23% of men with disabilities. This compares to the EU average of 20% for women with disabilities and 29% for men with disabilities[[6]](#footnote-7).

These findings are extremely concerning in general and paint a stark picture of the situation of women with disabilities in Ireland. Economic independence is essential to live a life free from poverty, and to escape situations of domestic violence.

We ask that all candidates pledge to bring the following measures into place, if elected:

* Adopt measures to support the development of a range of person-centred services in communities for independent living, including personal assistance. Ensure an appropriate and adequate workforce, addressing the current recruitment crisis.
* Ensure preventative measures against institutionalisation targeting children and families by ensuring early identification, early childhood intervention, and family support[[7]](#footnote-8).
* Promote the investment of EU funds in increasing the accessibility of communities, including transport, housing, and infrastructure to help make independent living a reality.
* Present European legislative proposals to guarantee a minimum income in all Member States ensuring an adequate standard of living that addresses the specific situation of persons with disabilities, including well documented additional disability-related costs. Ensure that poverty programmes, including those tackling energy poverty, specifically target and support disabled people
* Ensure that social protection measures guarantee a minimum income and access an adequate minimum standard of living. Ensure that processes used, such as means testing or income thresholds, maintain the right of persons with disabilities to be protected against poverty and social exclusion.
* Adopt further measures, including supported employment services, to increase the employment of persons with disabilities in inclusive and accessible workplaces in the open labour market. Such measures should tackle the specific situation of women, young people with disabilities, and people with high support needs who are particularly prone to being excluded from employment.
* Introduce measures to support families of persons with disabilities, notably those who act as family carers, to support and empower them to remain active in employment, to maintain good health, and to have a life of their own outside of caring. Ensure that adequate State supports are in place rather than relying on carers to fill in gaps caused by inadequate state provision. These measures should also seek to prevent carers from being disadvantaged or discriminated against.

# **4. Embracing accessibility – allocating free movement in Europe**

A stated achievement of the EU project is “freedom for its citizens to live, study or work anywhere in the EU[[8]](#footnote-9)“.Yet this key achievement has not been realised for all. Persons with disabilities are severely restricted by the need for supports and to have their disability registered in their new country of residence. The freedom to live, study, and work in a country of your choosing needs to apply to all. We ask that the Irish candidates pledge to adopt the following, if elected:

* Grant, with the European Disability Card, the necessary support for persons with disabilities during the transition period of moving to another country to study or to work, and until their disability has been certified by their new country of residence. Advocate for EU funding to support implementation of the Cards by Member States[[9]](#footnote-10)
* Introduce legal requirements to ensure that, when providing digital means to access a right or a service of general interest, there will always be a non-digital alternative through human interaction.
* Adopt legislative measures for air travel to avoid situations such as denial of boarding, obligation to travel with an assistant without the cost of an extra ticket being covered, lack of quality assistance in airports, and insufficient compensation for loss or damage of assistive and mobility equipment.
* Step up efforts to harmonise and expand accessibility requirements in transport infrastructure, including train stations and rolling stock, so all transport becomes more accessible to passengers with disabilities and a wide range of passengers.
* Ensure equal access for persons with disabilities to individual transportation means; for example, to obtain driving licenses and adapted cars.
* Introduce legislation to guarantee the availability and affordability of assistive technologies in the EU single market.
* Invest EU resources in increasing the knowledge and availability of national sign languages, easy to read formats, braille, speech to text, hearing assistive devices, and any other accessible means of information and communication for persons with disabilities.

# **5. Protecting person with disabilities in Europe and beyond**

It is essential to recognise the inherent vulnerability that society causes for persons with disabilities during times of conflict or natural disasters. Shelters, bunkers, and areas of respite are often not accessible leaving persons with disabilities exposed and in danger. Any work that the EU does in the promotion of the UN CRPD, as well as basic and fundamental human rights of persons with disabilities, should also apply to times of conflict and disaster relief. We ask candidates to support the following, if elected:

* Ensure the UN CRPD is promoted in the EU’s work around the globe in cooperation with persons with disabilities and their representative organisations. This should be the case regarding funding for international cooperation, humanitarian action, disaster risk reduction, and armed conflicts. Scrutinise the disbursement of EU funds in global work to prevent violations of the rights of persons with disabilities, with the EU supporting deinstitutionalisation processes in third partner countries.
* Support refugees with disabilities from across the globe fleeing conflict, persecution, climate disasters and crisis. Ensure that they are supported to flee, claim asylum, and rebuild their lives, with their disability related needs met.
* Make sure the EU’s contribution to the reconstruction of any former conflict area builds a more inclusive country for persons with disabilities. EU-supported reconstruction should include accessible housing, transport and public infrastructure, and community-based support services instead of institutionalised care.

The aim of this Manifesto is to outline achievable measures that can be undertaken by Members of the European Parliament to realise a Europe that is equitable and inclusive for all. The Disability Federation of Ireland, and the Irish delegates who attended the 5th European Parliament of Person with Disability, are dedicated to working with you to help progress the above agenda.

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Description automatically generated**DFI’s vision**

An Ireland where people with disabilities are participating fully in all aspects of society.

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Description automatically generated**DFI’s mission**

DFI is a federation of member organisations working with people with disabilities to implement UN CRPD and ensure equal participation.

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Member organisations are actively involved in DFI, working to implement the UN CRPD and to achieve the equal participation of people with disabilities in society.

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1. [Eurostat- Population with disability (2022)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population_with_disability) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. The Disability Intergroup of the European Parliament is an informal grouping of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from all nationalities and most political groups who are interested in promoting the disability policy in their work at the European Parliament as well as at the national level. It promotes the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, in line with the UN CRPD.**TION**  [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. In Ireland for example, the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024 (CES) recommends the phased increase of the current statutory target of 3% of employees with disabilities in the public sector to 6% by 2024. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Indecon (2021) [*The Cost of Disability in Ireland*](https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1d84e-the-cost-of-disability-in-ireland-research-report/) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/DDN-20221214-2> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. European Disability Forum (2023) European Human Rights Report Issue 7- The Right to Work: The employment situation of persons with disabilities in Europe [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. The [Ombudsman for Children’s *Mind the Gap* (2021)report](https://www.oco.ie/app/uploads/2021/03/MindTheGap_OCO_NUIG_Disability_Report.pdf) highlights issues impacting on the realisation of rights of children with disabilities in Ireland, including lack of early intervention [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Key European Achievements and Tangible Benefits <https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/eu-priorities/achievements_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. See more on the European Disability Card here: https://www.edf-feph.org/agreement-on-the-european-disability-card-major-advance-for-freedom-of-movement/ [↑](#footnote-ref-10)