



Disability Federation of Ireland

**Submission for the Human Rights Council
resolution 57/12 on local government and human
rights**

15 July 2025

1. Introduction

Disability Federation of Ireland, DFI, is a pan-disability, civil society umbrella organisation. We have over 100 member organisations from across Ireland. Our membership includes advocacy groups, community groups, service providing organisations, and family carer organisations, among others. We work at the local, national, and international level to promote the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN CRPD, and a more equal society for people with disabilities.

This submission is a summary of some of DFI's work on the local implementation of the UN CRPD. DFI is specifically focused on disability rights in Ireland. We hope that our work on these issues can be applied more broadly to other areas of human rights, and other states.

In this submission, we present two pieces of recent or on-going work on the local implementation of the UN CRPD. First is a research paper we commissioned, and published earlier this year, which looks at the local implementation of the UN CRPD, barriers to that implementation, and possible solutions to these barriers. Second is our ongoing work with one specific local authority, which has created a Committee that works to promote and implement the rights of people with disabilities in that local authority. This is a first of its kind in Ireland.

2. Research on local implementation of the UN CRPD

Last year, DFI undertook research on the local implementation of the UN CRPD.¹ This research, titled "Bridging the Gap" looked at how the UN CRPD was being implemented at a local level in Ireland, what barriers prevented its local implementation, and how these barriers could be addressed. The report provides a good look both at disability rights at the local level in Ireland, and some of the barriers to the implementation of human rights more generally at the local level in Ireland.

2.1 Human rights at the local level

The implementation of human rights at a local level is important, as local authorities have a hand in many of the services that shape people's every day lives. In the case of the UN CRPD, local authorities manage key services that are vital to independent living and social inclusion for people with disabilities, including:

- Housing (Article 19)
- Roads (Article 9)

¹ <https://www.disability-federation.ie/dfi-and-local-government1/bridging-the-gap-local-authorities-and-disability.html>

- Libraries (Articles 21 & 30)
- Transport (Article 9)
- Public spaces (Articles 19, 29 & 30)

It is therefore important that local authorities understand the importance of human rights, and their role in implementing conventions such as the UN CRPD.

In a survey as part of this research, Chief Executives of Local Authorities showed a moderate level of awareness of the UN CRPD, and an understanding of its link to their own work at local level.² Many local authorities were able to cite examples of good practices and improvements in their local area, including housing adaptations, accessibility improvements, awareness campaigns.

2.2 Barriers to Implementation

Some of the barriers to local implementation are unique to Ireland. This includes structural limitations that have an impact on local authorities in Ireland. Although reforms over the past decade have strengthened them somewhat, Ireland remains one of the most centralised states in Europe, and its local authorities receive among the lowest funding across OECD countries.³ Related to this, Irish local authorities are considered to have limited democratic decision-making powers when compared to other OECD local authorities.⁴

Within local authorities in Ireland, the staff most responsible for disability issues is the Access Officer. All local authorities have an Access Officer, as required under the Disability Act 2005. However, it is often a part time role, added on to a full-time position. And in many local authorities, it comes without a defined job description. A survey of Access Officers as part of the previously cited research found other difficulties they faced in trying to implement disability rights on a local level.⁵ These included:

- Lack of resources
- Lack of staff
- Lack of buy-in from senior management
- Lack of Key Performance Indicators around disability at a local level
- Lack of training for Access Officers
- Inconsistent engagement and consultation with the disability community in local authorities

² https://www.disability-federation.ie/assets/files/pdf/dfi_research_summary_ua_.pdf

³ <https://www.oecd.org/regional/regional-policy/profile-Ireland.pdf>

⁴ Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (Monitoring Committee), “Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Ireland” (Report, CG(2023)45-17final, 25 October 2023).

⁵ https://www.disability-federation.ie/assets/files/pdf/dfi_research_summary_ua_.pdf

Chief Executives also noted that the role of Access Officer required more support, and should be a full-time role. The rights of people with disabilities should of course be a core role of every local authority, and taken into account by all staff. However, the Access Officer could act to lead, coordinate, and champion actions, if the role was properly supported. The barriers to implementing the UN CRPD that they identified included:

- Inadequate funding
- Gaps in training
- Accessibility, particularly in older buildings and rural areas
- Limited transport and employment opportunities for people with disabilities in many areas

2.3 Proposed Solutions

There are some clear solutions to many of the problems facing local authorities in Ireland as they work to implement the UN CRPD. Increased resources around disability issues would be welcomed. Access Officers noted that other local programmes, focused on aging, climate, and health received much greater funding and resources than disability. The role of Access Officer could also be strengthened, by making it into a full-time role, senior enough to have real decision-making power and guide policy at the local level. Some kind of national programme to guide the local implementation, set benchmarks, and link disability work across local authorities, could also be an important change to the way disability rights are addressed and implemented by local authorities. Ireland is currently in the process of developing a new national disability strategy, and this could be incorporated into that process.

3. Embedding civil society in local government

In addition to our research on the local implementation of the UN CRPD, DFI has, for several years now, partnered with a local authority, Wicklow County Council, to work with them to improve their implementation of disability rights. As part of this partnership, a DFI staff member has been working embedded in Wicklow County Council. This partnership has resulted in the Wicklow County Council Disability & Inclusion Steering Committee, or DISC.⁶ This is an innovative approach to disability inclusion and the realisation of the rights of people with disabilities.

The DISC was ratified by the elected members of the Council in 2020, and is a sustainable structure. It is chaired by the Director of Services for Social Development, and includes elected councillors and stakeholders from the community, including people with disabilities and the

⁶ <https://www.disability-federation.ie/dfi-and-local-government1/wicklow-disc1.html>

organisations that support them that work with the local authority. It is administered by the DFI staff member who is embedded with the Council. It does not replace the role of the Access Officer, but complements their work.

In December of 2023, the DISC published its first Disability and Inclusion Strategy for Wicklow.⁷ This strategy will run until 2028, The Council has made funding for implementation available out of discretionary funds, as there is no disability rights implementation fund available for local authorities in Ireland. Other achievements of the DISC to date include:

- Successfully advocated for
 - a change to the local planning application process, making it necessary for large festivals and events to include a mobile Changing Places⁸
 - the inclusion of Changing Places facilities in Wicklow Library and Avondale Forest Park.
- Worked alongside Age Friendly to advise Avondale Forest Park on accessibility in advance of their public opening. The attraction was recently recognised as Ireland's first Age Friendly site by the World Health Organisation.
- Facilitated Universal Design training for district engineers
- Facilitated Disability Awareness and UN Convention training for Wicklow County Council staff, across multiple departments

4. Conclusion

These are two initiatives to improve the implementation of human rights at the local level. Both are focused on the UN CRPD, and both are tailored to the specific situation of local authorities in Ireland. However, it is hoped that they can provide some broader lessons on the theme of local government and human rights, and contribute to the global conversation around this issue.

⁷ https://countywicklowppn.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Digital-Wicklow-Disability-Inclusion-Strategy-Booklet_compressed-Final.pdf

⁸ Changing places are large accessible bathrooms, which include a ceiling track hoist and adjustable height changing table.



DFI's vision

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



DFI's mission

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



Four-year goal

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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