

DFI Brief on Ireland's National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People



DISABILITY FEDERATION
OF IRELAND

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Introduction

The [National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People](#), which will be called 'the Strategy' throughout this document, was published in September 2025. It is the first National Disability Strategy since Ireland ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN CRPD in 2018.

It is also the first strategy since the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, DCDE took over responsibility for disability policy from the Department of Health, DoH.

DCDE created the Strategy after talking with many people in the disability community. This included Disabled Persons' Organisations, DPOs, disabled people, organisations that support disabled people, and other experts. Many members of the Disability Federation of Ireland, DFI shared their knowledge and concerns to help shape the Strategy.

“

It is a big step forward that the Strategy takes a human rights-based approach, where disabled people are seen as rights-holders.

”

The Strategy focuses on important disability rights issues set out in the UN CRPD. It expects all government departments to work together using a 'whole-of-government' approach.

This means that every government department and agency must include disabled people, as rights-holders, in everything they do and to remove the barriers that stop disabled people from taking part in all areas of life.

Implementation overview

Publishing the Strategy is just the first step. Real change will only happen if the plan is put into action.

To make this happen, the government will publish a Programme Plan of Action every two years. These plans will be key to making sure the Strategy's commitments are fully carried out.

The Strategy emphasises the need for government departments to work together on:

- Communications and information
- Workforce planning
- Whole-of-government spending.

We still need more details on how the Strategy will be delivered, including clear actions, deadlines and ways to measure progress.

Each department must also receive enough funding to make real and lasting changes.

We hope these important points will be included in the first Programme Plan of Action which is due to be published by the end of

This means that every government department and agency must include disabled people as rights-holders in all policies and remove barriers that prevent full participation in society.



The first Programme Plan of Action is due by end of 2025.

It will decide what actions happen, who is responsible, and how success will be measured.

Summary of the Strategy's commitments

The Strategy is built on five main areas (pillars) and includes 123 actions in total. Below is a summary of the key areas and DFI's main concerns.

Pillar 1: Inclusive learning and education

- There are 27 actions to make schools and education more inclusive for disabled children, young people, and adults.
- It is positive that Irish Sign Language (ISL) is included more.
- However, there are no actions to address the continued creation of special schools and classes. This ongoing focus goes against the government's policy, and the UN CRPD, which both call for more inclusion of disabled children in mainstream education.



Pillar 2: Employment

- There are 21 actions aimed at helping disabled people find and keep decent work, in both the public and private sector.
- The Strategy promises to review the Disability Allowance, including how it is means-tested, and to look at ways for disabled people who work to keep other benefits. This is a positive step, but after this review, we need to see real actions to improve the system.
- Compared to the [Comprehensive Employment Strategy, 2019](#), promises on employment are weaker. There are no clear targets or timeframes to improve the employment rate of disabled people. Ireland still has one of the worst disability employment gaps in the EU.
- The Strategy also should set higher goals on public sector employment of disabled people, that aims to increase numbers, not just repeat old targets.

“ Promises are weaker than in the 2019 Employment Strategy. We need clear targets and timelines. ”

Pillar 3: Independent living and active participation

- There are 36 actions aimed at improving the delivery of specialist services, giving disabled people more control, and providing better support to take part in community life.
- It is positive that specialist disability services are now recognised as part of independent living, not just health services. This shows a move away from seeing disability as a medical issue, towards seeing disabled people as right-holders.
- The Strategy includes promises to expand and strengthen policy around Personal Assistant services, which would be a step forward.
- It also recommits to the [National Housing Strategy for Disabled People, 2022-2027](#), but largely repeats what is already in place.
- There is no clear target for closing congregated settings or large group homes. There is not enough attention on making all housing accessible which is a mainstream Universal Design approach. The needs of younger disabled people who are forced to live in nursing homes is also not addressed.
- Local authorities are recognised as important. This reflects the findings and recommendations from DFI's report, [Bridging the Gap: Implementation of UN CRPD at Local Level \(2025\)](#),. The commitment to appoint a full-time Access and Inclusion Officer in each local authority is very welcome.

Pillar 4: Health and wellbeing

- There are 24 actions under this Pillar, including a focus on mental health services and wellbeing. These aim to make services more accessible, respectful, and inclusive for disabled children and adults.
- It is positive that the wording has changed from “disability competency training” to “disability equality training”, showing a stronger rights-based approach.
- We welcome commitments to improve the accessibility of health services and mentions of Universal Design in achieving this.
- However, there are no actions on the new [Rare Diseases Strategy](#), which shows a gap in understanding of how people with rare diseases can also be part of the disability community.
- It is also concerning that there is no mention of disabled women’s health or actions to support it, including access to reproductive healthcare and other supports.



Pillar 5: Transport and mobility

- There are 15 actions aimed at improving transport and mobility, so disabled people can get where they want to go on an equal basis with others.
- The Strategy recognises the importance of Universal Design and a “whole-of-journey” approach which looks at accessibility across every stage of a journey.
- Plans to expand the Local Link Transport Programme and a new Vehicle Adaptation Scheme are welcome.
- The absence of any mention of the Mobility Allowance is worrying, especially given the long delays in creating a new scheme.

What is missing

No mention of some CRPD articles

The Government had to choose what to include in the Strategy, to avoid a very long list of actions. But not all articles of the UN CRPD are directly mentioned.

This is concerning because the Strategy is meant to be Ireland's plan to deliver on the Convention.

Some of the themes from these missing articles, including awareness-raising, participation in public and political life, access to justice and data collection, are in fact addressed in the strategy itself.



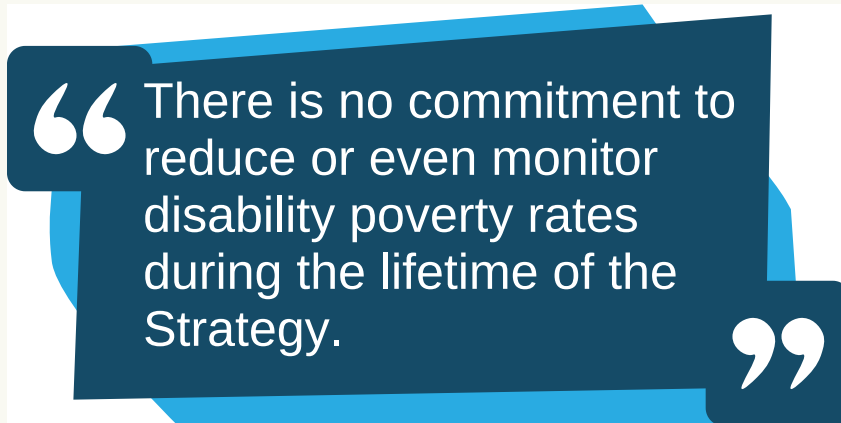
The following UN CRPD articles are not specifically mentioned:

- **Article 5** which is on equality and non-discrimination
- **Article 8** on Awareness-raising
- **Article 10** on Right to Life
- **Article 11** Situations of Risk and Humanitarian Emergencies)
- **Article 13** on Access to Justice
- **Article 22** on Respect for Privacy
- **Article 29** Participation in Political and Public Life
- **Article 31** Statistics and Data Collection.

No commitment to reducing poverty

We are concerned that it remains unclear how the Strategy will address the high rates of poverty among disabled people.

There is no commitment to reduce or even monitor disability poverty rates during the lifetime of the Strategy.



Independent advocacy

The Strategy includes no plans to provide advocacy services or a legal right to independent, rights-based, person-led advocacy.

This is a serious gap as advocacy is essential to supporting disabled people to use their legal rights, particularly under Article 12.3 of the UN CRPD, which is about the right to support to exercise legal capacity.

Some key issues

Intersectionality

The Strategy mentions intersectionality. This explains how different parts of a person's identity, such as gender, race, or disability shape their experiences.

This inclusion is positive but there are no clear practical actions, such as tackling gender-based violence experienced by disabled women.

The definition provided for intersectionality is limited, perhaps because Ireland does not yet have a legal definition.

Cost of Disability

It is welcome that the Strategy recognises the extra Costs of Disability disabled people face.

We argued that this should be a central theme of this Strategy, requiring actions across many Departments.

The Strategy promises to set-up a Cost of Disability Strategic Focus Network and more information is provided on this below. We are waiting for further details on how this will be done.



The Strategy plans to set up a Cost of Disability Strategic Focus Network.

Details expected in 2025.

Addressing the Cost of Disability should be an urgent priority, especially given the removal of once-off supports and no Cost of Disability measures in Budget 2026.

Data collection and research

The Strategy promises to set up a Disability Research and Data Advisory Group and to carry out a National Disability Survey after the next census.

It is important that data is collected about minority groups within the disability community, so that policies are fair and evidence-based.

Artificial intelligence

AI is developing quickly and can bring benefits and risks or disabled people.

The Strategy does not mention AI or how it could be used safely and effectively to support inclusion.

There is a chance to include AI in future plans, especially with the strategic focus network on assistive technology.

Irish Sign Language

It is positive to see commitments to Irish Sign Language, ISL.

Better implementation of the ISL Act is needed to meet the demand for ISL interpretation.

As Ireland's third official language, ISL must be properly supported so that deaf people can fully access services and information.



Next steps and implementation

The Government says the Strategy is a ‘living document’.

This means it will be reviewed and updated as things change, and progress is made.

We are waiting for more details about what actions will be taken and when. As noted earlier, these details should be set out in a series of two-year Programme Plans of Action due to be published by the end of 2025.

What the programme plans should include

These programme plans should include:

- How the actions under each commitment will be delivered
- Who is responsible for each action
- When each action will be completed
- How success will be measured, using Key Performance Indicators.

Strategic focus networks

The government will also create Strategic Focus Networks, each led by a government department or agency. They will bring together stakeholders to give advice on key issues.

Each network will hold one-day events or summits under each themed area.

These outcomes of these discussions will help shape future Programme Plans of Action for the Strategy.

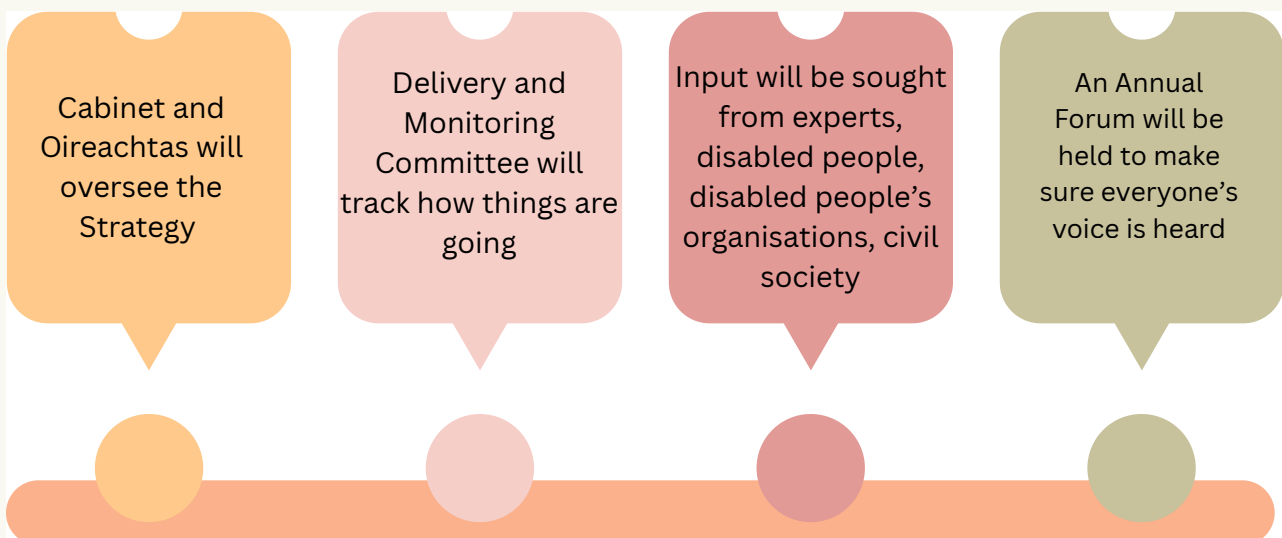
Under the First Plan 2025-2026, the Strategic Focus Networks will look at:

- Digital and Assistive Technology
- Cost of Disability
- Intersectionality.

Monitoring and implementation

Monitoring and checking the progress of the Strategy will be very important.

The following shows how the monitoring process will work



What is needed for success

As DFI noted when the Strategy was published, delivering real change for people with disabilities will need:

- Strong leadership and accountability
- Detailed plans for how to carry out the actions
- Enough funding to meet the commitments
- Skilled and committed staff
- Better public understanding of disability rights
- Easier ways for disabled people to get services and supports
- Partnership with all parts of the disability community.

DFI's role

DFI and our members are ready to play our part in making sure this Strategy leads to real change for people with disabilities.

We will work closely with the relevant departments and other key stakeholders to support the delivery of the Strategy and to make sure that the actions promised are followed through. DFI will take part in monitoring and review mechanisms, and we will track progress over the lifetime of the Strategy to see what is working well and where more action is needed.

We will also share feedback and evidence from our members and the wider disability community to help improve how the Strategy is delivered in practice.

We welcome feedback from our members at any stage, on what you think is working, what isn't, and what changes you want to see.



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