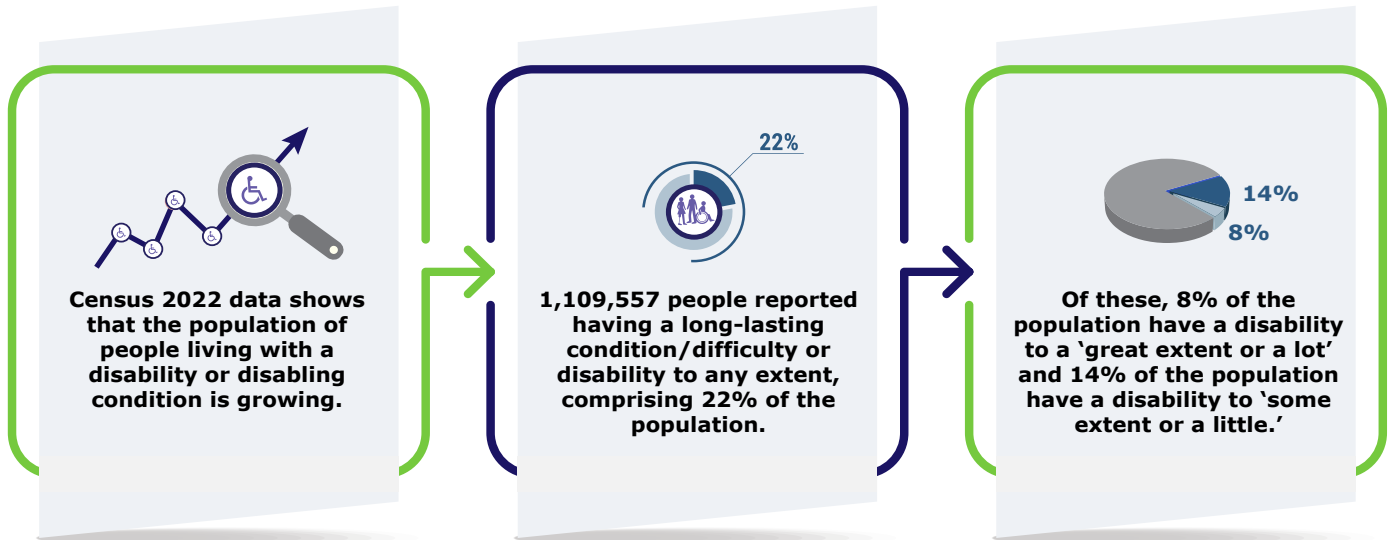




Disability Federation of Ireland Pre-Budget Submission 2024

Time for Action - Invest in People with Disabilities

People with disabilities live with high levels of **poverty and exclusion**. While our domestic economy grows and Irish finances are in rude health, current social protection supports maintain thousands of disabled people in poverty. Ireland is also at the bottom of the EU league table in relation to the disability employment gap.



Income

While the government is placing an emphasis on economic sustainability, the same attention must be given to social cohesion, prioritising increases to social protection payments and funding for crucial services in line with the rising cost of living. This would support the realisation for disabled people of the goals of the government's recently published Wellbeing Framework 2023. The Framework focuses on quality of life, with a particular emphasis on equality and sustainability, and itself recognises that people with disabilities "experience inequality across a high proportion of indicators"¹.

Inclusion

Ongoing structural inequalities prevent disabled people from realising their equal rights as citizens. Many disabled people struggle to secure suitable housing to live in, alongside necessary community supports. A lack of fully accessible, public transport means people with disabilities do not have free movement.

Disabled people also encounter significant waiting lists and lack of state provision of sufficient health, community, personal assistant and social care supports. A sustainable and properly resourced voluntary sector is also essential to deliver the supports disabled people need.

Action is needed in all of these areas which are necessary for independent living, equal to others, as outlined in the **UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities** (UN CRPD), which was unanimously ratified by the Dáil in 2018.

¹ Government of Ireland (2023). Understanding Life in Ireland: The Wellbeing-Framework 2023. <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/5cb4b-publication-of-understanding-life-in-ireland-the-well-being-framework-2023/>, p 33.

Key Statistics:

- Disabled people live with extra costs of €8,700 - €12,300 a year, not covered by existing social welfare provision (Indecon, 2021).
- Ireland ranks 24th of the EU 27 for disability poverty, and lowest in the EU for disability employment rates and the disability employment gap (Roadmap for Social Inclusion Progress Report, EDF 2023).
- One in two disabled people who are unable to work (44.3%) live in deprivation (CSO SILC, 2022).
- 1,250 people with disabilities under the age of 65 are inappropriately living in nursing homes (RTÉ via FOI, 2023)
- The number of disabled people on the housing list declined by half as much (5%) as those without disabilities (10%) in recent years (2020 Housing Agency, Summary of Social Housing Assessment).
- Upwards of 70% of disability services are provided by the voluntary sector.
- 64% of the HSE Disability Services budget supports about 8,300 people with disabilities in residential services (Disability Capacity Review, 2021).

Budget 2024: Rebuilding Sustainability to Invest in Our People

DFI is calling for a range of interwoven measures in Budget 2024 to ensure disabled people have equal opportunity to live independently in the community, with choices equal to others (Article 19, UN CRPD). Appropriate housing, adequate income and individualised social care supports (with access to timely integrated healthcare) will prevent unnecessary admissions to nursing-homes and go some way in achieving this.

1. Sustainable Disability Health and Social Care Services

Alongside the implementation of Sláintecare and the development of new Health Regions, integration of disability services is paramount to ensure the best outcomes for disabled people. Given that the majority of disability services are provided by the voluntary sector, a priority for government must be to resource and support a sustainable voluntary sector.

Disability voluntary organisations are experiencing a crisis in the recruitment and retention of staff, due to low levels of available skilled workers and insufficient levels of funding for Section 39 funded organisations. This causes disparity in pay, making it impossible for organisations to compete with better terms and conditions on offer for similar roles in the public sector. Ultimately this negatively impacts the quality and sustainability of services and supports for disabled people, exacerbating exclusion and reducing wellbeing and quality of life.



In Budget 2024, DFI calls for:

- Funding for **Section 39 funded organisation** to ensure their sustainability. Provide funding to increase pay by 15%², and reinstate the link to public sector pay for disability organisations.
- Sufficient investment to deliver the **Disability Capacity Review** and the swift publication of the **Disability Action Plan**. This includes building and strengthening comprehensive critical supports in the community such as personal assistant and home care services; respite; day services; residential services; multidisciplinary therapy services and a wide range of community supports.
- Repeat last year's €63m one-off **inflation fund for community and voluntary disability organisations** to address significant, ongoing inflation pressures.
- Provide a **disability funding stream** as part of the **Sláintecare Integration Innovation Fund**³ to drive best practice in the integrated care pathways for disabled people.
- Invest €26m to **fully roll-out Community Neurorehabilitation Teams** in every Community Health Organisation. This will include funding for Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and Clinical Psychologists.
- Provide €17.5m to support **disabled people under 65** to move out of nursing homes into appropriate housing, and to develop alternative housing and support pathways to stop more people entering nursing homes.

"In the last year the organisation has struggled to fill key roles. This has included front-line support worker roles who are critical to our ability to deliver safe, effective support. In one service area in 2022 the organisation had to step back from delivering support."
- DFI Member

These measures are necessary to tackle ongoing disability inequality, to deliver wellbeing and increase quality of life; enabling disabled people to live in the community, equal to others.

2. Tackling High Poverty Levels and the Cost of Disability

To address the structural and systemic causes of disabled people's disproportionately high levels of poverty, including the additional costs of having a disability, a specific poverty reduction strategy is required. This should outline yearly actions that will deliver the government's existing poverty reduction targets and action the findings of the Department of Social Protection's Indecon Report on the Cost of Disability.

² See the recently published recommendations of TASC here - https://www.tasc.ie/assets/files/pdf/the_wheel__tasc_report_f_v_080623.pdf.

³ See the Joint Statement on Energy Poverty from 29 social, environmental and voluntary organisations here: <https://www.friendsoftheearth.ie/news/cross-section-of-ngos-urge-government-to-tackle-cold-homes-a/>

In Budget 2024, DFI calls for:

- A recurring **Cost of Disability payment** of, at a minimum, €40 a week, building on the Cost of Disability one-off grant announced in Budget 2023.
- In addition, an increase in the **Disability Allowance**, and other core disability payments, of at least €27.50 a week. This is the absolute minimum required to keep pace with inflation.
- Ensure support for energy costs are set at an adequate level: **increase the annual value of the Fuel Allowance by €680.40** to restore its purchasing power, i.e. a weekly increase of €24.30 for a 28 week season. Consider restoring the 32 weeks of payment to better reflect the heating season.
- Continue to prioritise and use responsive targeted measures to support disabled people with the **cost-of-living crisis**, including addressing Energy Poverty issues, particularly in Winter 2023.⁴

“The cost of living is very bad, and I worry day-to-day constantly about it, that I won’t have enough money to heat my house. People are going to just suffer this year in this winter, especially people with disabilities. I really worry about what’s in the future for me and other people with disabilities.”

- Catherine Cooper, disabled self-advocate

3. Ensuring Community Inclusion and Participation

Independent living and being included as part of the community requires greater connectivity and collaboration across all local agencies, and for all Local Authority plans and actions to be disability proofed, from development to implementation and evaluation.

In Budget 2024, DFI calls for:

- A **Disability Inclusion Fund** for all **Local Authorities** to support their specific disability inclusion requirements in line with the UN CRPD and Public Sector Duty. Total cost: €7m.
- Investment in increased accessibility and frequency of **Local Link Transport** services for disabled people living in rural areas.
- Urgent establishment of a **Transport Support Scheme** to replace the Mobility Allowance and other transport schemes.
- Funding of €2m for **assistive technology** supports, including a national network, loan library, national database, information system, training programme and peer support development programme.

⁴ <https://www.friendsoftheearth.ie/news/cross-section-of-ngos-urge-government-to-tackle-cold-homes-a/>

4. Realising Housing for All

Delays, up to June 2023, in the publication of the Implementation Plan for the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027 mean that sufficient resources are necessary to enable immediate action. To ensure the positive ambitions of the Housing Strategy are realised it must now be rigorously implemented.

In Budget 2024, DFI calls for:

- Funding for Local Authority **Disability Friendly Housing Technical Advisor positions**, to be dedicated, standalone roles. Cost: €1.8m.
- Increase the **Capital Assistance Scheme** funding to €150m.
- Provide funding to build a sufficient percentage of **universally designed and wheelchair liveable** (i.e. Universal Design ++) housing.
- Increase the **Housing Adaptation Grant** for People with a Disability to €60m and urgently reform the scheme to support adaptations of private homes.
 - Maximum grants are not keeping pace with rising construction costs and must be increased to €60,000.
 - In addition, the income threshold for the Grant should be increased and only the income of the disabled person/primary carer in the household should be assessed for the means test.
- Increase the **Disabled Persons Grant** and Improvement Works in Lieu Schemes to €40m to support adaptation of social housing.
- A **top-up Capital Investment Fund** should be provided in 2024 to support disability upgrading and future-proofing of private and Local Authority homes which were not adapted in recent years due to insufficient funding within existing grant schemes.

A Clear and Transparent Budget

Meaningful and publicly available Budget disability proofing would provide greater clarity on the impact of budgetary measures for disabled people. Previous budgets have not been clear or transparent about the funding allocated. This has been further exacerbated by delays in publication of the HSE National Service Plan, creating additional uncertainty and a disruptive time lag in clarity about service allocations. DFI calls for a fully clear Budget Day announcement so disabled people can understand the implications of the budget for them - particularly in the areas of health and housing.



Progressing the UN CRPD

The UN CRPD commits to comprehensive actions to bring about the necessary changes to support the equal participation, rights and inclusion of people with disabilities. While some progress is being made, it is slow in other areas. For instance, we are waiting for:

- Ireland's UN CRPD implementation plan
- A Cost of Disability implementation plan, following the Department of Social Protection's 2021 Indecon Cost of Disability Report
- The Disability Capacity Review Action Plan
- Disability services strategic workforce planning to address supply and pay issues in the sector
- The Reasonable Accommodation Fund Review and Comprehensive Employment Strategy 2022-2024 Action Plan
- The findings of the Housing Adaptation Grant Review, and full implementation of the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People.

Two Budgets left to deliver on disability

Earlier this year the core disability budget moved from the Department of Health to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). Budget 2024 is the first opportunity for **DCEDIY to demonstrate its commitment to disability services and supports**. The current government has just two Budgets left to deliver on its significant Programme for Government commitments to disabled people and their families. Measures must be introduced to reduce the extremely high rates of poverty and to support meaningful inclusion and improved quality of life of disabled people.



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