

The Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) represents the interests and the expectations of people with disabilities to be fully included in Irish society. It comprises organisations that represent and support people with disabilities and disabling conditions.

The vision of DFI is that Irish society is fully inclusive of people with disabilities and disabling conditions so that they can exercise their full civil, economic, social and human rights and that they are enabled to reach their full potential in life.

Key Statistics on Disability

- 595,355 people in Ireland reported having a disability in Census 2011 – that is equivalent to 13% of the population of the country.⁵
- 75% of people who use disability services are not satisfied with the level of control they have over their lives.⁶
- Individuals who are not at work due to illness or disability endure among the highest levels of consistent poverty at 17.6%. This overshadows the national rate of 7.7%.⁷



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DISABILITY FEDERATION OF IRELAND



**Pre-Budget
Submission 2015**

Leave No-One Behind

**People with Disabilities: An Equal Part
of Ireland's Future**

The Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) calls on the Government of Ireland to 'Leave No-One Behind' and improve vital services and income supports for people with disabilities in Budget 2015. In particular, we urge this Government to increase disability services provided in the community to facilitate the independent living of disabled people now and into the future.

This Government needs to do the following:

- 1** Improve income and activation supports for people with disabilities.
- 2** Improve resourcing of disability services and other supports available in the community that enable people with disabilities to live independently and with dignity.
- 3** Ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) without further delay.

People

with disabilities represent over 595,000¹ Irish citizens, not including family, friends and neighbours. Disability is a societal issue, affecting people of all

ages and their families directly and indirectly. However, there is a serious lack of ambition by this Government to implement its own national strategy for people with disabilities, despite naming disability as their number one social justice priority². The adverse impact of cuts and withdrawals imposed on people with disabilities since 2008 means individuals with disabilities and their families do not have an adequate income and struggle with basic necessities. People out of work due to illness or disability are now five times as likely to be at risk of poverty³ and survive on the lowest annual average disposable income compared to other socio-economic groups⁴. This fact is unacceptable and must be addressed through Budget 2015.

Ireland is now at a critical stage in our economic recovery, with repeated calls for pay rises and tax reductions from the trade union and business sectors. However, there can be no further consideration of these approaches until there is a credible and functioning community infrastructure to support people with disabilities and their families. Since 2008, there has been a steady erosion of the kinds of flexible supports that facilitate choice, autonomy and independent living for people with disabilities. There has been continued uncertainty surrounding a series of decisions made by this Government which were subsequently 'put on hold' or reversed. The most recent of these included the reinstatement of Discretionary Medical Cards and the decision to revoke the cut in funding to 26 disability organisations through the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO). In addition, high profile cuts to services and supports, such as the Household Benefits Package and the closure of the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant to new applicants, have contributed to widespread distrust of this Government by people with disabilities and their families.

This Government's own National Disability Strategy promotes the introduction of policy objectives to support community living and employment for people with disabilities. Yet, this is repeatedly undermined with continual cuts to funding and administrative practices that damage critical supports to people with disabilities. DFI is looking to the Government to guarantee that no more cuts impacting on people with disabilities are implemented. Income, activation and support services for people with disabilities must be immediately improved.

¹ CSO (2012) Our Bill of Health, Government of Ireland.

² During the final pre-election Prime Time debate in February 2011, Miriam O'Callaghan asked the candidates what their number one social justice priority area was, to which Enda Kenny and Eamon Gilmore replied disability and mental ill-health.

³ In 2012, the 'at risk' of poverty rate for people 'at work' was 5.9% compared to 30.3% of people 'not at work due to illness or disability'. CSO (2014:16) Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2012, Table 2.

⁴ The mean equivalised disposable income for people not at work due to illness or disability was €14,101 compared to €25,930 of those at work. CSO (2014:13) Survey on Income and Living Standards 2012, CSO, Government of Ireland.

⁵ Central Statistics Office (2012:8) 'Census 2011 Profile 8 Our Bill of Health', Dublin Stationary Office

⁶ Department of Health (2010) 'Report On Public Consultation: Efficiency And Effectiveness Of Disability Services In Ireland', Department of Health and Children http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/vfm_consultation_report2010.pdf.

⁷ Central Statistics Office (2014:16), Table 2 'At risk of poverty, Deprivation and Consistent poverty rates by year' from the report 'Survey on Income and Living Conditions'. Central Statistics Office.

DFI calls for the following:

PROTECTION OF INCOME AND ACTIVATION SUPPORTS

- 1 Increase disability payments by €20 per week.**
- 2 Improve supplementary benefits.**
- 3 Include and support disabled people to participate in existing and future mainstream activation programmes.**
- 4 Introduce a disability tax credit.**
- 5 Grant medical cards based on need.**

In Budget 2015, this Government must ensure that all people with disabilities have an adequate income that supports them to live with dignity, in accordance with their human rights. As an interim measure to the introduction of an adequate assessment of need and an Independent Living allowance, DFI is calling for an increase of €20 to disability payments, as well as the protection of all supplementary benefits. Employment is the single most effective means of lifting people out of poverty: for this reason, DFI is seeking that all activation programmes be accessible to people with disabilities and that measures be put in place to 'make work pay', including the introduction of a Disability Tax Credit and medical card based on need. This will ensure that people who incur additional costs of disability are able to go to work.

RESOURCING OF COMMUNITY SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- 1 Increase provision of disability specific services.**
- 2 Increase mainstream services that support people to live independently in the community.**

A higher demand for disability services has coincided with the continued cuts to service provision funding. For instance, since 2008, HSE funding for disability services has dropped by €159.4 million, representing a 9.4% reduction in spending. This dramatic fall in funding is further exasperated by the fact that the HSE Value for Money (VfM) cut for 2014 has yet to be finalised. It is critical that the services so badly needed by people with disabilities should not be subject to further cuts. The objective of supporting people to live independently, free from discrimination, and to enjoy fundamental rights is clearly recognised in the UNCRPD. In order to achieve this objective, this Government must ensure that no further undue hardship is placed on people with disabilities in Budget 2015 through the cutting of their much-needed service provision in the community.

RATIFICATION OF THE UNCRPD

- 1 Ratify the UNCRPD without further delay.**

DFI urges the Irish Government to ratify the UNCRPD as a matter of urgency.