



**Disability Federation of Ireland**

**Submission for the General Comment on Article  
29, Participation in Political and Public Life**

**14 February 2025**

## 1. Introduction

Disability Federation of Ireland, DFI, is a pan-disability, civil society umbrella organisation. We have 120 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 looks at Article 29 of the UN CRPD, Participation in Political and Public Life, in Ireland. It briefly examines the laws, relevant policy/national initiatives, as well as reporting on personal experiences that we have been made aware of.

While much of Irish law is very positive, and hews closely to the requirements of the UN CRPD, there is room for improvement in both the implementation of the law, and the support offered to civil society and disabled person's organisations, or DPOs.

We hope information included in this submission on the Irish context can inform the creation of the General Comment on Article 29.

## 2. Irish Law

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, 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>1</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 place in Ireland are considered accessible.<sup>2</sup> Still, there is room for improvement. A review, done 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 users to easily and independently access the

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<sup>1</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>2</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)

building and vote.<sup>3</sup> To determine the accessibility of a polling station, Ireland uses a checklist developed in 2018.<sup>4</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.

## 2.1 Experiences in Ireland

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.

## 2.2 Postal voting

To receive a postal vote as a person with a disability living at home, the voter must have their application signed off 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 having a difficult time getting 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 tight, between when the date of 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>5</sup> While it’s usually possible to anticipate an election in Ireland, in the case of a snap election, which can be unexpected, this might give a person only a few days to complete their application. The Electoral Commission, in a report from 2024, stated that they felt the barriers to getting a postal vote

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<sup>3</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>4</sup> <https://nda.ie/uploads/publications/Accessibility-Checklist-for-Polling-Stations-April-2024-FINAL.docx>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mayo.ie/getmedia/768d9bc1-26fe-40ba-a460-69e51f7ee20d/PV2-Illness-and-Disability.pdf>

amounted to a breach of Article 29, and have committed to researching the issue.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.3 Accessible Polling Stations

DFI has also received reports from people who were told that their polling station was physical accessible, but found on arrival that it was not able 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.

### 2.4 Other Accommodations

Training of volunteers in polling places to support people with disabilities can sometimes 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>7</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>8</sup>

### 2.5 Cost of Political Participation

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.<sup>9</sup> They are also at a significantly higher risk of poverty, with 44.7% of people unable to work due to long-standing health problem (disability) living in deprivation, and consistent poverty rates for this grouping (16.5%) being more than 4 times the national average (3.6%).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, a government commissioned report published in 2021 showed that disabled people live with many and significant extra costs, which updated for inflation in recent years, is in

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<sup>6</sup> <https://cdn.electoralcommission.ie/app/uploads/2024/09/03150406/Post-Electoral-Event-Review.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.dlrcoco.ie/sites/dlrcoco/files/2023-10/Information%20for%20voters%20with%20disabilities.pdf>

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

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.disability-federation.ie/publications/dfi-pre-budget-2025-submission-to-dsp/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.disability-federation.ie/publications/dfi-pre-budget-2025-submission-to-dsp/> .

the range of €10,397 – €15,177 annual additional costs.<sup>11</sup> 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.

### 3. Disabled Persons Organisations

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>12</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.

DFI called for ring-fenced funding to be made available to DPOs during Ireland's General Election last year.<sup>13</sup>

### 4. Conclusion

In many ways, Ireland is close to the requirements of the UN CRPD. Legal barriers to voting or holding office have been removed, and on paper people with disabilities face few restrictions to participation in public life. However, these laws are often not implemented in ways that take due regard for the needs of people with disabilities. Many other barriers, such as culture, funding and resources, still prevent people with disabilities from fully achieving equality in this area.

There is also a need for progress on to encourage the development of a robust civil society around disability. A lack of funding, and no clear framework for engagement has hampered the development of DPOs in Ireland, which will need to be addressed for Ireland to fully achieve the promise of Article 29.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1d84e-the-cost-of-disability-in-ireland-research-report/> and <https://www.disability-federation.ie/publications/dfi-pre-budget-2025-submission-to-dsp/>.

<sup>12</sup> <https://nda.ie/uploads/publications/A-review-of-disabled-persons-organisations-and-their-participation-in-implementing-and-monitoring-uncrpd.pdf.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.disability-federation.ie/assets/files/pdf/disability\\_federation\\_of\\_ireland\\_-\\_general\\_election\\_manifesto\\_10102024.pdf](https://www.disability-federation.ie/assets/files/pdf/disability_federation_of_ireland_-_general_election_manifesto_10102024.pdf)



## **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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