

**Alternative Report  
For  
Ireland  
On the  
Convention on the Rights of Persons with  
Disabilities**

## Organisations Involved in this Report

- 1. Chime** - Chime is Ireland's national charity for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people. Through advice, services and our community network we support those who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, while also championing for equal rights and advocating for full inclusion in every part of society. Founded over 60 years ago, Chime offers core services that include care, technology and advice & information services. Chime's social groups, technical experts and dedicated centres create a community of inclusivity that helps Deaf and Hard of Hearing people to feel valued and supported. With a history of advocacy Chime work with Deaf and Hard of Hearing people from every walk of life to create change.
- 2. 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.
- 3. Enable Ireland** - Enable Ireland provides services to over 13,000 children and adults with disabilities and their families from over 40 locations in 14 counties. Covering childhood to adulthood our expert teams work with the individual and their family on a plan for each life stage.



- 4. Irish Wheelchair Association** - Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) is one of Ireland's leading representative organisations and service providers for people with physical disabilities. We were founded on the belief that everyone should be able to live a life of choice and equality. IWA provides a nationwide assisted living service, community centres in every county, a fleet of accessible buses, a national parking permit and driving school service, wheelchair accessible social houses and help young people with disabilities to build employability skills and confidence.
- 5. Mental Health Reform** - Mental Health Reform is Ireland's leading national coalition on mental health. Our vision is of an Ireland with accessible, effective and inclusive mental health services and supports. We drive the progressive reform of mental health services and supports, through coordination and policy development, research and innovation, accountability and collective advocacy. Together with our 86-member organisations and thousands of individual supporters, MHR provides a unified voice to the Government, its agencies, the Oireachtas and the general public on mental health issues. Further information on our members and our work can be found on the Mental Health Reform website, [www.mentalhealthreform.ie](http://www.mentalhealthreform.ie).
- 6. Rehab Group** - Rehab Group is an independent voluntary organisation that has been providing services to adults and children with disabilities for more than 70 years. We are a campaigning organisation that advocates for the 12,500 people who currently use our services and their families. Our purpose is to empower those we support to lead more independent lives and play an active and meaningful role in their communities by providing high-quality, flexible, and sustainable care services, learning, training and education, and employment skills and opportunities. We are a rights-based and inclusion-focused organisation comprising three divisions: RehabCare, National Learning Network and Employability and Social Enterprise. We aim to consistently amplify the voices of the individuals who use our services.

## **Involvement of People with Disabilities**

All of the organisations represented in this report work daily with people with disabilities. The content of this report is the result of that work. In some cases, the experiences in this report were gathered through focus groups with or surveys of people with disabilities. In other cases, experiences are based on what has been reported to these organisations as a result of their ongoing work supporting people with disabilities, or what they see the people with disabilities that they work with struggling with in their daily lives.

## Executive Summary

The overall report finds that while some areas of policy are improving the situation for people with disabilities, this improvement is often slow and marked by continuing problems. In other areas, the situation has either stalled or worsened since Ireland's state report was submitted in 2021. Here is a brief summation of each article:

### Article 9 – Accessibility

Accessibility has improved in many ways across Ireland, albeit slowly. There is still often a failure to consult meaningfully with people with disabilities, which means that the priorities of people with disabilities are not necessarily reflected in public works and other areas of accessibility.

### Article 12 - Equal recognition before the law

Since the submission of the state report in 2021 the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act, has been commenced. There are still some obstacles, to a full realisation of the rights it represents.

### Article 19 - Living independently and being included in the community

The housing crisis in Ireland continues to be a major barrier to independent living, has worsened in recent years. In addition to a lack of suitable housing, people with disabilities face other barriers.

### Article 27 - Work and employment

Ireland has one of the lowest employment rates for people with disabilities in the EU. The difficulties people with disabilities face in finding and maintaining employment are not improving.

### Article 28 - Adequate standard of living and social protection

Poverty is a consistent issue among people with disabilities. The high cost of living, inadequate social welfare rates, and the high cost of having a disability in Ireland, contribute to this problem.

### Article 29 - Participation in political and public life

On paper, Ireland has no barriers to voting, running for office, or taking part in politics. However, the implementation of these laws on the ground means that many people find it difficult to exercise their rights.

### Article 31 - Statistics and data collection

Ireland's data collection and disaggregation around disability leaves many organisations without the data they need to properly advocate for those they represent.

## Introduction

This Alternative Report is the work of several disability organisations working in Ireland. It represents their collective knowledge and experience around the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). It focuses on a specific set of articles. These represent areas where these organisations felt their experiences and insight could make a significant contribution to the work of the Committee, as well as those areas where there have been changes in policy or experiences since the submission of the state report in 2021. The collective organisations want to give a clear, up-to-date view of the situation in Ireland. They also represent areas in which urgent issues need to be brought to the Committee's attention. In Ireland, as in so many places around the world, it sometimes feels as if disability rights are moving backward. Certainly, in many areas highlighted in this report, the situation seems to be getting worse, or at best holding steady, rather than improving. This is despite the fact that Ireland's economy has been doing well, and the lack of resources that characterised the recession is no longer an issue. The articles of the UN CRPD covered in this report are:

- Article 9 - Accessibility
- Article 12 - Equal recognition before the law
- Article 19 - Living independently and being included in the community
- Article 27 - Work and employment
- Article 28 - Adequate standard of living and social protection
- Article 29 - Participation in political and public life
- Article 31 - Statistics and data collection

The inclusion of these articles, and exclusion of others, should not be interpreted as meaning that there are not important issues to address in other areas of the UN CRPD in Ireland. The goal of this report is to bring our expertise to a particular set of articles, and provide this information for the Committee to consider as it examines Ireland under the UN CRPD for the first time.

## Article 9 – Accessibility

### Accessible Infrastructure

The organisations involved in the drafting of this report feel that the accessibility of infrastructure has improved somewhat in the past few years, however several issues remain. Many of these issues can be traced to a lack of meaningful consultation with people with disabilities about what they need from the physical environment. Organisations observe

that even when consultation takes place, it is often late, and the results rarely appear to influence or be reflected in decisions subsequently made by the state. Consultations can become tokenistic without the presence of feedback or rationale on decision-making which does not take account of people's experiences. This leaves many people with disabilities with a lack of trust in the consultation process and in the state.

Another common area of complaint around accessible infrastructure in Ireland is the lack of accessible public transport. Many people with disabilities are unable to use a private vehicle, either because of accessibility or financial barriers. Therefore, they rely heavily on public transport, however this system has other barriers.

Evidence from disabled people cited by Rehab Group found some good practices, such as the free travel pass that allows people with disabilities to use public transit with no charge, and the Local Link services that serve many rural areas. Those who were able to make use of this service found it reliable and accessible. However, Local Link does not reach many rural locations, and often does not run in the evening or at night, not supporting people in how they would like to live their lives. And the free travel pass is only provided to those receiving a social protection payment, not all people with disabilities who might need it.

For all forms of public transport (buses, trains and light rail), there are issues with ensuring that all bus stops and train stations are fully accessible. In addition, for many forms of public transport, in particular trains and intercity buses, people with disabilities who require accommodation or assistance must notify the service between 1 to 24 hours in advance.<sup>1</sup> There are also continuing issues with designing bus stops and other transportation infrastructure in a way that makes people with disabilities feel safe, while also allowing for the needs of other travellers. Too often, the needs of cyclists and other modes of travel are put before those of people with disabilities travelling by public transport.<sup>2</sup>

There is also a lack of support for options other than public transport. The Mobility Allowance, a monthly payment to those unable to use public transport, to assist in the payment of taxis, enabled greater independent travel. A related scheme, the Motorised Transport Grant, help people adapt their private vehicles to suit their disability. However, these schemes were closed to new applicants in 2013, and no new scheme has been created to replace them. In the 2022 Annual Report of the Ombudsman, this lack of progress, despite clear calls from the Ombudsman to resume both schemes, was described as "progress has

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.irishrail.ie/en-ie/travel-information/accessibility-onboard-trains/planning-your-journey>;  
<https://www.transportforireland.ie/accessibility/travelling-with-a-visual-impairment/>

<sup>2</sup> [\*Getting Nowhere: - Irish Wheelchair Association.\*](#)

not just faltered but has stalled”.<sup>3</sup> This has left those who can’t access public transport with no clear alternative. This creates a financial burden and adds to the cost of disability for individuals.

Driving and walking can also present barriers. There is no consistent, mandatory accessibility standard for streets, footpaths and disabled parking bays. In focus groups conducted by Rehab Group, people with disabilities also report difficulty accessing recreation and leisure spaces, including parks, greenways, playgrounds, walking trails and beaches. This is despite the fact that in the National Physical Activity Review,<sup>4</sup> launched in 2016, Action 29 was to “Develop Guidelines, Materials, and Pathways to Promote Physical Activity for Mental Health Services and Disability Service”. Some programmes were successfully launched under this action, including a GAA coaching programme and an inclusive boccia tournament, but access to outdoor recreation remains an issue.

## Accessible information

It is the experience of the organisations represented here, that accessible information has improved over the past number of years. “Plain English” summaries are becoming more common, and many websites have been updated to be more accessible and compatible with screen readers. Braille, large print, Easy to Read and other accessible formats are also more common. As an example, the HSE recently partnered with Enable Ireland to produce accessible solutions for their newsletters on Adult Day Services. These now include Easy to Read versions, accessible Word and PDF documents, and video guides and podcasts, covering a wide array of accessible formats.

However, there are still barriers. For example, many non-profit organisations and other NGOs working in the disability sector do not have the resources to update websites or provide accessible versions of all their materials.

Access to Irish Sign Language (ISL) and ISL interpreters remains an issue in accessing information, services and communicating with public bodies. Ireland commenced the Irish Sign Language Act 2017 in late 2020, making ISL an official language of Ireland. The Act requires public bodies to provide sign language interpretation for people seeking access to statutory entitlements and services. Organisations report that the provision of free ISL for those seeking access to public services has improved to some degree. However, a December 2021 report on the operation of the Act found that just over half of public bodies, 51%, were

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<sup>3</sup> <https://ombudsman.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.ombudsman.ie/media/285148/fdae4330-698d-4600-a307-8dd07c522b00.pdf#page=null>

<sup>4</sup> <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/national-physical-activity-plan.pdf>



unaware of the Act or their responsibilities under it. In the same report, only 5% of people said that the ability to access public services through ISL was “good”.<sup>5</sup> A chronic shortage of ISL interpreters in Ireland means that it would be difficult to fully implement the Act even if all public bodies were aware of their responsibilities.

According to organisations represented in this report, there are systemic issues throughout the Irish education system in both exposing students to ISL, encouraging them to learn it, and recruiting new interpreters. This lack of interpreters has many knock-on effects. For instance, the new Work and Access scheme, set up in 2024, will cover the cost of ISL interpreters for employers who employ sign language users.<sup>6</sup> However, the lack of interpreters means that the scheme is struggling to deliver on its goals.

One persistent barrier for ISL users, mentioned by more than one organisation, is access to mental health services. There is only one mental health service aimed at the Deaf community, and it is located in Dublin, posing a barrier to those living outside the capital city.

Many organisations represented in this submission also report government forms to access benefits and grants being complex and difficult for an individual to complete. There has been a recent effort to improve some of these, such as the Housing Adaptation Grant, discussed later in this report. And while it has improved, it is still very difficult for many households to complete the application and access the grant without assistance. There are similar problems with the paperwork needed to apply for housing from local authorities. The paperwork is complex, the bureaucracy around it is dense, and in most local areas there are few supports to help people complete the process.

## Accessible Services

One area highlighted by organisations where services are not accessible is in services for mental health and psychosocial disabilities. In addition to the problems faced by a lack of ISL, listed above, there are many other barriers. Services are not, for instance, geographically equitable, with some areas of the country having a high concentration of mental health services, while other areas are deprived. The development of emergency and out-of-hours mental health support in Ireland is an on-going process. Sharing the Vision,<sup>7</sup> Ireland’s mental health policy from 2022-2024, laid

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<sup>5</sup> <https://nda.ie/publications/report-on-the-operation-of-the-irish-sign-language-act-2017-december-2021>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-social-protection/publications/operational-guidelines-work-and-access/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/mentalhealth/sharing-the-vision-implementation-plan-2022.pdf>

out the need for such services, and while progress has been made, further development is urgently needed. Ireland's emergency departments are often used as emergency mental health care, but work undertaken by Mental Health Reform highlights their inadequacies. Member organisations of Mental Health Reform are gravely concerned that the environment in an emergency department is distressing for those in crisis. This experience can be compounded by long waiting times, lack of trained staff, and people leaving the hospital with no aftercare plan. Research carried out on this issue found that 50% of those who presented to Emergency Departments due to mental health difficulties reported having an overall negative experience, and 36% reported a mix of positive and negative experiences. The research also found that persons who had been assessed by Clinical Nurses Specialists or psychiatric on-consultant hospital doctors and those whose assessments were not rushed were more likely to report overall positive experiences.<sup>8</sup>

In areas with a lack of mental health services, there is a move to use digital services to fill the gaps. However, digital services come with their own barriers. A report on these issues found that barriers to accessing digital mental health services included basic website accessibility and issues with interactive services for people with hearing or vision impairments.<sup>9</sup>

## Access Officers

In the State report, in paragraph 87, it is noted that "The Disability Act requires public services to appoint Access Officers to provide, arrange for and co-ordinate the provision of assistance and guidance to people with disabilities in accessing their services." DFI recently undertook research on, among other things, the role of Access Officers in local authorities.<sup>10</sup> Often it is the Access Officers in local authorities that people with disabilities and organisations are most likely to work with. While it is true that every local authority has an Access Officer, it is often a part-time position, or an "add on" to an already full-time role. Many Access Officers report that they were not given a defined job description when they were assigned the role. They also reported a lack of consistent training and funding, and no national guidance for their role.

## Recommendations:

- Ensure that the state consults meaningfully with people with disabilities around their accessibility needs, and includes them and their organisations in decision making and planning

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.3ts.ie/about-us/who-are-3ts/our-research/Accessing-Help-ED>

<sup>9</sup> [Digital Inclusion and Access to Mental](#)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.disability-federation.ie/dfi-and-local-government1/bridging-the-gap-local-authorities-and-disability.html>

- Make the Role of Access Officer a full-time, senior level position within local authorities to ensure local implementation of UN CRPD.
- Expand rural public transport, both in terms of routes and times.
- Reinsitute the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant to support those who cannot access public transport to travel freely.
- Prioritise the training and recruitment of ISL interpreters, and ensure that all public bodies are aware of their responsibility to provide ISL interpretation
- Simplify paperwork to access government supports.
- Improve access to out-of-hours and emergency mental health care.

### **Suggested Questions**

- Why has it taken so long to reinstitute the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant, despite calls from both the public and the Ombudsman to do so?
- Why are disability issues not assigned to a full-time role in public bodies, rather than the part time work of the Access Officer?
- How is the shortage of ISL interpreters being addressed?

## **Article 12 – Equal Recognition Before the Law**

The Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act, (ADM Act), was almost entirely commenced in April of 2023, and the Decision Support Service which it created is currently running and active. The goal of this act is to create a framework to support people with disabilities to make their own decisions.

For the most part, reception of the ADM has been positive among the organisations represented in this report. In their experience, both people with disabilities and the organisations that support them view the Act as a necessary and progressive step.

Many organisations have worked with the state to raise awareness of the Act and ensure that people with disabilities and their supporters understand how it works. It has also been important to ensure that service providers understand their role under the Act, and what responsibilities they have to support people to make their own decisions. All of this training and awareness raising is on-going, and will take time.

There is also a need for consideration of those who need Assistive Technology to communicate. Without communication, a person cannot make their wishes known. Some organisations feel that the issue of access to Augmentative and Alternative Communication devices is not given sufficient consideration in the Act and the guidance around it. This

may prevent non-speaking people from being able to fully enjoy their rights.

In addition, some organisations are already encountering problems with a lack of awareness in certain sectors of society, making it difficult for people to exercise their rights. This includes some private sector institutions, such as banks, being unaware that people should be able to make financial decisions. Some people worry the Act will become a “tick box exercise” and won’t lead to a meaningful expansion of people’s right to make their own decisions. And there is concern that the Act doesn’t go far enough. For instance, it still allows for the involuntary detention and treatment of people with mental health difficulties, as does the new mental health bill, Mental Health Bill 2024. Ireland has taken reservations to Articles 12 and 14 that allow for substitute decision making, involuntary confinement and involuntary treatment. As long as Ireland has these reservations, and continues to write these ideas into its laws, it will not be able to fully reach the potential of Article 12.

### **Recommendations:**

- Ireland should remove its reservations to Articles 12 and 14
- Awareness raising around the ADM Act should continue, and private sector institutions such as banks should be targeted
- Steps should be taken to ensure people with disabilities are able to exercise their rights under the ADM Act, including in the private sector, such as making banking and financial decisions.

### **Suggested Questions**

- Will Ireland remove reservations to Articles 12 and 14?

## **19 – Living Independently and Being Included in the Community**

### **Housing**

Ireland is currently in the grips of a housing crisis.<sup>11</sup> This has led to rising rates of homelessness.<sup>12</sup> This has obviously affected everyone in the state to some degree, but it has been particularly hard on the disability community, greatly affecting their right to live where they want, and to access independent housing. Access to assisted and independent living is getting worse as a result. Waiting lists for social housing are long, and there are bureaucratic barriers to getting on the lists that some people with

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/housing-planning/2025/03/22/all-the-obstacles-in-front-of-us-why-is-there-such-a-shortage-of-homes-to-buy-and-rent-in-ireland/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2025/0328/1504598-homeless-figures/>

disabilities are finding difficult to overcome. People with disabilities also spend longer on social housing waiting lists than non-disabled people. People with disabilities are less likely to live where they want, and in a situation they have chosen. Young people with disabilities are more likely to live at home, with nearly one in four adults over 25 living with their parents having a disability.<sup>13</sup> Despite the government's stated commitment to deinstitutionalisation, over 1,200 people under 65 with a disability are inappropriately living in nursing homes.<sup>14</sup>

Ireland recently created a new plan, the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027.<sup>15</sup> However, progress on its implementation has been slow. The strategy was published in January of 2022, but it took a further 18 months for the Action Plan for Implementation to be published, in June of 2023. Two years on from the publication of the Action Plan, there is no clarity on funding for its implementation. There are continuing problems with people with disabilities not being considered or consulted on what their housing needs are, and how to best address them in the context of the ongoing housing crisis.

There is a strong relationship between mental health difficulties and homelessness in Ireland. According to the European Commission, Ireland is the hardest place in the EU to access mental health care.<sup>16</sup> According to research carried out by the homelessness charity Depaul:

- 36.9% of residents over the period 2018-2023 reported enduring mental health difficulties, requiring intervention – nearly twice the national rate.
- 16% of Depaul residents have been hospitalised for mental health issues, rising to 38% among those who self-report mental health difficulties.
- Only 4% of Depaul residents have access to a psychiatric nurse, and just 9.4% can see a counsellor.
- 88% of service providers cite staff shortages and long waiting lists as major barriers to accessing care.
- 39% of people experiencing homelessness struggle with both mental health and substance misuse issues.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, according to the organisation Chime, there is a lack of awareness and funding around housing for Deaf people who wish to live independently. Chime themselves operate two residential homes that

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<sup>13</sup> Census (2023) [Census of the Population 2022](#)

<sup>14</sup> Nursing Home Support Scheme (Fair Deal) data as of November 2023

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/publications/national-housing-strategy-for-disabled-people-2022-2027/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.rte.ie/news/europe/2023/1011/1410232-mental-health-eu/>

<sup>17</sup> [Breaking The Cycle: Addressing Mental Health And Homelessness through integrated care](#)

support independent living, but these are both based in Dublin and there is no equivalent elsewhere in Ireland. Finding adequate support for independent housing can be particularly challenging for Deaf people who have additional needs.

People with intellectual disabilities also have difficulty accessing affordable and accessible housing. In 2022, only 299 people with intellectual disabilities were allocated social housing through local authorities, less than in previous years.<sup>18</sup> According to organisations who work with people with intellectual disabilities, many people report being forced to live at home with parents, or in residential accommodation, due to a lack of any other options.

Those who look for private rental accommodation find that many options are not suitable to their disabilities, and they cannot be easily adapted. As rental prices in Ireland continue to rise, even those who find suitable housing cannot always sustain it, often reporting difficulty affording basics such as food, utilities and rent, and having to make difficult choices to maintain their housing.

Organisations who provide supported and independent housing report difficulty in meeting demand for their services, and in maintaining their existing housing stock. There is a programme, the Capital Assistance Scheme,<sup>19</sup> that helps these organisations buy housing stock, but there are a number of problems with the scheme. Housing prices in Ireland continue to rise, and the price ceilings on three and four bedroom homes in the scheme are unrealistic. The approval process is long and cumbersome, and suitable properties can be lost during the process. There is no budget in the scheme to assist with maintenance of properties once they are purchased.

People with physical disabilities also face challenges accessing their preferred housing. A recent survey by the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) of its membership found that

- 55% of people owned their own house
- 77% of people adapted their own house
- 48% of people received the housing adaptation grant
- 75% of people said the grant received did not cover the cost
- 35% of people lived with family
- 2% of people lived in institutions and nursing homes
- 32% of people lived in social housing
- 50% of people are not living where they would choose to live

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<sup>18</sup> <https://housingireland.ie/inclusion-ireland-two-sides-of-the-supported-independent-living-coin/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://icsh.ie/resources/capital-assistance-scheme-reference-document-june-2022/>

One of the biggest problems facing people with physical disabilities is the current building regulations, which do not require most of the housing stock being built in Ireland to be fully accessible. This means people with physical disabilities often find themselves living in inaccessible housing, often with parents or other family members.

## Housing Adaptation Grants

Housing Adaptation Grants provide funding to assist a person with a disability, or their family, to modify their home to better suit them and their needs.<sup>20</sup> The grant is a vital support to allow people with disabilities to adapt their home, and is particularly important for parents of children with disabilities, and those who acquire a disability and want to remain in their house. The government has made several positive changes to the grant scheme since the time of the state report. The maximum value of the grant was recently increased to €40,000, and while in the past the grant covered 80% of the cost of adaptations, it now covers the full cost for households in the lowest income bracket.<sup>21</sup> A new application form in Plain English has also been developed.<sup>22</sup>

While these are welcomed improvements, issues still persist. Building costs in Ireland have increased substantially in recent years, and even with the increase in the grant, it still does not cover the cost of adaptations. Moreover the housing adaptation grant has only this year again reached level of funding it had in 2010, before cuts were made during the recession. In 2010, over €95 million was allocated for home adaptation. In 2025, this has now reached €99.5 million. And while the €10,000 increase in the maximum value of the grant is welcomed, it is not enough. The grant maximum level went over a decade without increase, and by 2022, organisations such as DFI were calling for an increase of the maximum value to €60,000.<sup>23</sup> This was before the latest increase in building costs.

The means tests is also still a problem. It takes into account not only the income of the person with a disability, but also their spouse and anyone else living in the home, which can reduce the funding amount available to the person. In the case of those who acquired their disability recently, their income from before they became disabled may be considered, even if they have lost their job, or changed to lower paying employment. And

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/housing/housing-grants-and-schemes/housing-supports-for-older-people-and-people-with-disabilities/housing-adaptation-grant-for-people-with-disability/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/housing/housing-grants-and-schemes/housing-supports-for-older-people-and-people-with-disabilities/housing-adaptation-grant-for-people-with-disability/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://monaghan.ie/housing/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2021/02/Application-Form-for-Housing-Adaptation-Grants-for-Older-People-and-People-with-a-Disability.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.disability-federation.ie/assets/files/pdf/disability\\_federation\\_of\\_ireland-\\_housing\\_adaptation\\_grant\\_review\\_submission.pdf](https://www.disability-federation.ie/assets/files/pdf/disability_federation_of_ireland-_housing_adaptation_grant_review_submission.pdf)



even with the simplified application form, the process of application can still be difficult for many people.

## Personal Assistance

There is significant unmet need in Ireland for Personal Assistants (PAs), a vital support to living independently. PA support is difficult to get, and those who do receive support often do not get the number of hours they need to fully live an independent life. According to the Action Plan for Disability Services 2024-2026, 800,000 extra PA hours will be needed by 2026 to keep pace with need.<sup>24</sup> Some of the participants in Rehab Group's focus groups report being effectively confined to their homes due to a lack of support. A survey of IWA's membership found that amongst their members:

- 26% said they were receiving a personal assistant service
- 40% of people said they have not got enough hours
- 17% of people need more than 10 extra hours
- 49% of people need between 6-10 extra hours
- 39% of people need between 1-5 extra hours
- 44% have been waiting for over 12 months for PA service

Furthermore, the situation around unmet need for PA support is not improving. The organisations that provide PA services have been losing staff due to underfunding. Those who work as PAs often receive low pay, and face financial difficulties as a result. This has reduced the availability of PA supports due to lack of staff. Although the state recently agreed to a pay deal to increase pay and funding in the sector,<sup>25</sup> the impact of this remains to be seen, including how and if it will improve PA supports for people with disabilities.

In addition, there is no right to a PA in Ireland. The state is currently preparing to deliver a statutory right to home support hours,<sup>26</sup> but the process is slow and was further delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic. And while a right to home support will be a significant help to many people with disabilities, it is not a replacement for PA support, and there is no sign of a right to this service being created.

## Social Inclusion

According to Ireland's state report, the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme, or SICAP, is "Ireland's primary social inclusion

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<sup>24</sup> <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/action-plan-for-disability-services-2024-2026.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-children-disability-and-equality/press-releases/state-agrees-unprecedented-funding-proposals-for-pay-increases-as-part-of-a-new-relationship-with-health-and-social-care-workers/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://hcci.ie/homecare-in-ireland/statutory-home-support-scheme/>



intervention”.<sup>27</sup> SICAP is designed to work with many disadvantaged groups in Ireland, not just people with disabilities. In the experience of many of the organisations represented in this report, significant barriers persist in SICAP’s capacity to support social inclusion for people with disabilities.

SICAP programmes over the years have sought to find new ways to include people with disabilities in the community. However, SICAP also has difficulties in fully including people with disabilities. SICAP programmes targeting people with disabilities tend to focus on particular groups of people with disabilities, rather than a mainstream focus on getting people with disabilities involved in all of SICAP’s programmes and activities. In addition, SICAP has difficulty reaching people with disabilities who are not already attached to services or other community groups. This means that many people with disabilities who are isolated, or simply haven’t sought out the help of disability services or other community groups, are not being included in these social inclusion programmes.

In addition, there are problems with social inclusion at the level of primary and secondary education. The current Government has prioritised the creation and expansion of special classes and special schools,<sup>28</sup> which runs the risk of segregating disabled children in the education system. This segregation can carry over into later life, undermining social cohesion and reinforcing exclusion of disabled people.

There are also structural impediments to mainstreaming. The recent report from the Department of Education’s Inspectorate<sup>29</sup> highlighting exclusionary criteria in schools’ admission policies is concerning. Criteria requiring a certain level of disability or standard of behaviour act as a barrier for children with intellectual disabilities. These admission barriers inhibit the Government’s stated policy of inclusive education and deny the legal right of every child or young person with special educational needs to an education in an inclusive environment with their peers.<sup>30</sup>

## **Recommendations:**

- Provide clear ring-fenced funding to support the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People, and any successor strategy.
- Reform the Capital Assistance Scheme.
- Continue to reform, improve and increase the Housing Adaptation Grant.

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<sup>27</sup> Paragraph 420 of the state report

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.rte.ie/news/politics/2025/0324/1503694-education-special-classes/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.rte.ie/documents/news/2025/05/20250507-supporting-all-children-and-young-people-to-access-an-appropriate-education.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> S.2 [The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004](#)

- New building regulations requiring the building of more accessible and universally designed housing are needed.
- Create a right to PA services, as well as a right to Home Support.
- If SICAP will continue to be the main social inclusion programme for people with disabilities, it requires significant reform.
- Prioritise the mainstreaming of children with disabilities in school, rather than the creation of special classes that segregate children.

### **Suggested Questions**

- How is the state addressing the housing crisis among people with disabilities?
- How will the state address rising construction and housing costs that create a barrier to independent living?
- Will the state create a right to Personal Assistance?

## **Article 27 – Work and Employment**

Ireland's employment rates for disabled people are amongst the lowest in the EU and the OECD. The disability employment gap is 37%, compared to the EU average of 21%, making it one of the worst in the EU.<sup>31</sup> And despite a number of programmes operating to help people with disabilities access work and employment, significant barriers remain which keep many people who would like to work out of the workforce.

One ongoing problem is a lack of disability awareness among employers. Many employers, especially smaller employers, may have never knowingly employed a person with a disability, and may hold negative stereotypes or preconceptions about people with disabilities. Some programmes do provide disability awareness training to employers, including those run by some organisations in this report, such as the Disability Federation of Ireland. But these barriers remain. Chime, for instance, has been able to support a small number of Deaf and hard of hearing individuals into employment, but this was mostly with large, multinational companies with prior experience supporting employees who are hard of hearing. Focus groups organised by Rehab Group report similar problems, with people looking for jobs finding that employers do not want to employ people with disabilities. Some organisations report that the recent use of Artificial Intelligence in screening curriculum vitae (CVs) has made this problem worse, with CV screening tools removing CVs that ask for accommodation before a human has looked at them.

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<sup>31</sup> <https://nda.ie/publications/discussion-paper-on-new-disability-employment-targets>

One positive development is the recently launched Work and Access Scheme.<sup>32</sup> This replaced the Reasonable Accommodation Scheme and the Disability Awareness Support Scheme in 2024, after a review concluded that change was needed. Most organisations have welcomed the changes. However, more employer education about the scheme is needed, as uptake has been very low, and is, in the experience of some organisations, mostly by large employers who already have the resources to support employees with disabilities. A related scheme is the Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant,<sup>33</sup> which recently increased in size, but again suffers from a lack of awareness and uptake.

Another programme to encourage employers to hire people with disabilities is the Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSS),<sup>34</sup> which offers a payment to employers to cover of the cost of adapting a position to a person with the disability who would otherwise not be able to take up the position. This is a useful programme, however when it was started, the scheme paid employers 70% of the minimum wage, but since then, the minimum wage has increased faster than the subsidy. In 2025 the scheme only covers 46% of the minimum wage, making it less attractive to employers. The last increase of the subsidy was in 2022. While a review of the scheme in 2023 brought in several welcomed reforms, including the removal of what many consider discriminatory language from application forms, the rate has not been increased.

An OECD Report, Procurement for Better Value – A Case Study of Ireland, commissioned by the Irish Government in 2023 concluded that Ireland could be doing more to use its €22 billion Budget for public procurement to help increase the number of people with disabilities in employment<sup>35</sup>. The OECD was critical that the Irish Government was not availing of instruments such as Article 20 of the EU Procurement Directive, which allows for reserved contract to help increase the number of people with disabilities in employment. The OECD report specifically decried the lack of data on the number of people with disabilities employed through framework agreements.

Many essential state supports that people with disabilities rely on, such as Disability Allowance, free travel cards, and medical cards (which entitle people to free healthcare), can be lost if a person earns income above a certain threshold. Fear of losing these essential benefits keeps many

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-social-protection/services/work-and-access/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-social-protection/services/workplace-equipment-adaptation-grant/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-social-protection/services/wage-subsidy-scheme/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.businesspost.ie/politics/oecd-use-e22-billion-state-spend-to-provide-more-jobs-for-people-with-disabilities/>

people with disabilities from seeking employment, even if, free of constraints, they would prefer to be working.

The last government strategy to improve the employment of people with disabilities in Ireland was the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES),<sup>36</sup> which ended in 2024. Concerningly, the third action plan for the CES for 2022-2024 was never published. A final review of the CES by the National Disability Authority, an independent state body which oversees disability policy, was carried out in 2024, as the strategy ended. This report concluded that while the CES had shown some progress, the disability employment gap persisted, and people with disabilities still reported “continuing fragmentation in and inflexibility of support services” around employment.<sup>37</sup> The final review made several suggestions, including shorter time frames on future strategies (the CES ran for 10 years), greater monitoring, and greater cooperation between government departments.

A new employment strategy has not yet been published. The state is preparing a new overall disability strategy at the time of writing, which is meant to include actions around employment as one of its main pillars, but the publication of this strategy has been delayed. This is very concerning given the fact that employment numbers in Ireland among people with disabilities continue to lag significantly behind the rest of the EU.

## Assistive Technology

Access to Assistive Technology (AT) is important, not just for employment, but for people with disabilities to live their lives independently in the community. While most organisations represented in this report agree that access to AT in Ireland is improving, there are still barriers and room for further improvement. Supports for disabled people to access AT are spread across a number of schemes from different government Departments. The Work and Access Scheme, which now includes the Workplace Equipment and Adaptation Grant, mentioned above, covers the cost of AT in the workplace. As mentioned, uptake and awareness is currently low.

Within primary and secondary education, schools can use the Assistive Technology Grant<sup>38</sup> to provide students with AT. However, this equipment must remain in the school, and cannot be used by the student at their

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-children-disability-and-equality/publications/comprehensive-employment-strategy-for-people-with-disabilities/>

<sup>37</sup> <https://nda.ie/publications/final-review-of-progress-under-the-comprehensive-employment-strategy-for-people-with-disabilities-2015-2024>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-education/services/assistive-technology-grant/>

home, which limits its usefulness, and means that children relying on AT at school cannot use it in their personal life.

At home, people can access some AT through the Aids and Appliances scheme.<sup>39</sup> However, many organisations working with people with disabilities are unaware of many of the advances in AT, and so awareness of what is possible is often lacking, so people with disabilities go without support that could improve their quality of life.

Access to hearing aids is a particular issue. People accessing hearing aids through the public health system can wait up to three years for assessment and treatment. According to Chime, the current HSE audiology waiting list for assessments is nearly 25,000. There is a grant, through the Treatment Benefit Scheme,<sup>40</sup> that can help people purchase hearing aids from private providers. It covers up to €500 per hearing aid (€1,000 total). This will cover the cost of the most basic hearing aid, with most people (80-90% of Chime clients) choosing to pay out of pocket for upgraded hearing aids.

## Insurance

In some instances, Ireland still allows discrimination against people with disabilities. This is particularly apparent in the area of insurance. Under the Equal Status Act 2000, insurance companies can charge higher premiums in cases involving a disability when that discrimination is based on “actuarial or statistical data”.<sup>41</sup> This has a direct impact for many people with disabilities. DFI is aware of many cases in which a person with a disability was refused employment, after an employer became aware that employing a disabled person would raise their insurance premiums. While it is illegal to refuse to employ a person because of their disability, people who are refused employment are reluctant to take legal action, as they worry doing so will affect their ability to find a job. There are also cases of people with disabilities being unable to buy a home, because they could not afford higher premiums, or in some cases were declined mortgage protection insurance. Some people have difficulty travelling abroad because of the cost of travel insurance. This kind of discrimination is preventing many people from living their lives as independently as they would like.

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<sup>39</sup> <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/2/primarycare/community-funded-schemes/aids-and-appliances/>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-social-protection/services/treatment-benefit-scheme/>

<sup>41</sup> Equal Status Act, Section 5(2)(d);

<https://revisedacts.lawreform.ie/eli/2000/act/8/section/5/revised/en/html>

## Recommendations:

- Implement training and inclusion programmes aimed at employers to combat negative stereotypes and perceptions that cause them not to hire people with disabilities.
- Make the medical card available to any disabled person who needs it. Medical card entitlement should be based on medical need rather than means-testing.
- Close the loophole that allows insurance companies to charge higher premiums for people with disabilities.
- Continue to improve the provision of Assistive Technology, and ensure that employers are aware of the programmes that help them to purchase such equipment.
- Create a new fully resourced and fully funded employment strategy for people with disabilities and avail of existing EU and national instruments to increase number disabled people in employment. The strategy should include clear measurable annual targets.

## Suggested Questions

- Will the state address the loophole that allows insurance discrimination?
- How does the state plan to improve access to AT?
- How does the state plan to address the employment gap for people with disabilities, now that the Comprehensive Employment Strategy has expired?

## Article 28 – Adequate Standard of Living and Social Protection

Poverty is a huge issue facing people with disabilities in Ireland. National poverty data show that the consistent poverty rate among people who are unable to work due to disability in Ireland is 19%, four times higher than the national average of 5%.<sup>42</sup> Also, people unable to work due to disability are at a much higher risk of poverty, 32.5%, compared to a national average of 11.7%, while they have a deprivation rate 3.5 times higher (38.5%) than employed people (11.6%). At an EU level Ireland performs very badly on disability poverty also.<sup>43</sup> This is despite the government's Roadmap for Social Inclusion goal, laid out in paragraph 410 of the State

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2024/keyfindings/>

<sup>43</sup> See for example [https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/document/download/7ec5fe18-b881-4140-b86a-7b22cb7a8580\\_en?filename=IE\\_CR\\_SWD\\_2025\\_207\\_1\\_EN\\_autre\\_document\\_travail\\_service\\_part1\\_v3.pdf](https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/document/download/7ec5fe18-b881-4140-b86a-7b22cb7a8580_en?filename=IE_CR_SWD_2025_207_1_EN_autre_document_travail_service_part1_v3.pdf)

Report, to reduce the EU at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) rate among people with disabilities to 28.7% by 2025 and be in the top 10 EU countries. However the fourth Roadmap progress report shows that last year's AROPE was 32.7% and we ranked 20<sup>th</sup> out of the EU 27, just one year out from 2025.<sup>44</sup>

Several factors contribute to this high poverty and deprivation level. A lack of employment, as discussed elsewhere, is one factor. Another is the extra Cost of Disability, which is not accounted for in many of the state supports offered to people with disabilities and their families. Equally means-testing also creates many financial difficulties for disabled households.

For instance, focus groups run by Rehab Group found that the number one issue raised by attendees was living with the extra Cost of Disability. Focus group members spoke of being unable to heat their homes, the difficulty of facing unexpected medical costs, and how poverty makes it difficult to live an independent life. The Irish Wheelchair Association reports similar issues. In a recent survey among their membership, they found that:

- 92% of people said they incurred an extra cost due to their disability
- 70% of people had extra medical costs
- 65% of people had extra costs for heating
- 37% of people had extra costs for food
- 69% of people had extra costs for transport
- 25% of people had extra costs for accommodation

The Indecon Report on the Cost of Disability (2021), commissioned by the Department of Social Protection, provided comprehensive policy evidence on costs experienced in Ireland. The report concluded that "there are significant additional costs faced by individuals with a disability *which are currently not met by existing programmes or by social welfare payments* [our emphasis]". The report evidenced extra costs in the range of €8,700-€12,300, as well as unaffordable extra costs of €2,706 a year.<sup>45</sup> Adjusted for 22% inflation since 2021, this is now €10,652 - €15,059.<sup>46</sup>

More recently, the Economic and Social Research Institute published a paper updating the Indecon figures, using more recent data.<sup>47</sup> The study shows that households with a disabled member "face significant financial

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<sup>44</sup> <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/roadmap-for-social-inclusion-2020-2025-ambition-goals-commitments-fourth-progress-repo.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1d84e-the-cost-of-disability-in-ireland-research-report/>

<sup>46</sup> The [Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator](#) shows inflation of 22% from January 2021 to May 2025.

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.esri.ie/publications/adjusting-estimates-of-poverty-for-the-cost-of-disability>



burdens related to disability and have very high at risk of poverty (AROP) rates.” The study established that:

- These households are more likely than other household types to be at risk of poverty and have a lower standard of living.
- Disabled people face extra costs in the range of €488-€555 on average a week.
- Disabled households required between 41% to 93% extra disposable income to achieve the same standard of living as a similar household with no disabled members.
- The at risk of poverty (AROP) rate is substantially higher for disabled people - 24%, compared to 10% for non-disabled people.
- When Cost of Disability is factored in, the AROP rate increases to a staggering 65%-76%.

The current Disability Allowance provided to support disabled people who cannot work is set at a basic rate of €244 – this is at maximum half the weekly extra expenses as outlined above, thus clearly deeply inadequate. Equally these cost issues relate not just to low income, but also to lack of services and supports (as discussed under other Articles), and of a joined-up cross-Departmental approach to Cost of Disability.

Over the past three budgets, the government has provided relatively small once-off annual payments to address the Cost of Disability, and while these were welcomed as a first acknowledgement of this issue, they did not cover anywhere near the entire extra Cost of Disability for most people. The 2025 Programme for Government<sup>48</sup> pledges to create a permanent annual Cost of Disability payment, but so far there are few concrete details on how that payment will work.

For those living on Disability Allowance, the payment does not provide enough to live an independent life in the community. Participants in Rehab Group’s focus groups stated that the allowance barely addresses day-to-day expenses, and that it left little for getting out of the house, socialising or engaging with the community. Staff at Rehab report linking people to food banks and other community supports.

The means-testing of social protection supports also creates great difficulties for people with disabilities and their families.<sup>49</sup> If someone moves in with their romantic partner, lives at home with family or shares

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<sup>48</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-the-taoiseach/publications/programme-for-government-2025-securing-irelands-future/>

<sup>49</sup> For more on this see <https://www.disability-federation.ie/news/latest/2024/05/29/the-impact-of-means-testing-on-disability-allowance/> and [https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_social\\_protection\\_community\\_and\\_ural\\_development\\_and\\_the\\_islands/2024-05-29/2/](https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_social_protection_community_and_ural_development_and_the_islands/2024-05-29/2/)



a house with others, the full household income is considered when assessing their entitlement to supports. This creates and perpetuates negative stereotypes, and crucially, financial dependency. It is assumed that family members or partners will subsidise the extra costs that disabled people live with, something which is unfair to everyone involved, and fails to vindicate rights under the UN CRPD. The individualisation of social protection payments has been recommended by the Joint Oireachtas (Irish parliament) Committee on Gender Equality, and the 2021 Citizen's Assembly.<sup>50</sup>

There is also a lack of a strong and clear strategy to address these issues, and to reduce poverty rates – the Roadmap for Social Inclusion commits to a poverty rate reduction, but it does not outline the actions that will be taken to achieve this reduction. Recent reform proposals around disability social protection were also not in line with the UN CRPD, and did not once mention Ireland's obligations under Article 28.<sup>51</sup>

### **Recommendations:**

- Reform the Disability Allowance so that it is enough to keep people out of poverty and support an independent life.
- Address the extra costs of disability through an adequate weekly Cost of Disability payment and by developing a detailed cross-Departmental Action Plan.
- Address issues like means-testing (by at minimum only assessing the disabled person's income), below poverty line social protection payments and benchmarking/indexation of social protection levels, factoring in Cost of Disability.

### **Suggested Questions**

- How will the state address the extra Cost of Disability to keep people out of poverty?
- How does the state plan to reduce poverty among people with disabilities?

## **Article 29 – Participation in Political and Public Life**

According to a report from the European Disability Forum, the legal framework in Ireland is largely positive on Article 29. Ireland upholds the rights of all people with disabilities to vote in elections, including our local,

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<sup>50</sup> See

[https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_gender\\_equality/reports/2022/2022-12-15\\_final-report-on-unfinished-democracy-achieving-gender-equality\\_en.pdf](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_gender_equality/reports/2022/2022-12-15_final-report-on-unfinished-democracy-achieving-gender-equality_en.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> For more on this see <https://www.disability-federation.ie/publications/dfi-submission-on-green-paper-may-2024/>

national, and EU elections. No person is barred from voting on the basis of disability. People with a disability that may find the voting process inaccessible can seek assistance from a person of their choice.<sup>52</sup>

Ireland also provides a postal vote option for those who are unable, by reason of disability, to vote at their voting station. People with disabilities whose polling station is inaccessible may also vote at another polling station that is accessible, though most polling places in Ireland are considered accessible.<sup>53</sup> However, a review, undertaken by the Electoral Commission in 2024, found that of 100 polling places visited, 29 did not have wheelchair ramps. Looking only at polling stations previously deemed accessible, the Commission found that 21% did not allow a wheelchair user to easily and independently access the building and vote.<sup>54</sup> To determine the accessibility of a polling station, Ireland uses a checklist developed in 2018.<sup>55</sup>

Currently, Ireland also has no disability-based restrictions on the right to run for or hold office. Until 2022, the law (Electoral Act 1992), did bar people of “unsound mind” from holding office in the Dáil, the lower house of the Irish parliament. However, there are no known cases of a person being barred from holding office under this test, and in 2022, this qualification was removed from the Electoral Act by the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) (Amendment) Act 2022.

While the Irish legal framework for voting and holding office is very much in line with Article 29, its implementation requires greater scrutiny. DFI is aware of cases in which people have had difficulty accessing their postal ballot, and many people with disabilities find the application process difficult and arduous.

To receive a postal vote as a person with a disability living at home, the voter must have their application signed by a medical practitioner such as a General Practitioner, GP. This can create a barrier, in relation to getting a timely access to a GP (who tend to have a very full case load and can often be booked out of appointments), as well as sometimes finding it difficult to get them to sign an application, to the point that some voters give up on the application. There is also a significant cost to a GP appointment for those who do not have a medical card. Many people have called for this process to be simplified by, for instance, allowing a wider range of professions, such as social workers or nurses, to sign off on the application. The window in which to request a postal vote is also very

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<sup>52</sup> [https://www.edf-feph.org/content/uploads/2022/10/edf\\_hr\\_report\\_issue\\_6\\_2022\\_accessible.pdf](https://www.edf-feph.org/content/uploads/2022/10/edf_hr_report_issue_6_2022_accessible.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> [https://www.edf-feph.org/content/uploads/2022/10/edf\\_hr\\_report\\_issue\\_6\\_2022\\_accessible.pdf](https://www.edf-feph.org/content/uploads/2022/10/edf_hr_report_issue_6_2022_accessible.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> [https://cdn.electoralcommission.ie/app/uploads/2024/12/06153929/Post-Electoral-Event-Review\\_7-June\\_English\\_Tagged.pdf](https://cdn.electoralcommission.ie/app/uploads/2024/12/06153929/Post-Electoral-Event-Review_7-June_English_Tagged.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> <https://nda.ie/uploads/publications/Accessibility-Checklist-for-Polling-Stations-April-2024-FINAL.docx>

tight, between the date an election is called and the acceptance of a request for a postal vote. While a person can request a postal vote at any time, if an election is called, their request must be received no later than two days after the Dáil is dissolved.<sup>56</sup> While it's usually possible to anticipate an election in Ireland, in the case of a snap election, this might give a person only a few days to complete their application. The Electoral Commission, in a 2024 report, stated that the barriers to getting a postal vote amounted to a breach of Article 29, and have committed to researching the issue.<sup>57</sup>

DFI has also received reports from people who were told that their polling station was physically accessible, but found on arrival that it was unable to accommodate their disability in particular. For instance, voters encountered ramps or lifts that could not accommodate larger powered wheelchairs. Equally there have on occasions been issues with allowing guide dogs into polling stations.

Training of volunteers in polling stations to support people with disabilities can fall short. DFI has received reports of people who were told they could not have a trusted person assist them to vote, even though the law in Ireland allows for this. In addition, a person can only assist two people for each election or referendum.<sup>58</sup> For a Personal Assistant or a worker in a disability service, this may prevent them from assisting everyone who has requested their help. In addition, while in theory people with vision impairments are accommodated to vote independently, in practice many find the template used for independent voting so difficult that they must ask for assistance, therefore losing their right to a secret ballot.<sup>59</sup>

While there is no legal barrier preventing people with disabilities from running for or holding office, it is still very rare in Ireland for a person with a declared, known disability to hold office, and there do not appear to be any official statistics tracking the number of people with disabilities in office. People with disabilities in Ireland are significantly less likely to be in employment, with one of the highest disability employment gaps, and lowest employment rates, in the EU, as well as high poverty rates. All of this impacts on the resources and funding that people with disabilities have available to them to run for office, given that it is often a costly undertaking. There are no government resources or programmes provided to encourage people with disabilities to seek elected office.

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<sup>56</sup> <https://www.mayo.ie/getmedia/768d9bc1-26fe-40ba-a460-69e51f7ee20d/PV2-Illness-and-Disability.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> <https://cdn.electoralcommission.ie/app/uploads/2024/09/03150406/Post-Electoral-Event-Review.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.dlrcoco.ie/sites/dlrcoco/files/2023-10/Information%20for%20voters%20with%20disabilities.pdf>

<sup>59</sup> [Voice of Vision Impairment Accessibility Report on Referendums of March 8th, 2024. – Voice of Vision Impairment](#)

## Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs)

Nothing in Irish law prevents a person with a disability from founding or joining a Disabled Persons Organisation, or DPO. However, Ireland does not currently have a robust, formal framework for DPOs to aid in their development or participation in government processes.

In addition, Ireland has no formal definition of a DPO, and does not keep a register of DPOs currently active in the country.<sup>60</sup> While the Irish government has a variety of consultation mechanisms, no formal system for DPOs to participate in decision making has been created. Ireland also does not provide funding to DPOs on a sustained, multiannual basis that would allow them to develop capacity.

### Recommendations:

- Create formal guidance on what a DPO is, and a formal mechanism for DPOs to participate in government decision making.
- Provide adequate, ongoing, and sustainable funding to support Disabled Persons' Organisations (DPOs).
- Reform the postal vote to make it easier for people who cannot access polling stations to vote. Including removing the financial cost for medical certification required to access this vote.
- Create and fund a programme to encourage people with disabilities and other marginalised communities to run for office.
- Ensure polling stations are truly and fully accessible.

### Suggested Questions

- How does the state plan to ensure the DPOs can participate in the decision making process on disability related issues?
- Will the state address the remaining barriers to voting, such as the difficulty of accessing a postal vote, for people with disabilities?
- Will the state create a plan to support people with disabilities to run for office?

## Article 31 – Statistic and Data Collection

In their Concluding Observations of the State's Sixth and Seventh Reports, The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women noted a lack of disaggregated data on "sex, gender, ethnicity, disability and age."<sup>61</sup> Several organisations in this report have experienced the problems with Ireland's data collection around disability. While the

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<sup>60</sup> <https://nda.ie/uploads/publications/A-review-of-disabled-persons-organisations-and-their-participation-in-implementing-and-monitoring-uncrpd.pdf.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> <https://docs.un.org/en/CEDAW/C/IRL/CO/6-7>

Census does collect data about disabilities, include hearing impairments, it does not then disaggregate that data, so that, for example, Chime cannot use the Census to estimate the employment or educational attainment rates of Deaf and hard of hearing people. Data on wheelchair use is not collected at all, which means it cannot be used by IWA. Data on people who are deaf blind is also not collected. All of this means that both the government and organisations are operating with an information deficit, when they make or influence policy.

**Recommendations:**

- Improve disaggregation of data around disability, and ensure that individuals and organisations can easily access this data.
- Consult with organisations and individuals around what information on disability is needed, so that policy and advocacy can be properly informed.

**Suggested Questions**

- How does the state plan to improve data gathering and disaggregation around disability?