



Disability Federation of Ireland

Half-Way Through – Are the Programme for Government Disability Commitments Being Implemented?

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Briefing on Key Issues

Social Exclusion

The following statistics demonstrate the level of exclusion that people with disabilities face:

- 13.5% of the population of Ireland, or 643,131 people have at least one disability.¹ (see more stats from Census 2016 in Appendix 1)
- 39.1% of those not working due to disability are at risk of poverty. This is over three times higher than the general population (11.6%).²
- Ireland has the lowest employment rate for disabled people in the EU, 20% lower than the EU average of 50.8%.³
- 27% of the homeless population have a disability - double the prevalence of disability in the general population (13.5%)⁴
- Only about 9% of people with disabilities, c. 56,000 people, are supported through specialist disability services.⁵

Wicked Problems

There are many complex issues impacting on the daily lives of people with disabilities today. They affect their income, choices, opportunities and the services that they need to live their day to day lives. These must be addressed to make a difference to this picture and implement the UN CRPD. These include:

- Huge levels of unmet need for services outlined in the Disability Capacity Review
- Young people with disabilities still being admitted to nursing homes due to a lack of community living options, whose situation was outlined in the Ombudsman's Wasted Lives report
- Up to €12,000 a year additional cost of disability faced by people
- The current levels of inflation that are adding to the poverty faced by disabled people
- Addressing the recruitment and retention crisis faced by voluntary disability organisations, including addressing lack of pay parity
- Progressing Disability Services for Children – workforce planning, pay and retention of staff, communication

¹ CSO, Census 2016

² CSO, Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2021

³ European Disability Forum, Poverty and Social Exclusion of People with Disabilities: European Human Rights Report: Issue 4 – 2020.

⁴ CSO, Census 2016

⁵ Department of Health, Disability Capacity Review to 2032 (2021)

- Recognising the value of and investing in community based, person-centred services like Personalised Budgets, Personal Assistance, Family Support etc.

The Programme for Government

The *Programme for Government- Our Shared Future* was published in June 2020, and contained a range of commitments in relation to disability. These commitments were related to UN CRPD implementation.

We are now half-way through the term of this government, and it is necessary to weigh up the outcomes progress that has been made to date and what is outstanding.

The Programme set out a vision for **a new social contract**:

*"Ireland requires a new national social contract between citizens and the State. The **ambition of this Government is to provide each citizen with accessible and affordable health care, housing, education, childcare and disability services, as well as a living wage, upskilling, and a dignified retirement.** It will provide greater security for individuals and communities and will be founded on the principle of equality and ensuring that every citizen can achieve their full potential..... Policy decisions throughout the course of the Government will consistently seek **to improve living standards for the most vulnerable in society.**"(p.74)*

The government has three Budgets remaining in which to make a difference in people with disabilities living standards and deliver on this ambitious new social contract. The Programme for Government was agreed after the commencement of COVID-19.

*"Ever since Ireland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we have **signalled to those with a disability that we are now serious about making a difference – a difference that will make things better.** The ratification raised awareness of the lived experience of people with disabilities, but we have much more to do."* (p.77)

Following correspondence from DFI, the Taoiseach replied, 26 February 2021, and stated that "the Cabinet Committee on Social Affairs and Equality, which meets regularly, will oversee implementation of Programme for Government commitments in the areas of social policy, equality and public services, including disability more generally."

The Programme for Government sets out the need to "continue to work with all government departments and their agencies, to ensure that a

disability perspective is integrated into mainstream policy development (p.79)”

Both the Programme for Government and the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) have committed to the development of an implementation plan to coordinate implementation of the UN CRPD. DFI is adamant that this needs to happen, and will engage in this process through our involvement in the NDIS Steering Group.

The Programme commits to “implement a consultation and participation model, in line with the UNCRPD, to enable people with disabilities to participate in the policy development process (p.78)”.

Some specific Programme for Government Disability Services commitments

The Programme for Government contains a range of commitments to improve disability services, such as:

- decreasing waiting times for Assessment of Need through additional therapy posts,
- prioritising early intervention and access to services,
- increasing PA and home support hours,
- expanding day services,
- additional respite,
- eliminating the practice of accommodating young people with disabilities in nursing homes,
- fully complete the establishment of the Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (0- 18 years) Network Teams.

These commitments are very positive. The expansion of services and increase in staff and funding needed to deliver this is not quantified in the Programme.

However, the publication of the *Disability Capacity Review to 2032* in 2021 laid out the level of investment and staffing needed. It estimated that a further €550m to €1000m investment in disability services by 2032 is required. (see further detail in Appendix 2)

A Disability Action Plan is being developed currently which will cover implementation of the Review until 2025. This must be published in advance of the summer economic statement this year so that it can inform Budget 2023, the first of three remaining Budgets of this government. **Starting this year, Budget announcements must transparently show the level of progress towards the Capacity Review.**

The Capacity Review is clear that staffing is essential to delivering the necessary services. Many of the organisations present at the AGM will be able to attest to:

- recruitment and retention challenges in their organisation
- the need for pay parity for section 39 organisations to enable them to retain staff, which has long been called for by the sector
- the need for a workforce planning approach to address the recruitment crisis, with representation from the sector (DFI called for this in its submission to the Disability Action Plan)

The impact of staffing shortages can be seen in:

- difficulty for children and adults to access therapy,
- the challenge for people to get a Personal Assistant,
- the lack of fully staffed Children's Disability Network Teams and more.

Individuals with disabilities will remain unable to access the services they need for independence if this is not addressed. This is needed to deliver on the Programme for Government commitment to:

*"improve the services available through better implementation and by working together across Government in a better way. **We want to empower and give those with a disability the ability to choose the supports that most meet their needs.**" (p.77)*

Social Protection/Income

The Commitments.....

The Programme for Government promised that “Policy decisions throughout the course of the Government will consistently seek to improve living standards for the most vulnerable in society”, committing to a new social contract. It also stated:

*“As we emerge from the COVID pandemic, we must build upon the unity, which was fundamental in our response, to **improve outcomes for those who are struggling on low incomes, struggling with caring responsibilities, having to raise their families alone, or living with a disability.** Any changes made in social welfare provisions will continue to be gender- and equality-proofed. We will do this by rigorous implementation of the ...Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025. (p.75)*

The Roadmap for Social Inclusion commits to specific poverty reduction and employment targets for people with disabilities, ie to

- reduce the AROPE (At Risk of Poverty and Social Exclusion) rate from 36.9%, first to 28.7% (2025) and then to 22.7% (2030); and
- increase the employment rate from 22.3%, first to 25% (2021) and then to 33% (2027).⁶

The disability specific section of the Programme for Government also commits to “use the recent research into the cost of disability to individuals and families to properly inform the direction of future policy (p.79).”

How we’re doing.....

Poverty

For many years disabled people have consistently had poverty rates 2-3 times higher than the national average. We are not making progress to change this sadly, in fact things are getting worse.

⁶<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/46557/bf7011904ede4562b925f98b15c4f1b5.pdf#page=1>. It also commits to continuing to implement NDIS and CES, develop a ‘strawman’ proposal to restructure long-term disability payments and commission and publish the cost of disability report.

The First Progress Report on the Roadmap to Social Inclusion shows that in 2019 Ireland's EU At Risk of Poverty and Exclusion (AROPE) poverty rate for disabled people actually disimproved - 37.8% of people with disabilities were deemed to be at risk, with Ireland still ranking a dismal 23rd out of the EU27. The second Progress Report is due to be published soon.

The recently published CSO 2021 SILC data also paint a bleak and alarming picture. The at risk of poverty rate for those not at work due to a long-standing health condition (disability) for 2021 was 39.1%. This rate is up almost 6% on last year's rate, when the overall average declined to 11.6% of the population. (See Appendix 3 for more details)

Disabled people are being left behind while overall poverty rates declines. The rate of poverty among disabled people is now 3 to 4 times that of the general population.

Cost of Disability

On cost of disability, a key driver of these poverty rates, the government published Indecon's research in December 2021. It confirmed what disability organisations have been highlighting for decades.

It found that the extra costs per year faced by those with disabilities ranged on average:

- between €9,600- €12,300 for those with 'severe' disabilities
- between €8,700- €10,000 for those with 'limited' disabilities

The annual basic income provided by Disability Allowance in 2022 is €10,816.

The Report recommends that measures to address the additional costs of disability should be based on a multifaceted approach involving:

- increased cash payments,
- enhanced access to service provision, and
- specific targeted grant programmes.

These should focus on:

- alleviation of poverty,
- reducing inequality, and
- improving social inclusion and quality of life of disabled individuals.

58% of the social protection recipients surveyed by Indecon indicated that extra income would be most useful in addressing these extra costs, while 31% said better services would be most helpful.

For many years disability organisations have called for a €20 weekly cost of disability payment to start to acknowledge these extra costs. This would only address 1/10th of the costs outlined above however.

Inflation and Cost of Living

The current exceptional levels of inflation and cost of living crisis are adding to the poverty already faced by people with disabilities. For someone who has to use electricity for a power chair or essential medical equipment for example, there is no way to mitigate against this. The extra costs for food, housing, medical equipment, energy etc. described by Indecon are increasing rapidly for many.

The Indecon report also shows that:

- disabled people spend 10% more on energy costs,
- are more likely to be in arrears on utility bills, and
- are more likely to be unable to afford to keep their home adequately warm. (This was based on CSO figures from 2003-2017, so these figures are likely to have increased substantially, especially over the past year.)

For the first time in 3 years, Disability Allowance core rates were increased in 2022, by €5.

Many anti-poverty organisations, and DFI, pointed out that this was unlikely to even keep pace with inflation, which has proven true. **(A €5 increase on €203 a week is a 2.5% increase, while inflation is now running at approximately 7%.)**

While there have been some targeted measures to address cost of living for those relying on social protection, such as the increase and extension of fuel allowance, not enough has been done to support disabled people (only 50% of whom qualify for fuel allowance), who are drastically more at risk of poverty.

The UK government recently announced a cost of living package which offered those disabled people who rely on social protection a universal £650 payment, a £150 disability cost of living payment, £400 discount in energy bills and a £150 council tax rebate. A similarly targeted support package is desperately needed for disabled people in Ireland, but has not yet been provided.

Conclusion

Talks between the Unions, Employers and Government on cost of living are underway. DFI is insistent on the inclusion of disability as part of the “social wage” element of those negotiations with Government. The social wage developments must expressly include disabled people and their families and be within the ambition of that new social contract. **Otherwise, we are losing ground, condemning disabled people who cannot work to poverty, and UN CRPD implementation recedes.** It is worth noting that on average EU countries spend 2% of their GDP on social protection for disability. Ireland spends 0.8%, the second lowest in the EU.

The outcome of the pay and social wage talks will determine the scope of the next few budgets. If UN CRPD implementation is not one of the pillars of the social wage package the next few years will be ones of growing poverty and exclusion across all fronts for disabled people and their families.

Note: To read the Disability section of the Programme for Government in full see Appendix 4

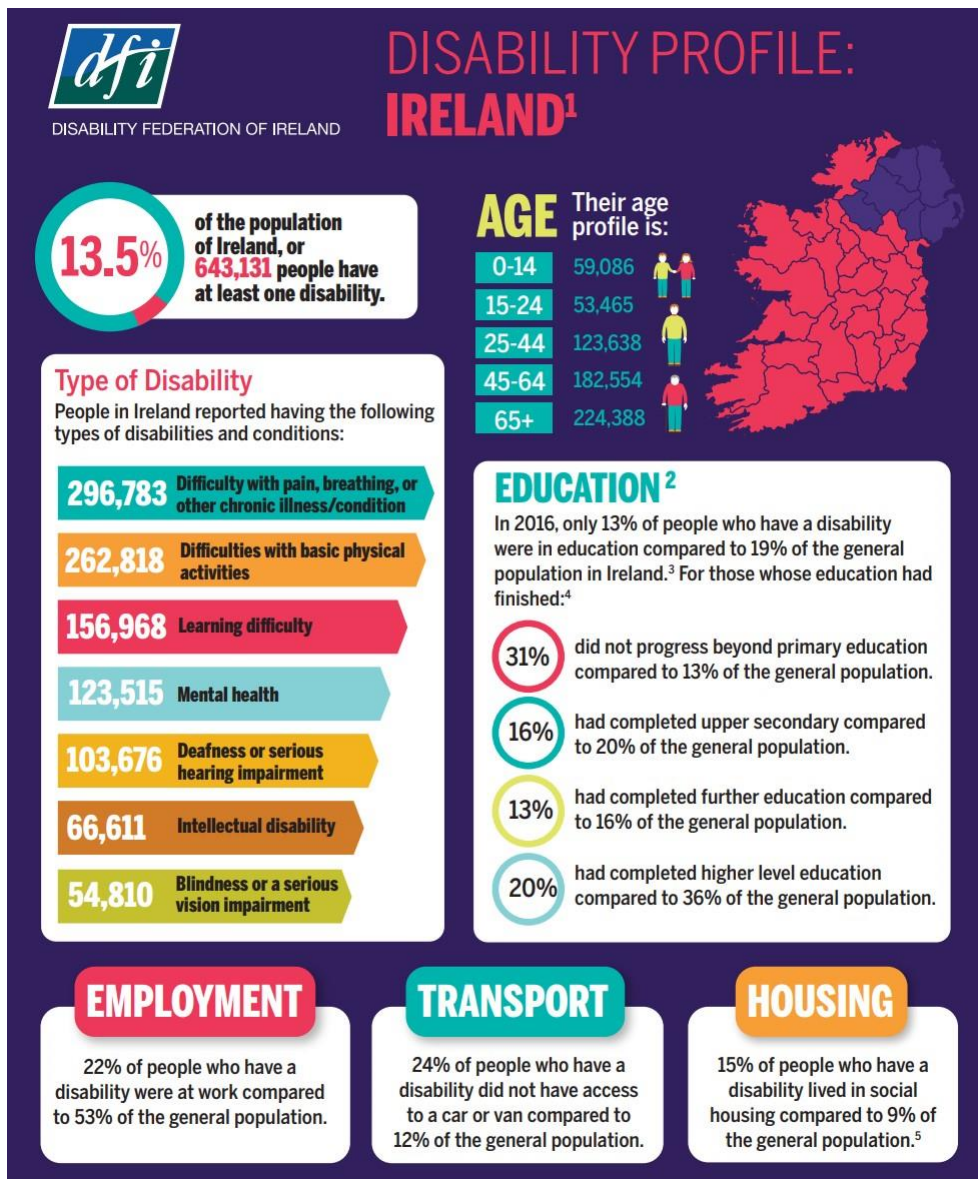
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Appendices

Appendix 1- Census 2016 Disability Statistics



See on DFI website- <https://www.disability-federation.ie/publications/dfi-infographic-ireland/>

Appendix 2- Tables from Disability Capacity Review (p.29) showing breakdown of funding needed

Table 1a: Estimate, additional annual funding required to meet demographic and unmet need – low

Type of disability service	Demography only			Demography + unmet need		
	2022	2027	2032	2022	2027	2032
	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
Residential – Minimum scenario	60	120	160	220	280	320
Day services	8	30	60	40	60	90
PA & home help	4	10	15	34	40	45
Therapies	3	5	6	48	48	54
Respite	2	3	4	18	21	25
Community services	3	6	9	3	6	9
Total (rounded)	80	170	250	350	450	550

Estimates are indicative only. Totals may not add up due to rounding

Table 1b: Estimate, additional annual funding required to meet demographic and unmet need – high

Type of disability service	Demography only			Demography + unmet need		
	2022	2027	2032	2022	2027	2032
	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
Residential – Pre-recession scenario	60	120	160	400	500	550
Day services	40	140	250	70	170	280
PA & home help	4	10	15	34	40	45
Therapies	3	5	6	74	74	80
Respite	2	3	4	18	21	25
Community services	3	6	9	3	6	9
Total (rounded)	110	280	450	600	800	1,000

Estimates are indicative only. Totals may not add up due to rounding

See Disability Capacity Review here-

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d3b2c-disability-capacity-review-to-2032-a-review-of-social-care-demand-and-capacity-requirements-to-2032/>

Appendix 3- Table from Survey of Income and Living Conditions 2021 showing breakdown of poverty rates

Table 3.1 At risk of poverty, deprivation¹ and consistent poverty rates by demographic characteristics and year

	At risk of poverty rate		Deprivation rate ¹		Consistent poverty rate	
	2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021
State	13.2	11.6	14.3	13.8	4.7	4.0
Principal Economic Status (aged 16 years and over)						
Employed	6.5	4.4	9.2	8.6	1.6	0.9
Unemployed	33.2	23.2	33.3	31.6	16.4	10.2
Retired	9.8	11.8	7.0	7.6	1.1	2.3
Unable to work due to long-standing health problems	33.4	39.1	37.0	39.6	16.2	19.2
Student, pupil	20.3	17.4	16.1	13.0	6.2	5.7
Fulfilling domestic tasks	20.7	19.5	16.5	15.6	5.8	5.1

See Survey on Income and Living Conditions here-

<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2021/povertyanddeprivation/>

Appendix 4- Disability Section of Programme for Government (pp. 77-79)

Disability

The Government believes in delivering health care in a manner that promotes patient empowerment, improves quality of life, and increases life expectancy. Ever since Ireland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we have signalled to those with a disability that we are now serious about making a difference – a difference that will make things better. The ratification raised awareness of the lived experience of people with disabilities, but we have much more to do. In doing more, we now need to improve the services available through better implementation and by working together across Government in a better way. We want to empower and give those with a disability the ability to choose the supports that most meet their needs.

Reflecting this, we will:

- Prioritise early diagnosis interventions and access to services.
- Improve and change services through better implementation and collaboration.
- Strengthen rights through the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities UNCRPD).
- Raise awareness of the lived experience of people with disabilities.
- Ensure that the most effective interventions are provided for each individual, to guarantee the best outcomes.
- Seek to reduce the waiting times for assessment of need under the Disability Act 2005, through the full-year provision of additional therapy posts.
- Fully implement the new standard operating procedure for assessment of needs for all applications.
- Fully complete the establishment of the Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (0- 18 years) Network Teams.
- Integrate access to mental health supports as part of disability service provision.
- Resource the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, with an emphasis on close collaboration between state agencies and civil society.
- Continue with the successful decongregation programme and complete a further move of more people with disabilities from congregated settings to homes in the community, with the necessary supports. People with disabilities and their families have been impacted by COVID-19 in many ways, whether from a move to delivering services online, or a reduction in services, to feelings of isolation. A renewed focus on how we provide services is needed.

We will:

- Work with all stakeholders to see how services and resources can be delivered.
- Reduce and provide a pathway to eliminate the practice of accommodating young people with serious disabilities in nursing homes.
- Expand and enhance the in-school speech and language pilots to improve the delivery of therapies in schools.
- Ensure that students with additional needs get the right assistance, at the right time, building on the learnings from the pilot currently underway, and subject to further consultation.
- Work towards implementing the most recent Disability Capacity Review.

- Support the Dialogue Forum, working with voluntary organisations to build a stronger working relationship between the State and the voluntary healthcare sector

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

We will enshrine disability rights by finalising the legislation required following Ireland's recent ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

The legislation will:

- Double the target for employment of people with disabilities in the public service to 6%.
- Reform the Mental Health Act 2001.
- Improve protections for people with disabilities against hate crime and hate speech.
- Improve access for people with disabilities to jury service.
- Remove outdated references to 'persons of unsound mind' from the Statute Book.
- Commence the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 to abolish wardships.
- Develop an implementation plan to coordinate implementation of the UNCRPD.
- Implement a consultation and participation model, in line with the UNCRPD, to enable people with disabilities to participate in the policy development process.
- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the UNCRPD after the first reporting cycle.
- Work with other parties in the Oireachtas to establish a Joint Oireachtas Committee to assist in monitoring and implementing the provisions in the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Raising Awareness and Lived Experience

We will:

- Develop programmes promoting awareness, among the general public, of the lived experience of people with disabilities.
- Enable people with disabilities to participate in cultural and heritage-related activities and programmes.
- Work towards physical accessibility to all government departments, local authorities and agencies providing services.
- Include the consideration of disability in all housing policy reviews.

Cost of Disability

We will use the recent research into the cost of disability to individuals and families to properly inform the direction of future policy. We are committed to the introduction of personalised budgets, improving the provision of services for people with disabilities through a range of options, including service brokers, and empowering people to choose the supports that most meet their needs. This will be based on the experience of the pilot schemes.

Employment Supports

We will:

- Promote an awareness and support programme for employers to support the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities.
- Develop initiatives that improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities living in rural areas, including through remote working options.
- Fast-track the return to Disability or Invalidity Pension for people where employment opportunities do not succeed.
- Fine-tune and expand targeted employment schemes, such as the Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSS) and the Ability Programme, to help more people with disabilities stay in the workforce.
- Commit to the social farming model, recognising the value of offering farming and horticultural work experience to people availing of health and social services, including disability services.
- Conduct an audit of equity of access to Further Education and Training (FET) for those with disabilities.

Residential and Respite Care

We will provide:

- Additional residential places and new emergency residential placements.
- Additional appropriate residential places for people currently living in respite care, as an emergency response to their needs.
- Further intensive transitional support packages for children and young people with complex/high support needs.
- Additional respite nights for people with disabilities.

Day Services and Supports

We will:

- Work to expand adult day services and supports, throughout the country, for adults with physical and sensory disabilities, intellectual disability, and autism.
- Deliver increased home support and Personal Assistance hours.

Autism Spectrum Disorders

We will:

- Implement the National Autism Plan and keep it under regular review.
- Ensure that there is effective cross-departmental implementation of the National Autism Plan, with reports being made to the relevant cabinet committee.
- Implement a programme of awareness-raising to provide a better information resource for children and parents about available supports.
- Deliver a campaign to create awareness of the challenges, needs and experiences of people with autism spectrum disorder.

- Build capacity and competence amongst key professionals working with people with autism, including a national training programme for clinicians.

Expanding into New Areas

We will:

- Expand the Equality Budgeting Initiative, looking at outcomes of expenditure, as they relate to people with a disability.
- Build on the work already undertaken to ensure that all public transport services are accessible to people with a disability.
- Continue to work with all government departments and their agencies, to ensure that a disability perspective is integrated into mainstream policy development.

Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons

We will review and improve the national policy document Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse, National Policy and Procedures.

The full Programme for Government can be accessed here-

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/>



DFI is about making Ireland fairer for people with disabilities.

We work to create an Ireland where everyone can thrive, where everyone is equally valued.

We do this by supporting people with disabilities and strengthening the disability movement.

There are over 120 member organisations in DFI. We also work with a growing number of other organisations that have a significant interest in people with disabilities.

DFI provides:

- Information
- Training and Support
- Networking
- Advocacy and Representation
- Research, Policy Development and Implementation
- Organisation and Management Development

Disability is a societal issue and DFI works with Government, and across all the social and economic strands and interests of society.

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